

Three Views on Latter-day Saints and the Jews

The following three essays deal with LDS perspectives on the Jews and Israel. In keeping with its main objective of publishing scholarly views on LDS topics, *BYU Studies* is pleased to assemble here three approaches to this very complex, religiously and politically sensitive subject.

In the first essay, Grant Underwood discusses Steven Epperson's book on the Mormons and the Jews (a published version of his doctoral dissertation at Temple University). Epperson's work, heavily influenced by broad contemporary American attitudes toward Jews, tends to emphasize the independent covenantal standing of the Jews before God. His book rejects the view that the Jews must eventually convert to Christianity in order to be acceptable to God. Underwood supplies contrary evidences from early Mormon sources and takes issue with a number of points advanced by Epperson's analysis.

Epperson then follows by reviewing Robert Millet and Joseph McConkie's book on the call and election of the house of Israel. Frequently quoting from various LDS sources, Millet and McConkie chart a path for the salvation of the house of Israel, including the Jews, that draws heavily on the concepts of the blood of Israel and coming to Christ. Alert to anything that might in any way be seen as anti-Semitic, Epperson offers some sober reminders that God loves all people and deals with his various children in their own time and way.

The differences of language and interpretation found in these two books are due, in part, to certain degrees of ambivalence that have existed in Mormon teaching and rhetoric regarding the Jews from the beginning. In order to explain how those strands of thought have been emphasized or deemphasized from decade to

decade in the history of the Church, *BYU Studies* invited Arnold Green to write a bibliographic essay summarizing and assessing the corpus of LDS writings about the Jews. His study, which compiles in its footnotes numerous significant references on the subject, shows how LDS positions have oscillated on such factors as God's judgment against or forgiveness of the Jews, the relative importance or unimportance of race or lineage, the relevance of the return of the Jews to Israel in relation to their attitudes toward Christ, and other pertinent sentiments. Like pistons, these interconnected issues have risen and fallen and risen again as the work of LDS theology has moved from era to era.

People often ask, What is the Mormon position on the Jews? or on any number of other similar topics. Within bounds, answers can usually be given to such questions. Where dispositive doctrines have not been propounded by the Church, however, several Mormon views may well exist. In some ways, such variety may expose an unsettled openness in meaning; in other respects, this multivalence may positively reflect the richness of a living religion.

When those of us on the board of editors for Macmillan's *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* were counseled by that project's Church advisors, we were encouraged to be clear wherever an issue was settled but to be open-ended if it was not. Our objective was not to cut off discussions in Church classes or meetings, but to present information that each person might find helpful in addressing the relevant topic.

As editor of *BYU Studies*, my aims are the same. Clearly, the LDS outlook on the history and salvation of the Jewish people opens onto a wide-angled landscape. Hopefully, readers will find in all parts of the following collection a combination of thorough scholarship, well-meaning scrutiny, and faithful reflection on Latter-day Saint interests in the temporal and eternal welfare of our Jewish brothers and sisters.

—John W. Welch