



Mormon Social Science Association

Spring 2008

Volume 29, Issue 1

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President's Message

Greetings!

For the second year in a row, the MSSA will have a session at the meetings of the Mormon History Association. This year the meetings are in Sacramento, CA. The theme of this year's MHA conference, "Growth and Gateways: Mormonism in a Wider World," is particularly suited for social science analyses, since the growth and internationalization of the church has been a hot topic lately. Our session is entitled, "Gathered in Zion and Scattered Abroad: How Social Context Affects Latter-day Saint Religious Vitality." It features papers by Armand Mauss and yours truly.

It looks like we're going to have three MSSA paper sessions at SSSR this year, a panel on the O'Dea book, and the Vernon lecture. A very nice selection. What's better is the fact that we're getting some new faces to present, including scholars from BYU, the UofU, Michigan, Alabama, UVSC, and the University of Durham, UK.

This newsletter also heralds the arrival of *Revisiting Thomas F. O'Dea's The Mormons: Contemporary Perspectives*. The book was essentially commissioned by the MSSA, and it was shepherded from an idea to the final product (which sits next to my keyboard as I type) by the volume's editors: MSSA members Cardell Jacobsen, John Hoffman and Tim Heaton. The book exceeds expectations, and is a treasure trove of social scientific thinking on the issues first raised by O'Dea. The ideas in the book as are diverse as its contributors, and topics range from Latter-day Saint sexual identities to nascent Mormonism in Russia, and everything in between. Indeed, the book goes well beyond its title, and is more a collection of essays in the spirit of O'Dea than a simple appraisal of his work 50 years out. Kudos as well to the University of Utah Press for publishing a great looking book. The U of U press has become quite active again in the field of Mormon studies, and that is very refreshing to see.

The book is already creating a buzz. A group of scholars recently met to discuss the book at Utah Valley State College. The group featured a number of MSSA members. You can read about the particulars of this event on the Salt Lake Tribune's website:

http://www.sltrib.com/faith/ci_8411998.

In sum, the MSSA appears to be in good shape, but in the near future it will be necessary to think about recruitment. I hope I don't offend anyone by saying that our membership is a little bit long in the tooth, and an infusion of fresh blood would be a good thing to ensure the robust health of the organization for years to come. If you have students who are interested in the social scientific study of Mormonism, let them know that dues for our august body are a steal at \$10.

Rick Phillips
University of North Florida

Book Review Jeffrey C. Fox. *Latter-Day Political Views*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006. xii + 230 pp. ISBN: 978-0739115558. Price: US\$ 29.92 (paperback).

Jeffrey C. Fox's book, *Latter-Day Political Views*, raises an intriguing question: Are Mormons politically homogeneous? This book brings some intriguing data to the discussion of this issue, though it has some limitations.

The book sets up the question of the homogeneity of Mor-

mons by referencing a number of prior studies that focus almost exclusively on the political views of Utah Mormons. Fox's argument is that Mormons from Utah may very well be politically homogeneous given all of the things they have in common (e.g., religion, race/ethnicity, culture region, prox-

imity to LDS headquarters, etc.), but as soon as you leave Utah, Mormons become substantially more heterogeneous and other factors begin to influence their political views. As Fox puts it, "German Latter-Day Saints, for example, would resemble other Germans more

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Future SSSR Meetings:

**2008: October 17-19,
Louisville, Kentucky**
**2009: October 23-25,
Denver, Colorado**

Future MHA Meetings:

**2008: May 22-25,
Sacramento, CA**
**2009: May 21-24,
Springfield, IL**
**2010: May 27-30,
Independence, MO**
**2011: May, St.
George, UT**

Please send your dues for 2008 to Michael McBride, 7 Frost Street; Irvine, CA 92617. Dues are \$10.00 annually. Checks should be made payable to "Mormon Social Science Association" or "MSSA."

Dues are also payable on the MSSA website via Paypal (which accepts credit cards).

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: mcbride@uci.edu

Latter-Day Political Views (continued)

than they would Mexican, French, or Samoan Latter-Day Saints" (p. 10). At the global level, this argument is compelling and makes sense; with Mormonism or any multinational religion, you are likely to find inter-national diversity and intra-national homogeneity (though I can think of a few exceptions – e.g., Jehovah's Witnesses). But this argument also states that Mormons outside Utah are politically different from Mormons inside Utah, which isn't as compelling. Unfortunately, there is very little recent data to test this latter issue (Mauss's survey of Mormons in Utah and the Bay area, which is re-analyzed in this book, addresses this, but is dated), and this book doesn't address the inside/outside Utah question either. Instead, this book focuses on two questions: (1) Are Mormons outside the U.S. different from Mormons inside the U.S.? And, (2) is there variation in political views among Mormons in the U.S.?

Another important element of this book is the discussion of the basic assumption of the book: that religion influences political views. Given the focus of the book – Mormon political views – it makes sense that the underlying argument is that being Mormon influences one's political views. But the author doesn't just assume this to be the case. Instead, he talks about some of the major criticisms of this assumption: (1) there aren't always clear positions on political issues within religions, (2) you have to control for other political and regional cultural influences, and (3) measuring this directly is basically impossible (p. 13).

Having faced a similar issue with some of my research, I think the first two criticisms are addressable, and Fox does an okay job addressing them. But the third issue is not as readily addressed; in order to accurately capture the influence of religion on political views a level of measurement is required that is basically impossible to attain. You'd have to track individuals over time and be able to peer inside their heads to observe how religion influences their personal views. That, of course, isn't going to happen. Thus, we are left assuming that, if you control for criticisms 1 and 2 above, you can infer that it is religion that is influencing attitudes and not something else. This isn't always a compelling argument, but I guess that's as good as we can do in the social sciences.

This leads me to the methodological approach in this book. In order to address the questions that interest him, Fox uses a purposive sample of active, long-time Mormons from the U.S. (26), Canada (11), and Mexico (14). The total sample is 51 active Mormons. While the obvious criticism of non-random sampling is applicable, I can understand Fox's approach as well: he forewent representativeness for depth of analysis. Even so, the sample is one of the major limitations of this book. In order to control for other political and regional influences (criticism #2 above), you really need a comparison group. Fox skirts this requirement by arguing, perhaps inaccurately, that respondents from different countries are "necessarily" different as a result of the cultural influence of their respective countries,

alleviating the necessity of comparison groups. For example, Fox asserts that Canadian Mormons support universal health care because it is the norm in Canada. That's probably true, but, in a sense, he is now layering an assumption on an assumption: Canadian Mormons differ from: (1) U.S. Mormons because of their Canadian culture, and (2) from non-Mormon Canadians because of their Mormon culture. Again, that is probably true, but this is a good illustration of how making arguments concerning the influence of culture on individuals is limited. How many cultures can influence an individual? If it is more than one, can you ever really separate out the influences?

In addition to the limitation of the sample size, the sampling methodology is unclear and potentially problematic. Fox describes his sample as, "balanced in terms of gender, income, and political party identification" (p. 57) but it is unclear what he means by "balanced." Fox does report in Table 4.1 the genders, ages, and political party identifications of the respondents, but this isn't summarized in a table or in the text. Here's what I calculated: 19 women, 32 men; average age is 43.31; 11 Democrats (US), 15 Republicans (US); 10 participants with only a high school education, 41 with some college (how much isn't clear); 2 Africans, 1 Hawaiian, 6 Latinos, 1 Maori, 5 Native Americans, 1 Puerto Rican, 2 Samoans, 33 Caucasians. According to Heaton, Bahr, and Jacobson (2005), 23% of Mormons are Democrats while 50%

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MSSA Leadership**President:**

Rick Phillips
(2005-2009)

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Ryan T. Cragun
(2009-2011)

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(2007-2009)

Henri Gooren
(2007-2009)

**Treasurer/
Secretary:**

Michael McBride
(2007-present)

Newsletter Editor:

Ryan T. Cragun
(2003-present)

Latter-Day Political Views (continued)

are Republicans (leaving another 27% as independents). Fox isn't too far off, but I wouldn't necessarily consider his sample balanced on this factor.

Additionally, how these individuals were recruited is not clear. In the acknowledgments, Fox mentions he did some interviewing on vacations with his family, but I'm not sure what that means in terms of recruitment. In Chapter 5 Fox reveals some of the occupations among his respondents; they include: a Mayor, a Congressman, and other political activists. That doesn't seem particularly representative of Mormons. If the goal of a research project is to illustrate that there is variation in Mormon political views, you can illustrate that to be true by either surveying lots of people to show there is variation (Heaton et al.'s approach), or you can find a bunch of people who differ from the stereotype and interview them. That appears to be what Fox has done. Unfortunately, the second approach isn't really going to answer definitively whether and/or how much variation in political views there is among Mormons as it is, in essence, sampling on the dependent variable: Fox found people (how, we don't know) who fit his criteria for non-stereotypical Mormons and then used them to say Mormons are not stereotypical. That's a circular argument. I do think Fox is right that there is variation, but this is a serious limitation of the study.

Fox uses three different data collection techniques to triangulate political attitudes. He did some initial interviewing to generate his measurement instruments, used Q sorting and a survey to gather the bulk of his

data, then interviewed a few more people. Q methodology is a forced choice ranking technique in which participants evaluate a series of statements based on their level of agreement with them. The rankings are then factor analyzed to generate groups, which appears to be a type of cluster analysis (though with Q sorting you can belong to multiple groups, which seems odd to me). Based on his study of Mormonism and the official and unofficial positions of the LDS religion on a number of political issues, Fox geared the questions in the Q sort and the survey instrument to test agreement with the following positions of the LDS religion:

Social and Moral Issues

- Endorse traditional "family values"
- Concern with moral decline and attribution of moral decline to the media
- Oppose abortion and gambling

Capitalism and Economic Issues

- Place high value on private property and economic self-determination
- Low support for redistribution of power and wealth
- Low support for environmental regulation
- Emphasize self-reliance versus government provision of basic needs
- Are trusting of government and deferential to authority
- Oppose socialized health care

Military Spending and Foreign Affairs

- Support military spending and interventionism
- Support free trade

LDS Issues

- Have a high view of the inspired Constitution, and of the U.S. as a "light unto the world."
- Vote and pay attention to politics
- High hope in the future and high political efficacy
- Strong focus on "law and order"
- Highly individualistic outlook

Miscellaneous Issues

- Oppose gun control
- Oppose affirmative action

The Q sort indicates there is some variation among Mormons on political attitudes (though Fox admits these findings are not generalizable beyond his sample). Fox derives six distinct groups (the number in each group is in parentheses), which he labels:

A: Pro-US Social Conservatives (21)

B: Pro-US Libertarians (14)

C: Pro-US Optimistic Liberals (9)

D: Pro-US Alienated Liberals (8)

E: Ambivalent-US Communitarians (17)

F: Ambivalent-US Moderate Libertarians (5)

While six groups are initially derived from the Q sort, when plotted in two-dimensional space, it becomes apparent that there really are, at most, 3 or 4 groups (C and D group

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"German Latter-Day Saints, for example, would resemble other Germans more than they would Mexican, French, or Samoan Latter-Day Saints" (p. 10)

Latter-Day Political Views (continued)

together, as do E and B). Additionally, a correlation of the Q factors (p. 58) illustrates that they are all highly correlated, which means every one of these groups has a lot in common. Fox attributes this to a shared superfactor: "a high level of optimistic US-centric moralism" (p. 86). This finding left me wondering if the differences are, in fact, an artifact of the methodology. If participants did not have to rank the statements but could, instead, rate them independently, would minor differences still result? The findings from the survey seem to indicate there would be some differences, but I don't believe they are different enough to allow groupings.

Additionally, without non-Mormons in the sample, I have to wonder if this analysis is finding lots of mini-clusters within a large cluster. If, for example, we pretend we can measure political views on a single continuum (we can't, it's multi-dimensional) and that continuum ranges from 0 to 100, it may be the case that Mormons generally fall in the 80 to 90 point range on that continuum. Rather than recognize that they all fall in a 10 point range, Fox is asserting that there is a substantive and important difference between 80 and 90 (and between 83 and 85). He is basically zooming into a single cluster and finding clusters within the cluster. Without comparison groups, I'm left wondering if what Fox is doing is detecting mini-clusters (A, B, C, D, etc.) within a larger cluster (Mormons) that is quite removed from other clusters (e.g.,

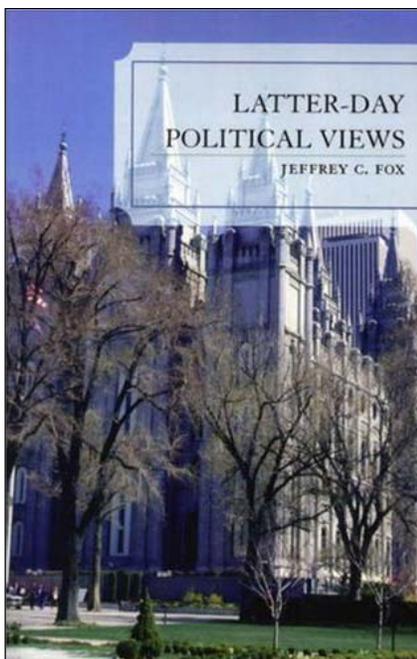
ultra-liberal feminists, socialists, or gay rights activists). What is this really telling us?

Following the Q sort, Fox looks at variations in attitudes by nationality. While the sample size really is too small to do the statistical analysis that Fox does, this part of the book was, to me at least, the most compelling argument that cultures other than religion influence attitudes. As noted earlier, almost to a person the Canadian participants supported universal health care while few Americans did and no Mexicans did. Given the limitations with the

majority groups. Again, this is not surprising, but it adds credibility to Fox's arguments.

To bolster the reader's confidence in his findings, Fox turns to additional data sets. He uses the National Election Studies (NELS), Armand Mauss's 1960s survey of Mormons in Utah and the Bay Area, as well as a KBYU exit poll data set. For the most part, these data sets support the arguments developed by Fox. The NELS data set is generally considered an excellent dataset, but Mauss's data is now over 40 years old, predates the change in race policy and even the push toward correlation. Generalizing from 40+ year old data to Mormons in the U.S. today is not very compelling. The KBYU data set, of course, is only from Utah, but Fox uses it to illustrate his point that Utah Mormons may be different from non-Utah Mormons; given its application, I don't think there is a problem with the KBYU data set. Combined, the additional data sets are a good addition, but better data sets are now available (see Heaton et. al. 2005).

There are some other very minor issues that warrant mention in passing. There is a lengthy yet unnecessary discussion of the early prosecution of Mormons. I think this was supposed to tie into the political views of Mormons, but how it was supposed to tie in isn't clear to me. In presenting the results for the Q sorts, only the significant statements for each group are presented, which makes it impossible to compare the groups. Readers



sample, this certainly isn't generalizable, but it does fit with general perceptions of what Mormons in these respective countries might believe. Unfortunately, the analysis by race is even more limited by the sample size, but it, too offers some intriguing insights: racial/ethnic minorities have more socially progressive views across the board than do the racial/ethnic

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"... most people already believe there is diversity among Mormons, but that diversity is within cluster, not between cluster..."

"The book is written for a general LDS audience, and does not purport to be a work of social science. However, there is much that is relevant to social scientists interested in Mormonism..."

Latter-Day Political Views (continued)

are left taking the author's word that they are really different. There are a few places where the author makes blanket statements that are unfounded, (e.g., "Church members always look to their leaders for guidance..." p. 29). These are unfortunate distractions in an otherwise well-written and carefully worded book (though there are quite a few typos and some table formatting issues that make them hard to read).

Ultimately, Fox concludes that, "... white Western Saints are a

fairly homogeneous minority within the worldwide membership of the church." That is probably overstating the case; but I'm not alone in that assessment. Fox also admits that, "the LDS conservative stereotype is correct in one sense. It is very unlikely that one will find significant numbers of textbook liberals among church members, particularly those who favor social libertarianism" (p. 161). I think this last statement from Fox is accurate. But I also think the broader issue, that Mor-

mons are not homogeneous, is a bit of a strawman: most people already believe there is diversity among Mormons, but that diversity is within a cluster, not between clusters. *Latter-Day Political Views* does provide some useful data illustrating inter-national diversity within that cluster, but this really is just a first step and not the definitive work.

Ryan T. Cragun
University of Tampa

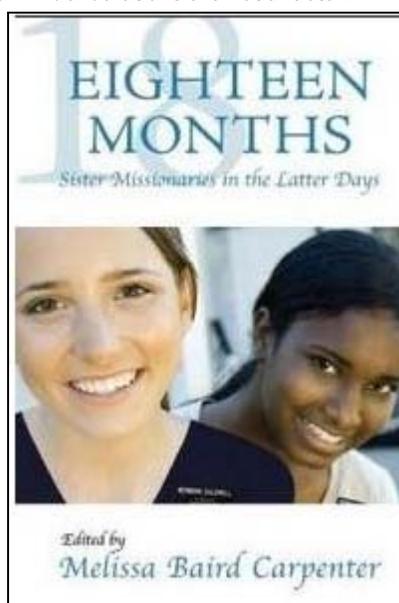
Book Review: Melissa Baird Carpenter, *Eighteen Months: Sister Missionaries in the Latter Days*, Orem, UT: Millennial Press, 2007. 171 pp. ASIN: B000VUAKCM. Price: US \$12.95 (paperback).

A great deal has been written lately about missionary work in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Missionaries are the engine of Mormon growth, and their distinctive appearance is a visible symbol of the church's presence around the globe. The missionary corps now numbers over 53,000, most of them men. For this reason, scholarly work on the mission experience has been disproportionately focused on the elders. However, sister missionaries are an important component of the Latter-day Saint missionizing enterprise, and there are good reasons why those hoping to understand Mormon proselytizing should consider the sisters separately. Sister missionaries have been around since 1898, and they now constitute nearly 20% of the proselytizing force. Sisters differ from their male counterparts in that they are older when they begin serving (21 vs. 19), their period of service is shorter (18 months vs. 2 years), and they tend to be

motivated to serve solely for religious reasons, since there is no expectation that young women will go on a mission and the social pressures that sometimes affect a young man's deliberations are not a factor.

the Latter Days, and it is a collection of essays written by women who have returned from the mission field. The book is edited by Melissa Baird Carpenter, the wife of a mission president in Brazil from 1998 – 2001. The contributors are allowed to speak in their own voice, without interpretations or interpolations by the editor. Hence, what follows is not an ethnography, but a collection of vignettes describing various aspects of sister missionary life. (The editor dubs her work a "collective memoir.") The chapters cover missionaries from a wide swath of time—from the 1980s to the present day—and detail experiences in mission fields ranging from Japan to Portugal to Salt Lake City.

The book is written for a general LDS audience, and does not purport to be a work of social science. However, there is much that is relevant to social scientists interested in Mormonism, and some intriguing



These distinctive features of LDS women's missionary work are the backdrop for a new book on sister missionaries. The book is entitled, *Eighteen Months: Sister Missionaries in*

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“Still others were shocked and humbled by the poverty they saw, and noted that being a missionary introduced them to the idea that they were—by the world’s standards—very rich and privileged.”

Eighteen Months (continued)

ing insights can be gleaned from these vignettes. For instance, many of the stories in this book frankly recount some of the hardships that anyone embarking on missionary work (especially in a foreign culture) might expect to endure. Some of the contributors were surprised to discover that, however strong their faith, religious commitment could not completely assuage the sting of homesickness, feelings of unworthiness, or culture shock. A number of sisters lamented the lack of creature comforts in the sweltering tropics, or the rather awkward practice of riding a bicycle in a skirt, or the palpable danger of being a conspicuous target for robbers in the developing world. Still others were shocked and humbled by the poverty they saw, and noted that being a missionary introduced them to the idea that they were—by the world’s standards—very rich and privileged.

Interpersonal relationships were a common theme in the essays. Even though sister missionaries share the same faith, some were surprised to find that this commonality doesn’t make it any easier to live with a stranger—especially since the global character of Mormonism virtually assures that you will live with someone of a different nationality and native tongue. Strategies for getting along and discovering first-hand that the church is no longer a primarily

American institution are important lessons and insights that are imparted to the reader in interesting and powerful ways through the essays.

Another frequent theme in *Eighteen Months* that anyone who has served an LDS mission can relate to are the debilitating effects of exhaustion and the cumulative toll of sleep deprivation. Missionary life is physically taxing, and the sisters write a great deal about how they managed to endure the rigors of their missions. Stories about nodding off while praying or falling asleep on a companion’s bed in proselytizing clothes illustrate that missionaries are expected to adhere to a demanding schedule and work at a swift pace.

Strikingly absent from the essays is any discussion of how leadership aspirations affect relationships between missionaries or promote conflict in the mission. The reason for this omission is obvious: the mission flowchart is a priesthood hierarchy, and hence the sisters are able to stand outside the politics that sometimes occupy the elders. This means that the vignettes are more focused on conversion stories, and on the spiritual experiences that characterize mission life.

Given that one primary audience for the book is young women who might be consider-

ing a mission, a lot of attention is given to spiritual experiences and the evidence of Providence in missionary life. It is interesting to note that several essayists write that the Spirit is often something that is not recognized in the moment, but rather seen through the clarity of hindsight.

Nevertheless, it is important not to generalize too much from the experiences of the women in *18 Months*, because this book does not present a representative sample of returned sisters. Although there are some notable exceptions, the women are disproportionately white Americans. They are also highly educated, with most of the contributors holding advanced degrees. This limits the extent to which one can generalize from the vignettes, but since the book does not purport to be a sociological study, this is not a criticism. Moreover, what the book lacks in generalizability it makes up for in the quality of the writing exhibited throughout. In short, *18 Months* is an enjoyable read and an excellent way to gather some first hand information about the lives of sister missionaries in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Rick Phillips
University of North Florida

News

Congratulations to Marie Cornwall and Matt Bahr

Marie Cornwall was chosen as the next editor of the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion. Her tenure was announced at the 2007 SSSR meetings. Her editorial duties began at the

beginning of 2008. Matt Bahr, another member of the MSSA, will be helping her out as the Book Review editor.

Claremont Mormon Studies Student Association

The Claremont Mormon Studies

Student Association has a new website:

<http://rsc.cgu.edu/cmssa/>

The website contains a variety of announcements and re-

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Mormon Social Science Association

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The Mormon Social Science Association (MSSA) exists for the purpose of promoting and sharing the scholarly study of Mormon life. Any person with an interest in the study of the social, cultural, or religious life of Mormons is eligible to join. MSSA provides contact and association among researchers and educators working in both academic and applied settings. It is interdisciplinary and international in scope and purpose. The association participates in the annual joint meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR) and the Religious Research Association (RRA). MSSA also publishes and distributes a semi-annual newsletter to its members.

Visit us at:

www.mormonsocialscience.org

News (continued) & Recent Publications

sources for individuals interested in scholarship on Mormonism, primarily from historical and humanities perspectives.

European Mormon Studies Association Conference

August 21-22, 2008 - The European Mormon Studies Association is joining with the Department of Comparative Religion at Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland for their annual conference. The theme of the conference is "Mormonism and the Christian Tradition." Deadline for paper proposals is April 15,

Recent Publications

McBride, Michael. "Club Mormon: Free-riders, Monitoring, and Exclusion in the LDS

Church," 2007, *Rationality and Society* 19 (4): 395-424

Inaugural issue of The British Journal of Mormon Studies is now available as a free download:

<http://www.lulu.com/content/2007882>

Jacobson, Cardell K, John P Hoffmann, and Tim B Heaton. 2008. *Revisiting Thomas F. O'Dea's The Mormons: Contemporary Perspectives*. University of Utah Press, \$34.95.

From the Press:

Fifty years ago, Thomas F. O'Dea, a Catholic sociologist who taught at the University of Utah from 1959 to 1964, published a landmark study titled simply *The Mormons*. It remains one of the most widely cited social science

treatments of Mormon society and culture.

Now, after five decades of additional scholarly inquiry, this volume revisits O'Dea's life and work, while offering new insights about the LDS Church and its members. Scholars from the U.S. and Europe contribute to an examination of the interplay between contemporary social issues and the church, including such topics as civil rights, the women's movement, homosexuality, rising divorce rates, and childbirth outside marriage. The relationship of the church to the nation is considered. Finally, issues relating to the international church are also discussed.

Drawing from diverse fields

such as sociology, economics, theology, psychology, and anthropology, each contribution offers a reflection of O'Dea's *The Mormons* while considering the persistent themes and contemporary issues that face the church today.

