12-1-2013

Shifting Borders and a Tattered Passport: Intellectual Journeys of a Mormon Academic

Roger Terry
Armand L. Mauss

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol52/iss4/16
BOOK NOTICES


Terryl Givens’s classic study on Mormon literature entitled The Viper on the Hearth is known as one of the most in-depth literary studies of anti-Mormon texts. Givens himself calls this a look at “the long and tumultuous relationship between Mormonism and American society” (5). This updated edition brings the study up to the present by adding consideration of the public media and cultural shifts of the last sixteen years.

The first part of this book, “Mormonism, Politics, and History,” gives a basic history of Mormonism and puts it in context of the culture and religions of the United States. In doing this, Givens answers many complex questions about the Church’s place in society, bringing those questions and answers up to recent events. Part two, “Mormonism and Fiction,” shows how Mormons have been represented—generally negatively—in literature and popular culture since the founding of the religion. This part contains most of the updates in this new edition, the most significant changes being found in the final chapter.

Those looking for Givens’s signature sharp and insightful analysis, particularly of recent media events, should not be disappointed, although the book does not give an in-depth treatment of the recent “Mormon Moment,” since the wave of media attention surrounding HBO’s Big Love, John Krakauer’s book Under the Banner of Heaven, the broadway musical The Book of Mormon, and Mitt Romney’s two presidential bids cannot be covered fully in a volume of this breadth. Still, this book comes highly recommended. Its updated information will be valuable, if not essential, for all students of Mormon literature and arts.

—Mickell Summerhays


“When the intellectual history of late-twentieth-century Mormonism is written,” begins Richard Bushman in the foreword to this memoir, “Armand Mauss will occupy a preeminent position” (ix). For this reason alone, Mauss’s reminiscences should be of interest to any serious student of Mormonism.

Mauss takes his title from the following quote by Neal A. Maxwell: “The LDS scholar has his citizenship in the Kingdom, but carries his passport into the professional world—not the other way around.” But Mauss’s observation that the borders have shifted over time and his passport is tattered reminds us that travel between the Church and the world is rarely a pleasure trip, especially for those who make the commute frequently. “Not only has the intellectual establishment in Athens sometimes seemed wary of accepting my passport when I have entered as a scholar in religious (especially Mormon) studies,” Mauss observes, “but I have often found suspicion about the authenticity of my passport even when I have tried to negotiate it in Jerusalem itself—in the Mormon ecclesiastical kingdom” (1).

Mauss’s memoir is a fascinating view of a consequential career, but it is much more. It is also a perceptive and personal accounting of how devotion to a discipline and commitment to a religious tradition can intersect in ways that produce benefits for both the academy and the faith community. His work in sociology enabled him to see how the LDS Church adjusted its degree of tension with the surrounding society in order to both survive and yet remain distinctive. His insight was new to his discipline and has shaped the way sociologists now...
view religious movements. It also led to
Mauss’s influential *The Angel and the Bee-
hive*, which offered a new lens through
which Mormons could view their own
history, particularly twentieth-century
Mormonism, a period most Latter-day
Saints had inhabited without really
examining in any depth.

The first chapter is titled “Not a Boring
Life,” and details of that life include grow-
ing up in the depression and war years; a
mission to New England that included
seven-month stretches of proselytizing
with “no purse or scrip,” referred to by
mission president S. Dilworth Young as
“country tracting”; a postmission stint
in Japan, where his father was mission
president, where Armand studied at a
Jesuit university and worked at an army
intelligence agency, and where he met
Ruth Hathaway, who became his wife
and the mother of their eight children;
his perseverance in pursuing graduate
studies over many years while teaching
at a high school and a community col-
lege; and the opportunities that led to a
long and productive career in academia.

The bulk of the book, however, is
devoted to the challenges of his cho-
sen discipline (including the challenges
some sociological theories posed for his
faith) and to his involvement in Mor-
mon studies, which was put on the back
burner until he had earned tenure and a
full professorship. Once free to study the
sociology of religion, he found himself
near the epicenter of many important
developments in Mormonism. Mauss’s
interest in the race issue, his theory
of how religions walk the tightrope
between retrenchment and assimilation,
his long involvement with *Dialogue: A
Journal of Mormon Thought*, his associa-
tion with BYU Studies as both an Acad-
emy member and a book reviewer, his
participation in Claremont Graduate
University’s foray into Mormon studies,
and his view of Mormonism from an
academic post outside of Utah all pro-
vide a framework that has enabled him
to study LDS history and culture in the
latter half of the twentieth century from
a unique vantage point. This memoir, if
anything, is a personal and professional
view of the LDS Church during a time
of great growth and transition. As such,
it should be a valuable addition to the
library of anyone interested in Mormon
studies.

—Roger Terry