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The Angel and the Beehive by Armand L. Mauss

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ARMAND L. MAUSS. *The Angel and the Beehive*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994. xvii; 257 pp. Charts and tables, appendix, bibliography, index. $29.95.

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The Angel and the Beehive is the story of Mormons vacillating between acceptance and rejection of the surrounding American culture. The beehive serves as the symbol of worldly enterprise, including economic, educational, cultural, and political success—the enterprises that help accelerate the process of assimilation. In sharp contrast, the angel represents the otherworldly spiritual dimensions, such as latter-day prophets, redemption of the dead, and proclaiming the faith to all—the dimensions that serve to separate Mormons from Gentiles and make Mormonism distinctive from other religions. The story is about Mormons seeking assimilation into the surrounding culture until the 1960s, then striving for distance when the culture becomes too receptive. They reevaluate their progress, gradually reverse the trend, and rebuild their barriers. Today, Mauss reports, the "angel is alive and well, and the church is anxious for the world to know it" (199).

But this book is more than a story about the Mormons' struggle with the larger culture. As a sociologist, Armand Mauss assesses this struggle using theory and research on the sect-to-church transition.[1] He explains how sectarian tension can increase religious commitment, and eventually he concludes that the LDS Church has defied the standard drift from sect to church by choosing to increase sectarian tension rather than reduce its demands on the faithful. Finally, the book reports on the personal journey of the author. Mauss describes the book as "an effort to help me understand my own changing relationship to the Mormon institutions and people" (xiii).

The Angel and the Beehive begins by devoting attention to the "successful assimilation" of Mormons prior to the 1960s. Chapters two through five provide evidence of the assimilation process. Drawing on Shepherd and Shepherd's analysis of rhetoric in general conference sermons[2] and on a variety of historical accounts, Mauss argues that until the 1960s Mormon leaders and the laity

were gradually de-emphasizing the distinctive features of Mormonism and attempting to bring the Church into the mainstream. Here, he turns to his own surveys of California and Utah Mormons in the 1960s and compares his findings to Stark and Glock's 1960s surveys of a wide range of denominations.[3] At the end of chapter four, he concludes that by the 1960s Mormons were highly assimilated, except in the area of "life-style," where he reported a "lagging assimilation."

Chapters six through eight then review the response of LDS Church officials and the laity to this process of assimilation. He describes this response as retrenchment. He narrows his review to five areas of retrenchment: the principle of continuous revelation through modern prophets, genealogy and temple work, the missionary program, family renewal, and religious education. He returns to Shepherd and Shepherd's work to demonstrate that these themes have received increased emphasis in general conference sermons and cites the General Social Surveys[4] to show that Mormons score higher than non-Mormons in these areas and numerous other measures of religiosity.

The final chapters argue that fundamentalism is on the rise within Mormonism. But the definition used for fundamentalism strays from standard LDS usage. Rather than referring to groups espousing polygamy, Mauss defines Mormon fundamentalists as those believing in scriptural inerrancy, salvation by grace, authoritarian leadership, and strict obedience to pastoral injunctions. Using this definition, he cites the use of a lay clergy, a movement toward centralized management, the turnover in the First Presidency, the reaction to a new class of intellectuals, and the disproportionate conversion of southerners as sources for this rise in fundamentalism. Again, Mauss illustrates how this trend is apparent in the belief and behavior of both Church officials and the laity. The final chapter closes the book by offering a few predictions and cautionary notes for the future.

The contributions of this book are many. Though not a historian, the author provides a historical backdrop to contemporary issues and draws on a variety of historical sources. This approach allows the author to include the variable of time in his analysis and argument. The book also addresses several theoretical issues by

demonstrating how the LDS Church defies the traditional sect-to-church drift and by offering perceptive insights on the institutional sources for what he calls fundamentalism. Though the author's personal support does not fall in the fundamentalist camp, he draws on rational choice theory to acknowledge the benefits of strict demands and a distinctive identity for the commitment of members and the growth of the organization. Finally, for those not familiar with the Mormon religion, this book provides an insider's knowledge on Mormon institutions and beliefs.

The limitations of the book are primarily limitations of the data. My most serious concern is whether the data support the basic trends the book is designed to explain. Were the Mormons highly assimilated in the 1960s, and have they reversed this trend since the 1960s? I am convinced by the arguments and the evidence that Church officials have made substantial strides toward keeping assimilation in check and promoting a distinctive identity. But I am less convinced that Church officials and the laity made a sharp turn in the 1960s. First, and perhaps most importantly, the level of assimilation in the 1960s is reviewed from only one side of the assimilation relationship—the Mormon side. Though LDS achievements reflected the achievements of the nation and the members identified with the culture around them, most Latter-day Saints were still regionally isolated, and tensions remained. Mauss concludes that only in the area of "life-style" was there evidence of "lagging assimilation." But as I review the tables, I see Mormon distinctiveness going beyond life-style, and I view life-style as a difference that makes a difference. Because life-style differences—such as religious endogamy, high birth rates, and abstinence from alcohol, tobacco, coffee, and tea—are highly revealing of a person's religious commitment, they are differences that draw effective boundaries. My reading of the data is that assimilation was far from complete in the 1960s.

Second, I am only partially convinced that there has been a noticeable retrenchment. I am persuaded that the rates of temple work, mission activity, and participation in family home evenings are increasing, but the surveys used to demonstrate a widening gap between Mormon religiosity and that of others are plagued with problems. In contrast to the surveys of the 1960s, which

focused on church members from selected regions, the General Social Surveys of the 1970s and 1980s were based on the entire adult population, and respondents were asked to list religious affiliation rather than membership. By using affiliates, the latter surveys include large numbers of inactive Catholics and Protestants in the non-Mormon category, sharply reducing the reported level of commitment for non-Mormons. Mauss acknowledges the resulting potential for distortion when he comments in a footnote: "It must be conceded here that juxtaposing the sixties data with the eighties data might well exaggerate the widening gap between Mormons and others" (156).

Beyond the issue of data, other readers will challenge the explanations offered for recent changes. Is the increasing rate of temple work, mission activity, and participation in family home evenings a retrenchment, or is this a response to the increasing Mormon growth outside the Utah sphere? As Mormons find themselves a local minority in the Midwest, the South, and around the world, are they being forced to take a sectarian stance and change their relationship with the larger culture? This book represents just one viewpoint on this intriguing issue.

Despite these concerns, Mauss's research will be of interest to a wide range of audiences. For social scientists, the book offers an inside look at recent changes in the LDS Church and applies these changes to key theoretical insights. For insiders, the book provides an application of theoretical insights to important Church issues. For anyone interested in American religion, the book reviews a diverse collection of data sources on American religion. And, for Mauss, the book has provided a journey in the ongoing quest for understanding. I'm sure many will want to join him on that journey.

NOTES

[1]In the sect-to-church theory, "churches" are religions that "have grown worldly and comfortable with the surrounding culture"; "sects" are groups that want to focus on otherworldly issues and therefore break away from churches (6).

[2]Gordon Shepherd and Gary Shepherd, *A Kingdom Transformed: Themes in the Development of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1984).

[3]Rodney Stark and Charles Y. Glock, *American Piety: The Nature of Religious Commitment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

[4]The General Social Surveys are federally funded, annual surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Corporation (NORC). See James A. Davis and Tom W. Smith, *General Social Surveys, 1972–1990* (Chicago: National Opinion Research Corporation, 1990).