

Moore, R. Laurence, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. xx + 243 pp. \$28.00.

In the tradition of his *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture* (1977), R. Laurence Moore of Cornell University has again entered a relatively unexplored area of American religious historiography. Moore rejects "the tendency to equate Protestant culture in America with the activities of a few denominational groups labeled 'mainline'" (p. viii). As a result, he stands against the interpretation of American religious history that prevailed from the beginning of the nineteenth century up through Sydney Ahlstrom's massive *Religious History of the American People* (1972)—a historiographical tradition that began the story with the New England Puritans and traced the religious development of America through the "respectable" denominations, to the detriment of a pluralistic milieu that spawned countless "fringe" sects. The outsiders, Moore forcefully argues, were generally treated as deviants and problems.

Moore turns the traditional paradigm on its head, holding that it has been the very pluralism of American religion that has provided its dynamic and forms its essence. Even the New England Puritans, he points out, got their start as religious outsiders. Only in America did they become insiders whose respectability later gave birth to new varieties of outsiders. Thus Moore's work is in line with that of Catherine Albanese's *America: Religion and Religions* (1981) which "manages to ignore Protestants until the fourth chapter" (p. 20).

Moore's intention, despite his revisionism, is not to eradicate past American religious historiography, but to supplement it by setting forth "some reasonably fresh ways to understand religious pluralism" (p. x). His purpose is to suggest ways that the history of America's religious outsiders "may become more central to our understanding of American experience and generative of more useful historical controversy than has hitherto surrounded them" (p. xv).

Not only has Moore argued that the role of the outsider is central to the development of American religion, but he has also set forth the thesis that the availability of outsider religious options acted as a sort of safety valve by helping to "contain the worst tendencies in American life" through providing "ways for many people to invest their life with a significance that eased their sense of frustration" (p. 210). In addition, he put forth the view that religious outsiders in the American tradition had a definite utility in the development of the nation, "however politically useless or even pernicious" their dissent might have been, because they "did a great deal to expose the shabbiness and the arrogance of the culture surrounding them and [thus] contributed a fair measure to whatever success the American system has had" (p. xii).

Religious Outsiders is divided into two parts. Part one covers outsider religion as it relates to ethnicity and American identity. In this section

Moore has chapters dealing with Mormons, Catholics, and Jews. Part two discusses "religions for average Americans." It has chapters on Christian Science, Adventism and other premillennial groups, fundamentalism, and the Black churches. The book also includes an introductory chapter and a lengthy postscript. These two chapters set forth the author's presuppositions and indicate the framework and significance of the chapters composing the body of the study. Moore did not seek to be exhaustive in his treatment of outsider bodies. Rather, he chose groups that illustrated major themes.

Moore's volume has several problems. One has to do with the complexity of his field. By its very nature, the implications of religious pluralism are much more difficult to treat than are those of a unified system due to the fact that its subject matter is diversity. That dilemma is compounded by the problem that there are few, if any, satisfactory models upon which to build. It is always more difficult to operate in relatively unexplored territory.

A second difficulty is intimately related to the first: the book lacks unity. Moore himself was somewhat disconcerted over this point. He notes that he started out to write a book but "wound up with a manuscript that in form resembles a series of essays" (p. vii). That does not mean that the individual essays are not enlightening. They are generally quite insightful, but they are not coherent in the sense that they consistently develop a unified theme. The volume's theme is most evident in its opening and closing discussions.

A third difficulty is that Moore seems to put too much sociological emphasis on the development of American religious diversity and not enough on factors related to belief. His statement that "the gulfs that religious Americans have invented to distinguish their various religious groups have not always, or even usually, had much to do with theology" (pp. 207-208) would probably be vigorously objected to by most of those Americans he is talking about.

In spite of its weaknesses, many of which might be expected, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* has cut new ground in American religious historiography. As such it is a useful contribution. It remains, however, for Moore and others in the future to more fully and coherently develop the theses set forth in the book.

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Stein, Robert H. *The Synoptic Problem: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987. 292 pp. \$17.95.

Dissatisfied with previous works on the synoptic problem and wishing to place a text in the hands of his students that approaches this topic from an evangelical point of view, Robert Stein has written a book that he calls