

SYNCRETISM AND PHILOSEMITISM: A CASE STUDY OF “JEWISH MORMONS”

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Over the last fifty years, a faction of the LDS Church have begun to identify themselves as Jewish Mormons. A large proportion of these people have Jewish ancestry but do not understand them or their ancestors' conversion to Mormonism as a replacement of their Judaism, and that the two faiths can cohabitate. This paper (1) contextualizes the current phenomenon in historical Mormon-Jewish relations discussed in the writings by theologians Richards and Epperson and historians Goldberg and Glanz, (2) describes current Jewish-Mormon practices and rituals, and (3) explores how the theological position of Jewish Mormons can be understood in relation to both Philosemitism and syncretism. This primarily ethnographic research entailed participant observation in the Jewish Mormon movement, B'nai Shalom, and the BYU Passover Seder in addition to semi-structured interviews of prominent members. From this research, I discuss several facets of Jewish Mormon culture and religion: the composition of the Mormon Passover Seder, Jewish Mormon understanding of the Holocaust, sub-identities including Ashkenazi or Sephardic, and use of Jewish food and music. Furthermore, this paper discusses the theological factors that led to this faith syncretism, and how this case differs from traditional syncretic processes. I posit that out of a deep fascination, admiration, and perceived connection to Judaism, Jewish Mormons and some traditional Mormons have built a relatable caricature of the average Jew, and that this perception of similarity significantly influences community relations.

