

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.

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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

his book. Olmstead's first chapter is devoted to "The European Heritage," in which he classifies and discusses a variety of religions from left-wing Protestantism through the Church of England to Roman Catholicism and Judaism. Hudson begins with a consideration of "The American Context," in which he deals not only with the European roots of American religion but with the characteristics which seem to him to define the nation's religious life. The unity which he describes lies closer to social than to theological matters; thus he points out the way in which the Great Awakening helped to bind the nation together by developing a national consciousness. While sacrificing detail, this emphasis provides a greater thematic unity than one finds in Olmstead, and it also permits the author to pay greater attention to historical continuity. Hudson's marked sympathy for what he calls the "functional catholicity" which the major Protestant denominations have exhibited since the Great Awakening tends to make him impatient with any group that resists participation in the mainstream of American life. While this sympathy is one aspect of the thematic approach which he adopts, it is also something of a bias.

Olmstead relates the emergence of Mormonism to the frontier, which was "a natural breeding ground for bizarre cults and utopian societies which desired some virgin retreat" in which to build their paradises. Thus he sees Joseph Smith as a "fitting product of the paroxysmal erratic society of New York's Burned-over District." The Book of Mormon, he feels, can be fully explained in terms of Smith's experiences, for he "was probably a genuine and sincere man who expressed with both logic and emotion the prevailing ethos of his time." Much is made of the importance of the doctrine of polygamy in precipitating the tensions which ultimately led to Smith's murder and the trek westward. In dealing with the later history of Mormonism, Olmstead again dwells upon polygamy and tensions with the national government, though he also praises Brigham Young and notes the growth of the Church in the twentieth century through its missionary efforts. While the author's treatment is detailed and he seeks to be fair, one cannot read it without being strongly affected by the more exotic details of Mormon history, and these reinforce the initial picture of the context out of which Mormonism is seen to have sprung. One gets little sense of its theological tenets or of its more conventional adjustments to American life. Possibly because Olmstead takes religion seriously as a transcendent concern he is preoccupied with explaining away Mormon claims to revelation which challenge conventional Protestant beliefs.

It would be naive to expect non-Mormons to find these claims credible, but I suspect that Hudson's emphasis upon the social dimension of religion accounts for his much greater restraint in passing such judgments. Indirectly he allows Alexander Campbell to suggest that the Book of Mormon is an answer to all the problems of the Burned-over District, and he notes similarities with Campbellite doctrine. Still, Smith's quest for religious authority, the founding of the Church, the basic doctrines of Mormonism, and the events preceding the migration to the West are described objectively and fairly. Thus the general reader is given an accurate if brief sense of what Mormonism represented during the early years of its history. The author's suggestion that the Book of Mormon is a religious declaration of independence from the Old World similar to many contemporary declarations of independence

such as Emerson's "American Scholar" intrigues me. While I would insist upon some qualifications, I think there is much truth in the statement that "the Old World heritage was declared to be both obsolete and irrelevant, for the restoration of the true church was dependent upon the recovery of an independent American tradition which extended back to the time of the Babylonian Exile and had been validated by the post-resurrection appearance of Christ on American shores." Although Hudson suggests that in many ways Mormonism is an American religion, the over-all impression which he gives is of a peculiar people whose ties with the rest of the nation were at best tenuous. He argues that "it was abundantly clear that the Mormons were not a part of conventional society, and their separateness created antagonism. This hostility, in turn, increased their sense of separateness, and the sense of separateness encouraged further innovation."

Doubtless, Mormons would insist on other bases for innovation, but I think they would accept the suggestion of separateness. Though secular involvement has increased through the years so as to qualify the notion that Mormons are a separate or peculiar people, this accommodation has not been true of Mormonism as a religion. The Mormon Church has not participated significantly in the religious life of the nation during the past century, particularly in the area of "functional catholicity." Thus in terms of his emphasis Hudson is justified in omitting any treatment of Mormonism after the trek to Utah except to note the growth of the Church from 1916 to 1960.

The fact that recent statistical analyses of American religion have placed Mormonism in a much more prominent position than either of these histories do can be explained, I think, largely in terms of Mormonism's isolation from the major religious currents of the past century. These would include the Social Gospel, innovations and reformulations of theology including neo-orthodoxy, ecumenism, and the present-day commitment to social reform and especially Civil Rights. All of these activities have involved cooperative efforts among the various denominations, including most significantly in recent years Roman Catholicism, and have been characterized by complex interaction with the culture at large. It can of course be correctly asserted that great numbers of religious people in this country still adhere to a traditional theology and a very conservative emphasis upon personal religion, but these concerns are simply not likely to receive much stress in general histories of religion unless controversy with liberal elements is involved. It seems reasonable to suppose that a man whose commitments are narrowly denominational and who is hostile to doctrinal changes and social involvement is not very likely to write a history of American religion. Thus if Mormonism since the time of Brigham Young seems slighted, one would have to say the same thing about a much larger denomination, the Southern Baptists, who at present also adhere generally to an old-time religion and a conservative position on such matters as the ecumenical movement and Civil Rights.

One final observation seems in order. General religious histories must of necessity be based on the scholarly endeavors of others, and one cannot come away from either study without feeling that they could have benefited by the kind of investigation of the early history of Mormonism which Mario S. De Pillis points the way toward in the first number of this journal.