

A Scholarly Feast of Contemporary Mormonism

Contemporary Mormonism: Social Science Perspectives. Edited by Marie Cornwall, Tim B. Heaton, and Lawrence A. Young (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

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THE EDITORS OF THIS BOOK HAVE assembled a plethora of outstanding social science scholarship. The works selected are astute, readable, and thought-provoking. The book is filled with research in almost prose form, as well as quantitative and qualitative analyses of issues important to Mormonism today.

Particularly striking is an article by Marie Cornwall. "The Institutional Role of Mormon Women" is a compelling look at women's roles in religion, specifically Mormonism. With some Jewish comparisons as a foreground, Cornwall documents the role of women in the Mormon religion from its inception to the present day. The piece is not rancorous, but rather fair and even with its treatment of the topic.

Cornwall finds that historically the role of women in Mormonism was generally ambiguous. More avenues for contribution were available through Joseph Smith, but these have disappeared as the church has become larger and more bureaucratic. She believes that through bureaucracy men

were given ever expanding roles, while women were assigned a specific sphere which emphasizes the notion that women are an "organizational liability" thereby increasing their invisibility and silence in the church bureaucracy (261).

The book does not shy away from controversial topics such as missionary companionship. "The Mormon Missionary Companionship" by Keith Parry is an ethnographic study rich in comparisons of the social values of young, Mormon, male missionaries with young men trained in "bush" schools. The comparisons demonstrate the discovery of "self" and "other" as a missionary is taught by peers and near-seniors, as well as by authority figures, as in "bush" schools. This is only one of Parry's emphases. One finding brushes on the gender-based missionary roles in the church, with the basic expectation that a young woman is discouraged from serving a mission (203). The views are sociologically compelling through the focus on male roles, male mentoring, and male role models for missionaries. His conclusions are thought-provoking and hopefully motivating.

Another interesting article deals with religion and mental health. This study by Allen E. Bergin, I. Reed Payne, Paul H. Jenkins, and Marie Cornwall concludes that there are many variables associated with mental health, with religion being only