

***Shifting Borders and a Tattered Passport: Intellectual Journeys of a Mormon Academic* (University of Utah Press, 2012) by Armand Mauss**

Review by Gordon Shepherd

Armand is not only a good scholar, he's also a good writer. These two qualities, of course, are not always equivalent. In Armand's case, however, solid scholarship and good writing strongly complement each other and are characteristic of his substantial body of published work.

As a good writer, Armand is adept at using metaphors. Take, for example, his earlier book on Mormonism entitled *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation*. As two iconic LDS symbols, the beehive and the angel signify Mormonism's worldly and otherworldly orientations in tension with one another; and they concisely embody Armand's thesis regarding the dialectical relationship between Mormonism's distinctive religious fundamentals and the dominant religious traditions and secular institutions of American society. Likewise, for the title of his intellectual memoir that we are reviewing today, Armand skillfully deploys the language of borders and passports as metaphors for rendering an exposition of his transactional careers in academia and the Mormon faith community—parallel careers that have mutually shaped Armand's intellectual development and contributions to both academic scholarship and the LDS Church.

Whether they have good writing skills or not, most people do not write and publish their personal memoirs. We should therefore ask why some people do so and why anybody else should read them. In his forthcoming book, *Justifiable Conduct*, sociologist Erich Goode argues that memoir writing is primarily a rhetorical vehicle for self-vindication. All of us routinely attempt to justify ourselves in daily life by offering verbal accounts of our conduct in conversations with other people. Those who formulate more complex, vindicating accounts of their life's most prominent endeavors in written form offer prospective readers a memoir. To a greater or lesser degree, memoirs may be candid, honest, revealing—even confessional—but ultimately are always written from a self-vindicating perspective. This, Goode argues, is the author's primary motive for writing a memoir.

While this may explain why people write memoirs, it does not explain why other people read them. People read memoirs to learn something. By this I don't mean

merely learning details about the personal lives of the rich and famous (let alone about people with more modest lives like Armand Mauss). We read memoirs for information that is potentially instructive, that reveals insights for a richer understanding of issues and events pertinent to our own lives and concerns, even when we must take with a grain of salt the author's personal representations of them. A memoir typically includes an insider's account of behind the scenes activities that are not widely known, including personal perceptions of other relevant actors who are necessarily involved in the author's narrative. Of course an author's accounts are biased, but a good memoir also constructs a meaningful historical context; it informs readers of the author's time and place and of the cultural surroundings, so that we learn something more about the world than the author's mere moral judgments of himself and his peers.

What is instructive in Armand's memoir? In the most general terms, Armand's memoir demonstrates how people may acquire and manage two central identities in frequent tension while maintaining an essential integrity to both. More specifically, we see in his memoir an earnest, maturational struggle to reconcile the timeless tension between religious faith and secular learning in such a way that he honors both the LDS tradition and academic social science—two often contending communities in which his religious and professional identities remain steadfastly rooted. Neither one of these identities can, in Armand's case, be fully understood apart from the other

Needless to say, this is not the only pathway followed by budding, scholar-intellectuals raised (or as Armand puts it, "steeped") in the religious traditions of the LDS faith. Many others in Armand's shoes have ended up making very different choices, either distancing themselves from their hereditary faith or subordinating their scholarly preoccupations to Mormonism's lay demands and intellectual constraints. Armand has done neither. He has bridged these two worlds. He has managed to influentially negotiate his way back and forth through the halls of academe and the councils of the church in such a way as to make respected contributions to both.

What are Armand's contributions and how do they demonstrate the intimate connections between his religious and scholarly commitments? To answer these questions we must turn to the substantive contents of his memoir.

In Chapter One Armand narrates a summary overview of the major forming connections and events in his life. He was raised in California (rather than the Utah- Mormon heartland) by devout Mormon parents struggling to make ends meet during the Great Depression. Armand was always a good student in school. We can infer that he was bright, socially active, and increasingly confident in his own abilities and opinions. This included youthful, uncritical confidence in his religious faith, which he did not shy away from explaining or defending to his non-LDS peers. Armand's post-World War II experience as a youthful Mormon missionary in New England strongly reinforced his adolescent religious identity and self-confidence, but included at least one important new lesson that he internalized for the rest of his life. And that was the need to support one's beliefs with credible forms of evidence and documentation. Armand learned that simply asserting truth claims (religious or otherwise) in dialogue with educated detractors was not only ineffectual, it was personally humiliating and irresponsible. This lesson was strengthened later through Armand's undergraduate education at Sophia University, a venerable Jesuit school in Japan. The Jesuits were models of sophisticated erudition in defense of Catholic teachings while also being highly conversant in secular subjects. They were philosophically credible and they influenced Armand's aspirations toward becoming an articulate and scholastically well prepared defender of his own LDS faith.

There is not time to review in detail all of the shaping connections and events relative to Armand's intellectual maturation. Suffice it to say that while still an undergraduate student he got married to a very patient and supportive wife, commenced having a big Mormon family (eventually totaling eight children), served in the U.S air force, accepted and served in various lay LDS callings including counselor in a ward bishopric, worked an assortment of jobs to support his growing family, and eventually started taking graduate courses at Berkeley to earn a Master's degree and secondary teaching credential. Consequently, Armand began teaching in the public school system and eventually hired on as an instructor at a California state junior college. All of this is to say that Armand's family obligations and religious duties were at the forefront of his early adult concerns, retarding for over a dozen years his full immersion into academia. This lengthy interregnum also meant that before commencing his PhD studies in sociology (also at Berkeley), Armand was a mature adult, with a world view formed by his

Mormon faith, middle class working values, and conservative political opinions that were sharply at variance with the emerging youth movements and radicalism of the 1960s.

It's also fair to say that, intellectually, Armand was profoundly influenced by his graduate education in sociology, studying with and encouraged by some of the prominent scholars in the discipline, including several with national standing in the sociology of religion. It was at this time that Armand began thinking seriously about the possibilities of studying his Mormon faith tradition through the academic lens of empirical sociology. This was not motivated by a loss of religious faith; to the contrary, Armand saw the prospects of satisfying his dormant intellectualism with regard to contested issues of Mormon history, theology, and cultural practices—and, we may also infer, the prospect of becoming a more credible and effective defender of the faith.

It should be noted, however, that at this point Armand was not interested in gaining a position at BYU, the LDS Church's flagship university, where he surmised his intellectual inquisitiveness and academic interest in the sociology of Mormonism would not be rewarded. Instead, after his graduate studies at Berkeley, Armand accepted a junior faculty position at Utah State, where he remained only two years before actively seeking a more prestigious academic appointment at Washington State University. There he successfully pursued his professional career until retirement in 1999. Since the turn of the new century, Armand has enjoyed a post-retirement career as adjunct faculty and a member of the LDS Council for Mormon studies at Claremont Graduate University.

Such is the skimpiest outline of the mobility of Armand's academic life. In forwarding his professional career, we see Armand's ambition at play as he pursued full integration and advancement in academia. This meant postponing his interest in Mormon studies to concentrate on more conventional social science research topics in the areas of social problems, deviance, alcohol studies, and social movements, for which he was able to win grants, cultivate a stable of graduate students, publish articles in reputable journals, and gain a national reputation in the field of social problems. During this time Armand contributed an occasional article on Mormon topics to *Dialogue*, but did not really shift his full

attention to Mormon studies until achieving tenure and academic rank at Washington State.

Eventually, Armand's academic credentials won him editorship of *The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*—the discipline's premier journal in religion—where he was able to enhance his visibility and reputation among scholars of religion, as well as enrich his own breadth of knowledge concerning religious issues that crystallized his understanding of contemporary Mormonism as a particular kind of religious movement in the modern world.

One major result of this crystallization was Armand's first book on the Mormon religion—*The Angel and the Beehive*—a landmark study published in 1994 that advanced Armand's highly influential thesis concerning the contending assimilationist and retrenchment tendencies of modern Mormonism. A decade later, Armand published another major book on Mormonism—*All of Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage*—the culmination of his decades long preoccupation with racial issues confronting modern Mormonism in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

In both these books Armand employed the critical, analytical methods and analysis of his scholarly training. Neither book is apologetic and both books have raised some defensive eyebrows in Latter-day Saint circles. At the same time, neither book is at all polemical and, to the discerning reader, we see in both books Armand's ultimately protective attitude toward his LDS faith in conjunction with his own scholarly integrity.

Armand, of course, has done far more for Mormon scholarship than write two major books. Over the years he has written numerous articles for *Dialogue*, the *Journal of Mormon History*, *Sunstone*, and various edited volumes of collective readings on Mormon topics—displaying in all of them his characteristically careful scholarship and underlying, respectful affection for the LDS Church and its rank and file members.

Of equal importance, Armand has actively supported and performed leadership roles in many of the most important organizations that have emerged over the past 40 years for providing non-official, auxiliary outlets for scholarship in the Mormon intellectual community. He was the Mormon Social Science Association's first

president and remains a senior, highly influential member of that organization; he has served a term as *President of the Mormon History Association* as well; and, perhaps most influentially, he began serving on *Dialogue's* editorial board in 1979 and, for ten years was a member of its Board of Directors, including a stint as board chairman during a time of considerable upheaval and transition for the journal. Finally, in his retirement, Armand became and remains actively involved with the Claremont Graduate University's trend-setting experiment in developing a Mormon Studies component to its nationally renowned school of religious studies.

In all of these endeavors, both academic and church related, Armand's connections and aspirations with regard to his Mormon faith have undergone significant change. His early aspirations for advancement in LDS leadership ranks were deflected by his parallel advancement as a serious, academic scholar. His academic training in sociology sensitized him to the fact that all organizations, including the LDS Church, are socially constructed by human actors. He retains respect for ecclesiastical authority but does not view church leaders as infallible and feels free to offer what he considers to be balanced criticism when circumstances warrant. His mature, scholarly views on Mormon history and contemporary church functioning have occasioned some friction with local ecclesiastical leaders but have never produced serious ruptures in Armand's church standing. At the same time, Armand also characteristically has taken it upon himself to speak unofficially in defense of the church and its policies to media sources and his academic colleagues. And for decades as a prominent figure in the contemporary Mormon intellectual community, Armand has acted vigorously in promoting his views, both in his writing and various administrative positions. In so doing he occasionally has been involved in earnest disagreements with his fellow Mormon intellectuals, some of which are candidly recounted in his memoir.

As Armand himself says, his has not been a boring life. It is a life that reveals how one's passports granting passage across the borderlands of religious faith and secular learning may become worn and a little tattered by frequent use over time, but still remain intact. Anyone reading Armand's memoir not only will see the unfolding of his closely entwined religious and professional careers, but also will be enlightened about changing trends in the ecclesiastical culture of the LDS Church from the critical perspective of a preeminent, academic insider.