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*New Children of Israel: Emerging Jewish Communities in an Era of Globalization* by Nathan P. Devir (review)

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The compendium serves several purposes. It gives evidence to the growing interest in what is now a new field of study. It offers a venue for examining some of the groups, systems of belief, and practices that have taken hold in contemporary Israel. Feraro and Lewis have put together a dozen articles, written mostly by young Israeli scholars, a number of whom were still working on their doctoral dissertations at the time the volume was in production. The articles deal with varied groups and systems, from Neo-Kabbalah as a form of consumer culture to the history of Theosophy and Anthroposophy in Israel. A number of the articles deal with the relationship between alternative spiritual groups and mainstream Israeli society, recording some of the public debates and attempts at legislating and ultimately controlling, or curtailing, what for many members of the Israeli establishment had been an unwelcome invasion of “cults.” These are large and important topics, which merit a series of studies each. The contribution of this volume, however, is in providing a spectrum, admittedly partial, of alternative spiritualities in Israel, and allowing interested readers to learn about a number of the new groups and the challenges they have confronted in making headway into society, changing the cultural and spiritual landscape along their way.

The last two articles in the collection relate to what the editors consider to be “on the fringes”—new Christian or Christian-Jewish groups arriving from Africa. Such hybrid communities that attempt to amalgamate the Christian faith with Jewish identity have in actuality become a common feature in Israeli society in the last decades, and should appear at the center of any discussion on new or alternative spiritual groups in the country.

In sum, the volume is a welcome contribution to the study of alternative spiritualities in Israel. It offers a partial view and does not attempt to cover all groups, but still provides an important introduction and overview of the field. At the same time, it shows the need for more such volumes that, cumulatively, would offer a richer and more comprehensive understanding of what is now a major feature of Israeli culture and life.

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*New Children of Israel: Emerging Jewish Communities in an Era of Globalization.* By Nathan P. Devir. University of Utah Press, 2017. 336 pages. \$29.95 paper; ebook available.

One of the biggest debates in the contemporary Jewish world is the question of who is a Jew. This debate has a legal angle, for according to Israel’s Law of Return, every Jew is entitled to a right to immigrate to Israel and to become an Israeli citizen. Nathan P. Devir’s *New Children of Israel* reviews another aspect of this debate through the examination of

three “Judaizing” or “neo-Jewish” communities in Ghana, Cameroon, and India. Devir visited these emerging communities and wrote a fascinating report. He believes that an unprecedented wave of self-defining Jews from the developing world is modern Jewry’s next watershed event. According to his research, this new wave has the potential to grow into millions of people.

The movements studied are The House of Israel of Ghana, Beth Yeshourun of Cameroon, and Children of Ephraim of India. Some of these emerging movements claim to be the heirs of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. According to the Bible, after the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.E., the ten tribes inhabiting the kingdom were exiled, and their whereabouts lost. During the 1980s and 1990s, some movements emerged claiming to be the descendants of the lost tribes. For instance, the State of Israel has acknowledged that the Beta Israel Movement from Ethiopia was indeed related to historic Judaism; during the 1990s almost all of its members—about 55,000 people—immigrated to Israel.

According to Devir, there are several aspects common to all of the movements. First, at some point in their history, travelers, traders, missionaries, or colonial administrators pointed out that some of their cultural practices were possibly Hebraic or Israelite in origin. These practices included animal sacrifice, burial taboos, observance of a Saturday sabbath and a lunar calendar, and more. Second, most members of each community have a recent Christian theological background. Many have come to Judaism through Christian communities that emphasize the Old Testament, such as Seventh-day Adventism. Choosing Judaism is viewed as a return to roots. Third, each group has endured centuries of oppression. Thus, “they see themselves as Jewish in symbolic terms” (223). Devir’s main argument is that these new movements of self-defining Jews are first and foremost a reaction against colonialism, and, as such, against the Christianity that represents colonial oppression. Becoming Jewish, then, is a counter-reaction.

A fourth similarity is that their practice of Jewish customs, including observing the Sabbath, puts the practitioners in grave physical and economic danger. The growth of radical Islam, like Boko Haram, in the heartland of Africa threatens those who define themselves as Jews. Finally, the internet plays a major role in the creation and the dissemination of information among these communities.

How has the Jewish world reacted to this unexpected global movement? Those who embrace and support the new Jewish communities come mainly from American Jewry. The Conservative movement has ordained some members of these communities as rabbis, and an organization called Kulanu (“All of Us”) has even offered financial support. However, the Israeli stance is much more reserved; Israel even refused to offer tourist visas to some of the African leaders of these movements.

Because Israel accepted the entire Beta Israel community from Ethiopia—something that has strained Israel’s welfare system—many observers now fear that an intention to immigrate is the underlying reason for these emerging movements “discovering” their Jewish roots. Devir convincingly argues that this is not the case with these movements, nevertheless skepticism remains.

*The New Children of Israel* is an excellent account of a fascinating topic. It is one of the most original and interesting books on Jewish identity recently published. The author demonstrates brilliant command of the materials. Who is a Jew in our day? This is a question with many possible and surprising answers.

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*Everyday Mysticism: A Contemplative Community at Work in the Desert.* By Ariel Glucklich. Yale University Press. 2017. 260 pages. \$45.00 cloth; ebook available.

In the 1990s I was working for the Kibbutz Movement, inspiring and coordinating environmental projects throughout the 270 kibbutz communities (kibbutzim) in Israel. This took me to a relatively new community in the mountains above the Arava Valley in southern Israel. Neot Smadar was then in its infancy, just a few years old, and all I knew was that they grew organic vegetables and sold them to upscale restaurants in the nearby resort of Eilat. I spent a few hours there, was impressed, and left. A year or two later I heard they were building an art center using radical new techniques for cooling, with ecological materials. I took a couple of groups that were touring environmental projects to visit, and again I was duly impressed.

It was only when I became engrossed in Ariel Glucklich’s recent book *Everyday Mysticism* that I realized how much I had missed on my much too brief visits. He writes that the inner principle that drives this community is hidden, and it had certainly been well hidden from me!

The text alternates between a historical overview—gleaned from documentary evidence and conversations between Glucklich and long-term residents, along with transcripts of teacher-student discussions maintained in their archives—and personal observations noted on extended visits over several years. For me the text was well woven together, but others may prefer to concentrate on his notes as a “participant observer” (9). There is a good index, eight pages of bibliography, and a thorough set of notes and references.

In the spring of 1989 a number of people from Jerusalem moved to an abandoned kibbutz in the mountains above the Arava Valley in