

wings," he played a central role in Utah Democratic Party politics as a stump speaker, political appointee, and active partisan. His attacks on Reed Smoot during the 1908 campaign, for instance, led to intense cross-examination before the Council of the Twelve, rather than simply the one or two "pulpit preachments" from Joseph F. Smith (p. 272). Other examples could also be cited.

Although it is wrong to expect an author to write the book the reviewer would like to have written, one often wonders about the rationale for the inclusion or exclusion of particular material. This is particularly true with regard to the controversial problems in which B. H. Roberts was involved. One wonders, for instance, why so much space should have been devoted to a consideration of Roberts's controversy with William Jarman which from the perspective of today will probably be viewed as antiquarian and why no space at all is given to the controversy over the Book of Abraham with the Reverend F. S. Spalding, Roberts's extensive work in the 1920s encompassing at least three manuscripts on problems related to the Book of Mormon (both of which are of vital contemporary interest), or Roberts's discussions with the First Presidency concerning the exclusion of the King Follett Discourse from the first edition of the *History of the Church*.

The value of the biography lies principally in the chronological treatment of the life of B. H. Roberts and in the inspiration it will provide to Latter-day Saints. It is difficult to conceive of a less auspicious beginning for a life which proved so productive and valuable to himself and his co-religionists. B. H. Roberts was undoubtedly one of the mighty men of Zion, and this biography will assist in perpetuating his memory in the collective consciousness of the Mormon people.

ELLWOOD, ROBERT S., JR. *Alternative Altars: Unconventional and Eastern Spirituality in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979. 192 pp. \$12.95.

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IS MORMONISM EMERGENT OR MAINLINE?

Alternative Altars explores the impact and meaning of religious life in American history outside the Judeo-Christian mainstream. It is a fecund but disjointed panorama—a fascinating collage of essays,

accounts, and affirmations in which Professor Robert Ellwood, director of the East Asian Studies Center at the University of Southern California, probably the leading American expert on emergent "cults," examines closely three "moments" in his own career: Spiritualism and the Shakers, Theosophy (he is a member of the Theosophical Society of America), and Western Zen.

Professor Ellwood sees two styles in American religion today—the "temple" and the "cave." In his view, conventional religion fits the paradigm of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem, stable and fixed, with men dwelling together in happy harmony, full of gratitude to God for fruitful families and bounteous fields. This is mainline religion and is normative, large, and established. On the world scene, it is the huge mosques of Cairo and Tehran, the Altar of Heaven of the old Chinese emperors in Peking, the Grand Shrine of Ise in Japan, and the Christian cathedrals in Europe and America. In the United States it is the Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists, Catholics, and Jews.

Then there is the metaphor of the cave, filled with alternative altars, with novel religious "cults" (Ellwood rarely uses this term; he opts for "excursus" or "emergent" religion). As in Plato's cave, the inhabitants are unhappy prisoners bound in chains, forced to turn their backs to the light. All they know of reality is a shadowplay created by a bonfire behind them, which projects dark, dancing images before their deprived eyes. Here the groups are small and short-lived, centered around a charismatic leader, basically concerned with mystical experience, having beliefs at great variance with those of the larger community outside.

In *Alternative Altars*, Ellwood probes two questions he briefly touched upon a year ago in a lecture at Brigham Young University: What is a cult (an emergent religion)? What distinguishes it from an established (mainline) one? His treatment of these questions provides useful indices for examining religious groups which he did not directly consider. For example, using his criteria, we should be able to determine when a religion ceases to be a dissident sect and begins to take on the aura of a legitimate, mainline church. More specifically, using Ellwood's analysis, let us see whether The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints should be regarded as an "alternative altar" of unconventional spirituality belonging to the community of spiritualism, theosophy, Western Zen, and the likes of the Moonies or the Nichiren shoshu people, or whether it is more accurate to identify Mormonism with the traditional mainstream Christian churches.

Obviously, this book review is not the place to attempt a thorough examination of this matter, but let me list here several of

Ellwood's more important criteria for distinguishing emergent religions and suggest ways in which the ideology and operations of Mormonism may compare or disagree with them.

1. *Emergent religions as asylum faiths.*

In Ellwood's analysis, emergent religions are intense communities, requiring full-time practice. They avoid being directly competitive with established religions by taking more intensive forms than the normative religions do. They are "total institutions." Shakers, Zen centers, the Hare Krishna, etc., are all examples of total institutions comparable to prisons, boarding schools, insane asylums, or monasteries. The nonnormative religions also have a more diffuse influence; in them there are many dual or multiple memberships and activities. For example, many non-Hindu Americans meditate in Maharishi's Transcendental Meditation (TM) mode or do yoga. But very few non-Roman Catholics say the rosary in Catholic churches, and very few synagogues have regular plurality of non-Jewish visitors.

Mormonism a total way of life rather than a creedal pronouncement. Members are expected to apply the principles of their religion in all aspects of daily life—social, physical, moral, economic, political, and academic. Mormonism has sought to develop a lifestyle distinct from the world at large, and there have been elements of separatism in the Mormon historical experience. However, there has never been a monastic syndrome in Mormonism, no propensity for ascetic withdrawal, and no equivalent to the Zen center or the Hare Krishna ashram. Mormons do not shy away from being directly competitive with alternative religions, including the established American faiths. Although there are Mormons who are attracted to Buddhist and Hindu meditation practices, these members could not feel comfortable bringing these into the Church. No one could continue to be known as a practicing Mormon who at the same time becomes a promotional advocate or devotee of TM, Zen meditation, Nichiren shoshu, or the like.

2. *Leadership, charisma, and the feminine aspect.*

In the unconventional groups, the charisma of the mediumistic minister, the oracle, the inspired, prophetic leader is emphasized. The focus is like the shaman of old, as in the example of Madam Blavatsky of Theosophy or any of the Zen masters, who represent self-

replenishing charismatic leadership in principle. Also a prominent symbol of the many emergent religions is feminine leadership. The predominance of women in ecstatic, mystical, and healing cults is a worldwide fact. It is evident in Haitian voodoo, the ancient Greek Dionysiacs, the Japanese new religions, as in the somewhat decorous shakers, spiritualists, theosophists, and pentecostalists of America. In some of these faiths the feminine is identified with the divine; there is an image of a god which is feminine. In mainline American churches feminine clerical or professional leadership has never been more than nominal.

Mormonism, the living prophet, and a Mother in Heaven. The Mormon religion places primary emphasis on the inspired leadership of a living prophet who is regarded as a revelator and spokesman of the will of God. The prophet-president of the Church is a man, since he must hold the priesthood, and this privilege is reserved for men. The Supreme God of Mormonism is male, but in a sense not completely so. Mormons believe that a modified *shakti* principle is operative in the celestial spheres. That is, the gods are never without their consorts. Father in Heaven cannot exist without his companion, a Mother Goddess, for man cannot be exalted without a wife. In Mormonism, as in some other religions, there is room for a Mother in Heaven. Relationships in the eternal world require the female presence. Although men and women preserve their individual identity forever, ultimate reality cannot exist without them both.

3. *Monism and meditation.*

In Eastern spirituality, ultimate reality is One. But between this ultimate monism (a belief that underlying supreme power or principle is one) and this world of toil and shadows, we often have an intermediate polytheism in the emergent religions: an assemblage of masters, spirits, buddhas, gurus, gods, or archetypes who give texture and color to the One, and who can reach down to guide pilgrims along the way. Emphasis on creation is slight; the excursionist has in view instead an eternal, though sometimes evolving, world.

In emergent groups, trance and meditation are often emphasized, although these are either not allowed or are tightly controlled and limited to experts within the group. In fact this is the reason for the existence of a number of meditation groups. They each offer legitimated teachers who are often thought of as members of a long lineage of such teachers. They teach that meditation should be

taught only by experts. In meditation (of TM, Zen, yoga, the Divine Light Mission, etc.) the consciousness is directed away from outward things and is reflected back upon itself, upon particular sacred images or thoughts which are conjured up in the mind, upon the formless essence of consciousness. The meditation act should induce a tranquil or ecstatic state of consciousness.

Mormon pluralism and prayer. In Mormonism, the supreme influence or power in the universe consists of three separate, personal deities: the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, who are united in purpose and plan. They created man and the world. Mankind is literally the spirit offspring of God the Father. In underlying philosophy, reality is dualistic. Good is coeternal with evil. Besides God there is the devil. In addition to mind or spirit, matter also eternally exists, light and darkness are coeternal, etc.

Mormons also believe in meditation, but its object is not consciousness itself. It is essentially a form of prayer which is psychologically and symbolically structured as an "I-Thou" relationship with a personal God (or Gods) conceived of as essentially outside the psyche. In prayer, there may well be an expansive consciousness, but most often it involves a greater awareness of one's relationship with God. In Mormonism prayer can and should be meditative, but it is not confined to introspective experience.

4. *Withdrawal, single, simple practice, and sacred earth.*

Excursus religions appeal to selected people, not families. They have a tendency to reach isolated people or single status people (young people, older women, and so on) rather than families and demographic cross sections one would expect community religions to reach. The cult stance of most emergent religions is maintained by advancing a single, simple practice which can produce fairly immediate and perceptible subjective change and can be practiced alone or in a small, ad hoc group quite independent of the kind of elaborate activities and structural ramifications of the parish church. Chants (mantras), meditation, special liturgical or healing rites (such as *jorei* in the World Messianity movement), or exciting concepts or symbols are examples. Also, in excursus religions there is usually an invitation to return to sacred earth. They demarcate sacred space and time with seasonal rites and sacred geographical locations. There are holy places charged with sacred power and worthy of pilgrimages. Often these are sacred mountains or mountain retreats.

Mormonism, a family-centered movement. No other American faith places more emphasis on the preservation of family life and the home than do the Mormons. Therefore, Mormonism seeks to reach people of all ages and all stations in life. Likewise, there is no single, simple distinguishing ordinance or activity in the Mormon faith that is key to all else, or that covers the entire range of spiritual or ecclesiastical needs, although there are a number of rites, ceremonies, and observances that are appropriate at given stages of development in the life of a practicing Latter-day Saint. On the other hand, in the matter of sacred earth, Mormons are probably closer to the emergent religions than to the conventional faiths. Also, like the Hebrews of old, they are temple-building people. And only within the sacred reserves of the temple can the highest and most sacred blessings of the faith be received.

SUMMARY

Using Ellwood's guidelines for distinguishing "new" religions from old, we cannot say that Mormonism belongs fully to either, because it is somewhat ambivalent toward both. In balance, the Mormon religion is closer to the mainline faiths than to the emerging ones. This in part derives from sharing many common Western historical and cultural traditions. It is inaccurate to classify Mormonism as a cult, not simply because it can no longer be regarded as small or short-lived in the American scene, or not simply because it has now become global in outreach and emphasis (it now has four-and-a-half million members in eighty-one countries and sixteen territories), but, more importantly, because it is now perceived more for the ways in which it belongs to the community of mainstream religions (Christ-centered, biblical, strong emphasis on preserving the traditional family, etc.) than for the ways in which it has been regarded as different from them or as strange.

In some fundamental sense, Mormonism is a bridge between the "new" East and the "traditional" West. Among conventional Christian theologians in modern times, there has been an insistence that knowledge of God must rely on reason, logic, and the words of the Bible. Among unconventional religious groups, knowledge of the Divine has been largely subjective and mystic, involving inner consciousness or enlightenment. Somewhere in between these two, and involving something of both, is the Mormon approach to religion. Mormons believe that knowledge of God is neither totally empiricist nor totally mystic. To us, the scriptures speak clearly of

revelation in both objective and subjective dimensions—in both the Word and the Spirit.

The swing toward subjective personal experience, so prevalent among the newly emergent Eastern faiths in this country, has been paralleled by a renewed interest among mainline Christians in “the Spirit.” Speech cannot be parted from the breath that creates it. Although the conventional preoccupation with scientific and reasonable knowledge has been reflected in a general emphasis among biblical Christians on the importance of the Word of Truth, an intellectual understanding of the Word as objectively given is not enough. *Knowing about God* is not *knowing God* himself. In this Mormons would tend to agree with the newly emergent religions. The Word must be applied to the heart and mind subjectively by the Spirit, so that man recognizes the divine personalities behind the mighty acts and words and enters into a personal relationship with them. In Mormonism there must be cooperation between internal divine illumination (the emergent faiths) and external truth (the traditional Judeo-Christian faiths). In this particular, at least, Mormonism is both “new and everlasting.”