

A Survey of LDS Proselyting Efforts to the Jewish People

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From Thucydides to Carl Becker and from Vico to R. C. Collingwood, historians and philosophers of history have debated the question of teleology, or purpose, in the historical process. The Latter-day Saints approach the issue with a religious *weltanschauung* fairly saturated with prophetic significance. In the tradition of Old Testament Judaism and early Christianity, they admittedly and proudly consider the essence of history to be the unfolding of a divine blueprint for man's ultimate salvation. Indeed, one aspect of the Mormon "gospel plan" charts chronologically and in detail the process of taking God's redeeming word to every nation and people.

This process allegedly began with Father Adam, who first received the divine injunction to teach his offspring the ways of truth. Adam's posterity occasionally became corrupt in the sight of God, however, and the all-important knowledge of salvation was lost, necessitating periodic "restorations" through Abraham, Moses, and other representatives of the "covenant lineage." Following the advent of Jesus, the saving message was deliberately withdrawn from the Israelites, who had since Old Testament times been its sole guardians and beneficiaries, so that the "Gentiles" might have an opportunity to attain salvation. Yet it was predicted that, after a period, the "times of the Gentiles" would be fulfilled and the gospel would be restored to a portion of scattered Israel which would be gathered to a "Zion" in America and then to the Jews who would return to Jerusalem.

Latter-day Saint history has thus unfolded in terms of this chronology. Early converts to Mormonism were designated as "Israelites" of the tribe of Ephraim, and their gathering place near Independence, Missouri, was earmarked as the site for the New Jerusalem. The stream of converts emigrating from Great

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Britain to Missouri, Illinois, and Utah was proof to Mormons that the Lord's timetable for "Ephraim" was on schedule and that the return of "Judah" to Palestine was imminent. Consequently, the Latter-day Saints have developed a twofold Zionism. They have prayed for their own ingathering on the American frontier and, almost as ardently, for the Jews' return to Palestine as prelude to an eventual but certain Jewish acceptance of Jesus and his teachings.

PRAYER FOR JERUSALEM

Thus Joseph Smith, dedicating the Kirtland Temple in 1836, prayed God "to have mercy upon the children of Jacob, that Jerusalem, from this hour, may begin to be redeemed; and the yoke of bondage may begin to be broken off from the house of David, and the children of Judah may begin to return to the lands which Thou didst give to Abraham, their father."¹ In 1840, a Latter-day Saint conference in Nauvoo, Illinois, formally resolved that the time for the Jewish return had arrived. The Church accordingly dispatched a pair of apostles to Palestine, though only one of them, Orson Hyde, completed the journey. From the Mount of Olives, he officially petitioned God to "restore the kingdom of Israel—raise up Jerusalem as its capital and constitute her people as a distinct nation and government."² The following year, another LDS assembly issued a manifesto to the Jews of the world, commanding them to return to Palestine where they should prepare to receive their Messiah.³

From then until now, Mormons have often interpreted events in Jewish history as signals that the "times of the Gentiles" were drawing to a close and that a mass conversion of Jews to Mormonism loomed on the horizon. Official actions of the Church hierarchy, however, have traditionally been limited to offering prayers and dedicating Palestine, suggesting that the formal termination of the period for Gentiles to

¹Doctrine and Covenants 109:60-64.

²Elder Hyde transcribed the prayer, delivered on October 24, 1841, and mailed it to Orson Pratt in Liverpool. The letter is reprinted in Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1949), Vol. 4, pp. 457-458.

³"Proclamation of the Twelve Apostles," *Millennial Star*, Vol. 6 (October 15, 1845), p. 136. For a more exhaustive survey of LDS Zionism, see Eldin Ricks, "Zionism and the Mormon Church," *Herzl Year Book*, Vol. 5 (1963), pp. 147-174.

hear the "gospel" still remains in the future. Nevertheless, efforts have occasionally been made by individual Church members and leaders to take the message of Mormonism to persons of Jewish heritage. The purpose of this paper is to trace these unofficial proselyting endeavors from 1836 until 1965.

FIRST PREACHING TO A JEW

Perhaps the first attempt to preach Mormonism to a Jew occurred in 1836 when Joseph Smith spoke of his religious experiences to Joshua Seixas, a Hebrew scholar whom the "brethren" had engaged to instruct at their "School of the Prophets" in Kirtland. Seixas listened cordially, but despite the Mormon Prophet's prediction that he would "eventually embrace the new and everlasting covenant,"⁴ the Jewish scholar did not prove to be fertile ground for the restored faith. Nor did the Jewish-Christian minister whom Orson Hyde visited in Trieste while en route to Palestine in 1840. "I called upon him to be baptized for the remission of his sins," wrote the apostle. Yet the experience only convinced Elder Hyde that "there is more hope of those Jews receiving the fullness of the gospel, whose minds have never been poisoned by the bane of modern sectarianism."⁵

After the death of Joseph Smith in 1844, subsequent Mormon leaders during the nineteenth century showed little interest in discussing their religion with Jews. Brigham Young, perhaps as a result of his belief that Jews were suffering under divine justice,⁶ felt that such missionary work would be in vain until the "second coming." On one occasion, he even declared that Alexander Neibaur, Mormonism's first Jewish proselyte,⁷ was not really of Jewish descent because no real Jew could believe in Jesus; the fact that Neibaur accepted Christ was conclusive proof to Brigham that Neibaur was no Jew. This attitude prevailed through John Taylor to Wilford Woodruff; consequently, no overtures were made by Mormons to Jews during the re-

⁴DCH 2:397.

⁵*Ibid.*, 4:497-498.

⁶See *Journal of Discourses*, 2:279.

⁷Despite a popular LDS myth, Orson Hyde was most likely not Jewish. Neibaur (1808-1883), a German-Jew and already a Christian before encountering Mormonism, was baptized in 1838. His daughter, Jessica Neibaur, married Charles W. Nibley. See Susa Young Gates, "Alexander Neibaur," *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, Vol. 9 (April, 1914), pp. 53-63.

mainder of the century. In 1872, George A. Smith was sent to rededicate Palestine for the Jewish return; but, like the earlier mission of Orson Hyde, this second journey was concerned with the gathering rather than with the conversion of Judah. Upon his return, moreover, George A. Smith declared that "there is no infidel on the face of the earth who can disbelieve the mission of the Savior more than they do."⁸

UTAH JEWISH COMMUNITIES

It is understandable that the customarily convert-minded Saints failed to proselytize a growing Jewish community in their own back yard. By 1876, there were congregations of Jews in Salt Lake City, Ogden, Corinne, Bingham, Provo, and even Nephi, which were on fairly amiable terms with their Mormon neighbors.⁹ Their Mormon neighbors, however, made no recognizable attempt to proselytize them. Similarly, the LDS "Near Eastern Mission," established in 1884, concentrated primarily on Armenians and Europeans, almost completely ignoring the Palestinian Jewish settlements. "The Jewish and Christian colonies of Palestine," reported European Mission President Joseph M. Tanner in 1886, "with one exception, do not inspire one with much hope of their conversion."¹⁰ One missionary laboring in Haifa, Don C. Musser, did mention in 1892 that he expected to baptize a Jewish convert,¹¹ but the result was never confirmed.

The only event during the first century of Mormonism which can possibly be construed as an indication that the saints might have been preparing to proselytize Jews occurred in 1888. During that year after an intense study of the New Testament, Rabbi Edward Joseph Isaacson accepted Jesus, was expelled from his congregation in Germany, and subsequently became converted to Mormonism. Within a few months, apparently motivated by no more than the zeal of a new convert, he had completely translated the Book of Mormon into Yiddish. Had it been published, the translation might have enabled many European and Palestinian Jews to read the keystone book of

⁸*Journal of Discourses*, 16:96.

⁹In 1865, Utah Jews celebrated Rosh Hashana on Temple Square; the cornerstone for Salt Lake's synagogue was laid in 1903 by Joseph F. Smith; and Utah, in 1917, became the second state of the Union to elect a Jewish governor.

¹⁰*Millennial Star*, Vol. 48 (May 31, 1886), p. 351.

¹¹See the *Deseret Weekly*, January 14, 1893.

Mormonism. In 1890, however, Isaacson left Utah in disrepute, and his handwritten manuscript has remained almost unnoticed in the Church Historian's Office.

In 1902, Palestine was dedicated a third time by Apostle Francis M. Lyman and a fourth time in 1921 by Apostle James E. Talmage. These rededications demonstrate the continuing LDS interest in the Jewish return, while reactions to intermittent world events during that period indicate a modified attitude toward the possibility of Jewish proselyting. In 1917, on the heels of the famous Balfour Declaration, British General Edmund H. Allenby captured Jerusalem for the Allies of World War I. "No people on earth," responded a daughter of Brigham Young, "with the exception of the Jews themselves, have more cause for rejoicing and see more clearly the hand of the Lord in the redemption of Jerusalem from the oppression of the Gentile Turk, than do the Latter-day Saints."¹² Heber J. Grant, well-known for speaking out against anti-Semitism and not so well-known for being a booster of the Jewish National Fund,¹³ acknowledged that "one of the benefits of the great and terrible world war, through which the nations of the earth have recently passed, will be the opportunity for the Jews to return to the land of their fathers."¹⁴ And Joseph F. Smith reacted to Allenby's "redemption of Jerusalem" by writing: "It strikes me that the hour is nigh. I believe that the times of the Gentiles will surely be fulfilled, and the light will break forth among the Jews."¹⁵ The changing times and the new emphasis encouraged a few attempts to take the Mormon gospel to persons of Jewish decent.

BOOK OF MORMON TRANSLATED INTO HEBREW

About 1922, another Jewish convert to Mormonism, Herman Miller, completed a translation of the Book of Mormon into Hebrew. Although evaluated as adequate,¹⁶ the Hebrew translation, like its Yiddish predecessor, was never published and, at present, the manuscript even appears to be lost. Since at that

¹²Susa Young Gates, "The Return of the Jews," *Relief Society Magazine*, Vol. 5 (August, 1918), pp. 469-470.

¹³See *The Improvement Era*, Vol. 23 (September, 1920), p. 1040.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, Vol. 23 (February, 1920), p. 285.

¹⁵Joseph F. Smith, "Gathering of Latter-day Saints and of Hebrews," *Liabona: The Elders Journal*, Vol. 15 (January, 1918), p. 469.

¹⁶See letter from Josiah Hickman to Joseph F. Smith in Sidney B. Sperry, *Our Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Stevens & Wallis, 1947), pp. 33-35.

time no significant body of Jews spoke Hebrew, such a rendition of the Book of Mormon then would have had no practical value anyway, although it could be of infinite worth to contemporary LDS scholars, inasmuch as a Hebrew Book of Mormon may presently be desired.

In May of 1922, Brigham H. Roberts was called to serve as president of the "Eastern States Mission" of the Church with headquarters in New York City. There, the missionary-historian became acquainted with Abraham Silverstein, a Christian Jew who edited a monthly publication entitled *The Redeemed Hebrew*. The November, 1925, edition of the paper included a letter which set forth a Canadian Rabbi's reasons for denying to Jesus the title of the Jewish Messiah. In the same issue, Silverstein editorially invited Christian ministers to refute the Rabbi, who had signed his name "Rasha." B. H. Roberts composed three replies to "Rasha, the Jew" which were published in successive issues of *The Redeemed Hebrew*. Roberts' initial treatise attempts to establish that there exists a plurality of gods and that the New Testament Jesus was an incarnation of the Old Testament Jehovah. His second article reviews Messianic prophecies, while the third introduces "the new testimony for Jesus" contained in the Book of Mormon. In 1932, the three articles were supplemented by additional material and published as a book entitled *Rasha—the Jew*. Under Roberts and his successors, Henry H. Rolapp and James H. Moyle, Eastern States missionaries distributed the three papers as a proselyting tract. But, although a few exciting prospects were reported during the 1926-1935 period, no Jews became Mormons as a result of the literary appeal. The significance of this episode was primarily a historic one: an LDS leader had for the first time undertaken to proselytize a Jewish community by composing an exposition of the Mormon gospel especially for Jews.

In the Near Eastern Mission, post-World War I proselyting also reached a few Jewish settlers. Mrs. Joseph W. Booth, widow of the mission president who died at Haifa in 1929, reported upon her return to Salt Lake City that Jews frequently visited her home and that a few of them had joined the Mormon Church. She qualified, however, that "most of the missionary work was done among the Syrians and Armenians. . . ."¹⁷ In

¹⁷No author listed, "Jews Accepting Christ by Thousands," *Liabona: The Elders Journal*, Vol. 30 (1932), p. 17.

1933, Apostle John A. Widstoe visited the Holy Land where he performed the fifth dedication of Palestine for the return of the Jews, and installed as the local mission president Badwagen Piranian, an Armenian raised in Switzerland. Apostle Widstoe confided his intent to have the Book of Mormon translated into Hebrew¹⁸ and instructed the new mission leader to proselytize the Jewish population. Piranian tried for over two years and, although there are indications that he was initially encouraged in the endeavor,¹⁹ he gradually became convinced that it was impossible to convert Jews. Mission headquarters were subsequently relocated in Beirut and, except for a brief attempt to reach the Lebanese Jewish community by a young Jewish Mormon, Albert Ostraff, no more attempts were made before the mission was disbanded in 1950. Two years before that, however, another portentous event had taken place in the Holy Land, giving rise to the largest LDS proselyting program to the Jews.

ISRAEL BECOMES STATE

In May, 1948, decades of Zionist dreams and effort culminated in the birth of Israel, a modern republic recreated on the soil of an ancient kingdom. Pious Jews everywhere hailed the event as a miracle and quoted passages from their beloved Torah which predicted a homecoming for the dispersed of Judah. No less excited were the Latter-day Saints, many of whom viewed the Jewish state's formation as a key event in God's plan for the latter days. "On May 14, 1948," recalled Joseph Fielding Smith, "England withdrew and the Republic of Israel came into existence. This is a very significant event which we must not forget."²⁰ Ezra Taft Benson testified that "in fulfillment of these ancient prophecies, a great drama is being enacted in Palestine. The Jews are returning as one of the events of the last days."²¹ And Arthur V. Watkins, Mormon senator from Utah, wrote: "Israel, as an independent nation,

¹⁸John A. Widstoe, *In a Sunlit Land* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1952), p. 201. This intended translation was most likely never made.

¹⁹In the *Near East Mission History* (Church Historian's Office), under date of July 24, 1933, Piranian recorded in his Swiss dialect that various Jews were showing a genuine interest in Mormonism and were desirous of reading the Book of Mormon: "Die Juden haben tatsaechlich Interesse fur das Volk Ephraim, verschiedene haben das Buch Mormon zum lehsen gewuenscht."

²⁰Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), Vol. 3, p. 261.

²¹Conference Reports: 120a (April 8, 1950), pp. 71-79.

is an established fact and must be accepted. No one believing in the prophecies of God would contend otherwise."²²

It wasn't long before a few eager Saints began to conclude that the day had at last arrived when the process of teaching the gospel should be directed away from the Gentiles back to the lineage of Israel. "It is my sincere prayer," confided BYU instructor Lynn M. Hilton (who had earlier attempted to form an organization to prepare Mormons for Jewish proselyting), "that we will not be as reluctant to take the gospel from the Gentiles and give it to Israel as Peter was reluctant to do the converse in the meridian of time."²³ "It would seem to me," suggested Apostle LeGrand Richards in 1954, "that the 'times of the Gentiles' are now fulfilled to the point where we should carry the message to this chosen branch of the House of Israel."²⁴ Later, in a general conference, Elder Richards encouraged: "I have in my heart a feeling that it will not be long until the Presidency of the Church will feel to open up missionary work among these people."²⁵

Perhaps in anticipation of such proselyting, Elder Richards had compiled some information on both Jewry and Mormonism, arranging it so as to impress the former with the latter's theology. In 1954, he published his compilation as *Israel! Do You Know?*, whose thesis suggests that the Ephraimite-Saints currently administer the redeeming knowledge possessed anciently by their Jewish cousins. "The Gospel was restored in these latter days to the seed of Joseph," he explained, "and they have the responsibility of carrying it to the Jews."²⁶ Although the other General Authorities were evidently reluctant to call a halt to the times of the Gentiles, they agreed to let Elder Richards set up experimental "Jewish Missions" in a few areas.

JEWISH MISSION IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

The largest Jewish Mission by far developed in Southern California where John M. Russon, president of the Los Angeles

²²Arthur V. Watkins, "When Applied Christianity Comes to Palestine," *The Instructor*, Vol. 44 (November, 1959), pp. 358-359.

²³Lynn M. Hilton, *The Jews—A Promised People* (Provo: BYU Extension Publications, 1958), p. 62.

²⁴LeGrand Richards, *The Dawning of Israel's Day* (Provo: BYU Extension Publications, 1954), p. 9.

²⁵LeGrand Richards, "The Word of God Will Stand," *The Improvement Era*, Vol. 57 (June, 1954), p. 405.

²⁶Richards, *The Dawning of Israel's Day*, p. 6.

Stake, agreed in 1955 to oversee the specialized proselyting effort. Russon delegated the time-consuming aspects of it, however, to J. Leland Anderson, whom he appointed "Coordinator of the Jewish Mission." Anderson's assistant was Jerome Horowitz, a young Jewish-Mormon attorney, who was persuaded to move to Los Angeles from Ogden, Utah. Apostle Richards, anxious for success, suggested to Anderson that "the best missionary with the Jews that I know of in the Church is Rose Marie Reid . . . so I am sure it would be well to call her to assist in this work. . . ." ²⁷

Born into a Canadian Latter-day Saint family, Rose Marie (nee Yancey) Reid accepted her father's prediction that the Jews would return to Jerusalem during her generation. Following the death of her husband, the young designer moved to Los Angeles where the swim suit firm bearing her name became prominent in the Jewish-dominated textile industry. Desirous of teaching her religion to business associates, she outlined a monologue for explaining Mormonism to Jews. When LeGrand Richards became acquainted with Mrs. Reid in 1954, he encouraged her to author a pamphlet as an introduction to his *Israel! Do You Know?*²⁸ and to write down her "lesson plan" for Jewish investigators of Mormonism. The manuscript of her *Suggested Plan for Teaching the Gospel to the Jewish People* became available to missionaries in March, 1956, but, due to a thorough review by the Church Missionary Committee, was not published until July, 1958.²⁹ Despite Mrs. Reid's insistence to the contrary, her *Suggested Plan* was never really authorized by the LDS hierarchy. "I doubt if the Church will want to adopt it as a recommended Church program," explained LeGrand Richards in April, 1956. "I think I can get the committee

²⁷Letter from LeGrand Richards to J. Leland Anderson, October 1, 1955, in Los Angeles Stake Center (1209 S. Manhattan Place, Los Angeles, California), file under "Jewish Mission." Subsequent citations from this file will be designated "Los Angeles Stake File."

²⁸The pamphlet, *Attention Israel* (n.p., 1954), is a dialogue between Mrs. Reid and "Eugene," an agnostic Jewish student who "recently graduated from Columbia University." Mrs. Reid leads Eugene and the reader through a discussion of Old Testament history, avoiding the question of Jesus and emphasizing the idea of Jewish-Mormon kinship through the tribes of Israel.

²⁹The published lesson plan, which includes two volumes of visual aids, was printed in Salt Lake City by the Deseret News Press. Mrs. Reid combined the dialogue of her "first lesson" with thirty pages of suggestions for approaching Jews and printed it separately as *Do's and Don't's Before Teaching the Jewish People* (n.p., n.d.). Also, with the help of professional photographer, Robert Perine, some progress was made on a plan to develop filmstrip presentations of each lesson.

to approve of it to be issued under her name and then let it serve as useful a purpose as it can for the missionaries who desire to use it."³⁰ Although the lesson material was hailed by a majority of Mrs. Reid's cohorts as a thorough guide for teaching Mormonism to Jews, a few felt it to be a bit complicated and complained that those lacking Mrs. Reid's dynamic personality would have difficulty using it effectively. The objections of one delegation of missionaries from Inglewood Stake led them to write their own lesson plan³¹ and to form a "Jewish District" within their own stake mission. In the regular interstake Jewish Mission, however, Rose Marie Reid was put in charge of "preliminary training" of missionaries, most of whom had implicit faith in her.

In January, 1956, the Jewish Mission officials met with some delegates from the Conference of Jewish Women's Organizations, who were touring the LDS Los Angeles Temple, and presented to them the message of Mormonism. The women were polite, but none of them became serious investigators of the Latter-day Saint Church. Apart from this instance, the Los Angeles Jewish Mission did little real proselyting before 1957. J. Leland Anderson resigned as coordinator in August, 1956, but Apostle Richards had, in the meanwhile, organized Jewish Missions in other areas.

UTAH JEWISH MISSIONS

In Salt Lake City, Wilford Stake President George Z. Aposhian agreed to supervise the Jewish Mission, and High Councilman Sherman Young took charge of proselyting. The group of ten to twelve missionaries used a 1951 "United Jewish Council Jewish Population Census" for Salt Lake in order to discover prospects. "We will contact every Jewish family," promised Sherman Young, "and they will all have an opportunity to hear the gospel or know that we have a friendly interest in them."³² Over a three-year period, the "gospel" was heard

³⁰Letter from LeGrand Richards to John M. Russon, April 20, 1956; Los Angeles Stake File.

³¹This dittoed lesson plan, *A Systematic Program for Teaching the Gospel to the Jewish People*, was written in 1957 by Albert P. Ostraff and Farrel T. Miles, using, according to Miles, "the principle of testimony and simplicity; and no effort was necessarily made to avoid the mention of Christ."

³²Sherman Young, "Memorandum to President Aposhian," January, 1957; contained in file under "Jewish Mission" recently transferred from the Wilford Stake Center to the Church Historian's Office.

by more than three hundred Salt Lake Valley Jews, several of whom attended LDS meetings but none of whom converted to Mormonism. The Salt Lake missionaries, however, spent much of their time with Latter-day Saint groups, explaining the Jewish-Mormon kinship and combatting anti-Semitism among their own people.³³

In Ogden, Utah, missionary work to Jews was made a part of the East Ogden Stake Mission. Stake President Scott B. Price delegated to Bruce Gibb, serving in 1955 as a counselor in the stake mission presidency, the task of supervising the effort. Gibb composed his own set of thirteen lessons for presenting Mormonism to Jews and, with a ten-man missionary force, he set out to contact Ogden's fifty-odd Jewish families. Twenty of these were visited regularly, Gibb approximated, and two Jewish men were converted to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

In San Francisco, former Bishop R. John Cummings and William Fred Grow were the sole participants in the Jewish Mission. They contacted their own business and social acquaintances who were Jewish, telling them that Mormons were fellow Israelites. "Since Jews consider the terms: Jews, Israelites and Hebrews to be synonymous," confided Cummings, "such a statement requires an explanation."³⁴ Fred Grow estimated

³³Primarily because of external influences (e.g., political affiliations or business and social contacts), some Mormons reflect negative secular attitudes toward Jews. However, in a paper presented to the American Sociological Association in San Francisco, August 31, 1967, Dr. Armand L. Mauss of Utah State University explained that inasmuch as they identify themselves with Jews as "Israelites," Mormons are much less apt to exhibit anti-Semitic attitudes or practices than are members of other Christian denominations. Dr. Mauss also found that, unlike other Christians who tend to become more anti-Semitic as they become more orthodox, Mormons tend to be less so, since orthodox Latter-day Saints would be more likely to subscribe to the "doctrine of Semitic identification." And although there is a tendency for Mormons to believe that the historic Jew has been "punished" for backsliding, Dr. Mauss contended that "the Mormon theological outlook is not nearly so much concerned with recriminations for *past misdeeds* as it is with the *future redemption* [underlining his] of all Israelite peoples and their establishment in historic homelands. If anyone can expect the wrath of God for their wickedness, it is not the Jews, but rather the Gentiles, who have rejected the Jewish scriptures and persecuted the Jews. . . . The official teachings of the Mormon Church not only take a sympathetic theological stance toward Jews, but also imply that anti-Semitic behavior is tantamount to fighting against God." [Dr. Mauss has submitted his paper for publication in an academic journal and is presently awaiting the editorial decision.] Despite this general tendency, however, the little anti-Jewish sentiment that does exist among Mormons continues to be embarrassing for both theological and humanistic reasons.

³⁴Letter from R. John Cummings to author, January 11, 1967.

that thirty Jewish persons were taught the basics of Mormonism by himself and Mr. Cummings, two of whom joined the Latter-day Saint Church.

Portland (Oregon) Stake President C. Carlile Carleson, pursuant to a request by LeGrand Richards, delegated the task of supervising Jewish missionary work to L. A. West, a former member of the stake presidency. West and his seven companions obtained contacts by going from door to door in Jewish neighborhoods and, using Bruce Gibb's "lesson plan," managed to convert a Jewish father and son before President Carleson halted the effort in 1957. "There was a change of attitude on the part of the Stake Presidency," said West, "who thought it best to let the regularly appointed stake missionaries continue the work. As far as I know, no further activity was concentrated on the Jews."³⁵

While Apostle Richards organized his Jewish Missions in the West, the LDS stakes in New York and Washington, D.C., launched similar movements. In New York City, a pair of Jewish Mormons were commissioned by stake authorities to approach the Jewish community. One of these, Dr. Irving H. Cohen, authored an eighty-two page pamphlet entitled *Jews of the Torah* (1957 and 1963), which attempts to demonstrate that modern Jewry has deviated from its Old Testament prototype and that Jesus was indeed the Jewish Messiah. Dr. Cohen and Albert Solomon employed the booklet as their guide for explaining Mormonism to Jews and as the introductory reading material for Jewish investigators. Cohen, whose special mission ended in 1962, has been influential in the conversions of several Jewish persons to Mormonism.

In 1956, LDS authorities in Washington, D.C., assigned two stake missionaries to work exclusively with Jews. Artel Ricks and Alden Evans, after composing their nine-lesson "Washington Stake Plan for Teaching the Gospel to the Jewish People," delivered their message, over a three-year period, to approximately fifty Jewish persons, one of whom became a Mormon. "Most of them wanted to join the Church," said Mr. Ricks, "but were prevented from taking the step because of family pressures."³⁶

³⁵Letter from L. A. West to author, February 5, 1967.

³⁶Letter from Artel Ricks to author, December 4, 1966.

Back in Los Angeles in August, 1956, John Russon appointed former Stake President Leo J. Muir to replace J. Leland Anderson as coordinator of the Jewish Mission. Muir and Jerome Horowitz outlined a program of weekly meetings where more than a hundred missionaries met to study Rose Marie Reid's lesson plan and to learn techniques for proselyting Jews. Some of the most important axioms were avoid mentioning Jesus at the outset; say "Jewish" rather than "Jew"; discourage premature Church attendance by Jewish contacts (lest the congregation sing "Onward Christian Soldiers"!"); prevent Jewish investigators from reading the Book of Mormon too soon; emphasize that Mormons are Israelites; and tell Jewish people that Latter-day Saints have always supported Zionist aspirations in Israel. The missionaries were urged to contact Jewish persons through a variety of methods: a roster was compiled of Mormons married to Jews; a list of Jewish visitors to the Mormon temple was obtained; LDS Church members were asked to supply the names and addresses of Jewish acquaintances; and missionaries were instructed to visit synagogues or Jewish service organizations, and to go from door to door in Jewish neighborhoods. During 1957 and 1958, Mormon "missionaries to the Jewish people" in Southern California spent over 10,000 hours proselyting, delivered in Jewish homes over 1,200 lessons, and converted to their faith about thirty Jewish persons.

JEWISH MISSIONS DISBANDED

In March, 1959, the LDS First Presidency directed that henceforth all proselyting efforts to Jews should be channelled through existing stake missionary organizations, thus discontinuing the experimental Jewish Missions. The directive suggested that each stake might assign two missionaries to prepare themselves to teach Jews, should they be "discovered in the normal course of proselyting,"³⁷ but only a couple of stakes did this and these for just a very short time. Then, in order to arrive at a unity of the faith with regard to the numerous "lesson plans" for teaching Mormonism to Jews which had cropped up during the era of the Jewish Missions, the Mission-

³⁷The directive, "RE: Missionary Work Among the Jews," was sent March 2, 1959, "From the Office of the First Presidency to Presidents of Stakes and Stake Mission Presidents." It was reprinted in the *California Intermountain News*, a weekly for Southern California Mormons, on April 2, 1959.

ary Committee selected four members of the Brigham Young University College of Religious Instruction faculty to review the extant literature. Eldin Ricks, Daniel H. Ludlow, Ellis T. Rasmussen and Sidney B. Sperry analyzed the works of Eugene Hilton, Irving H. Cohen, Bruce Gibb, Rose Marie Reid and Artel Ricks; but, rather than merely recommending one of the five, they determined to write their own set of lessons. Although these authors felt handicapped because they lacked direct association with Jewish people, they nevertheless possessed a keen understanding of Hebraic scripture and tradition, and their material will likely serve as the basis for instruction when the Mormons decide to proselytize the Jews in earnest. Although the First Presidency's directive formally ended all Jewish Missions, the Southern California organization, in March, 1959, was something quite different from what it had set out to be in August, 1955.

The Jewish Mission leaders became convinced by mid-1958 that a few of their converts were not being warmly received into Mormon congregations. Jerome Horowitz prepared lectures to inform missionaries about Jewish religious beliefs, and Rose Marie Reid, after proposing that all Jewish Mormons attend the same congregation, authored a *Suggested Handbook for Use by the Integration Committee in the L.D.S. Church*,³⁸ a chapter of which itemized the special problems of Jewish converts to Mormonism. Eventually, however, the search for a method of enabling Mormons to understand and to befriend Jews led to San Bernardino, California, where an LDS civic leader had already developed his answer to the same problem. His answer was a more subtle kind of proselyting which, in many respects, was not proselyting at all.

In 1958, San Bernardino Stake Mission President Ken Dyal³⁹ pondered a request to organize a mission to the Jews. Rather than conduct bona fide missionary work, however, he initiated a course of study to instruct Mormons in the history of ancient and modern Judaism. Aided by his two counselors, Charles Spurrier and George Barnes, Dyal presented his series of nine lessons several times in the San Bernardino area. As part of the

³⁸Los Angeles: printed on the California Intermountain News Press, 1958.

³⁹By 1958, Kenneth W. Dyal had served for several years as manager of San Bernardino's famous "Orange Show." In 1964, he was elected to Congress as a Representative (D) from California's Thirty-third District.

instruction, moreover, his pupils visited Friday evening services in local temples or synagogues, sent greeting cards to Jewish acquaintances on Rosh Hashana, sponsored a troupe of LDS girls who learned and then performed Israeli folk dances, and set up a fund to establish an "Orson Hyde Forest" in the Holy Land. Dyal's goal was to lead Latter-day Saints toward an understanding of Judaism and a genuine friendship for Jewish people, delaying missionary work until there developed "an adequate basis." "One or two Jewish friends who know that a Mormon acquaintance is willing to stand up and reprove the name caller," he contended, "will do more for the eventual willingness of these people to hear our message than a thousand out punching doorbells."⁴⁰

In October, 1958, Charles Spurrier spoke these sentiments to the Los Angeles Jewish Mission and, in December, Ken Dyal communicated them by letter to Ned Redding, by then prominent in the interstake movement. Through these and other contacts, the Los Angeles Jewish Mission in January, 1959, was converted into the "Understanding Israel Program." The reorganized movement was governed by a "Coordinating Council" comprising Jerome Horowitz, Ken Dyal, Rose Marie Reid, Ned Redding, Harry Howard, Albert Ostraff and Janell Warner, and was "advised" by John Russon and Wayne A. Reeves, presidents of the Los Angeles and San Bernardino Stakes, respectively. "This new program," Russon explained, "supercedes all other activity among the Jewish people."⁴¹ The Understanding Israel Program launched an effort to teach Dyal's lessons to representatives of Southern California wards who would, after the end of the course, return and enlighten their own congregations. Then, once the saints were thoroughly indoctrinated, the Jewish Mission could pursue its original goals with greater success. But before the initial phase was even completed, the First Presidency's directive also discontinued this venture in Jewish friendship. The idea of understanding Israel, however, was later revived on a more youthful and grandiose scale.

⁴⁰Letter from Ken Dyal to Ned Redding, December 12, 1958, Los Angeles Stake File.

⁴¹*California Intermountain News*, January 22, 1959.

THE YOVAIL DANCERS

In 1960, Mrs. Mildred Handy was called by her bishop in San Diego, California, to teach a series of lessons for adults in the Mutual Improvement Association (MIA). Recalling her contact with Ken Dyal and using his material, Mrs. Handy outlined a course of study on the "House of Israel." Later, she composed her own set of thirty lessons, which she employed in subsequent "Understanding Israel" classes. Mrs. Handy's contribution to Dyal's idea was an increased association of Jews with Mormons, brought about via programs of drama, dance and cultural exchange. "I wanted to develop a learning program," she later wrote, "that would go beyond mere theoretical study and provide a real understanding through literal experience."⁴² Her main vehicle in accomplishing this was a folk dance group christened "The Yovail Dancers," which was transplanted from San Diego to Los Angeles when Mrs. Handy became "Adult Study Leader" in the Pasadena Stake MIA. Her principal duty was the supervision of Understanding Israel classes in the various wards, but her consuming interest was the Yovail Dancers. The group grew to include over sixty LDS teen-agers who learned, then performed, traditional Jewish and Israeli folk songs and dances. By linking biblical, ghetto, and modern steps with an explanatory narrative, Mrs. Handy told the Jewish story from ancient to contemporary times. She called the presentation "Fire of Israel," and her dancers displayed it before Jewish spectators at the Westside Jewish Community Center, the Shrine Auditorium, the Pasadena Civic Auditorium and, during the summer of 1964, in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Beer Sheba, Zurich and Paris. In Jerusalem, the LDS dancers received the "Pilgrim's Medal" from the Israeli Government; and in Beer Sheba, Clifford I. Cummings of the Pasadena Stake Presidency was invited to explain Mormonism to the audience. Although direct proselyting was not a part of their itinerary, the young dancers conceived of their activity as having missionary value. Mrs. Handy felt that the manifestation of Mormon interest in Jewish culture, along with the mingling of the two peoples, would generate a climate of mutual understanding, a prerequisite for successful missionary work. Following the tour of Israel in 1964, the Yovail Dance group was disbanded by

⁴²Mildred Handy, *The Yovail Story* (Provo: ditto copies, 1965), p. 32.

Pasadena Stake leaders who evidently feared that the mushroom activity might conflict with existing Church programs for youth.

Since 1964, there seems to have been a dearth of attempts organized by Mormons either to convert Jews or to win their friendship, although there have undoubtedly been some which have escaped the author's attention. Likewise, there have likely been other instances prior to 1964 wherein Latter-day Saints, individually or collectively, have tried to get their Jewish cousins to see the light. Those cited above, however, appear to be the major ones, and they serve as an adequate basis for the following conclusion: the Mormon Church has neither officially nor on a large scale undertaken to carry its message to the Jewish people. The sporadic endeavors hitherto attempted have largely been initiated by individual Church members and, while most have been tolerated, none have been encouraged by the Church leaders. For their part, the "Brethren" apparently feel that the "times of the Gentiles" are lingering on, and thus additional time will be required "to turn the hearts of the Jews unto the prophets, and the prophets unto the Jews. . . ." ⁴³

⁴³Doctrine and Covenants 98:17.