

much the hero in the end, these are faults common to any biographer who loves his subject. Madsen's description of Roberts as a man of the spirit and as a restless and querulous soul are superb. He frequently

writes as one who knows first hand the problems Roberts faced. Even though he disappoints us because of what might have been, he has produced a book well worth reading.

Spiritual Colonials on the Little Colorado

Roots of Modern Mormonism. By Mark P. Leone. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979. \$15.00.

Reviewed by MICHAEL RABER, *whose Ph.D. dissertation for Yale University in anthropology dealt with the agricultural economics of the Spring City, Utah area in the nineteenth century.*

The Mormon intellectual establishment is still relatively young, so it continues to react nervously to publications on Mormonism written by non-Mormons. Serious non-Mormon interpretations often generate more anxiety among practicing Mormon historians and social scientists than anything written by disaffected or less-than-completely-convinced Saints. The appearance of this book over a year ago is a case in point: with some understandable confusion about its contents, Mormons have borne I-know-this-book-cannot-be-true testimonies in public and private discussions.

Such reactions surprise me somewhat, since most of anthropologist Leone's book remains well within the tradition of conventional Mormon historiography, and in many places even lags behind some recent extensions of that tradition. Leone attempts two related tasks. He points out differences between nineteenth and twentieth century

Mormonism and presents a model of transformation to explain the differences. His project is thus similar in design to much of the literature written on Mormon history over the last thirty years, and much of his method consists of an uncritical use of that literature to perform his second task. At the same time, there is a disjuncture between his two tasks caused by his methods and perspective, which make his observations on modern Mormonism appear weird and arbitrary to many Mormons.

Leone's basic argument is straightforward in content if not expression, and is predicated on a materialist notion that symbolic interpretations of reality are based on the economic and political relationships of those doing the interpreting. For him, nineteenth-century Mormonism consisted of a successful communal critique of industrial capitalism, framed in doctrines of knowledge and power which allowed for understanding and manipulation of reality within a closed system of authoritarian hierarchy. Religious authority encompassed most Mormon activity and was directed at practical problems of developing a distinctly non-industrial egalitarian society in difficult natural and social environments. The application of power toward this end was characterized by continual, case-by-case assessment of problems in which precedent was rarely applied; all events could

thus be interpreted within a non-contradictory framework which explained success as a function of righteous action and failure as a test of moral fiber.

Leone sees a breakdown of this integrated system in the twentieth century as the role of the Church in a regional economy was replaced by national powers of finance and government. Church members were no longer part of a distinctly Mormon world, but members of a national and international economy. With religious authority unable to organize society, the practical, precedentless application of religion to events continued on a more individualized basis. Church members now constantly re-invent their theology to suit the shifting circumstances of faceless economies, within a loose grab-bag of symbols, in such a way that all events are made to fit a plan without a society. With this lack of consistent precedents in doctrinal re-invention seen as stifling historical perspective on themselves, Mormons, for Leone, are preserving their colonial economic status by using doctrine to develop a superficial sense of differentness, rather than to understand and alter reality as the nineteenth-century leaders are said to have done.

There are many problems with this argument in both design and presentation. I will review some of them in ascending order of probable irritability to many Mormon readers, and as they are placed in historical time. Leone's historical arguments are uninformed and not well related to his observations about modern Mormonism. With no examination of what the 'communal' or 'socialist' ideals of Mormonism were, he asserts that these ideals were realized in an integrated commonwealth where central direction and planning created viable economies. His method here is to interpret historical action in the Little Colorado settlements with a combination of anthropological systems theory borrowed from Roy Rappaport's account of ritual regulation of economy in New Guinea (*Pigs for the Ancestors*, 1968, Yale University Press), and Leonard Arrington's model of the centrally-directed Great Basin Kingdom. The system he presents is closed, centralized and largely

autonomous. As such, it is at odds with much that is being learned about the local development of unplanned economies, the failure of most regional Mormon efforts at central planning and the constant economic relationships with non-Mormon America, all of which diminished any communal, authoritarian efforts in most parts of the Great Basin. His Arizona cases fit some of his assumptions because they were extreme cases of Mormon towns dependent on aid and guidance from Salt Lake and on the central direction of large-scale irrigation projects. Neither of these characteristics, however, was typical of Mormon towns.

To get from the last century to the current one, Leone relies heavily on the familiar model of Federal aggression breaking up the organic Mormon kingdom. While he would rather use internal contradictions within Mormonism to make the transition, he interprets the problem of wealth in ideally egalitarian Mormon society as one derived from the very success of central direction, rather than as one derived from the decentralized, largely uncontrollable nature of Mormon agricultural production. By seeing historical Mormon society from the top down, he is left with no mechanism other than the United States to explain the twentieth century: if church leaders were powerful enough to enforce consensus in his communal model, they should have been powerful enough to reverse the ill effects of their own success.

These are all important distinctions if one is concerned with when and how Mormons were absorbed into a national economy—and I think he is wrong about most of them—but Leone's historical arguments have little relationship to his observations on modern conditions. Here his methods are entirely different. His nineteenth century is a product of using existing models of interpretation to understand social and economic action, but his twentieth century is a product of a highly personal set of observations on the nature of Mormon belief in response to his own experiences with Mormons. These observations are grounded in his a-historical reactions to what he saw and heard. The two main themes he outlines—individualized, do-it-yourself

manipulation of symbols and an equally individualized perception of a past that seems like the present—are not equally developed. His ideas on ‘memory’ and history do not account for a vivid interest in twentieth century social discontinuity which I have seen among both Mormon intellectuals and rural farmers and workers. He establishes that Mormons personalize the past but not that they fail to understand it.

In his analysis of the individual use of symbols, however, he is extremely acute. He outlines how religious concepts are manipulated in an undifferentiated fashion for specific, daily practical purposes, contrasting this usage with an application of hierarchically-arranged, universally understood principles of eternal behavior which many Mormons and non-Mormons would rather see as the Mormon way. However, he does not relate current Mormon beliefs and symbolic usages to current Mormon society or economy in any systematic fashion. The differences in his methods fracture any connection in his overall argument. History and ethnography have not been successfully melded.

In an attempt to patch over such gaps, Leone tries to introduce a notion of a

memoryless, colonialized modern Mormonism, subordinate to the outside world. Like too many analytical terms in this book, “subordinate”, “colonial”, and “memory” are never examined or used in any discrete sense, and they rarely inform the points he is trying to make about past or present. Trying to present Mormons as a colonialized group is daring, and it has already struck many nerves, but Leone’s historical analysis is insufficient to sustain this interpretation: Mormonism here looks as colonial as anything the rest of America believes. This vitiates the contention considerably.

Problems of style and usage often make this a difficult book to read, but it is hardly a book to get defensive about. Leone’s attempt to encompass all of Mormon history does not work, but it goes a long way in explaining the ability of Mormonism to buoy up its adherents through large and small adversities. I cannot do justice to his ethnographic analyses here, but this book is a genuine contribution to cultural—not historical—understanding of modern Mormonism. In many ways, it is the first such published contribution to appear in several decades.

