

## ISRAELITES ALL

B. Z. Sobel

*Jew and Mormon: Historic Group Relation and Religious Outlook.* By Rudolph Glanz. New York: The Author, 1963. vii + 379 pp. \$6.00.

B. Z. Sobel is Associate Professor of Sociology at Brandeis University.

For those interested in expanding our understanding of the phenomena of Mormonism and of Judaism, the appearance of Glanz's *Jew and Mormon* should have constituted an event of some significance. Students of the history of religions, historians, sociologists, and for that matter knowledgeable laymen have, since the very first appearance of Mormonism, recognized and commented upon the obvious parallels existing between the two faith-communities: the sense of peoplehood, persecutions, charges of legalism, religious polity, etc. Glanz quotes from Ludlow's *The Heart of the Continent* to indicate this startling congruity:

"It is curious to see how the very physical circumstances of Mormonism are a copy of the Jewish. The parallel is not a fanciful or accidental one. The Mormons acknowledge, in some points intend it, themselves. Kirtland and Nauvoo were their settlements in Egypt; Joe Smith was their Moses; and when he died too early for a sight of the promised land, Brigham Young became the Joshua who led them all the way home. They have founded their Jerusalem in a Holy Land wonderfully like the original. Like Gennesareth, Lake Utah is a body of fresh water emptying by a river Jordan into a Dead sea without outlet and intensely saline. The Saints find their Edomites and Philistines in the Indians . . . and in the troops of Uncle Sam. The climate is a photographic copy of the Judean; the thirsty fields must be irrigated through long seasons of rainless, cloudless heat, while the ridges of Lebanon, here called the Wahsatch, are covered with snow."

The historical parallels are of course plain enough, but the sociological implications of these are even more interesting and seminal, making Mr. Glanz's failure (and failure it is) all the more disheartening. I don't remember a book that I found more difficult to read, or to learn from, than this one. It is dry, where the raw materials have intrinsic flair, pedantic throughout, badly edited, over long and over drawn (a whole chapter is devoted to two [maybe one] Jewish convert[s] to Mormonism in the 19th century), and in general it adds little or nothing to anything that anybody might want to know something about. I came to the book expecting much and came away totally frustrated and just a little angry. In fairness to Mr. Glanz it must be noted that the work was intended to be an exercise in historical research, bringing together diverse materials of all sorts bearing on the relationships and contacts between Jews and Mormons. In large measure he has succeeded in doing this, but "bringing together" should apply to structure, analysis and the elaboration of *meaning* rather than mere *collecting*, and herein lies the book's failure.

In discussing the Mormon mission to the Jews, for example, it is not adequate to make passing references to the legitimating nature of this mission

and then devote the remainder of a lengthy chapter to recounting the instances and places where missionary contact occurred. One wants to know something about the special internal purposes and effects of this mission upon the unfolding Mormon praxis. Similarly, in taking note of Mormon particularism, economic innovation, church governance, minority status, it would have been useful to go beyond the notation of points at which Mormon and Jewish practices intersected to discuss ways in which they differed because of historical, ecological, and theological divergencies. In short, we are dealing with a fascinating datum of religious and social innovation, where questions about the nature of two distinct and yet curiously related phenomena could be raised which could make understanding of both more feasible, but where the author aborts in a miasma of trivia and simple cataloguing. I, for one, am amazed at how Mormons and Jews manifest similar loyalty to their faith-community even in the absence of theological commitment. What is it in the nature of the two structures that elicits this loyalty? One cannot help but be struck by the sense of group cohesion and mutual dependence that both manage to inspire in their adherents. Is there a common, isolatable element or group of elements that might account for this? I find the historicity that pervades both Mormonism and Judaism a source of wonder. Can this be understood to form a basic strut of support for both groups and a partial explanation for their strength? Similarly intriguing is the shared emphasis on the establishment, or at least the advancement, of the future celestial Zion here and now, the centrality of the Old Testament, the sanctification of family life, the dedication to pragmatism, the acceptance, indeed embracing, of science into the total framework of both groups. One wants to know how these elements emerged among the new "Peculiar People" and how (if at all) they are related to the dynamic that underlies normative Judaism — matters to which Mr. Glanz does not address himself at all.

Without demanding that Mr. Glanz write a book that he did not intend to write, I nevertheless feel that the raising of questions similar to the above are important in making sense of the raw historical data.

For all that I believe the book seriously deficient in most respects, I think some positive latent function has been served through its publication. It does, in fact, represent the first attempt to go beyond the occasional notation of Jewish-Mormon similarities on a sporadic and informal plane, suggesting that the exploration of this relationship in a systematic and scholarly fashion might prove beneficial and of interest. Without attempting to stretch parallels to an absurd degree, I wonder if something about the nature of minority group internal defenses and the problem of individual sub-group identity might be learned from intensive and close study of these two factors within the two cultures. Differences between the groups might prove similarly heuristic, for example, the Mormon "predilection" toward political conservatism and the Jewish community's seemingly unshakable commitment to political liberalism. Here we have two minority communities attempting to structure some kind of defensive stand *vis a vis* the embracing, larger culture, who have arrived at quite different behavioral and ideological positions. The various mechanisms — historical, ideological, theological — which have played a role in this drama are, I feel, worthy of further and deeper explication. Glanz's volume does not qualify as a major effort in this direction and it will remain a task for future scholars and researchers. The material is

too rich and too promising to be left in the archivist's dead hand, and I suspect that it will not be too long before a really first-rate work dealing with Jew and Mormon will emerge.

## MORMONISM AND AMERICAN RELIGION

David Bertelson

*History of Religion in the United States.* By Clifton E. Olmstead. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1960 xii + 628 pp. \$11.65.

*Religion in America.* By Winthrop S. Hudson. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965. xiv + 447 pp. \$7.95.

David Bertelson obtained his Ph.D. in the History of American Civilization from Harvard University and now teaches in the History Department at the University of California at Berkeley.

In a sense this review can be termed an attempt to make much of fairly little, for the amount of space devoted to Mormonism in each of these works is very small — six pages out of 593 in Olmstead and five pages out of 425 in Hudson. Given the variety and complexity of the materials with which the authors deal, however, one hesitates to criticize these proportions, which serve as reminders of the fact that in the total religious experience of the nation Mormonism's place is rather small. Still, it is conspicuous enough to justify a consideration of the ways in which both authors approach it. But first I should like to say something about each work as a whole.

Olmstead's aim is "to achieve a fairly balanced treatment of American religion" by steering a middle course between a sociological and a theological emphasis. His technique is to sketch in the social, political, intellectual, and economic conditions in which religious organizations develop policies and doctrines. This is not to say that religious life is presumed to be simply a reaction to secular happenings, for Olmstead seems sympathetic toward its transcendent dimension and he also praises the responsiveness of religion to social needs. While the course of secular history provides an element of organization, the author relies essentially upon a series of classifications under which he includes brief treatments of relevant denominations, sects, organizations or individuals. This enables him to deal with a vast amount of information, which he treats for the most part objectively. On the other hand, a succession of categories followed by a rundown of facts pertaining to about a half dozen major denominations gives the book a mechanical quality, heightened by the sacrifice of historical continuity to the classification scheme. Thus throughout much of the last third of the book one shuttles back and forth in the period since the Civil War in order to cover a variety of topics ranging from missions and religious cults to movements toward Christian unity.

Hudson's aim is different from Olmstead's. He has given less attention to individual denominations, and his "central purpose has been to depict the religious life of the American people in interaction with other dimensions of their experience, and to depict the unity American religious life exhibits as well as its particularities." While Olmstead too is concerned with interaction, I do not get any sense of an inner unity to American religious life itself. The difference in approach can be seen in how each author begins