

## The Contributions of Armand Mauss to Mormon Studies

By Gary Shepherd

Presented at the Annual Meetings of the SSSR/MSSA, Salt Lake City, November 2, 2002

It's a distinct honor for me to be part of this panel to recognize the scholarly contributions of Armand Mauss to religious and Mormon studies. In my estimation, Armand is the pre-eminent scholar of contemporary Mormonism, and virtually all of us in this room—not to mention thousands of other scholars, students, and knowledge-seeking lay-people—have been the fortunate beneficiaries of this fact. The brief time we have here today is not adequate to provide a detailed account—or even a good summary—of all Armand's contributions over a 35-year career. In the 15 or 20 minutes allocated to me, I will only attempt to highlight several general categories of what I see as among his most significant contributions to Mormon studies alone.

First I want to highlight Armand's leadership role in facilitating, promoting, and stimulating the scholarly study of Mormonism. He has done this over a career of unparalleled multiple, central involvements with professional bodies of social scientists, historians, and theologians. Since we are right now in a session sponsored by the Mormon Social Science Association as part of the annual meetings of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, let me first comment briefly on Armand's connection to these two organizations.

It is no exaggeration to say that our own little group—the MSSA—owes its 25-year survival primarily to Armand's guidance, prodding, and encouragement since its inception in 1976 (then less inclusively named the Sociological Study of Mormon Life). Armand was not only among those who joined with Glen Vernon in founding the SSML, but subsequently he literally carried this organization on his back for many years as editor and chief contributor to the newsletter and as the *de facto* driving force in recruiting new members, lining up papers and speakers, and generally representing and linking us to other professional scholarly bodies with interests in Mormonism. While MSSA (so named since 1995) has remained modest in size and operation, we have counted among our ranks Mormon scholars of some mark, whose work we have encouraged, supported, critiqued, improved, and advanced. Armand's imprint is clearly on the greater portion of these positive accomplishments.

Much more visible and significant to social scientists of religion in general was and is, of course, Armand's prominent involvement in the SSSR, including especially his 3-year editorship of the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* from 1989 through 1992. Armand was in a strategic position then to gain greater recognition and advancement for good Mormon studies scholarship within SSSR, which I believe he did. But more important for Mormon studies than mere positional patronage of colleagues was Armand's own merited stature among his associates as an outstanding scholar who exemplified, in his own scholarship as well as in his editorial and other official duties, high professional standards and intellectual rigor that reflected favorably upon and gained credibility for the work of other scholars of Mormonism. In short, I believe he

has elevated the overall stature of Mormon studies in the social sciences by both his own scholarly example and by insisting on application of the same high standards in assessing the work of other Mormon scholars.

Outside the social science arena per se, Armand's influence on the maintenance and development of Mormon studies has been even greater. Most visible among his contributions within the non-social science community of Mormonism scholars have been his long-standing connections to *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, and to the Mormon History Association. *Dialogue*, the first and premier interdisciplinary scholarly journal devoted exclusively to works on Mormonism, has been in existence for 36 years and is subscribed to and followed religiously by thousands of readers. Armand has been a scholarly contributor to *Dialogue* for 35 of these 36 years, a member of its editorial and advisory boards for 19 years, and Chair of the Board of Directors for the past four years. This long span of continual service in key policy and editorial positions strongly suggests that Armand has exerted a significant impact on the substance and direction of critical thought within the Mormon intellectual community. He has also provided crucial behind-the-scenes leadership in keeping *Dialogue* afloat during recurrent periods of financial and production crisis, particularly in the last several years since assuming the office of Board Chair.

*Dialogue* has provided an indispensable forum for expressing Mormon culture and examining the relevance of Mormonism to "secular life..." to "the larger stream of world religious thought, and [to] human experience as a whole." Since *Dialogue* is an interdisciplinary journal, the proportion of social science pieces appearing in its pages has been relatively small compared to the combined proportion of historical, literary, artistic, and theological works published. Nevertheless, Armand has effectively advocated for and facilitated the appearance of good social science in *Dialogue*, again through the combination of his own high caliber scholarship and professional stature among his colleagues. Most notable in this regard was a special issue that Armand guest-edited in 1996 on the prospects and issues facing Mormons and Mormonism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century that was replete with articles written by social scientists.

Armand's service as a council member of the Mormon History Association and his ascendancy as president of the association in 1997-8 are particularly significant indicators of the scope and significance of Armand's contributions to Mormon Studies. The MHA is a large organization comprised of multiple thousands of unusually committed members, many of whom appear from time to time to be somewhat dubious of the usefulness of social science research on Mormon topics. Armand has clearly done yeoman service to alter this attitude through the usual means of professional reputation and his own impeccable scholarship (that invariably demonstrates historical sensitivity and command of relevant historical sources while illuminating core Mormon topics with sociological insight). Additional contributing factors of no small import are Armand's instincts for effective organizational leadership, his intellectual integrity, moral courage, and his personal connectedness with so many important Mormon intellectuals, Mormon scholars, and an array of Mormon scholarly enterprises.

Indeed, it is this last point that perhaps is most reflective of Armand's cumulative value to Mormon studies, namely the overlapping scope of his organizational, intellectual, and personal involvements in key positions, key relationships, and in key scholarly issues relating to

the study of Mormonism. Who has cultivated a wider, more significant network of contacts with Mormon insiders and outsiders, social scientists and non-social scientists, believers and unbelievers, and in the process has stimulated and facilitated an enormously fruitful cross-fertilization of perspectives, ideas, and understanding of Mormon institutions and their dynamic interaction with the larger world, than Armand Mauss?

And who has been a more compelling advocate of the particular value of social science to an understanding of Mormonism than Armand? His monumental effort in cataloging and annotating the social science literature on Mormons—recently published in two separate volumes published by the University of Illinois Press as chapters in a unique, larger bibliographic project edited by historians James Allen, Ronald Walker, and David Whittaker—was a major contribution to a general appreciation for the scope and useful application of social science methods and insights in Mormon studies. Of course, Armand's own scholarship on Mormon topics has made significant contributions in its own right and indeed exemplifies the potential of properly conceived and executed sociological analysis to do so. It is to Armand's scholarship on Mormonism that I now briefly turn my attention.

Armand's CV reveals a lengthy and distinguished list of scholarly publications and presentations over the course of his career. Today I am only going to highlight two of his published works with a particular emphasis on the latter of these. The works are, first, *The Angel and The Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation*, published by the University of Illinois Press in 1994, and, second, the forthcoming *All of Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage*, also published by the University of Illinois Press. Both of these books represent the culmination of an early research agenda set by Armand as far back as his graduate school days at the University of California, Berkeley in the mid to late 1960s. This agenda focused on seeing social change as the central issue in the sociological study of Mormonism. Subsequently, the bulk of Armand's work in Mormon studies, especially including these last two books, is fundamentally concerned with analyzing the transformation of Mormon beliefs, practices, and institutions in relation to a complex history of relationships with the external social world.

*The Angel and the Beehive* in some ways more broadly addresses this social change or transformation theme, subsuming for instance some of the racial and ethnic issues more specifically targeted in *All of Abraham's Children*. It attempts to chart and account for the curvilinear nature of Mormon accommodation to an initially hostile and increasingly secular host society. Departing from traditional sect-church models that project continual compromising of socially radical tenets and practices ultimately leading to loss of a distinctive and oppositional identity, Armand marshals a number of empirical findings to argue that contemporary Mormonism has entered into a retrenchment phase of identity protection. (Ironically, though, one of these main retrenchment trends is identified as increasing belief and policy merger with certain strands of conservative Protestantism, itself a movement towards loss of distinctive Mormon identity.)

While *All of Abraham's Children* is subsumable in a theoretical sense to the more general conceptual framework aimed at in *The Angel and the Beehive*, it is nevertheless a truly ambitious work of broad scope. As important as *Angel and the Beehive* is, *All of Abraham's Children*, in

my judgment, is a more mature, coherent, and thematically consistent work. In fact, I believe it is a seminal work, Armand's true *magnum opus* and his single greatest legacy to scholarship on Mormonism. To produce this book, Armand has assiduously combed through and integrated a vast literature on racial and ethnic beliefs and practices as these pertain to Mormon theology and policy and has joined this literature to his own primary research on these issues. He particularly focuses attention on those major racial-ethnic categories (in relation to white Europeans) that have been most significant in Mormon history, namely Indians of both North and South America, Polynesians, Jews, Africans, and African-Americans. He reviews the historical context in which primal Mormon assumptions about race and lineage related to these categories emerged and identifies the various strands of external influences on Mormon thinking about these topics, including the 19<sup>th</sup> Century ideologies of British Israelism and Anglo Saxon Triumphalism. He shows the manifest significance of these assumptions for Mormonism past, present, and future, and reveals the complex processes through which these assumptions have changed and are still changing as the modern Mormon Church continues its world-wide expansion through massive missionary efforts. In fact Armand convincingly argues that a substantial fraction of this growth is itself both product and producer of changes in Mormon thought on the divine meaning of lineage and ethnic-racial categories.

More specifically, *All Abraham's Children* expands our understanding of (1) the origins and subsequent development of key Mormon theological assumptions on the divine implications of group lineage, (2) the way these theological assumptions have over time generated substantial impact on major organizational policies and programs, particularly involving missionary efforts, (3) the dynamics involved in racial-ethnic relationships as the Mormon Church continues to expand among the non-European peoples of the world, and (4) the socio-historical events and processes which have created pressure for modifying Mormon thought and practice related to race and ethnicity. These are issues that, through Armand's masterly treatment, heuristically expand their value to a wider audience beyond specialists in Mormon studies. Scholars of American history will find much in these pages that adds to their grasp of significant social forces and movements operating in both the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Social Scientists too will discover much here that illuminates such core theoretical topics as identity construction and transformation, minority versus majority relationships, ethnic and racial conflict, and the dynamics of social accommodation and change. Finally, anyone who grasps the significance of modern Mormon global expansion will achieve, through a careful reading of Armand's book, an enlarged understanding of the premises that both fuel and are confronted by this same expansion.

The last thing that I would like to highlight more explicitly about Armand's scholarly contributions to Mormon studies is his insistence on wedding sound empirical data, including the historical record, to meaningful conceptual analysis. This is a quality present in virtually all of his work but is showcased most impressively in *All Abraham's Children*. In his synthesis of secondary and primary source materials, Armand's analysis displays the virtues of combining both ideographic and nomothetic theoretical approaches; that is, detailed explications of particular, historically specific events are combined with overarching explanations that identify general causal patterns operating within these events. Quibbles can be made over the identification and interpretation of various historical facts in *All Abraham's Children*. But the overall level of analytical discourse engaged in here is of a very high order and is richly satisfying at both concrete informational and abstract theoretical levels.

There is, in fact, a strong whiff of Max Weber in the conceptual scope and analytical method employed by Armand in this work. There is also an underlying social constructionist view of human activity in the theoretical perspectives Armand applies to comprehend the interrelated Mormon patterns of theological and organizational change in relation to various encounters with non-Mormon societies. These insights are accessible to the non-sociologist as well as to the specialist. Armand's writing is remarkably free from technical, sociological jargon without impairing the conceptual import of what he is saying. Finally, but not least importantly for sound and credible scholarship on religious subjects, Armand's work is a model of objective detachment. His personal status as a Mormon never manifests itself in polemics; it is only evident in the insider access and insights that yield greater verisimilitude to his presentation and analysis. Armand is in fact a man of religious faith. But in the realm of scholarship, he is first and foremost a faithful sociologist who has mastered his craft and has the faith to apply it to his own religious tradition in ways that yield greater appreciation for the human dimensions of that tradition.