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REVIEW – THE MISSION OF MORMONISM IN NORWAY, 1851– 1920

Reviewed by Christian Euvrard

Johnnie Glad, *The Mission of Mormonism in Norway, 1851–1920, A Study and Analysis of the Reception Process*, (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Peter Lang Publishers, 2006), Paperback: £58.00.

It was my pleasure to meet with Johnnie Glad last August, on the occasion of the Annual Conference of the European Mormon Studies Association (EMSA), in Turin, Italy. Born in Norway in 1929, this gracious gentleman is an eminent theologian. After his studies at the University of Oslo, Det Teologiske Menighetsfakultet, he pursued studies at the Columbia University and the Theological Seminary, both in New York, as well as at the School of Theology, in Boston, receiving a master's degree in Religious Education and a doctor's degree in Theology. He then served as a member of the clergy of The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, in different parishes in New York, New Jersey, Wisconsin and Massachusetts. Returning to Norway in 1968, he started teaching religion at Levanger Teachers' College and what is now the University of Stavanger.

His interest in Mormonism started while working as a parish pastor in the United States. He has conducted thorough research on Mormonism and Norway over the years with regular visits to Utah, particularly to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' (LDS) Church History Library. He has also done a very complete survey of all archival documents about Mormonism in Norway available in the Church Department, Justice Department, National Archives and University Library in Oslo, as well as in the Institute of Missiology and Ecumenical Theology, University of Aarhus, Denmark.

Glad begins with a general introduction. He looks at previous works on the topic of the Mormon Mission in Norway, most of which written by Mormon authors, which he labels as "Mormon apologists" while recognizing their interest to his study. The great interest and contribution of his work will be the research among reports, studies, letters of prominent clergymen, theologians and professors in relation with

what our author calls the “Mormon issue” as well as the study of newspapers, magazines and periodicals’ articles about the Mormons in Norway. Judging by the list of references he was able to consult (26–27), it seems he had access to most documentation at the LDS Church History Library.

Glad states as his approach to his work: “Our study dealing with Mormonism and Norway during the period 1851–1920 is a study and analysis of the reception process when this new and strange religion Mormonism first arrived in Norway in 1851. What happened when that which was old and familiar was being confronted and challenged by something new and strange? Or to be more specific, what happened when this new religious movement met the official and well established religion that had ruled the grounds for years?” (27). This statement should be kept in mind. The author’s approach is not a history of the Mormon Church in Norway. Anybody expecting this would be disappointed. Glad centers on how the Lutheran Church and the Norwegian State reacted to the introduction of this “new and strange” religion. He states: “The resistance in Norway against the Mormons was not primarily a defense for the State Church but for the common Christian religion. In other words, Mormonism was considered a deviation not only from the teachings of the Lutheran State Church but from Christendom as a whole,” adding a little further “The Mormon missionary work was considered an attack against the homogeneous culture and society” (31). This is the key to understand the work of Glad.

His study is divided in three parts: Part I – “How it all started” is intended to be first of all, a general presentation of Mormonism. He addresses the history of Mormonism in the United States (Chapter 1). It offers no surprises for a scholar of LDS history. To account for the success of the Mormon missionaries in the British Isles, Glad places more emphasis on the emigration system than on conversion.

Chapter 2, the “doctrinal foundation of Mormonism,” starts with the Articles of Faith and then presents different beliefs of the LDS Church. However, the leitmotiv is always to show how these concepts “deviate from the Christian faith.” Whether the concept of God, the interpretation of salvation, the scriptures and revelation, all doctrines are different from what is generally accepted by what we could call “mainstream Christianity.” The author’s position is summarized in the following statement: “Lutherans and many with them believe that God has revealed himself conclusively and authoritatively in Jesus Christ and he continues to make himself known through the Word and Sacra-

ments, where he reveals all that is necessary for the salvation of man” (73). Anything added by the Mormons is clearly presented as deviation. Millennialism and baptism for the dead are studied in that light. The last section of this chapter deals with polygamy. The title is “Polygamy. A historical retrospect on the problem of dual communication and practice,” a chapter which emphasizes the secrecy of the practice, as well as the fact that it was practiced even after the Manifesto of 1890. Glad concludes: “It is therefore important to go somewhat in depth into this subject in order to unveil methods and strategies that were used by the leadership of the Mormon Church” (111).

The chapter that follows is a brief historical retrospect (only 25 pages) of Mormonism’s arrival in Norway (Chapter 3). We are disappointed that the historical facts are so sketchy. It would have been interesting to know to what extent Mormonism developed in Norway. Very few numbers are given. We learn of the Norwegians converted to Mormonism in western settlements in Wisconsin. Mention is made of the calling of Apostle Erastus Snow to start missionary work in Scandinavia, but with little details about their arrival and the development of their congregations. We discover that the first branch was organized in Norway in Risør in 1852 with 18 members and in the next paragraph that the Norwegian Mission was divided in three districts, Oslo, Bergen and Trondheim, which implies that in these areas the LDS Church had found success in a numerical amount of converts. Another figure mentioned is the report of a Mormon missionary in 1858 counting 376 members in 11 branches. The first building is erected in 1870 and dedicated in 1871 with the presence of 400 LDS members. Finally (133) we learn that, for the period 1851–1920, the Mormons had in Norway:

“Baptisms	7939
Emigration	3326
Removed	1304
Deaths	769
Excommunications	1997
Total membership as of 31 December 1920 was 1287.”	

We can regret that Glad did not investigate, or share more information, on who were the first generations of Norwegian converts to the Mormon Church, their motivation and emigration. What classes of society were they from? Did they enter the Church as families or individuals? Did they remain faithful or did they come back to Norway after

the emigration? No portrait, no example is given of who they were and why they converted. This leaves aside a whole side of the question. If Mormonism was so uncharacteristically un-Christian, as Glad asserts, why did these nearly 8,000 Norwegians, many of whom were no doubt Christians, embrace Mormonism and still consider themselves as being Christian? Glad fails to answer these questions.

Part II is entitled "The issue of religious freedom" and goes from Chapter 4 to 7. One might have wished that this part came first as it gives the religious, historical, political and social background necessary to understand fully the challenge that the introduction of Mormonism in Norway represented. Most people know the history of the conversion of Norway to the Reformation movement and particularly to the Lutheran faith. After the Peace of Augsburg of 1555, and according to the famous motto "Cujus regio, ejus religio", meaning each country in Northern Europe could choose its faith and religion according to the decision of its king or prince. What was developed in most countries is a State-Church theory, pointing out the absolute necessity of religious uniformity. France, which had both Catholic and Protestant subjects under a catholic monarchy would be a counter example of this policy with the tragic religious wars as a consequence. From this time on, being Norwegian and being Lutheran was considered one and the same thing. Glad concludes his chapter 4 with this sentence: "In other words, non-Lutherans were prohibited from practicing their religion" (153). Quakers, Russian Orthodox, Catholics and of course Jews, whether coming from emigration or conversion, soon had to face the restrictions of the law. This was the start of a heroic fight for religious freedom.

Glad examines (Chapter 5) the steps going from the Conventicle Law of January 1741 (dealing with religious awakening, the influence of pietism) to the abolition of it under the influence of the Haugean Movement, in July of 1842. This was the end of the strict dominion of the Lutheran Church as a State Church. He then follows (Chapter 6) how a real religious freedom would emerge with the Dissenter Law which received royal sanction in July 1845, mainly for denominations recognized as professing "Christian Religion." Glad explains: "The fight to abolish the Conventicle Law was a fight against the monopoly position of the clergy in the State Church. The fight for the Dissenter Law was a fight against State Church domination within society in general" (195).

Did this evolution profit the Mormons who had arrived in the meantime? As early as September 1852, five Mormons sent a letter to the

regional commissioner of Ostfold to organize "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" under the §2 of the Dissenter Law. This brought the authority to examine whether or not the Mormons qualified as Christians. Glad takes us into the meanders of the religious and political institutions to determine the "official" position granted to the Mormons (Chapter 7). This is a long but very interesting part of his book. In the case of Mormonism in Norway, neither the Lutheran bishops, nor the Theological Faculty could agree, leaving the Church Department perplexed as to what should be decided. However, the Mormons were left as outsiders in regard to the Dissenter Law. It was not until 1969, with the replacement of the Dissenter Law with *Lov om trdomssamfunn og ymist anna* that the Mormons received an official recognition.

Part III offers another very insightful study of the reaction to Mormonism in Norway through the press and some major figures of theologians, professors and other prominent speakers. Glad did a wonderful job in cataloging a series of books and newspaper articles on Mormonism. We could be tempted to say "against" Mormonism, for although he states "the reactions were to a great extent negative while others again were more open minded and liberal" (235-36), he does not give many examples of the latter. We shall not attempt to cover all articles and books summarized by Glad (Chapter 8) but only list the themes of oppositions. "Are Mormons Christians?" is of course the root of all debate since disqualifying them as non-Christians seems sufficient. The Mormons are accused of using a Christian vocabulary and Christian concepts but distorting them so much that this apparent familiarity is another trap for credulous people. The Mormons are dangerous, they "fool" people, they conceal "grave and divergent doctrines," they seduce young girls to whom they offer "free passage" to Utah. The polygamy issue occupies many of such articles: "Daddy has gotten a new wife," "The life of women among the Mormons," "The Mormons' girl-catching," "The Mormon Maid," are only a few examples of such titles in articles, books, plays and even, later, motion pictures. The authors try "to remove the mask of the terrible and blasphemous sect" (249). We regret that Glad always gives a summary of the different articles or books without ever actually quoting the original text. This leaves a doubt as to the personal opinion of Glad himself. Does he agree with and take for himself the many accusations, criticisms and extremely negative reports on the Mormons? The reader hopes for a personal position, a critical distance, a committed opinion, unfortunately in vain. We are served the nineteenth century propaganda without any attempt of critical analysis.

This deficit strongly hampers the credibility of the study as scientific research. When he adds “Mormonism was described as a fantastic and confused mixture of Judaism, Mohammedism and simple paganism mixed in with strongly distorted Christian thoughts” (255), one wonders who is speaking.

Chapter 9 follows with a long series of portraits of prominent bishops, theologians and teachers who have encountered the Mormon issue. Each is introduced by a long, somewhat unnecessary, biography. What is interesting is to follow the difficulties such intellectuals have in admitting divergent views, differing doctrines, contradictory beliefs. For one, “Mormonism embodied in its very nature lies and immorality that carried the seed of destruction” (271). For another, “how the Mormons, whom he considered to be apostles of lies, could be accepted in a country that had been blessed with the Word of God and the means of grace” remains a question (317). Yet another wanted “to help prevent fellow Christians from becoming ensnared in this trap of lies and if possibly rescue some who already had fallen into it” (350).

In this long list, Mormonism is compared “to a monster with long tentacles several fathoms long” (357), the converts are “unhappy and deceived people who had been strapped in the firm net of a deplorable religion by a bloodsucking priesthood” (358). All this literature urged some pastors to organize a rescue mission in Utah to save the “hundreds of compatriots...brought into bondage, sliding on the slippery downward path to eternal perdition” (359). Glad gives the report of some 132,776 persons converted from Scandinavia with the result of some 30,000 to 40,000 in Utah around 1881. However, “the mission work in Utah was hard and difficult,” “during a ten-years period from the founding of the congregation about seventy adults had joined” and “only thirty members were left” (368). Andreas Mortensen, for his part, concluded that Mormonism “felt as if a creepy snake was coiling itself around his feet and was moving up around his body. At this point Mortensen understood what a Satanic power that lay at the bottom of Mormonism” (378).

In chapter 10, Glad covers the anti-Mormon campaigns of the first decades of the 1900s. The material covered there is essentially the same as the anti-Mormon propaganda. Similar themes are addressed in the content of chapter 12 by presenting the reaction from dissenters (mainly Methodists) and Lutheran non-State organizations. They apply the same accusation of misusing “the name of Christianity in an attempt to cover up the worst carnal debaucheries in connection with desecrated

priestly tyranny” (436). However, one interesting point is the documentation of the US Secretary of State’s plan to use diplomatic ways of limiting the impact of Mormon missionaries in Europe in order to limit the number of Mormon emigrants in the US. This well orchestrated campaign had lasting consequences, forcing the LDS Church to send a special “embassy” to Scandinavia in the persons of LDS Senator and Apostle Reed Smoot and Apostle John A. Widtsoe in the 1920s, which is only briefly mentioned by Glad (130–32).

At the end of this long one-sided catalog of harsh criticism against Mormonism in a book one would hope would possess more objectivity, some remarks are necessary:

1. In presenting only the opposition to Mormonism in Norway, one gets a very unbalanced feeling. Glad argues that to understand “why did people react the way they did” one has to consider “the historical and doctrinal aspects of Mormonism.” However, how can we explain the thousands of converts from Norway? Especially since those who emigrated to Utah seem to have remained attached to their new faith as a majority.

2. Again, it is unclear who is speaking? Is it Reverend Glad, the former Lutheran Minister? Is it Professor Glad, the Theologian? By rarely using quotation marks, Glad leaves the strong impression that most critical positions presented reflect his own views. But then, it would have been fair to present the counter arguments of the LDS position. Even the “Epilogue” is in this regard disappointing. In many ways this makes the book appear more like an opinionated attack on Mormonism rather than an objective and balanced scholarly study of Mormonism.

3. What is missing? We wish Glad would have mentioned the excellent work of Terryl L. Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth, Mormons, Myths and the Construction of Heresy*, which title fits so well with the image used by Mortensen (quoted above) of the Mormon Church as a “viper on the hearth” (a phrase from an article in the *Cosmopolitan*, in 1911). Givens explains: “One of the challenges Mormonism – like other heterodoxies – presented to its detractors...was that its religious radicalism was an opportunity for toleration at the same time it was an occasion for outrage. At those times when outrage carried the day, the pressure of pluralism made it desirable to cast the objectionability of Mormonism in

non-religious terms.”¹ In other terms, if Mormonism is labeled as a non-religion, then there is no need to tolerate it, or as famous French author Molière put it “Qui veut noyer son chien l’accuse de la rage” [if you want to kill your dog just say he got the rabies]. On what ground will a new Church or religion “deserve” the honorable label of religion?²

4. The process is well known today, each new religious group has to go through a period of persecution and criticism before, eventually, reaching a level of social normalization. This is the other problem with the process of introduction of Mormonism in Norway described by Glad: it stops in 1920. At least in the epilogue, it would have been interesting to know the position of the Norwegian State, of the Lutheran State Church, of the Norwegians themselves towards Mormonism today. Without going into details, the presentation of the results of Smoot and Widtsoe’s visit to Norway (including their visit to the King), the official recognition of 1988 and the more than 4,000 members presently in Norway could have given us the end result of the process described. In reality, the whole topic centers on the question of religious propaganda and counter-propaganda. People can reject Mormonism and criticize it all they want of course. The purpose is not to declare which Church or Religion is true, but to recognize that in the reaction of a given denomination towards a new faith, we learn more about that denomination than about the new faith. In other words, what Glad has presented us with, and in this regard it is extremely interesting, is more a description of the tensions of the Lutheran Church, the conservatism of Norwegian intellectuals (particularly theologians) and Norwegian society as a whole, rather than a description of what Mormonism actually was or is in Norway.

5. But the real topic that is addressed and should have been developed in a more systematic way is the question of religious freedom. Ole Vig, “A Norse Educator” (331), is probably one of the few that really understood what was at stake. We thank Glad for presenting this thoroughly. Vig clearly separated the two issues: On one hand whether

¹ Terryl L. Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth, Mormons, Myths and the Construction of Heresy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 7.

² On this topic, see the excellent article by Alain Dierkens and Anne Morelli, “L’honorable label de ‘religion’ et son homologation par les pouvoirs politiques,” in *Sectes et hérésies, de l’Antiquité à nos jours* (Bruxelles: Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles, 2002), pp. 9–14.

Mormonism was true and corresponded to the standards of mainstream Christianity had to be determined, and eventually attacked through “spiritual weapons.” This could be the function of the Lutheran Church, or any other Church. But, on the other hand, coercion (police, civil courts, etc.) could not be used against a religion only on doctrinal grounds: “The duty of the state was to see to it that everyone followed the civil laws, but otherwise were given the rights to live and enjoy freedom” (340). And the author of the article goes as far as explaining that “the demand for religious and intellectual freedom was not modern liberalism or philanthropy, but true Christian virtue” (340). At least, the Mormons “awakened clergymen and teachers of religion,” and Mormons could “become good Norwegian citizens,” concluding that “a serious Mormon stood much closer to the Lord than a false Lutheran” (430–31). This development brings a refreshing balance and Glad could have developed this aspect some more.

6. Congratulations also to Professor Glad for chapter 11 in which “The problem of tolerance–intolerance” is discussed (407–29). Most Norwegians thought that religious freedom had been introduced with the Dissenter Law but the case of Mormonism demonstrated the contrary. In one article in the newspaper *Morgenbladet*,³ entitled “Mormonism and Religious Freedom”, the author explains that since “every religion needed outward signs and manifestations in life” (freedom of worship), the Dissenter Law, not recognizing Mormons as Christians, practically declared “that it was punishable to be a non-Christian” (408). By labeling Mormonism a crime, the Norwegian law and State denied freedom of religion but “an aberration great or small [is] not a crime” (409). Thus, legally, there is “a middle road between recognition and protection, and that was toleration, nothing more or less” (411). The author also insisted that “among Lutherans the law of tolerance was deeply imprinted, as they emphasized the importance of free research and the freedom of choice” (411). Consequently, they should have more inclined to grant that same freedom to others.

As a conclusion, we can emphasize how the problem of reception of Mormonism in Norway follows a pattern that is easily

³ Johnnie Glad, *The Mission of Mormonism in Norway, 1851–1920, A Study and Analysis of the Reception Process* (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Peter Lang Publishers, 2006), pp. 408–411.

recognizable. It has very modern implications: who will be qualified, in a given State, to legitimize a religious movement? Can the official Church or religion do it? It would seem tempting in a regime of State–Church, but how can one expect this given Church to accept a competing faith within its territory? The question has a very acute application today with the acceptance of Christian denominations in Islamic countries. Can the State authorities declare what is religiously correct? It seems hardly possible, especially when the State proclaims to be ideologically neutral. The difficulties are obvious in France with its regime of Separation of Churches and State, while trying to define which “sects” or “cults” can be accepted or not. Of course, concerning Mormonism, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, polygamy was a difficult issue. But even beyond polygamy after the Manifesto, being a religious minority remains a challenge for the hosting societies. The examples of the Baptists, the Quakers, the Adventists or the Jehovah Witnesses, all give ample illustration of this difficulty. Mormons are no different. Today, with the phenomenon of globalization, new challenges have emerged. To what extent will the Muslims be accepted in Western societies? The news media bring their lot of examples: the scarf, the “burka,” the minarets in the mosques, etc. Whether the turban of the Sikhs, the kippah of the Jews, the cross of the Christians, what is it that can be tolerated in public spaces such as schools, hospitals, or administrations? It will still be debated for a long time. Johnnie Glad’s book has the merit of giving us an example of the past, Mormonism in Norway (1851–1920) which offers a fundamental paradigm very useful today.

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