

In Memoriam, Armand L. Mauss (1928–2020)

I was saddened but not surprised by the recent passing of Armand L. Mauss, an esteemed scholar, BYU Studies editorial board member, and a kind mentor to me. When I saw him last, he neither expected nor particularly wanted to live much longer. He had long since tempered his expectations for this life. His sights were set on the next one, especially after Ruth’s passing in 2018.

There are few mentors and advisors I admire as much as Armand. To me he was a consummate combination of intellectual and spiritual, academic and advocate. Several fitting tributes have already been published. Much attention has been appropriately paid in them to his seminal books. I’m inclined, therefore, to draw a little attention to two of his lesser-known articles that have also profoundly shaped my thinking.

Here is the first sentence of his 1969 article “Dimensions of Religious Defection:” “It is probably indicative of a bias in social science that religious *commitment* is considered a research problem, but religious *defection* is not.”¹ Since reading that and the argument that followed, I’ve been as interested in defection as in conversion, thinking of them as mirror images. Understanding one leads to understanding the other. I know of no historical character who exemplifies both conversion and defection better than William E. McLellin, an early Latter-day Saint Apostle and apostate. I’ve read what McLellin wrote and what has been written about him. Armand authored the most penetrating insight in that entire bibliography. He applied a theory of competing selves to McLellin’s personality and behavior that can be profitably applied to other characters in their contexts.²

With Armand’s passing, we have lost not only an exemplary scholar but also a devoted friend and mentor to many. His scholarship was always balanced, informed, insightful, and enduring. Sometime in the near future, BYU Studies, inspired by Armand’s work, will dedicate a special issue to the questions surrounding religious conversion and defection.

—Steven C. Harper, editor in chief

1. Armand L. Mauss, “Dimensions of Religious Defection,” *Review of Religious Research* 10, no. 3 (Spring 1969): 128–35.

2. Armand L. Mauss, “Apostasy and the Management of Spoiled Identity,” in *The Politics of Religious Apostasy: The Role of Apostates in the Transformation of Religious Movements*, ed. David G. Bromley (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1998), 51–74.