

# *THE AARONIC ORDER: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MODERN MORMON SECT*

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SOCIAL SCIENTISTS HAVE FREQUENTLY REMARKED on the proliferation of religious denominations, sects and cults in the United States. Since its early history, Mormonism has spawned a large number of sects directly or indirectly. At least eighty-nine religious groups (many of which no longer exist) can be traced back to the church established by Joseph Smith on April 6, 1830.<sup>1</sup> One of these schismatic groups, the Aaronic Order, emerged in response to various tensions within the social structure and ideology of twentieth century Mormonism. Individuals were attracted to and eventually joined the Aaronic Order largely because the Mormon Church became increasingly oriented to the middle classes in the twentieth century. Whereas nineteenth century Mormonism was characterized by many sectarian features, twentieth century Mormonism took on more denominational or "church-like" features.

The Aaronic Order is a small millenarian group founded by Maurice L. Glendenning in the early 1930s. Many members of the Aaronic Order believe they are lineal descendants of Aaron and/or Levi of Old Testament times. The members of the Aaronic Order (who refer to themselves as Levites or Aaronites) also believe that they are to perform special religious functions before the second coming of Jesus Christ, which they claim will occur before 2000 A.D.

The Aaronic Order consists of the following branches: a congregation located in a suburb of Salt Lake City and serving the Salt Lake Valley; a congregation located in Springville and serving the Utah Valley (Provo-Orem) area; the Eskdale commune located in western Millard County a few miles from the Utah-Nevada border; and a cooperative community called Partoun located in western Juab

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County, also a few miles from the Utah-Nevada border.

Of the 400 members in the Order, a minority resides in the Eskdale commune, but it is the center of Levite activity. The Eskdale commune is the principal Levite economic endeavor, the location of the Aaronic Order's educational and musical facilities and the site of the annual June convention. It serves as a model for communal living and is a place where many Levites aspire to live eventually. Eskdale and the other desert communes which will be established are the places where the Levites will be "purified as gold and silver" and will prepare for the second coming of Christ.

The data that I obtained on the Aaronic Order was gathered primarily between October 1973 and December 1975, although some follow-up was carried out as late as July 1976.<sup>2</sup> Between January and June 1975, I worked among the Levites full-time, frequently visiting the desert communities of Eskdale and Partoun, attending worship services and study classes at the Salt Lake and Springville branches and interviewing various members in all the branches. I also interviewed the leaders and many middle-aged and elderly members, many of whom have been affiliated with the Aaronic Order since the 1940s and some of whom were followers of Glendenning in the 1930s.

#### HISTORY AND BELIEFS

The Aaronic Order is rooted in Mormonism. Most of the early followers of Glendenning were members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as have been the more-recent converts of the sect. Glendenning, his wife and his young daughter settled in the staunch Mormon community of Provo, forty-five miles south of Salt Lake City, in 1929. Glendenning had previously resided in several places, including Oregon, Montana, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Colorado. On April 14, 1929, Glendenning and his wife were baptized members of the Mormon Church, deciding to follow the example of their daughter. They became active in the Church and looked forward to the day when they would receive a temple recommend.

Shortly after Glendenning joined the Church, he began to inform various individuals that he was receiving revelations from a supernatural source. He found certain concepts in Mormonism similar to those in the writings that he had received.<sup>3</sup> On July 16, 1930, he received a writing in which the voice identified itself as the "Elias who should come in the last days."<sup>4</sup> In a later writing the voice identified itself as a forerunner and messenger for God prophesying the second coming of Christ.<sup>5</sup> It was not long before the church hierarchy opposed Glendenning.

He maintained that he was a literal descendant of Aaron and that the revelations given to him by the Angel Elias directed the Levites to restore the House of Israel and prepare the tribes of Israel for the second coming of Christ. The Levites are the priesthood tribe and will "minister unto" the other tribes of Israel. According to Levite belief, in March of 1938, Glendenning climbed to the top of a small hill near Crystal Springs, Nevada, where the Angel Elias restored to him "all the keys and authority of the Priesthood" unto which he had been ordained in the spirit during pre-mortality.<sup>6</sup> Glendenning was further told that he

would have the power to confer the "keys and authority of the Priesthood" to others who were patrilineal descendants of Aaron.

Between the early 1930s and 1942, discussion meetings dealing with the Levitical Writings, which Glendenning periodically received, were held in the homes of interested people in the Salt Lake and Utah Valleys. Apparently, during this period, a fair number of people investigated Glendenning's claims but gradually lost interest. He nevertheless, gained a small but devoted following during the 1930s, which formed the nucleus of the Aaronic Order when it was formally established. After an unsuccessful attempt to establish a communal venture in southwestern Utah in the 1930s, he worked at various jobs in southern Utah and eventually moved to Los Angeles where he established a chiropractic practice.

While Glendenning lived in southern Utah and in Los Angeles, small groups still regularly met in Salt Lake City and Provo to discuss the Writings. Some of his followers expressed concern that an organization based on the Writings had not yet been established.<sup>7</sup> Some members of this group contacted him and consecrated their belongings for the establishment of the Aaronic Order in late November of 1942. Articles of incorporation were filed with the State of Utah under the name of "Aaronic Order" or "Order of Aaron" as a nonprofit, religious organization listing Maurice L. Glendenning as its president.

Like the Mormon Church, the Aaronic Order claims to be a "restoration" of a previously existing religious organization. Even though many Levites accept the restoration of the Mormon Church, they claim that another restoration must occur before the second coming of Christ—that of the Order of Aaron and the House of Israel. Although there are strong similarities between Levite and Mormon theology, the members of the Aaronic Order vehemently deny that their organization is a Mormon "offshoot" or schism. They believe that their church and the Levitical priesthood were established in 1736 B.C. by Jesus Christ (also believed to be Jehovah) when Levi was consecrated a priest.<sup>8</sup>

There are definite ideological and structural similarities between Mormonism and the Aaronic Order. Many Levites, particularly middle-aged and elderly ones, acknowledge a certain theological connection between the two. These Levites believe that the Mormon Church was theologically valid (and perhaps still is in some respects) until about the time of the formal establishment of the Aaronic Order. A fair number of Levites still feel that eventually the Aaronic Order and the Mormon Church will merge and that meanwhile they may have separate but complementary functions.

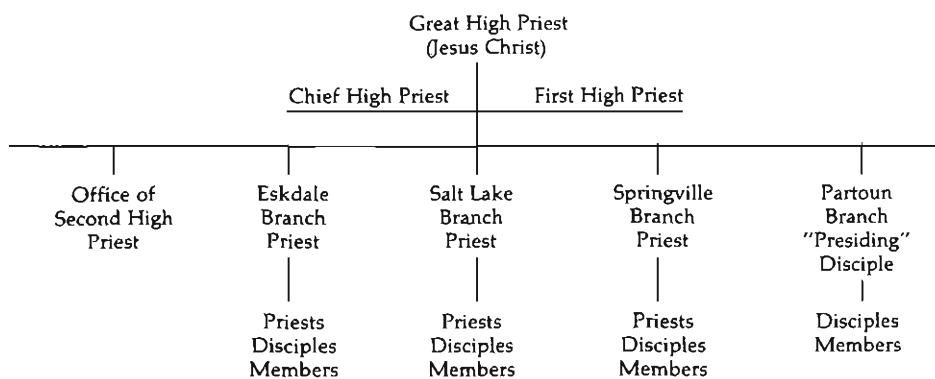
The Levites generally recognize the Mormon scriptures and Joseph Smith, although some say that he became a "fallen prophet" later in his life. The revelations that Glendenning received from the Angel Elias are transcribed in three separate books—the *Book of Elias*, the *Book of New Revelations*, and the *Disciple Book*. Glendenning is not considered to have been a "prophet" or "revelator" but a "mediator" whose duty was merely to record the revelations given by Elias. Although the *Doctrine and Covenants* ends with Section 136 and the *Book of Elias* begins with Section 137, the Aaronic Order denies that the latter is a continuation of the former. The Levites believe that with the death of Maurice Glendenning, the Angel Elias ceased speaking to the Chief High Priest.

Significant parallels exist between Levite and Mormon cosmology. The Levites, like Mormons, believe in a plurality of gods, the pre-mortal existence, the progression of gods and the "three degrees of glory." On the other hand, the Levite concept of the Trinity resembles that of Catholics and Protestants more than that of Mormons. The Levites also deny the practical universalism of Mormonism and accept the concepts of heaven and hell as found in most other Christian churches.

The Levites' ideal is to avoid the outside world, but they desire to be well-informed about its affairs. Many "worldly" recreational activities are considered to be sinful and "of Satan" by the Levites: alcoholic beverages, drugs, tobacco, dances and many motion pictures. Other recreational outlets such as hiking, biking, hayrides, sightseeing and singing are considered necessary and desirable. Educational films and "wholesome" entertainment films are occasionally viewed at the Eskdale commune. The Levites do not believe in observing Christmas in the traditional American manner because it is based on pagan practices. Members of the Order also believe in pacifism and nonviolence and maintain that the Levites of Old Testament times were exempt from military service.

Because Levite politico-religious organization is complex, despite the small size of the Order, only a brief description can be presented here. Although the priesthood hierarchies of the Mormon Church and the Aaronic Order are similar, appreciable differences have also developed. Unlike the Mormon Church, the Aaronic Order strongly emphasizes the Aaronic priesthood. The Levites believe the Melchizedek priesthood became corrupted after the time of Malachi and, according to one male informant, has not yet been "set in order." Young males designated to be "of Aaron" are not permitted to officiate as priests until they reach their early twenties. Figure 1 illustrates the priesthood hierarchy and its relationships to other members of the Aaronic Order.

Figure 1: Priesthood Hierarchy and Relationships within the Aaronic Order



The Levites believe that Jesus Christ is the Great High Priest of the Aaronic Order and the True Church of God. Through him the authority is delegated to the priests and the councils of the Aaronic Order. The Chief High Priest is in charge of the "spiritual affairs" of the Aaronic Order and the First High Priest is

in charge of the "temporal affairs." Both these offices have been held by Robert Conrad since the death of Glendenning in 1969. At one time Glendenning held the title of First High Priest, but later he was designated the Chief High Priest and Robert Conrad the First High Priest. The Office of Second High Priest consists of a principal Second High Priest and his assistants, also referred to as Second High Priests. The Second High Priest and his assistants are responsible for the performance of certain ordinances. At the present time, the Aaronic Order has four Second High Priests, of whom three, including the principal Second High Priest, are brothers. The former principal Second High Priest, now deceased, was the father of these three men.

The Priest of the Branch is responsible for the "spiritual and temporal affairs" of a particular branch. The Salt Lake and Springville branches both have a permanent Priest of the Branch. The branch priest of the Eskdale commune is called the "acting priest," a position that is rotated every three months among the priests residing at Eskdale. Other priests and disciples assist the branch priest in the performance of ordinances and other branch functions. Although Partoun has had resident branch priests in the past, it presently does not have one. A male resident of Partoun, referred to as the "lead" or "acting" disciple, carries out many of the spiritual and temporal functions that a branch priest ordinarily conducts. An attempt is made to have priests from the Eskdale commune visit the Partoun branch at least twice a month for certain rituals.

Fully consecrated males are disciples organized into a "brotherhood" that meets regularly in each branch. Female disciples are not organized into a "sisterhood" but, according to the Chief High Priest, this may be done in the future. All of the priests and male disciples in the Aaronic Order are now married.

The members of the Aaronic Order believe that the "law of consecration," which embodies "giving all one's possessions of this world's goods" and "all one's time, talents, and energy to the service of God," was given to the tribe of Levi in 1736 B.C.<sup>9</sup> and that the Levites and other Israelite groups lived communally as did Jesus Christ and his followers. The members of the Aaronic Order consequently maintain that they should strive to live communally, advancing to this state through several steps.

In the spring of 1949 the Levites established their first community, Partoun, in the desert of western Utah. Their decision was partly a response to a writing called, "Go ye into the lands of the earth."<sup>10</sup> Partoun was established as a cooperative rather than a communal venture, although participants theoretically were to consecrate their property and possessions to the Aaronic Order. Thirty-seven homesteads (each 160 acres) were filed for, some by non-Levites, and of these, thirty were actually settled for some time. Partoun had many economic problems and only a few homesteads became somewhat productive. Several individuals and families, most of them older, still live at Partoun, convinced that some day this portion of the Snake Valley will be populated by thousands of refugees from the cities.

The Eskdale commune was established in 1955 under the guidelines of the Desert Entry Act, which enabled the community, unlike Partoun, to concentrate the residences in one area rather than establish individual homesteads. The commune gradually gained population, developed land for agriculture and added

new buildings. Most early settlers of Eskdale lived in one-room houses lit by coal-oil and gas lamps. Later the community acquired a 60,000 watt generator for electricity. In 1972 Eskdale hooked up its electrical system with the Mt. Wheeler Power Company of Nevada. In September 1956, Eskdale established a public grade school with nine students, which became part of the Millard County School District.<sup>11</sup> A high school, completely funded by the Aaronic Order, was added to the community in 1960.

The Levites maintain that they should not count the members of their group. To determine the size of the Levite community, I divided the Levite community into two categories according to their religious activity. "Active" members either attend Levite activities at least once every two months or fail to attend because they reside outside of the state of Utah or because of old age and poor health, but still express a strong commitment to the Aaronic Order. Individuals (except for young children) who did not meet these qualifications were classified as inactive members. Table 1 presents census figures for mid-1975.

Table 1

## A Census of the Levite Community

	Active Members		Inactive Members
	Over Age 18	Under Age 18	Over Age 18
Male	56	50	51
Female	71	52	57
Total	<u>127</u>	<u>102</u>	<u>108</u>

Because I was unable to contact most inactive adult members, their children were usually not included in the census. When adults are inactive, in nearly all cases their children under eighteen years of age are not active members of the Levite community. Since I usually had to rely on information given by active members to identify inactive members, the census figure for the latter is conservative.

Table 2 presents selected demographic characteristics of the Eskdale commune in early May 1975. In one of the nuclear families the husband-father is a metallurgist who works in Idaho and plans to move to Eskdale. Because Eskdale has a number of school children whose parents are not residents of the community, its population is lower during the summer months. A few of the school children are not members of the Aaronic Order. After I conducted my census, Eskdale's population declined by about twenty-five percent due to a major schism of young and middle-aged members during late 1975 and 1976.

Table 2

## Selected Demographic Characteristics of the Eskdale Commune

Nuclear families with children	9
Couples without children	3
Widows	4
Bachelors	6
School children whose parents are not Eskdale residents	17
Eskdale population	94

## THE ESKDALE COMMUNE

The Levites believe the Eskdale commune fulfills the United Order principle that played such a vital role for the nineteenth century Mormons. The Aaronic Order theoretically requires an individual or family who resides at Eskdale to be fully consecrated and free of debts. The Eskdale Community Council, however, has made some exceptions. Just as the Salt Lake Valley was viewed as Zion by the early Mormon pioneers, the Levites view the Snake Valley of the Great Basin—the location of both Eskdale and Partoun—as a refuge from the "wickedness of Babylon." Today Eskdale is composed of thirteen houses arranged in two semi-circular rows on the eastern side of the community grounds, two small trailers housing two widows, and several public facilities. Except for the grade school, all the public buildings are located on the western side of the community grounds. These include the dining hall/kitchen/laundry complex, a small high school building, the auditorium/school/music complex, the Montessori school and the school dormitory. The dairy is located southeast of the community center, and the shop buildings are directly north of it.

Eskdale's primary economic activities are crop and dairy agriculture. In the spring of 1975, Eskdale had about 750 acres under cultivation and 21 wells, which varied in depth from about 40 to 200 feet. Eskdale's principal crop is alfalfa, most of which is used to feed the community's cattle, although some is sold commercially; generally there are three or four alfalfa crops a year. Other crops grown at Eskdale include corn, wheat and barley. Eskdale also has two vegetable gardens that provide potatoes, corn, onions, carrots, beans, peas, pumpkin, squash, beets and parsnips for the community and other members of the Order. In 1975 Eskdale owned about 70 milk cows and about 100 calves, springers and dry cows. Several years earlier Eskdale owned about 30 head of beef cattle, but this number decreased to a handful. Eskdale's modern dairy was completed in December 1972; milk and cream are picked up at Eskdale and trucked to Delta, about 85 miles northeast of the commune.

According to the work manager, Eskdale's immediate economic goal is to become "self-sufficient." Since its establishment Eskdale has not operated at a profit, and it is subsidized by the tithes and contributions of members of the Order. For example, a member who works as a metallurgist in Idaho contributed a large amount of money for the construction of Eskdale's dairy several years ago. Although at one time most Levites earned a relatively low income, in the past decade or so a number have become professionals, well-paid craftsmen, and contractors, undoubtedly improving the financial status of the Order. In theory, the Order opposes going into debt, but it will borrow money if it has material or real assets that can be used as collateral.

There are many reasons for Eskdale's failure to operate at a profit during any fiscal year since its establishment in 1955. One is the constant expansion of the community's physical facilities—the construction of family dwelling units, school buildings, a school dormitory, a dairy, a community center, a shop building; the drilling of wells; the purchase of farm equipment; the installation of plumbing, heating and electrical systems; and the development of desert land into agricultural land. Although members donate labor, the building materials, transportation costs and other expenditures make operating at a profit difficult. Limited farm equip-

ment prevents greater development of land. According to the work manager, it takes three to five years of planting for the alkaline soil of the Snake Valley to become productive. Other factors that have retarded self-sufficiency include community factionalism, inefficient administrative and farming techniques and a heavy investment of financing and staffing the Eskdale educational system.

Like Mormons, the Levites emphasize education and are atypical of many sectarian groups. A focus of the Eskdale commune has been its school system: a Montessori school (the first in the state of Utah), a grade school and a high school. In February of 1975 the grade school had twenty-two students, about half of whom were children of people not residing at Eskdale. The grade school enrollment fluctuates from year to year (thirty students attended during the 1973-74, academic year). The size of the student body and faculty of the high school also fluctuates from year to year. During the 1974-75 academic year approximately twenty-five students attended the high school and two graduated in May, but during the 1973-74 academic year thirty-two students attended and seven graduated. As many as forty students attended high school in previous years. During the 1974-75 academic year the high school had three full-time instructors (all with teaching degrees) and two part-time instructors (both without college degrees). During the 1972-73 academic year the high school had eight full-time and part-time teachers, six of whom had college degrees, but not necessarily in education.

Although the schools lack many of the facilities of outside schools, the low student-faculty ratio compensates for this. Eskdale graduates have been readily accepted by colleges and universities, although the high school is not accredited. A proportionally high number of Eskdale graduates receive college scholarships, and many students pass tests granting them the equivalent of one year's college course work. Levite college students, particularly those whose families live at Eskdale, support their own education with scholarships and part time work.

The people of Eskdale and the Order are proud of the music program and community orchestra. Since the Levites of Old Testament times were musicians, the Levites believe they must continue this tradition. They sing hymns frequently at religious services and meal singing is a recreational outlet. In addition to a Christian evangelistic hymnal, the Levites use a hymnal called *Songs of Levi and Aaron*, which contains songs composed by members of the Order. Undoubtedly, the strong emphasis on music in the Order is partly a carry-over of the Mormon musical tradition, as well as a result of Glendenning's emphasis.

Piano instruction is basic to the music education program and begins for many students in the third grade. Students may be involved in one to four hours of musical instruction and practice daily. In 1973 the school orchestra became the community orchestra after some adults expressed a desire to learn how to play musical instruments. The community orchestra consists of grade and high school students, young people who recently graduated from high school and adults, the majority of whom are females. The forty-five piece orchestra plays primarily religious and classical music and has performed at locations in Utah and eastern Nevada, including the University of Utah and Brigham Young University.

#### **THE EMERGENCE OF THE AARONIC ORDER**

Max Weber and Anthony F. C. Wallace have discussed the importance of the

"charismatic leader" to the emergence of new religious movements.<sup>12</sup> Just as Joseph Smith and Brigham Young had a strong and permanent influence on Mormonism, so has Maurice L. Glendenning affected the Aaronic Order. Many Levites note that Glendenning was a striking figure. Although he was only about five feet seven inches tall and fairly heavy (weighing about 200 pounds), he is described as a handsome man with a well-groomed beard (although at times he did not wear one) and, in later years, silver-colored hair. Some Levites commented that when Glendenning walked into a public place, people would immediately notice his impressive appearance. He is remembered as an interesting conversationalist who could comment on almost every subject. Perhaps ten or more diplomas and certificates, including some in chiropractics and naturopathy, hung on the walls of his office. The current Chief High Priest told me that although Glendenning did not hold a degree in geology, he could speak knowledgeably about geological matters with geologists and petroleum engineers.

Glendenning instituted the practice in the Aaronic Order of granting certificates to individuals who reached various positions such as discipleship, and he was quick to grant leadership to those who impressed him. He placed one informant on the Eskdale Community Council who had just joined the Order and still had debts. Another Levite male, now deceased, was made the chairman of the Supreme Council shortly after joining the Order. The current Chief High Priest, who lived at Eskdale for about a year before he joined the Order, was called to be the First High Priest shortly after his conversion.

The Levites often speak of Glendenning's winning and charming personality. He was warm, friendly, optimistic, and decisive. He had a good sense of humor and was very affectionate with children. According to one male informant, Glendenning "made people feel like they were something special." Two other informants said that Glendenning told some people, themselves included, that he had known them in an earlier existence.

The Levites who were personally acquainted with Glendenning admit that he had "weaknesses" and personality differences with some members of the Order. He was very assertive and could become angry if people opposed him. According to a Levite woman who had known Glendenning since the 1930s, he could be very vindictive and carry a "grudge for a long time." According to the current Chief High Priest, if people acted cordially toward Glendenning, he would respond toward them in a similar manner. But if they insulted him, they might receive a "surprise."

Weber's concept of church-sect dichotomy views charisma in the church as being attached to the office, whereas in the sect it is attached to the religious leader.<sup>13</sup> According to Weber, the sect develops into a church through the process he calls "routinization of charisma." In Mormonism this process has been completed. The average Mormon is not so much impressed with the personality of the president of the Church as with the power of the office he holds. At times Mormons express dislike for the personal attributes of a particular president but still maintain that he has access to supernatural guidance. Maurice Glendenning, like Joseph Smith, possessed a tremendous amount of personal charisma, but unlike Smith, his charisma has not become routine. Robert Conrad is not as charismatic as Glendenning. He is well liked and addressed as "Brother Bob" by the Levites even though he holds a doctorate in education.

Social scientists recognize that the "church" and "sect" classifications of religious organizations is oversimplified, and they have developed typologies that also include the concept of "denomination" as first defined by Niebuhr.<sup>14</sup> Denominations maintain a more relaxed, world-comprising ethic fully attuned to the needs of the bourgeoisie. According to Becker, denominations are "in an advanced stage of development and adjustment to each other and the secular world."<sup>15</sup> Although the Mormon Church has not developed a spirit of tolerance for other religious groups, it has accommodated itself to the economic and political institutions of American society. Members of a sect withdraw from the larger society. While the Levites do not reject the larger society as vehemently as do groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, they regard many American values and pursuits as irrelevant to spiritual salvation. While the Mormon Church approaches both the "church" and "denomination" categories, the Aaronic Order is closer to the "sect" category.

Nineteenth century sectarian Mormonism emphasized cooperation, egalitarianism and provisions for the needy. Despite their early failures to live communally as the United Order in the Midwest and later in the Intermountain West, the Mormons developed a number of cooperative institutions in the West, including irrigation cooperatives, stores, industries, cattle and sheep companies and the Women's Relief Society. It would be misleading, however, to romanticize nineteenth century Mormon cooperative efforts. Mormonism has had a hierarchical, political-religious organization from its very beginning, and a strong correlation between church position and socio-economic status emerged at a fairly early date. But the disparity between rich and poor within the Mormon Church was not as apparent and pronounced in the nineteenth century as it became in the twentieth century.

After the proclamation of the Manifesto in 1890, Mormon cooperative efforts declined. According to Leonard Arrington, "Most of the goals of the pioneer church—the gathering, the Mormon village, unique property institutions, economic independence, the theocratic Kingdom—were abandoned, or well on their way toward abandonment, at the end of the century."<sup>16</sup> As the Mormon Church entered the twentieth century it accommodated itself to the political and economic institutions of the United States. Individualism, laissez-faire capitalism and social inequality were accepted by the Mormon hierarchy. The LDS leaders generally became conservative Republicans who spoke out against federal welfare programs and unionism.

As the twentieth century progressed, the Mormon Church expanded its financial investments and created new ones in the sugar beet industry, mercantile establishments, publishing houses, communications, ranching and farming, real estate, insurance, mining and many other economic enterprises. The Church rationalized its financial investments on the premise that they provided income and employment for the poor. Mormon leaders often sat on the board of directors of Church-owned businesses or ones in which the Church had large investments. Several years after the onset of the Depression, the cooperative approach was reasserted by the establishment of welfare farms and industries, but these efforts were modest compared to those that existed under nineteenth century Mormonism.<sup>17</sup>

The Mormon Church still espouses the "Law of Consecration" or "United Order" and the concept of stewardship as ideals but maintains that these are not followed because the members are not yet ready. Joseph Smith maintained that the United Order would have to be established before the second coming of Christ.<sup>18</sup> Today Mormons do not seriously discuss the establishment of communal living in the near future. The Mormon hierarchy and most active Mormons are firm believers in the free enterprise system. They are often outspoken critics of socialistic practices and governments. J. Kenneth Davies' study of the Mormon Church's "middle-class propensities" clearly illustrates its accommodation to secular political and economic institutions during the twentieth century.<sup>19</sup> Whereas nineteenth century Mormonism drew many of its converts from the "disinherited" and often substituted religious for social status, twentieth century Mormonism achieved middle class respectability and made religious and social status congruent. Positions of leadership in the church hierarchy became progressively difficult for the "common man" to acquire and tend to be granted to the successful businessman or professional. The accommodation of the Mormon Church to the political and economic institutions of American society was responsible for its loss of various sectarian qualities. In response to this accommodation, various sects emerged, including the Order of Aaron, that appealed to the "disinherited" of Mormon culture. Although not all groups that seceded from the Mormon Church can be analyzed by the church-sect model, many can, particularly those that developed in the twentieth century.

It is not a coincidence that what later became the Aaronic Order emerged shortly after the onset of the Great Depression. Boisen notes a great proliferation of new sects in American society during the 1930s.<sup>20</sup> According to several long-time members of the Aaronic Order, many people interested in the Levitical writings during the 1930s were adversely affected by the Great Depression. In a sample of thirty-five male and thirty female Levite pioneers, most early members were individuals of low socioeconomic status.

Early members of the Order complained of the failure of the Mormon Church to practice consecration and the United Order, particularly during the Depression but also later. A few converts, particularly men, questioned the business orientation of the Mormon Church's hierarchy. Some converts felt discriminated against because they were not as affluent or educated as the prominent members of their wards. Although some men achieved positions in the Mormon Church at the ward level, most Levites held a minor position if one at all. Except for the present Chief High Priest, who was in a ward bishopric and a stake mission presidency in California, it appears that no other members of the Order had held a position in a ward bishopric or one of higher status.

Some features of the Levite political-religious organization suggest that it has compensated for the low social status experienced within American culture and, more specifically, Mormonism. Liston Pope's observation that "the sect substitutes religious status for social status" appears to hold true for the Aaronic Order.<sup>21</sup> Whereas the Mormon Church may offer the "common man" only a minor position within its hierarchy, the Aaronic Order may make him a high-ranking member in the priesthood and in the councils of the House of Israel. His position can be comparable to that of the cardinals and archbishops of the Catholic Church

or the general authorities of the Mormon Church. Whereas a Mormon views himself as a member of a "chosen people," a Levite priest or disciple is part of the "chosen of the chosen." In commenting on the social psychological significance of the Council of Fifty for its members, Hansen notes that "it was, after all, a heady prospect for a tinsmith or farmer to be told that he would be one of the governing princes in the Kingdom of God with authority to rule the nations of the earth."<sup>22</sup> The councils of the Aaronic Order perform much of the same function as did the Council of Fifty.

#### LATER DEVELOPMENT OF THE ORDER

Once a religious organization establishes its social structure and ideology, further development depends on forces different from those responsible for its origin. In the Aaronic Order, two factors especially significant in its development were the dynamic and charismatic leadership of Maurice L. Glendenning and the group's contact with fundamentalist Protestant groups. Glendenning was disturbed that many members of the Aaronic Order were still holding on to many Mormon beliefs and behavioral patterns. After the formal establishment of the order, particularly during the 1940s, Levites still attended Mormon meetings, often using these as vehicles to express their belief in the messages of Elias. It was not until the mid-1950s, that the Order encountered Protestant fundamentalists and made a definite break with Mormonism. During the 1950s and 1960s, young Levites attended a pentecostal Bible college in Colorado. This experience together with other contacts with Protestant groups and individuals resulted in a shift away from Mormonism and toward fundamentalist Protestantism.

The Aaronic Order can be divided into three generations: The first generation, or "pioneers," includes all members sixty years of age and older; the second generation, those between thirty and fifty-nine years of age; and the third generation, those under thirty years of age. Beliefs tend to be unified on a generational rather than a group-wide level. The differences between the first and third generations are considerable—the first generation being a product of Mormon culture and the third having little exposure to Mormon ideology. The second generation stands with a foot in both camps, many of its members raised in Mormonism but also exposed to fundamentalist Protestantism in late adolescence or early adulthood. Even within each generation viewpoints differ as some individuals incorporate concepts from other belief systems, a phenomenon particularly characteristic of the first generation.

The Aaronic Order's shift toward fundamentalist Protestantism is best reflected in members of the third generation. Almost all of them were raised not as Mormons but as Levites. They generally know little about Mormonism and often do not regard Joseph Smith as a prophet or give the matter only little consideration. When Mormon doctrinal points are discussed by middle-aged and older Levites, young people express surprise that some of these points are part of "official" Levite ideology. Formal religious training in the Eskdale schools emphasizes traditional Protestant doctrines rather than the doctrines of the Aaronic Order. Although the young people are present at study meetings where various Levite beliefs are discussed, generally these discussions do not actively include school

children. Some members of the third generation over twenty years of age have a greater comprehension of "official" Levite ideology than the school children, but generally they were not as interested in ideology as in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and in receiving the "gifts" of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, a Levite bachelor in his early twenties told me that he has not read the *Book of Elias* nor was he sure where he could obtain one. For many young people, Glendenning is a remote figure, although they may remember having seen and heard him. Members of the third generation deemphasize doctrines and stress a deep commitment to Jesus Christ. Specific doctrines are often viewed as divisive. This new philosophy within the Aaronic Order was a reaction to the relatively weak exposure to "official" Levite ideology that many young people have received.

By the fall of 1975, however, the ideological differences between fundamentalist Protestantism and the Aaronic Order became apparent to many young members and even to some middle-aged members. The ensuing controversy resulted in the expulsion of the leader of the charismatic movement and his chief disciple. These events, in turn, led to a major schism in which over twenty-five of Eskdale's residents and a number of young Levites residing on the outside left the Aaronic Order.

### CONCLUSION

The Aaronic Order is a sect that appealed to a certain alienated segment within the Mormon Church, which, by accommodating to the larger society, no longer satisfied the needs of some of its lower working class members. Members of the Order attempted to resurrect the *Gemeinschaft* ethos, which they perceived to have been characteristic of nineteenth century Mormonism. The emphasis of the early Levites on communalism, egalitarianism, the imminent millennium, and modern day revelation indicates that they strongly desired to revitalize Mormonism. The ideological shift away from Mormonism and toward fundamentalist Protestantism beginning in the mid-1950s, was promoted by Glendenning and later condoned by the present Chief High Priest. The implications of the resulting schism remain to be seen, but a process of retrenchment of the remaining Levites can be expected.

The Mormon Church and the Aaronic Order were both established by charismatic individuals claiming to be divinely directed. Both emphasized egalitarian and communal ideals, appealed to people of humble origins and attempted to rejuvenate their respective sociocultural milieus. Although the early Mormon Church did not come out of any particular religious body, it attracted people who felt that the churches they belonged to were not following Christian ideals.

Despite a variety of external and internal problems, the Mormon Church managed to grow. Its structure has changed from a socialist theocracy in the nineteenth century to a complex bureaucracy resembling the modern corporation in the twentieth century. After several decades, the Aaronic Order is not much larger than it was during its early years. It has not made the transition from a sect to a church or a denomination-like organization. The recent schism has drained much of its vitality by pulling away many younger members. The Aaronic Order is not likely to get larger, but it may occasionally attract the "disinherited" of the Mormon Church.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Kate B. Carter, *Denominations That Base Their Beliefs on the Teaching of Joseph Smith*, (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1969), and Russell R. Rich, *Those Who Would Be Leaders*, (Provo, Utah: Brigham University Lecture Series, Extension Publications, 1959).

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed description and analysis of the Aaronic Order consult my doctoral dissertation, "The Levites of Utah: The Development of and Recruitment to a Small Millenarian Sect," (Salt Lake City: Department of Anthropology, University of Utah, March 1976).

<sup>3</sup> Blanche W. Beeston, *Purified as Gold and Silver*, (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton, 1966), pp. 35-56.

<sup>4</sup> *Book of Elias*: Section 166, (Salt Lake City: Corporation of the President of the Aaronic Order, 1944). The revelations that Glendenning claimed to have received from the Angel Elias are compiled in the *Book of Elias*, the *Book of New Revelations*, and the *Disciple Book*.

<sup>5</sup> *Book of Elias*: Section 185.

<sup>6</sup> *Book of Elias*: Section 217.

<sup>7</sup> Blanche W. Beeston, *Now My Servant*, (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton, 1957), pp. 90-93.

<sup>8</sup> Maurice L. Glendenning, *The True Church of God (With His Levites)*, (Salt Lake City: Corporation of the President of the Aaronic Order, 1955), pp. 10-13.

<sup>9</sup> Beeston 1966, p. 260, and *Book of New Revelations*, Chapter 8, (Salt Lake City: Corporation of the President of the Aaronic Order, 1948).

<sup>10</sup> *Book of New Revelations*, Chapter 23.

<sup>11</sup> Beeston 1966, p. 223.

<sup>12</sup> See Reinhard Bendix, *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait*, (New York: Doubleday, Anchor, 1962) and Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Mazeway Resynthesis: A Biocultural Theory of Religious Inspiration," *Transaction of the New Academy of Science*, 1956, 18, 626-636.

<sup>13</sup> Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, Ephraim Fischoff, trans., (Boston: Beacon, 1963).

<sup>14</sup> Richard H. Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1929).

<sup>15</sup> Howard Becker, *Systematic Sociology, on the Basis of the Beziehungslehre and Gelilderlehre of Leopold von Wiese*, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1932) p. 626.

<sup>16</sup> Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints 1830-1890*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1958), p. 403.

<sup>17</sup> Wallace Turner, *The Mormon Establishment*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966), pp. 102-136.

<sup>18</sup> Nels Anerson, *Desert Saints: The Mormon Frontier in Utah*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, Phoenix), p. 374.

<sup>19</sup> J. Kenneth Davies, "The Mormon Church: Its Middle Class Propensities," *Review of Religious Research*, 1963, 4, 84-95.

<sup>20</sup> Anton T. Boisen, "Religion and Hard Times: A Study of the Holy Rollers," *Social Action*, 1939, 5, 8-35.

<sup>21</sup> Liston Pope, *Millhands and Preachers*, (New Haven: Yale University, 1942), p. 137.

<sup>22</sup> Klaus J. Hansen, *Quest for Empire: The Political Kingdom of God and the Council of Fifty in Mormon History*, (Lansing: Michigan State University, University of Nebraska Press, 1967), pp. 188-189.