

PROTESTANT SECTARIANISM IN MEXICO:  
THE CASE OF LOS JUDIOS ESPIRITUALES  
OF THE CITY OF VERACRUZ

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## ABSTRACT

### PROTESTANT SECTARIANISM IN MEXICO: THE CASE OF LOS JUDIOS ESPIRITUALES OF THE CITY OF VERACRUZ

by Jacob Joseph Climo

The major purpose of this thesis is to present a very basic introduction to the study of Protestantism in Mexico by introducing the reader to a specific religious sect which I studied in Veracruz, Mexico, during the summer of 1967.

In the first chapter I briefly explain some of the background to the theory of sectarianism, paying particular attention to the problem of the general theory of sectarianism and the uniquenesses of specific sects which results from the various cultural and historical contexts in which they are found. I also present Brian Wilson's typology of sects which emphasizes the sect's institutional organization and the relationship of 1) the sect's circumstances of origin, and 2) the sect's response to the world, to that organization.

In the second chapter I describe the general sectarian setting in Veracruz, briefly outline the economic condition of the sect's adherents, and then present a short history of the emergence of the Spiritual Jews. Next, I account for the highly syncretistic nature of this sect's

ideology by tracing its relationship to three major religions as seen through the eyes of its adherents. I also present a description of the beliefs and rituals practiced by this sect in which I attempt to illustrate implicitly the sort of organization which the sect has developed. Finally, I classify the Spiritual Jews into Wilson's typology.

In the third chapter I take cognizance of the process of sectarian development as the only real justification for the typology. I then predict the future course of the Spiritual Jews on the basis of the five major alternatives open to the developing sect and the various social factors which influence the development.

In my final discussion I briefly review the argument presented and propose that Wilson's typology is operable for areas containing diverse sectarian forms. I also raise some important problems for future investigation of the problem of sectarianism. Finally, I assert that such study of sectarianism represents only an introduction to larger social processes in Mexico, which generated its development. I conclude by mentioning a number of reasons why the study of Protestantism can provide an excellent vehicle for observing the evolution of Mexico's religious institutions and culture.



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By

Jacob Joseph Climo

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## INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 1967 I studied the Spiritual Jews, a religious sect which recently emerged in the port city of Veracruz, Mexico. From my initial understanding there were four characteristics which rendered this group a particularly appealing one for study. First, the sect was already free from alien Protestant missionary contact and therefore completely "native" in the sense that it emerged within a Mexican context and was being developed by and for Mexicans. Second, the highly syncretistic nature of the sect's rituals and beliefs implied contact, in some form or other, with other Jews as well as Protestants. No Jewish missionaries were present, however, and this presented an interesting riddle regarding the origin of the Jewish elements. Third, Judaism itself is further removed from the dominant Catholicism when compared to other religions gaining converts in Mexico. This is evidenced by its general lack of emphasis on concepts such as life after death, its omission of original sin as a fundamental belief, and most important, its exclusion of Christ as a religious figure. Regarding religious change and the development of sectarianism, the fact that Judaism is so far removed from Catholicism implied that the emergent religious practices and beliefs in this sect would be more obvious deviations from

the Catholic Church. Better illumination with regard to secular adjustments of the adherents would be evident than if conversion to another religion were studied. This idea has been presented by E. Willems in his recent work on sectarianism in Chile and Brazil. Willems says, ". . . one would expect the relative success of a new religion or sect to be the greater the more its structure and ideology deviate from those of the traditional social order."<sup>1</sup> A comparison of different Protestant groups confirms this expectation. Finally, the newness of the group in Veracruz offered the possibility of tracing its roots clearly and decisively to socio-cultural factors such as poverty, class suppression, or as a reaction to some specific historical event such as a recent migration of peasants to the city.

Soon after I began my investigation it became apparent that only a small number of the issues I raised could be pursued in twelve weeks. A further limitation of my field work revolved around the fact that the Spiritual Jews lived dispersed throughout Veracruz rather than in a single neighborhood which I had naively assumed at the beginning. I established my own living quarters in a hotel within walking distance of the synagogue but for the majority of my

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<sup>1</sup>E. Willems, "Culture Change and the Rise of Protestantism in Brazil and Chile," in The Protestant Ethic and Modernization: A Comparative View, S. W. Eisenstadt, editor (New York, London: Basic Books, Inc., 1968), p. 195.

interviews I utilized the local bus and taxi services.

After being presented to the congregation by the minister, who endorsed my project, I was generally accepted by the members. Many of them invited me to their homes in the afternoons and evenings when they were not working. The informality of the "brothers" coupled with their willingness to help me greatly facilitated my interviewing. The information about the Spiritual Jews which I present in this essay results from those interviews and my continuous observations of the sect's religious activities.

Certainly, I regret the short period of time allotted for my study. Some vital areas of anthropological inquiry, like the economic circumstances of the group, have been presented very briefly and would undoubtedly expand in detail and theoretical significance with further study. Other related problems like the attitude of the Catholic Church toward such religious groups, the role of the charismatic leader, the general significance of Protestantism and Protestant Sectarianism in changing Mexican culture, etc., etc., have not been attempted here since their proper elaboration would have required far greater time for fieldwork and general research as well as a very comprehensive view of the evolution of Mexican culture. I conceive of this study as a preliminary investigation, however, and look forward to returning in a number of years to observe the Spiritual Jews further, to note the changes in their ideology .

and organization, and to check the actual course of their development as a religious sect with the course I have predicted in this essay.

The format of the essay is as follows:

In the first chapter I briefly explain some of the academic background in the theory of sectarianism, paying particular attention to the problem of the general theory of sectarianism and the uniquenesses of specific sects which results from the various cultural and historical contexts in which they are found. I also present Brian Wilson's typology of sects which emphasizes the sect's institutional organization and the relationship of 1) the sect's circumstances of origin, and 2) the sect's response to the world, to that organization.

In the second chapter I describe the general sectarian setting in Veracruz, briefly outline the economic condition of the sect's adherents, and then present a short history of the emergence of the Spiritual Jews. Next, I account for the highly syncretistic nature of this sect's ideology by tracing its relationship to three major religions as seen through the eyes of its adherents. I also present a description of the beliefs and rituals practiced by this sect in which I attempt to illustrate implicitly the sort of organization which the sect has developed. Finally, I classify the Spiritual Jews into Wilson's typology.

In the third chapter I take cognizance of the process



of sectarian development as the only real justification for the typology. I then predict the future course of the Spiritual Jews on the basis of the five major alternatives open to the developing sect and the various social factors which influence the development.

In my final discussion I briefly review the argument presented and propose that Wilson's typology is operable for areas containing diverse sectarian forms. I also raise some important problems for future investigation of the problem of sectarianism. Finally, I assert that such study of sectarianism represents only an introduction to larger social processes in Mexico, which generated its development. I conclude by mentioning a number of reasons why the study of Protestantism can provide an excellent vehicle for observing the evolution of Mexico's religious institutions and culture.

## CHAPTER I

### THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### Background to the Study of Sectarianism

Practically all modern work on sectarianism arose from Weber's usage of the term "sect" in his original thesis, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Many social scientists focused their attention on Weber's major theoretical proposition which, "attributed the rise of modern, as distinct from pre-modern, types of capitalism to the influence of Protestantism and especially Calvinism."<sup>1</sup> In Fischhoff's view,

The whole historical work of Weber has ultimately one primary object: the understanding of contemporary European cultures, especially modern capitalism. It presses forward to the underlying morale (geist) of capitalism and its pervasive attitudes to life: and beyond this to modern occidental rationalism as such, which he came to regard as the crucial characteristic of the modern world.<sup>2</sup>

Scholars like Tawney, Luthy, Trevor-Roper and others were fundamentally interested in the role Protestantism and, by extension, Protestant sects, played in cultural and social

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<sup>1</sup>S. W. Eisenstadt, "The Protestant Ethic Thesis in an Analytical and Comparative Framework," in The Protestant Ethic and Modernization, Eisenstadt, editor (New York, London: Basic Books, Inc., 1968), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Ephraim Fischhoff, "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: The History of a Controversy," in Eisenstadt, op. cit., p. 72.

change. They sought in the concept of the Protestant Ethic or some equivalent the key to an understanding of why some non-western cultures achieved modernization while others did not. One of the facets of their research included a long history of scholastic debate, mostly regarding the causal issue of whether the ethic provided impetus to economic and social change or the converse.<sup>3</sup>

Ernst Troeltsch, one of Weber's early defenders, developed a typology of sectarianism and was the first to contend that sectarians emerged from poorer classes, people who suffered from and were incensed by the economic disparities existing in their churches. They attempted a return to the original Christianity of the Primitive Church which condemned such divisiveness among men. In so doing, they isolated themselves from society (sometimes physically but always ideologically) forming small sects. Troeltsch also provided an enumerative definition of sect which was widely accepted,

. . . lay Christianity, personal achievement in ethics and in religion, the radical fellowship of love, religious equality and brotherly love, indifference toward the authority of the state and the ruling classes, dislike of technical law and of the oath, the separation of the religious life from the economic struggle by means of the ideal of poverty and frugality . . . the distinctness of the personal religious relationship, criticism of official spiritual

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<sup>3</sup>A. F. C. Wallace, Religion: An Anthropological View (New York: Random House, Inc., 1966), pp. 188-189.

guides and theologians, the appeal to the New Testament and the Primitive Church.<sup>4</sup>

Troeltsch's typology, however, leaned heavily on the development of medieval Christian sects which were generally quite similar in circumstances of origin and institutional organization.<sup>5</sup> Although Troeltsch himself recognized the limitations of his typology within the sociology of religion, later scholars tended to extend the application of type-constructs to show that all sects were more or less similar in organization, ideology, social composition, communal character, and circumstance of origin--a proposition of little warrant since it failed to account for the great diversity among sects and also confused the concept of sect with those of church and denomination.<sup>6</sup>

In 1924 H. Richard Niebuhr proposed a thesis of sect development and employed the same concept although his empirical cases were the conversionist sects arising from the very different context of 19th century evangelical American Protestantism. Niebuhr

recognized that the denominations in the United States in the 1920s . . . corresponded broadly to the social divisions which prevailed among men. In extending his thesis he suggested that there

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<sup>4</sup>John M. Yinger, Religion in the Struggle for Power (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1946), p. 31.

<sup>5</sup>Wilson calls these "adventist" sects. Bryan Wilson (editor), Patterns of Sectarianism: Organization and Ideology in Social and Religious Movements (London: Heinemann, 1967), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

was a dynamic relationship between sect and denomination . . . broadly that every sect which did not wither away, might be expected to develop into a denomination. He went further in suggesting a basic circumstance which promoted this development; as each narrow and exclusive sect, emphasizing voluntary adherence, recruited its own second generation--the children of its founders--so, it became a denomination. Once there were inborn members, the sect, he held, had ceased to be a sect. It moved from an early exclusiveness to an acceptance of the legitimacy of other religious movements.<sup>7</sup>

The movements treated by Troeltsch and Niebuhr respectively, may certainly be regarded as sects in a broad sense, but it must also be recognized that sects differ from one another, and more especially in different historical periods and cultural contexts. Wilson makes this point clearly,

The search for uniformities and convergences of social phenomena and processes must not supercede the proper regard for the differences and distinctiveness of historical periods. Reified ideal types may sometimes promote this particular sociological error. What is hoped is established here, is that a guarded use of types can be shown to facilitate sociological explanation. The types, however, must always be of use in application to empirical data. Typologies are not explanations in themselves, although they are sometimes mistaken for such; they are not meant to provide the student with a neatly parcelled set of categories that catch truth by the forelock. Only as types are usable to explain processes are they really justifiable.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Bryan Wilson (editor), Religion in Secular Society (London: Watts, 1966), p. 200.

<sup>8</sup>Wilson, Patterns of Sectarianism, p. 4.

### Wilson's Typology of Sects

The following includes Wilson's characterization of sect and denomination and his typology which has been adopted in somewhat condensed form for purposes of this paper:

Typically a sect may be identified by the following characteristics: it is a voluntary association; membership is by proof to sect authorities of some claim to personal merit--such as knowledge of doctrine, affirmation of the conversion experience, or recommendation of members in good standing; exclusiveness is emphasized, and expulsion exercised against those who contravene doctrinal, moral, or organizational precepts; its self-conception is of an elect, a gathered remnant, possessing special enlightenment; personal perfection is the expected standard of aspiration, in whatever terms this is judged; it accepts, at least as an ideal, the priesthood of all believers; there is a high level of lay participation; there is opportunity for the member spontaneously to express his commitment; the sect is hostile or indifferent to the secular society and to the state. ✓

The denomination in contrast shows the following features: formally a voluntary association; it accepts adherents without imposition of traditional prerequisites of entry, and employs purely formalized procedures of admission; breadth and tolerance are emphasized; since

membership is laxly enrolled expulsion is not a common device for dealing with the apathetic and the wayward; its self conception is unclear and its doctrinal position unstressed; content to be a movement among others, all of which are thought to be acceptable in the sight of God; it accepts the standards and values of the prevailing culture and conventional morality, though the conceptions it entertains of these may be those of a particular social class; there is a trained professional ministry; lay participation occurs but is typically restricted to particular sections of the laity and to particular areas of activity; services are formalized and spontaneity is absent; education of the young is of greater concern than the evangelism of the outsider; additional activities are largely non-religious in character; individual commitment is not very intensive; the denomination accepts values of the secular society and the state; members are drawn from any section of the community, but within one church, or any one religion, membership will tend to limit itself to those who are socially compatible.

These particular characteristics--ultimate voluntarism of sect allegiance, the distinctiveness and apartness from the wider society, and especially from its religious organization; the inappropriateness of rational criteria to its operations; and the interim nature of the sect's conception of its mission--all affect the type of organization which sects evolve.

Doctrine cannot be openly changed because of the absoluteness of the religious ideology. This being so, since some doctrine relates to ecclesiastical organization, the organizational pattern of the sect is alterable only in exceptional circumstances, and then reform occurs as "restoration" of pristine principles and practices.

Sects do change in organizational structure and even in their teachings, but such changes can be accomplished only under certain circumstances like a charismatic leader who innovates or the introduction of particular sorts of action like recruiting methods, or the gradual relaxing of sect stringency over time in the classical denominationalizing pattern. If sect organization does change, it tends, new revelations apart, to change by a slow process of shifting emphasis; by slow accumulation of informal power; by gradual acceptance of new procedures borrowed from outside society.

The preceding includes most of the loose generalization which may be made about sects. There is evidence that older sects, sects that perpetuate in the present a pattern of sectarian organization, from the past display relatively low articulation of distinctly religious organization. Such sects tend to have arisen in rural communities, the life and patterns of which were not formally organized. They tend to subsume religious organization in community structure, employing religious sanctions merely as boundary-maintaining



devices. Hence, the essential difference between the Amish and the Mennonites, for example, is not found in religious doctrine but in community organization.

Sects lacking strong community allegiance (whether it be the product of ethnicity, heredity recruitment, or segregated communitarian settlements) as a basis of solidarity and persistence, must necessarily rely on some form of derived organizational structure.

Here a distinction is made between movements which place more reliance on common doctrinal commitment (which, if moral precepts are emphasized, can lead to a distinctive way of life) and those which rely more on an authoritarian structure to determine the arrangements of association.<sup>9</sup>

Organization may be examined in relation to two other variable characteristics; response to the world, and circumstance of origin. Significant patterns can be shown to occur between organization and each of these factors. By organization, Wilson means a pattern of institutionalized procedures which regulate the activities of a movement. As a minimum, sect organization must include procedures for the following ends:

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<sup>9</sup>Other patterns like that of the Plymouth Brethren can avoid both subscription and elaborate organizational structure, and tolerate some diversity in doctrine and local practice although these cases are rare. For elaboration of this point see Wilson, Patterns of Sectarianism, p. 14.

1) There must be agencies which determine the places of meeting and the activities which occur once members are met, or which make other arrangements for the dissemination of teaching.

2) Some person must be invested with the right to call meetings and some to preside over them.

3) There must be arrangements for decision making about purely administrative and instrumental concerns such as ownership or hire of property, and the maintenance of premises.

4) There must be agencies to maintain essential agreement of belief and practice, no matter how minimal is the basis of consensus.

5) Arrangements must be evolved for accepting new members (even if they are drawn from those who conform to specific criteria of eligibility, such as ethnicity, age, freedom from other allegiances).

6) Procedures must exist for determining the worthiness of new entrants and for disciplining transgressions and deviations of the old.

7) The socialization of new members must be the specific concern of someone, and these duties must be both allocated and undertaken.

8) Agencies must sooner or later come into being to regulate the sect's movement with external authorities, to treat with secular agencies on matters of mutual concern

(exemptions claimed by the sect from, for example, medical care, state subsidiary, war service, education, etc.).

Wilson's typology revolves mainly around the two variables of response to the world, and circumstances of origin, and their relationship to the sect's organization.

The "conversionist" sects, because of their preoccupation with the prospect of changing this world by changing the hearts of men, are dominated by the desire to convert people and involve them in their way of life and worship. This has distinct consequences for the sect organization. It tends to mean that there must be a hierarchy of offices in which some officials direct campaigns of recruitment and others concern themselves with the proper socialization and maintenance of the converted. It is not surprising then, to find that this type of sect tends to model its organization, either at once, or increasingly as its activities demand, on that of a non-conformist denomination. It is this type of sect which displays most proclivity towards becoming a denomination. Pentacostalism and Salvationists typify this pattern.<sup>10</sup>

The "adventist" sects put organization at a discount. They are, at least initially, inclined to suppose the advent to be imminent and to regard time, energy and resources expended on organization as deflected from more

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<sup>10</sup>Wilson, Religion in Secular Society, p. 201.

urgent purposes. Minimal organization is then often the ideal of such a sect. The absence of organization sometimes makes such movements particularly subject to dissipation or schism. Where elaborate organization does evolve it is, as among Jehovah Witnesses, largely for the activity for promulgating the message. It may, in these circumstances, be regarded as less important than the truth itself; as an efficient means of obeying the injunction to preach to all the world. Seventh Day Adventists, Christophelians, and Jehovah Witnesses are examples of this type.<sup>11</sup>

The "introversionist" sects are again frequently disposed to accept minimal organization. Since they are concerned with direct inspiration, their organizational structure is often merely an attempt to regulate the operation of the Spirit. Alternatively where such sects are the secondary development of originally adventist movements, they have very often become preoccupied with the cultivation of piety and perhaps with devotional practices. The Exclusive Brethren typify this pattern.<sup>12</sup>

The "gnostic" sects of modern times represent a more complete assimilation of religious activity to the goals accepted in modern society and typically these movements adapt procedures and structures more fully in keeping with

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

modern rationally conducted enterprises than with traditional ecclesiastical patterns. Christian Science, as one of the first of this type movement, has an interestingly mixed pattern of secular and religious organization--a lay ministry and a separate system, modeled on more secular lines of therapists and teachers. Supreme over all is a board of directors which resembles the board of a company more than a bench of bishops. Gnostic movements have tended increasingly to adopt secular models of organization and to employ their techniques of publicity. Some have abandoned congregational worship altogether.

Not all of these responses are necessarily the pristine responses of sects, since their orientation to the world often undergoes modification over the years. Circumstances of origin is the second element that may be closely associated with sect organization. Wilson proposes five distinctive ways in which sects may be said to originate:

- 1) Sects may arise when a charismatic figure presents a new teaching, and recruits from any or all other religious movements and from the population generally. The charismatic figure may be a new prophet, a man or a woman, who offers a new interpretation or who seeks to restore an old one, who, in short, tells men what they shall do to be saved.

- 2) Sects may also begin as a consequence of internal schism within existing sects.

- 3) They may arise more or less spontaneously by the

coming together of a group of "seekers" who evolve as a group experience, new patterns of worship, and new statements of belief.

4) Sects may arise from the attempts to revitalize the beliefs and practices within a major religious movement, as old groups are called to intensify their commitment or new groups called to express it for the first time. These developments may be associated with attempts to de-institutionalize and de-ritualize church organization and practice.

5) Non-denominational revivalism may, as an unintended consequence, bring new sects into being, as those who undergo similar enthusiastic conversion find assimilation into existing denominations difficult.

The foregoing attempts no more than to suggest that some sect organization can be associated with other variables. There are recurrent tendencies, but they are far from being invariable. Wilson's typology based on the origins of the sect's emergence and the sect's response to the world will be emphasized in my classification of the Spiritual Jews.

## CHAPTER II

### THE DESCRIPTION AND CLASSIFICATION OF THE SPIRITUAL JEWS

It is now possible to describe the Spiritual Jews and then classify the sect within the broad typology presented by Wilson. We must also take note of the sect's uniquenesses which resulted from its particular circumstances of development but these will be elaborated more fully in Chapter Three.

#### Setting of Sectarianism in Veracruz

Over the past century and more obviously within the past forty years a variety of religious movements have emerged throughout Mexico. All of them share at least two important features: first, they represent the introduction of some form of Protestantism from the United States, and second, they consciously offer themselves as alternatives to the predominant and influential religious institution in Mexico, the Catholic Church.

Such movements have already penetrated into Mexico's rural areas but, their centers of activity are, inevitably, located in the highly populated and more heterogeneous urban areas where the "major processes of social change tend to focus."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>M. Weber, Sociology of Religion (Introduction by Talcott Parsons) (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), p. xii.

To shed light on the variety of sectarian movements in Mexico, I will briefly describe, on the basis of their recent historical origins only, three kinds of movements which I have observed in the port city of Veracruz. First, and not at all uncommon, are indigenous prophetic movements. In this kind of movement, for example, a prophet may emerge from an impoverished barrio, foresee the destruction of the world and proceed to baptize a following until the appointed doomsday when disillusionment usually disperses the fold. Such movements are generally short-lived in cities and perhaps for this reason no studies of urban prophetic movements have been done in Mexico. Second, and most obviously active in the modern city are organized missionary movements, imposed and sponsored by large alien (usually U.S.) religious denominations. Outstanding among these groups in Mexico are the Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Lutherans. Because of the obvious importation of ideology and leadership from the United States (not to mention the vast sums of money invested) this type of movement is clearly distinguishable from that of the indigenous prophet.

A third kind of movement now appearing in Mexican cities seems to have emerged from recent schisms within the organized missionary movements. Neither prophetic in the sense of indigenous inception nor missionary in the sense of alien sponsorship, these movements represent a rather interesting combination of the two. Many of these sects,



it seems, have developed after large missionary movements have presumably succeeded in forming a viable local outlet. As the religion adapts to institutionalization in its Mexican environment inevitable doctrinal or organizational disputes develop among its local adherents.<sup>2</sup> Such internal dissent often terminates in complete fission resulting in the formation of two somewhat different sects--each claiming on the one hand, to be the "true" denominational outlet, while on the other hand, being forced to differentiate itself from and condemn its counterpart. Thus, by stressing local and sectarian allegiance each new sect emphasizes its uniquenesses. At the same time larger denominational loyalties are underplayed since these loyalties would call attention to similarities with the sect's counterpart.

Usually this phenomenon emerges among the smaller denominations or "non-historical churches"<sup>3</sup> whose grasp on their outlets is not so powerful as is that of the larger missionary denominations or "historical churches." Sects

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<sup>2</sup>The inevitability of such disputes has been asserted by Weber, Niebuhr, Wilson and many others. For a particularly clear discussion see Thomas O'Dea, The Sociology of Religion (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), pp. 90-97.

<sup>3</sup>"Historical church" is used to differentiate the older, better known and established denominations such as Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran, etc., from the more recently established denominations ("non-historical church") such as Jehovah Witness, Seventh Day Adventist, etc. See, for example, Land of Eldorado by Sante Uberto Barbieri and Kenneth Strachan.

of these smaller denominations sub-divide more frequently maintaining a greater number of smaller churches while the larger and better established denominations demonstrate greater cohesion and consequently fewer churches.

To illustrate this point for Veracruz, one need only glance at the list of that city's churches (on the following pages) which I obtained from the department of statistics. It is apparent that historical churches like Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian have been able to maintain the greatest hold on their outlets. These denominations together only support six churches in Veracruz. Certain non-historical denominations which are well-established in Mexico because of their early entry and appeal to the impoverished masses also contain themselves well. The Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons, for example, support only one congregation each in Veracruz.<sup>4</sup> Regarding the smaller denominations in Mexico the table lists nine Pentecostal sects in Veracruz alone. In addition to the Pentecosts, however, there are

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<sup>4</sup>It is interesting that neither of these groups is registered in Veracruz. They may, however, be registered with the government in Mexico City (although I have not had access to those statistics) or they may have placed their buildings in the names of private persons, trying to avoid the government law requiring that all church property belong to and be registered with the government. Many small denominations hold their services in the homes of one of the members. These are called "houses of God" ("casas de Dios") and often sects continue this way until they can afford to build a chapel.

TABLE 1

RELACION DE LOS TEMPLOS EXISTENTES EN EL  
MUNICIPIO DE VERACRUZ

NOMBRE DEL TEMPLO	RELIGION	DOMICILIO
Nuestra Sra. de la Asuncion	Catolica	Ave. Independencia y M. Molina
Nuestra Sra. de los Dolores (La Divina Pastora)	"	Constitucion No 63
La Virgen de Guadalupe	"	Ave. Pino Suarez No 159
La Divina Providencia	"	J. P. Silva y Jimenez Norte
Nuestra Sra. de la Luz	"	Juan Soto No 234
Nuestra Sra. de la Merced	"	V. de la Cadena y Calle 4
Santo Cristo del Buen Viaje	"	Doblado y 20 de Noviembre
La Gran Madre de Dios	"	Jalapa No 83
Santa Rita de Casia	"	Espana y Cristobal Colon
Sagrado Corazon de Jesus	"	Venustiano Carranza No 185
Stella Maris	"	Ave. Flores Magon No 185
San Jose	"	Jimenez y Cordoba
Divino Salvador	Evangelica Pentacostes	Ave. 16 de Septiem- bre No 327
Getsemani	"	Juan Soto No 120
Bethania	"	Ave. Constituyentes No 47
Bethel	"	Azueta No 91

TABLE 1 (continued)

NOMBRE DEL TEMPLO	RELIGION	DOMICILIO
Monte de los Olivos	Evangelica Pentacostes	Calle 4 Lote 153 Fco. Canal y Hernan Cortes
el M.I.E.P.I.	"	Campero Esquina Revillagigedo
El Nazareno	"	Netzahualcoyotl y E. Morales
Iglesia Carpinteros	"	Callejuela Peru No 2
Iglesia de Dios "Emmanuel"	"	Venezuela No 36
Primera Iglesia Bautista	Evangelica Bautista	Gral. Prim No 33
Iglesia Bautista "Beren"	"	Simon Bolivar y 2 de Abril
Tabernaculo Bautista Biblico	"	Ave. Pensamiento No 16
1a Iglesia Presb. "El Sinai"	Presbiteriana	Ave. Hidalgo No 50
2a Iglesia Presb. "El Buen Pastor"	"	Ave. 20 de Noviem- bre No 71
Iglesia Metodista "Emmanuel"	Metodista	Ave. Flores Magnon No 112
La Luz del Mundo	Cristiana	Francisco Canal No 507
Monte Horeb	Evangelica de la Iglesia de Dios del Septimo dia	Diaz Aragon y 1 de Mayo

innumerable independent sects and sects which belong to very small denominations. The denominational hold on these sects is either non-existent or so minimal that the majority of them are not even registered with the government.<sup>5</sup>

Given this brief historical background of sectarianism in Veracruz I can now turn to the description and typological classification of the Spiritual Jews--a religious sect of the third kind of movement discussed.

#### Economic Condition of the Adherents

The most recent literature explaining Protestant Sectarianism has defined it partly as a class phenomenon. Wilson, for example, states that,

. . . religious movements, as essentially social movements can be expected to stand in specific relation to social class, to their prevailing socio-economic and social conditions, and to the cultural and social ethos obtaining within such social groupings.<sup>6</sup>

My preliminary data on the Spiritual Jews indicate that the adherents to this sect clearly represented a middle to lower-middle class or proletariat (wage-earners employed in non-agricultural occupations<sup>7</sup>) phenomenon. Seventeen

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<sup>5</sup>Later on I mention that getting enough money to construct or buy a building is doubtless an important stage in the development of Mexican religious sects.

<sup>6</sup>Wilson, Religion in Secular Society, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup>Scott Cook, The Prophets: A Revivalistic Folk Religious Movement in Puerto Rico, Caribbean Studies, Vol. 4, No. 4, 1962, p. 7.

of twenty-eight active adult adherents<sup>8</sup> were employed in Veracruz and the surrounding area. The remaining eleven were either married women supported by husbands or elderly widows supported by children. The tables on the following pages include statistics on place of birth, age, years of education, type of employment at the present time, and present income of the employed male and female adherents. The tables also include known information on the years of schooling and occupation of their parents. I have not included tables for the remaining eleven unemployed women who are supported by husbands or children. My information, however, indicates that their supporters maintain similar proletariat occupations, i.e., slaughterer, sailor, secretary, etc.

A comparison of education level from the tables reveals a clear improvement from the parental generation. In addition to this upward trend there are indications for its continuance. Many of the members' children anticipate or presently pursue higher levels of education aspiring to skilled or professional occupations. There are a number of school-aged girls and boys in secondary and preparatory schools studying business and/or secretarial skills. Two girls, both of the wealthiest family, are studying law and medicine, respectively. A few of the adherents' children

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<sup>8</sup>I define "adult" as over twenty-two years of age. "Active" denotes, loosely, those members whom I saw regularly at religious services.

TABLE 2a

## EMPLOYED FEMALE MEMBERS\*

Born	Age	Years of schooling	Father's years of schooling	Occupation	Father's occupation	Monthly income in dollars
1. Veracruz	29	10	8	Computer tech. (IBM)	Boat inspector	160
2. Veracruz	33	9	6	Stenographer	Electric Co. worker	144
3. --	30	8	0	Secretary-- Post Office	Laborer	--
4. Veracruz	28	6.5	4	Beautician	Peasant	variable
5. Veracruz	29	7	6	Stenographer	Bird salesman	120
6. Campeche	39	8	-	Official in large corp.	Secretary for local gov't. official	320
7. Oaxaca	44	3	-	Bakes cakes for bakery	Actor	variable
8. Mexico City	31	6	0	Sells social security	Salesman	variable

\*All mothers were housewives with the exception of #6 whose mother taught school.

TABLE 2b

## EMPLOYED MALE MEMBERS\*

Born	Age	Years of schooling	Father's years of schooling	Occupation	Father's occupation	Monthly income in dollars
1. Veracruz	37	12	10	Electric Co. official	Mechanical eng. for Western Union	200
2. Monterey	35	5	0	Dock worker	Peasant	--
3. Orizaba	37	13	6	Mechanic in Tomsa Tube Factory	Textile factory laborer	160
4. Veracruz	22	4	6	Factory worker Tomsa	Sanitation inspector	100
5. Oaxaca	33	6	0	Secretary-general labor union--Tomsa	Peasant	Very high salary
6. Tlacotalpan	53	6	6	Train guard	Salesman	100
7. Puebla	30	6	-	Bus driver	--	100
8. Paso Del Macho	69	6	6	Ranchero (mgr.)	Journalist	120
9. Yucatan	29	8	6	Metalurgist	Didn't work	200

\*All mothers were housewives with the exceptions of #7 who was an orphan and #1 whose mother was a telegraphist.



are affiliated with the Tamsa Tube Factory as laborers. Their association is understandable since the secretary-treasurer of the Tamsa labor union is a past minister of the sect.

Since most of the adherents were ignorant of their parents' incomes this information is not available. In terms of occupation, however, the tables illustrate that the present generation shows a definite trend toward acquiring greater skills as compared with their parents. This is most marked among the working women, who, in every case, are semi-professional or skilled workers. It is also significant that, with only one exception, none of their mothers worked.<sup>9</sup> All the working women are either unmarried or separated from their husbands for greater or lesser periods of time. These women, mostly between twenty-five and forty, usually live with their parents and supplement the family income.

Two values stressed by the sect tend to indicate a perpetuation of economic and educational mobility. First, the sect holds very positive and articulate opinions about work. Emphasis is placed on the religious work of the community of God through discipline, work, and clean living

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<sup>9</sup>The relevance of this fact is obviously related to changing socio-economic conditions and corresponding changes in roles because of rapid social change: modernization and nationalization. This will be elaborated later in the essay.

of the individual adherents. There is also general antagonism towards ministers and religious leaders who do not hold secular jobs in addition to their ministerial positions; this antagonism is mainly directed toward the clergy of the Catholic Church but also towards the first minister of the Spiritual Jews, who was abandoned by them, as will be explained later. The second value concerns the identification with and emulation of the Mexican Jewish community. This must be seen not only as religious identification, as the Spiritual Jews claim, but also as identification with Mexican Jewish economic and educational mobility.

In terms of class, then, the Spiritual Jews fundamentally represent a proletariat class employed by large corporations, as factory workers, laborers, artisans, or office workers. There are no members in business and no professionals. The general economic trend of this particular sect has been toward upward mobility. This trend is especially valid when the present adherents are contrasted with their parents, who, for the most part, were not adherents of the sect. It is not known, however, whether such a trend should be linked mainly to sectarian values (as in the Protestant Ethic in Weber's terms) or whether it mainly reflects a general improvement of the Mexican urban proletariat class.

## Origin of the Spiritual Jews

The history of the religious sect called the Spiritual Jews involves some twenty years. During this period a number of changes in location, leadership and membership mark the process of its development.

The Church of God (Seventh Day)<sup>10</sup> began in America in 1933 because of a schism in the Church of God sect, an offshoot of the Seventh Day Adventist Movement. Elder A. N. Dugger, a leader in the American Church of God movement journeyed to Palestine. On his return dissension arose over matters of church government and Dugger was deposed by the majority of a general conference. He moved to Salem, West Virginia, where he established a new sect, The Church of God Seventh Day. Dugger's church has been characterized as observing Saturday as the Sabbath, holding to the unconscious state of the dead, washing the feet, perpetuating the law of the "clean and unclean," and refusing to recognize the divine inspiration of Mrs. White, the founder of the Seventh Day Adventists. The doctrines were close to those of Adventism, however, in its emphasis on the nearness of Christ's coming. The Church also displayed considerable emotional enthusiasm in its meetings.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>This sect is not to be confused with the British revivalist sect of the same name described by Wilson, Patterns of Sectarianism, p. 34.

<sup>11</sup>Elmer T. Clark, The Small Sects in America (New York: Abington Cohnbury, 1948), pp. 43-44.

In the early 1930's two Mexicans, Jose Juarez and Amos Alvarez, and one American, a Mr. Sanders, migrated to Veracruz where they began an extension of The Church of God Seventh Day. Soon they constructed a wooden chapel on Cuahctemoc and Paraguay Streets and enjoyed a measure of success in their evangelical activities. Their particular sect had four notable characteristics: their observance of Saturday as the Sabbath, their semi-asceticism resulting from their fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible, their singular emphasis on the Ten Commandments which were chanted by the entire congregation at each service, and their refusal to baptize anyone under fifteen years of age, baptism being an adult matter on a strictly voluntary basis.

Following the early Jewish influence on the original American Adventist movement,<sup>12</sup> they placed a star of David on the chapel door. The Ten Commandments stood as an arc at the center of the chapel, the holy phrases were carved in large Spanish words and Hebrew numerals were used to number the commandments. (The contemporary congregation of The Church of God Seventh Day in Veracruz does not know what the star or the Hebrew letters signify).

Unfortunately, not much more is known of the Church of God Seventh Day in Veracruz. Its relationship to the Spiritual Jews in doctrine and ritual will become apparent;

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 2-5.

but this relationship is secondary to the essay. What is primary is that it was from the Church of God (Seventh Day) that the leader, more appropriately, the founder of the Spiritual Jews, emerged.

Juan Mago was born to a Protestant family and had been raised in the Church of God (Seventh Day). Even as a youth in the early 1940's his vast Biblical knowledge had been recognized by the congregation. He actively participated in all the religious functions of the congregation and on Wednesday evenings lead a Bible class. In 1946 Mago went to Mexico City to study in a Naval academy. During his four years in Mexico City he developed friendships with a number of religious Mexican Jews and became passionately absorbed in the study of Judaism. Motivated by his discovery that the world was anti-Protestant and anti-Semitic, Mago decided to devote himself entirely to the cause of his religion and his people who, to his way of thinking, had become "Spiritual Jews," or Jews by belief but not by birth. He dropped out of the naval academy in his final year and remained in Mexico City studying Judaism informally under the guidance of his friends. After a year he returned to Veracruz.

Most unfortunately for Mago The Church of God Seventh Day, while anxious for his participation, was not entirely willing to accept all his discoveries from Judaism. Mago married, resumed his Bible class and, for a while,

remained an active member of the Church of God. Through his Bible class, however, he was able to introduce his own ideas of Judaism into the church. When he tried to institute the slaughtering of a kid on Passover he was chastised by the minister. His final breach with the Church of God came when he and his Bible class introduced and celebrated the holiday of Tabernacles (The Jewish Succot) by decorating the church with a vast array of fruits and branches from various trees. He proved that the holiday had a Biblical origin, but the minister and general membership were in violent opposition. In 1949 Mago and a few devoted followers from his Bible class left the Church of God and called themselves the "Spiritual Jews."

Over the next seven years Mago formed a most remarkable following. He drew into his sphere a large number of people because of his personal charisma and knowledge of the Bible, and he created a congregation of well over one hundred adult members. Among his converts he numbered two Protestant ministers; one, Pedro Vegas, abandoned his own pulpit to follow Mago; the other, Carlos Sanchez, was then a man in his sixties, who had long been retired from a personal religious quest, which had, at one time or other, led him to almost every conceivable sect. Mago also appealed to younger men of Protestant and Catholic background. In 1953 Felipe Peon, a telegraphist, was brought into the fold. Felipe soon converted his own family and then developed a

passion for Zionism, which was later to take him to Israel.

During this period Mago introduced, in somewhat altered form, all the Jewish customs and ceremonies he could. In addition, he maintained many of the older Protestant customs such as calling members "brothers" and kneeling for important prayers. All this was enveloped within his fundamental emphasis on the Bible, obedience to the Ten Commandments, and salvation through Christ. Mago encouraged private Bible study as well as group study which became highly stylized after his own polemic form. He extended previous Protestant taboos which prohibited consumption of blood and pork to include Jewish prohibitions on certain other meats and fish. Saturday had long been kept as the Sabbath, and to this Mago added the prohibition of working on Saturday and the Jewish candelabra in which he burned olive oil. Mago reached the height of his reformation in 1956. Throughout this period he held services in his home on the Twentieth of November Street.

In 1957 Mago, it seems, chased his wife and children out of the house, moved another woman in, and then fled to Mexico City to avoid the wrath of his wife's family. The facts concerning his activities are somewhat obscure, but before leaving, he entrusted the church to the old man, Carlos Sanchez, instructing him to conduct services in his own home on Gomez Farias Street, until he, Mago, returned. The congregation remained with Sanchez scarcely a year.

The old man was becoming blind, he was tired and often ill, and most important, the congregation in its entirety had, by now, heard and discussed the Mago scandal (that he "divorced" his wife was the polite way of saying it) and decided, unanimously (in his absence), to abandon him. Sanchez entrusted the congregation to Felipe Peon and services moved to Peon's house on Carabeles Street.

According to the congregants Felipe was a most passionate and idealistic minister. Through the years his desire for Judaism had become more ardent as did his desire to emigrate to Israel. His difficulties were, first, the fact that the Jews of the flesh in Israel did not accept Christ, and second, the expense of the journey. Peon's friend, a Syrian Jewish merchant from Veracruz, arranged for an important rabbi from Mexico City to write a letter of introduction for him to David Ben Gurion. The immigration had also been financially aided by the Jewish Agency and after years of waiting, Felipe, his wife, his baby daughter, and his mother were preparing to go to Israel.

During this time of preparation an important difficulty arose within the congregation when the members began to anticipate finding a new minister. Felipe had neither appointed a successor nor was he willing to let another begin. Six months before he departed Alberto Fiel, who worked as an engineer for the local water company and had been a Spiritual Jew for many years, prevailed upon Carlos Sanchez



and the old man donated land for a small chapel. Alberto and six other members put up the money (2,000 pesos each), had the chapel constructed, and began services quite a few months before Felipe Peon departed. This geographical split apparently led to a further separation for when Felipe finally did leave in 1964, he turned the congregation over to Pedro Vegas, the other Protestant minister, not to Alberto Fiel. For two years the congregation was divided into two factions: those under Alberto in the new chapel on Altamirano Street, and those under Vegas in his home. In 1966 the two congregations reconciled their differences and reunited in the chapel on Altamirano. Both Vegas and Alberto shared the pulpit until Vegas was elected secretary-general of his labor union and had to step down (at least while holding office) because of his involvement in politics ("la politica"). (This feeling of the Spiritual Jews that being a labor union leader is a political office and therefore conflicts with religious leadership is in keeping with sectarian views that worldly pursuits and activities other than dire necessities invalidates the truly religious life). Thus for the past year the Spiritual Jews have held their services in the chapel on Altamirano with Alberto Fiel as their minister.

Mago had returned from Mexico City while the congregation was still in Felipe Peon's hands. After violently accusing Peon of stealing his flock he attacked Peon, both

hitting him in the mouth and kicking him. Peon remained passive.

In the following years Mago formed another congregation which now surpasses the Altamirano congregation in membership. Mago's congregation is not considered the same sect by the Spiritual Jews on Altamirano even though the ritual and doctrine are practically identical. The fact that Mago is a "divorced" man represents an irreparable schism for the Altamirano congregation, who believe that the minister, of all people, must follow the law of God.

#### Syncretism of the Sect

Because of the highly syncretistic nature of the sect, explaining its relationship to other religious traditions appears necessary. Although the sect emerged from the larger Seventh Day Adventist Movement in Mexico it cannot be overemphasized that today the members regard themselves as non-Protestant, non-Catholic, and non-Jewish, by conventional understandings of these terms.

A discussion of the sect's relationship to each of these major religions is vital to an understanding of their syncretistic system. The Spiritual Jews feel close affinity with "Jews of the Flesh" (Judios Carnales) on the basis of the Bible, minority status, and a number of similar rituals which emerged from their contact. They identify with the history of the "Jews of the Flesh" in the Bible. For

them, the original covenant between God and Abraham culminated with the coming of Christ. Here the Jews of the Flesh are punished for not having accepted Christ and must wander as persecuted exiles throughout the world. The Spiritual Jews also emphasize their minority status and the difficulties of observing God's law in a mundane world. They also feel further affinity with the Jews of the Flesh since God has now permitted the exiles to return to their ancient country, Israel. For the Spiritual Jews this return to Israel is but an indication of the coming Messiah. Personal ties and communication with Felipe Peon, who migrated to Israel, certainly reinforces their ties with the Jews of the Flesh.

The Spiritual Jews have also maintained acquaintances with other Jews of the Flesh in Veracruz. In this context it will be remembered that Felipe Peon received contact with Israel through his Syrian Jewish friend, a merchant in town. A further example is the Jewish textile merchant who supplies the sect with golden stars of David which they wear as pendants.

Other Jewish religious elements have also been incorporated into the sect. A seven branch candelabrum, already mentioned, was introduced by Juan Mago. The candelabrum is of special interest in that the Jews of the Spirit do not burn candles but only olive oil. They believe candles are not part of religious practices among Jews of the Flesh as well as alien to Biblical practices, and that Jews throughout the world burn olive oil only. This is an "hybridized"

innovation<sup>13</sup> having no basis in fact. In addition, the Jewish calendar has been adopted in slightly altered form. In services Jewish hymns appear; the Jewish National Anthem and the "Shema" (Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One) are sung in Hebrew while a popular religious hymn is sung in Spanish to the theme of the movie "Exodus." Other Jewish elements include Hebrew phrases for salutation and holidays.

Two major factors differentiate the Spiritual Jews from other Jews. The Spiritual Jews are Jews by faith rather than birth, by spirit rather than flesh. They have been baptized voluntarily because of belief rather than descent. This biological-spiritual dichotomy means that many traditionally Jewish customs which are vaguely known are related to spiritual or symbolic observance only. The best example of this is the circumcision. While the Jews of the Flesh practice carnal circumcision on male infants, the Spiritual Jews believe in circumcising their hearts, not their bodies. Thus, there is no circumcision ceremony as such but rather a short presentation to the congregation where, after about a month after birth, both male and female children are blessed. These are other examples but suffice it to say, the old theological dichotomy of flesh and spirit serves to distinguish

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<sup>13</sup>Homer Barnett, Innovation: The Basis of Culture Change (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1953), p. 10.

the Spiritual Jews from the others. Second, and very important to the Jews of the Spirit, is the fact of Christ, the Messiah, who came to earth but was not recognized by Gentiles or Jews. He will not return until both Jews and Gentiles recognize him as Savior. Thus, the Spiritual Jews anticipate uniting with other Jews through Christ, while the Jews of the Flesh neither accept Christ as Messiah nor prophet. These two factors of differentiation are recognized by the Jews of the Flesh in Veracruz as well as by the Spiritual Jews. Of seven Jews of the Flesh who are merchants in Veracruz, only one (of Israeli origin) contemplated joining Mago's group, claiming there was no difference between their belief and his. The others affirmed the two major distinctions mentioned above and added that their relations with the Spiritual Jews were more favorable than with the Catholics. Despite the differences mentioned, it should be noted that the Spiritual Jews maintain warm feelings toward and identification with the Jews of the Flesh, regarding them as the Holy people chosen by God (pueblo escogido).

The sect's relationship to the Catholic Church is also of great importance. Feelings regarding the Church are quite negative, and factors of differentiation extensive. This is understandable in that the Catholic Church, because it is the dominant religious institution in Mexico and because it is anti-sectarian, constitutes the major obstacle

to any emergent religious movement. Such religious movements in Mexico are initially more anti-Catholic than pro anything else. But here it must be remembered that the Spiritual Jews emerged most recently from a Protestant sect rather than from the Catholic Church. This factor is quite important in that the break from the Catholic Church is successfully completed in almost all areas of religion.

Even the parent generation of the present sect of Spiritual Jews shows a definite Protestant influence. Of thirty-one members, ten claimed that one or both of their parents had been Protestant of one denomination or other. Thus, while the antipathy for the Church remains, the break in religious practice is really almost complete.

The first objection to the Catholic Church involves its hierarchical organization and the hypocrisy which results from such an authoritarian chain of command. The clergy of the Church are considered woman-chasers, drinkers, gamblers, and the authority of the Pope is mocked. The Spiritual Jews feel strongly that leadership should be non-authoritarian and faultless. Thus, the preacher, commonly called rabbi, of the Spiritual Jews, offers a study or lecture and leads the formal service but does not make decisions independent of the congregation. He becomes leader by his superior knowledge, his esteem, and his religious respectability, and he maintains his position by consensus. The second objection to the Catholic Church is economic. The

Church is regarded as the giant exploiter of the masses, who ignorantly follow instructions. Thus, the Catholic religious service is performed by the clergy for the laity who pay money, while the religious service of the Spiritual Jews is regarded as the responsibility of all the members. Every individual has equal religious status and is directly responsible for his own relationship with the deity. Salvation is personal, not by purchase. Most members of the sect describe the Church as a good business (un buen negocio) seeking money for each holy ritual it performs and charging for something it never gives--salvation. The Spiritual Jews regard their church as a non-profit organization, taking money only for its bare maintenance. Since the equal status of the members obviates the clergy-laity dichotomy, the preacher works full-time in addition to his preaching for which he receives no monetary compensation. This reinforces the value of work as a means for achieving respectability within the congregation. It is often stressed that, "all Spiritual Jews work." The sect emphasizes the value of individual responsibility both in religion and work, as was previously noted.

The next objection to the Catholic Church involves its beliefs and rituals. The Heaven-Hell dichotomy espoused by the Catholic Church is abolished in favor of the traditional Protestant notion of personal salvation. Most members believe in a spiritual existence after death but regard

Heaven and Hell as operative metaphors rather than absolute reality. Life after death will become important when the Messiah returns and awakens the dead. Before that time, there is spiritual but not physical existence after death. This existence is never clearly elaborated, however, and seldom mentioned in prayer. The many holidays of the Catholic Church including Christmas, Easter and the various festivals honoring innumerable saints and virgins are scorned. The sect maintains great antagonism toward birthdays since the Mexican Catholic equivalent, Saint's Day, is regarded as a religious celebration for the individual as well as the saint. The baptism ceremony of the Spiritual Jews, as will be described in the next section, neither involves a Godfather (compadre) as in the Catholic baptism, nor symbolizes salvation for the individual. The sect also rejects various religious objects of the church claiming that the Church promotes idolatry in the form of statues and images. These include the cross, saints and virgins, candles, the rosary, and images of Christ.

Catholics, themselves, are regarded as ignorant and misguided though not evil. They are pagans or gentiles living in the world of sin and indulgence. The Spiritual Jews ideally would like to convert the Catholics but recognize the power the Church holds over them, and since the sect also maintains its own clearly defined standards of entrance (among them, personal spiritual quest and desire for knowledge



of God's law) few converts are made.

Three practices of the sect may be traced to Catholic origins. The first is the women's wearing of ritual veils (mantillas), the second, kneeling in prayer, and the third, the belief in marriage as a sacred union terminated only upon death. The Mago case mentioned earlier constitutes their precedent against divorce. It should be noted that these three items which I am here considering Catholic in origin are also practiced by the great majority of Protestant sects.

The relationship of the Spiritual Jews to Protestantism is difficult to explain in concise terms because of the wide range of ritual belief and expression among Protestant sects. While the Spiritual Jews are not affiliated with any recognizably Protestant denomination their objections to the Catholic Church along with their own institutional organization follow the general pattern of Protestant sectarianism elaborated earlier in the essay. Distinctions from Protestant churches which the Spiritual Jews assert are minor and only involve the sect's relations to specific churches with which they have come into contact. A good example may be seen in their objection to the overabundance of instrumentation and ecstatic conversions which characterize the Pentecostes down the street. Movements like the Spiritual Jews are usually considered part of the larger Protestant sectarian movement in Mexico.

## Beliefs and Rituals of the Sect

The beliefs of the Spiritual Jews involve their conceptions of the nature of man and the universe--past, present and future; their contentions about supernatural beings; and their conceptions of their role as a religious community and as a collection of individuals.

Both Old and New Testaments constitute the codified mythology of the Spiritual Jews. According to them, the Old Testament contains the creation of the universe by a supreme Father deity--Jehovah. Jehovah appears to a Jewish patriarch, Abraham, and makes a covenant with him; Abraham is to worship Jehovah and Jehovah promises to sanctify Abraham's descendants and give them a Holy Land. In the course of Old Testament events the chosen people are made slaves, then liberated by Jehovah with the help of a leader, Moses. Jehovah now offers the Jews a code of law: moral, ethical and religious--the Ten Commandments. This code reifies the original covenant made with Abraham. In the New Testament the Jews are seen as fallen from the covenant with Jehovah, the Father God. Jehovah sends His Son, Christ, who is born of a Jewish virgin girl. The Jews specifically and mankind generally reject the Son, who, after a well-known career of preaching, is crucified by the Romans. His preachings are, however, recorded and constitute yet another reinforcement of Jehovah's covenant--this time with mankind generally. Though they do not lose their chosen people

status, the Jews are dispersed throughout the world in punishment for their failure to accept Christ. In recent years Jehovah has enabled them to recover their original land. This is but a sign that Christ will come again soon, this time to end the world and judge all the individuals in it.

The Spiritual Jews regard themselves as the chosen people who, like the Jews, must obey God's Commandments and, unlike the Jews, must accept Christ as their Messiah. The value of obedience to the laws and commandments of the sect constitute its major emphasis today although to the Adventist sect from which the Spiritual Jews emerged, the eschatology was probably of primary importance.

Angels are accepted realities though little is said of them or their position in the pantheon. Heaven and Hell are helpful metaphors which explain what could happen at the end of the world. The Devil, another metaphor, is individual temptation to break the rules. The Devil, as temptation, is a reality against which the sect and its adherents are constantly struggling.

The pagans or gentiles live in the profane world of flesh participating in sins of ignorance and indulgence. The average man is ignorant of his condition and really blameless since the evil for his sins lies mainly at the door of the Catholic Church, which constantly exploits and misguides him.

The religious rituals of the Spiritual Jews are

mainly enacted in a small chapel on Altamirano Street. A large door at the south wall provides the entrance to the synagogue (la Synagoga). The chapel consists of a singular rectangular room about 15' x 45' and an adjoining aisleway which contains a water spout and a toilet. The pulpit, a raised platform at the north end of the room, contains a lectern on the east side, which is used by the minister. A small unused organ stands behind the lectern against the north wall and a large candelabrum, which burns seven cups of olive oil, stands on the west side. The Ten Commandments are written on two cardboard tablets located in the center of the north wall. The tablets are covered by a curtain which is opened during religious services. Below the raised platform in front of the minister's lectern there is a smaller lectern for speakers other than the minister. There are eleven rows of seats which are entered from the east aisle and end against the west wall. A side door off the east wall permits entrance to the aisleway.

The religious rituals of the Spiritual Jews may be categorized into two general headings: services and taboos. Services usually follow the Sabbath Service format taken from Friday evening and Saturday afternoons. There are also special services for holidays, study groups, marriages, prayer meetings, and baptisms.

I will now describe an average Saturday afternoon service, drawing mainly on actual events which I witnessed

and other information which I added in order to present a complete account of the kinds of rituals and events which occur regularly. The service begins at 4:00 p.m. but not everyone enters the chapel together. Provided some respected member who has a key is present, the early-comers open the door and windows to cool off the chapel for the service. As people enter the chapel they generally follow a pre-service ritual. Women always place a mantilla on their head before entering the chapel, while men do not cover their heads. Some members then go to the aisleway and wash their hands at the waterspout. After washing, they re-enter the chapel and kneel at any seat in silent meditation. There is no male-female seating segregation. Others, who have completed meditation either sit, reading their copy of the Bible, chatting quietly with other congregants, or singing hymns together or even alone. As more people enter they greet the congregation with "peace unto you brothers" (paz a vos hermanos) and the others respond, "unto you peace" (a vos paz), while the member performs his pre-service rituals. Not everyone washes hands but everyone, regardless whether the service has begun or not, kneels and meditates privately upon entering the chapel.

When around twenty to twenty-five members are present the minister, who sits among the congregants, rises to light the olive oil candelabrum. His wife and children enter with fresh flowers and place them in vases over the entire

pulpit area. The minister then walks to his lectern and states, "For the honor, glory and praise of God, peace be unto you brothers." The congregation responds, "amen," performs a semi-stand and the service has officially begun.

The service always opens with a hymn chosen by the congregation. The page number in the hymnary is announced by the member who suggested the hymn. By the conclusion of the first hymn, most of the late-comers have entered and terminated their pre-service rituals. Usually fifty to seventy individuals are now present representing about thirty-five to forty adult members, their children and any visitors. Following the hymn the minister gives thanks to God through a kneeling prayer. All kneel at their seats and face East toward Jerusalem while the minister prays aloud for the congregation, orphans, widows, liars, and blesses both Spiritual Jews and Jews of the Flesh. He also thanks God for making the congregation the chosen people. Finally, he calls for God's law to be accepted, "from this time and for evermore." The congregation responds, "amen," and rises. Now the minister takes the curtain string, which covers the Ten Commandments, and draws it while all chant three times in Spanish:

Oye Israel, El Señor, Nuestro Dios  
El Señor Uno Es.

(Hear O Israel, the Lord our God,  
The Lord is One.)

This phrase is then sung in Hebrew which is transliterated

in the hymnary as follows:

Shema Yisroel, Adonoi Eloenu,  
Adonoi Ejad.

The Ten Commandments are written on the tablets in large letters with key words lettered in red. The minister now calls for a reading of the law and a male congregant (the individual varies from week to week) walks to the lectern below the minister and, as the minister calls out the commandments numerically, reads them aloud from his Bible. The congregation sits for the reading. The minister now takes a pendant star of David and a new hymnary and anoints them each with a drop of olive oil. He blesses the objects while the congregation bows their heads. When he finishes the prayer the owners of the newly acquired objects rise and claim them.

At this point in the service the minister begins his sermon. Everyone takes out his Bible to follow the passages quoted in the lecture. Each time the minister quotes a passage to emphasize a lesson, some member, usually male, but occasionally female, stands up and reads the passage aloud. If a member thinks of another verse which he knows will reinforce the theme, he calls the minister's attention by raising his hand and saying, "brother," and then stands to read his additional verse. All passages are thought to explain all others and there is never a question of contradiction in the Bible. Thus, any verse a "brother" may add is accepted as additional explanation and welcomed. Whether

the theme of the sermon is Biblical history, about the everyday life of man, or about the mission of the community, it is always reinforced by the Biblical verses quoted. The worth of a study is judged on the interrelatedness of the verses quoted. Many congregants take notes for further private study or discussion. The following is a sermon delivered by Juan Mago about eight years ago:

#### THE CROSS<sup>14</sup>

When Christ was going to be crucified, Pilate placed a title above the cross:

"Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. (John: 19-20)

After having lashed Jesus and delivered him to be crucified, he walked in the direction of Calvary and there the religions wrongly state he carried his cross. Oh, what a great lie. Jesus did not carry the cross. Is it true?

As they were marching out, they came upon a man of Cyrene, Simon by name; this man they compelled to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull) they offered him wine to drink, mingled with gall; but when he tasted it he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him they divided his garments among them by casting lots; then they sat down and kept watch over him there. And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus the King of the Jews." (Matthew: 27:32-38)

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<sup>14</sup>This sermon was copied word for word by one of the adherents when it was presented. She was kind enough to type a copy for me.



Since that time for a man to die on a cross was the worst revilement that could happen; for it was a curse.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us--for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree." (Galatians: 2:13)

Then, ever since those times, the cross was a symbol of cursedness. And Christ by being there and by being full of our sins, took them in order to stop them from dangling.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. (I Peter: 2:24)

. . . taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. (Philippians: 2:24)

The cross existed long before Christ came to earth; it is already spoken of in the Old Testament:

And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is accursed by God; you shall not defile your hands which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance. (Deuteronomy: 21:22-23)

Regularly we see in history that Jews killed by stoning and by no other method; and concerning when the plebian Pilate was speaking with the Jews he asked them this:

"What accusation do you bring against this man?" They answered him, "If this man were not evil doer, we would not have handed him over." Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death." This was to fulfill the word which Jesus had spoken to show by what death he was to die. Pilate entered the praetorium again and called Jesus, and he said, to him, "Are

you the king of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say this to you about me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chiefs of priests have handed you over to me. . . . (John: 18:29-34)

Further is a demonstration that it was not the Jews who used to crucify, that Pilate said it to Jesus:

"You will not speak to me? Do you know that I have the power to release you and the power to crucify you?" (John: 19:9-10)

Further, Christ predicting to his disciples told them how and by whom he would be killed:

. . . and deliver him to the gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day. (Matthew: 20:19)

Who actually crucified Christ? The Bible says the Roman soldiers; and afterwards they tore his clothes and cast lots to distribute them. More, for many people Christ died only at the hands of the Jews, but they are ignorant of one thing: that it was because of a political conspiracy that he died. The Bible demonstrates it:

. . . the Pharisees gathered in the council and said, "What are we to do, for this man performs many sins? If we let him go on thus, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation. But one of them, Caiaphas, who was High Priest that year said to them, "You know nothing at all; you do not understand that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish." He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation. (John: 11:47-51)

The cross, as has been shown, is a symbol of cursed-ness; Cain, the first man who assassinated his brother at the beginning of the creation was so branded--the Bible says

the brand was on his forehead and the prophet Ezekiel also declared to us that the brand was on the forehead:

And the Lord said to him, "Go through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark upon the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it." (Ezekiel: 9:4)

Considered to be a symbol of cursedness, the cross was admitted in Roman Catholicism since it is said that Saint Elena of the Cross, the mother of Pope Constantine Max, said that she saw a flaming cross in the sky with an inscription in Latin which said: "with this sign you will conquer." But God, the knower of all human things had said through the mouth of his prophet Isaiah:

I am the Lord and there is no other. I did not speak in secret. . . . I declare what is right. Assemble yourselves and come, draw near together, you survivors of the nations. They have no knowledge who carry about wooden (cross) idols, and keep on praying to a god who cannot save.

When in the desert, He made a cross with a metal serpent (symbol that they had captured the Gods of medicine) erected by Moses. The serpent cross cured the Hebrews of the plague of the burning serpent. In order to raise the cross there had to be a hole in the ground and then ropes with which to hoist it. Thus, it was necessary for the Christians to have the crosses where they sacrificed. Concerning this the apostle says:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up. (John: 8:28)

So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the son of

man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me." (John: 8:28)

". . . and I, when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all men to myself." He said this to show by what death he was to die. (John: 12:32-52)

The road following Christ is not one of roses but rather of thistles and spines. It was He who said:

"If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." (Luke: 9:23)

". . . and he who does take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me." (Matthew: 10:38)

You also, oh brother, lack one thing in order to be a true disciple:

"You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, give to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven; and come, follow me." (Mark: 10:21-22)

Man therefore should not worship the cross since it is the symbol of death. Paul, I include, considered himself crucified throughout the gospel:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians: 2-20)

And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. (Galatians: 5:24-25)

If you are a true disciple, end your flesh and your affections, crucify your old self; the scripture says:

"With the baptism . . . know this, that our old self was crucified with him, so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin, for he who died is freed from sin." (Romans: 6:3-7)

At the conclusion of the sermon the congregation says "amen," and rises for a hymn which is usually chosen for its pertinence to the theme of the sermon. After the hymn, a small boy passes a basket for temple support--flowers, oil, and electricity only. Occasionally the basket is passed a second time in order to aid an ill member. Ill members are always elderly ladies. The secretary in charge of funds, a young working girl, counts the money with the little boy. The minister then announces the amount from the pulpit. Following the basket passing, the minister makes important announcements. He may read a letter from Felipe Peon from Israel, announce a date for a baptism or holiday, congratulate a birth, or wish the ill a quick recovery. During announcements problems concerning the members also arise. This provides a chance for offering opinions on matters of duty such as cleaning the chapel and also matters of serious dispute concerning the brothers. Opinions are freely voiced.

On one occasion the minister read an invitation from Juan Mago to a conference on the Middle East war. After reading the rather flowery invitation the minister's dry comment was, "we all know him." He continued saying that acceptance or rejection was up to the individual brother. Mago's ex-wife rose and showed a special invitation which she had received. This was regarded by the congregation as a mockery of her since no one else had received one.

The minister concluded by saying that he had read the invitation, his duty, but let no one think that by doing so he endorsed it. A lady asked for the floor. "We have dignity," she began, and asked that in a show of unity the congregation unanimously reject the invitation. The blind elder, Carlos Sanchez, rose and began telling of his respect for Mago. Few men he knew had such an intellect and ability to speak and study the word of God. But, for two things Mago had to be criticized--God would not forget them, for his greed and for his being a lady's man. Finally, the minister concluded that it was not for the congregation to judge Mago. "God is the only judge," he said, "Our purpose is to clarify our relations with Mago, not judge him." This was acceptable to all and the discussion closed.

The minister announced a final hymn and the congregation rose to sing it. The service concluded with a final kneeling prayer and a benediction: "May the Lord guard your coming out and your going in from his hour and forevermore," and the minister gave his own benediction in Hebrew: "Peace and blessings be unto you."

After the service ends the congregants leave the hot chapel quickly and spend a while socializing in front of it. The majority meander over to the bus stop where they visit until their respective buses arrive.

Besides the Sabbath there are three holidays observed during the year. These are the Biblical holidays of La Pasqua,

Tabernacles (the Jewish Succot) and Pentecostes (receiving of the law). I was unable to attend these holidays since they did not occur during the time of my investigation. The following rituals were explained to me by various adherents including the minister. I have included this information because it completes the discussion of the Spiritual Jews' rituals and further evidences their ideological link with the Jews of the Flesh in Mexico.

La Pascua, unfortunately, is the sole Spanish word for Easter and Passover. From the word alone it is impossible to know to which holiday the Spiritual Jews make reference. They also refer to the holiday as the Hebrew "Pesach," however, and it becomes apparent that Jewish influence is present. The Spiritual Jews celebrate La Pascua in March (Nissan) beginning their ceremonies the evening before the corresponding Jewish Passover and continuing for seven additional days. The first evening is the only night of the communion, therefore the most important. Attendance is mandatory for the entire congregation.

La Pascua for the Spiritual Jews is a "spiritual" Passover begun by Christ himself. Therefore most of the ritual objects and traditional foods which the Jews of the Flesh use are omitted.

At 4:00 p.m. the service begins with hymns and a sermon explaining the significance of the holiday to the Spiritual Jews. When evening falls the entire congregation

assembles in the aisleway and ceremonially wash their feet by pairs of the same sex. The ritual is in remembrance of the Biblical Levites who washed the feet of the priests. Next, the minister begins the traditional meal by breaking the "mazah" (a Hebrew word) or unleavened bread into small pieces. These he places on a large plate which is passed through the congregation. Each member takes one piece. If a member considers himself ritually unclean because of a recent journey or death in his family he may abstain from the meal. The minister blesses the mazah and all consume it. He then pours "Kosher" wine from Israel into a large silver goblet. The wine is blessed and the goblet is passed through the congregation, each taking a sip and then passing it on. The mood is solemn. After partaking of the wine, hymns are sung and the service concludes with a kneeling prayer. The holiday lasts for seven more days during which time there are daily services for all who can attend. For seven days the congregation is prohibited from eating any food products containing leavening, i.e., bread, cake, etc. Tortillas of corn are, of course, permitted.

La Pascua symbolizes a repetition of Christ's last supper. The wine represents his blood, the mazah, his flesh. The Spiritual Jews celebrate La Pascua only once a year in conscious opposition to the frequent communions of Catholic and Protestant churches.

Recently, there has been some debate concerning the



additional custom of slaughtering and consuming a kid. This custom, originated by Juan Mago, has been omitted from the official church service. It should be noted, however, that one congregant does slaughter a kid and invites some of the others to a meal of it in his home. There is conflict within the congregation regarding the legitimacy of this custom.

The holiday of Pentecostes corresponds to the Jewish holiday, Sh'vuot, and usually falls some time in May (Sivan). This holiday celebrates the Biblical receiving of the Law from Mount Sinai. It includes no special ceremony but consists solely of a lecture explaining the significance of the holiday.

The final holiday, Cabanas, corresponds to the Jewish holiday of Succot, and is celebrated around the last seven days of September (Tishray). Cabanas celebrates the fall harvest season and also attempts to repeat the desert wanderings of the Biblical Children of Israel who lived in small huts; hence "Cabanas." Fruit branches and fruits from various trees and shrubs are used to adorn the entire chapel. The sect holds services and meditations for a seven day period. At the termination of the festival, the membership buys back the fruit from the church at reduced prices.

These three holidays constitute the total number observed by the Spiritual Jews. On the Day of Atonement, the most sacred day of the year for the Jews of the Flesh, the Spiritual Jews blow a trumpet in recognition of their

affinity with other Jews.

In addition to Sabbath and holiday services there are also regular services on Wednesday evening and Saturday morning. The Wednesday evening service is led by one of the younger male members. It consists of hymns, the kneeling prayer, and a short lecture which the leader offers. On various occasions especially when the leader cannot attend, Wednesday evening services are converted into a prayer-meeting which consists mainly of private meditation. Sometimes hymns are sung but no formal lecture of service is made at this "oracion." These sessions last as long as three hours and members come and go freely. Attendance is usually small.

On Saturday morning a different male member leads the school. Although some adults do attend, the class is geared to school age children. Here hymns are sung and the Ten Commandments and other Biblical passages are recited by each student.

When a death occurs within the congregation no formal service is made since Mexican Law requires that the corpse be buried within twenty-four hours after death. There usually is not time to notify the congregation and call a service but an attempt is made to notify the membership by word of mouth. The obituary is placed in the Veracruz paper by the community. When possible, a gathering of the congregation takes place in the home of the deceased,

a custom which the Spiritual Jews consciously distinguish from the Catholic wake since there are no alcoholic beverages, no forms of gambling, and no discussions about death. Instead, the congregation sings hymns of praise to God and the members offer personal condolences to the bereaved.

Because of its small membership marriages are rare in the congregation. There have only been two since its formation. A marriage is a joyous occasion as well as a serious matter concerning rights and obligations before God and the community. Marriages are performed only on Saturday and a hall is rented since the Altamirano chapel is far too small for both regular members and guests. The ceremony is not performed unless both bride and groom have been baptized by the sect. The families of bride and groom send invitations and outsiders are welcome to attend. The following is a description of the most recent marriage ceremony: (1965)

The groom, dressed in suit and tie, enters first and walks down the aisle with his mother. He stands under a canopy, a prayer-shawl (Jewish tallit) held at each corner by one man. Next, the minister enters to officiate. The ideal ceremony, according to the lady who described this ceremony, has twelve "rabbis" officiating, but this is close to impossible and has never been done. Finally the bride enters dressed in white and veiled. She is accompanied by an elderly respected woman of the church. They also stand

under the canopy. During this time the minister writes a contract which is to resemble the Biblical contract of Isaac's wedding to Rebecca (Genesis). The minister joins bride and groom together and the groom lifts the bride's veil symbolizing the necessity of not repeating the Biblical story of Jacob's confused bride (Genesis: 29:22-25). The groom must make sure the bride is the correct girl and not a substitute. Next, the minister reads the Ten Commandments and charges both bride and groom to keep God's law by proper living as members of Israel. They are to keep the Ten Commandments, the food taboos; the woman is to obey the man and the man to respect her. Both give their consent. So that all may know the union may never be destroyed the bride, the groom, and the minister all partake of a cup of wine imported from Israel. The minister, the last to drink, takes the large goblet and smashes it on the floor to symbolize the union. This terminates the actual nuptial ceremony. The congregation joins in special hymns and psalms to bless the couple. The bride and groom exit to the hymns, followed by the bride's attendant and the minister. Because of the sacred nature of this ceremony the Spiritual Jews believe that marriage may be terminated only upon death.

One of the most important services is the baptism ceremony. Since this is the sole method of admitting new members it is also regarded as final entrance into the chosen community and can not be terminated during the lifetime of

the individual. Because of the gravity of such a step, frequent visitors and aspirants for membership are continually reminded to consider carefully before deciding to convert. It is stressed that the way of the Spiritual Jews is difficult, requiring self-discipline and knowledge. Even the children of the congregants are not considered members until they voluntarily request baptism after age 15. If a member leaves the church and then returns asking to be baptized again he is denied and the adherents regard him as "a dog which re-eats its vomit." One does not convert after attending a single or even a second service. Although there are a few individuals who converted after only three or four months of visiting, these are exceptions. The average member visited anywhere from six months to three years before finally deciding to be baptized. During this waiting period, a time of spiritual and intellectual development, the recruit is treated in most respects like a full member. He is called "brother," may read in the service, and is expected to attend as often as possible. His name, however, does not appear on the roster which is frequently read for attendance and monetary pledges for the holidays. He also may not lead a study or enter his opinion in debates. Before conversion, the visitor is not required to keep the commandments or taboos of the sect although he is expected to resolve to do so by the time of his baptism. Some members make an attempt to meet with him for study periods;

this also offers an opportunity for acquaintance.

Of the thirty-two regular members interviewed, twenty were first introduced to the sect by a friend from school or work; ten were introduced by relatives, and only two, both men, discovered the church on their own.

When a visitor decides he is ready to convert he first speaks to the minister. The minister, at this time, asks him why he has decided to convert and the answer should be (usually is) satisfactory to the minister. Then the minister cautions the novice, reminding him of the seriousness of the decision and of all the commandments and taboos he will have to observe. At Sabbath services the minister announces the decision to the congregation. A date is set about a month before the ceremony. Baptisms are always on Saturday and take place at the river Jamapa in Medellin outside Veracruz. One recruit is enough to instigate the ceremony but the sect usually waits for two or more as individuals are often hesitant "to go alone."

On the day of a baptism, the congregation packs food and drink, charters a bus, and journeys to the Jamapa River where the ceremony transpires.

After arrival, the minister opens the Sabbath service with a sermon explaining the meaning of baptism. The service concludes with the singing of hymns. Now the congregation walks to the river bank and the baptism ceremony begins. The minister turns to the initiates and for the

last time asks them if they still wish to convert. They may still withdraw gracefully. Then, providing they wish to continue, he places their right hand on the Bible, asks them to raise their left hand and repeat the oath after him:

"I believe in the law of God, in Jehovah, God of the armies, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and my father. I swear before these witnesses and before God to comply with and respect His law; making a pact with God on this day."

To this the minister replies:

"If you do this let God reward you. If not, He will demand it at the end of days anyway."

The minister, his aide (a respected and elderly member) and the neophytes walk into the river while the congregation sings the traditional baptism hymns. The neophyte holds the minister's hand with both of his and the minister then pulls him backward, completely submerging him in the water. As the minister baptizes the neophytes, one by one, he blesses them:

"In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, I so baptize you."

Following the baptism the neophyte is congratulated by the congregants and joins in with the hymns until all have been baptized. The congregation finishes the hymns, blesses the food and eats.

The baptism symbolizes the spiritual death and, upon leaving the water, a new life and awakening. The neophyte is obligated to comply with the Ten Commandments, keep the Sabbath and holidays, and observe the taboos--ending his

old evil ways, i.e., smoking, drinking, etc. By this ceremony he has made a personal pact with God obliging him to keep God's laws. He has also become a full member of the community of the chosen people. The baptism does not, however, insure his salvation. This will depend on his conduct while on earth and inevitably, on the deity.

A final comment should be made about the general atmosphere of the services. Primarily, the mood of the congregation depends upon the particular activity of the service. During the reading of the Law, the congregation chants loudly and resolutely. During the kneeling prayers and prayers where heads are bowed the mood is solemn and quiet. Hymns range in content and melody from joyous and patriotic to sad and humble. Musical instruments are rarely used; only on one occasion an accordianist accompanied a baritone. Individual expression may be quite matter of fact, debate, complete disagreement, dissatisfaction, or an apology for missing a service. There is also opportunity for humor though never jokes. Finally, the conspicuous presence of many small and demanding children necessitates a degree of informality which perhaps would not be found otherwise.

The atmosphere also depends to a degree on the particular service. Marriages and Cabanas by their very nature are joyous occasions while oraciones and La Pascua are generally more grave. The regular Sabbath is informal yet serious. One important factor to the Spiritual Jews is the



complete religious equality of all the members. They open and close the chapel and they determine what will take place within it. There is no clergy and therefore open expression concerning the most unsettled policies is the practice.

In summary, services are generally informal with a good deal of individual participation. Participation consists of intellectual and reasonable discussion rather than emotionalism and ecstasy common to many sectarian churches.

The second general heading of religious rituals involves the taboos observed by the sect. These fall into two categories: taboos prescribed by the written religious code, and taboos observed by general consensus of the community. The major food taboos are those elaborated in the Old Testament of the Bible:

"Say to the people of Israel, these are the living things which you may eat among all the beasts that are on the earth. Whatever parts the hoof and is cloven-footed and chews the cud, among the animals you may eat. Nevertheless, among those that chew the cud or part the hoof, you shall not eat these. . . . (Lev. 11:2-4) Of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch; they are unclean to you." (Lev. 11:8)

The members consume no pork or ham products, including lard. Since swine and beef constitute the major "beast" products of Veracruz, the Biblical taboo is clear-cut. Lamb is permitted but rarely available in Veracruz. Only one member, who was not active in the sect, admitted that he did not observe the taboo.

"These you may eat, of all that are in the waters. Everything in the waters that has fins and scales,

whether in the sea or in the rivers, you may eat. But anything in the seas or the rivers that has not fins and scales . . . is an abomination to you." (Lev. 11:9-10)

Veracruz, located on the Gulf of Mexico, provides a massive variety of sea food possibilities. For this reason, the Biblical qualifications of scales and fins is somewhat ambiguous. While the whole community abstains from obviously unqualified seafood like crabs, oysters, eels and tortoises, there is some question about shrimp. About half the congregation said they eat shrimp but added that they believe shrimp has scales and fins.

"And these you shall have in abomination among the birds, they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination; the eagle, the vulture, the osprey, the kite, the facon according to its kind, the ostrich. . . ." (Lev. 11:13-15)

The Jews of the Spirit eat chicken although many refrain from turkey and all from duck on the basis that duck is of the ostrich family.

A further taboo, also Biblical, prohibits women from entering the synagogue during menstruation.

Unwritten taboos which are observed by consensus of the membership include drinking any alcoholic beverages, smoking, sexual intercourse out of wedlock, gambling or games of chance, dancing, and movies.

Inability to stop drinking and/or smoking is the most frequent excuse offered by many husbands of women of the sect who, while they are sympathetic to the sect, have not converted. Gambling by playing cards or dominoes is

forbidden but many do play the National Lottery. Dancing, perhaps Mexico's major urban social activity, permitting young people to meet, is generally forbidden. School or occupational dances, however, are considered proper by those who attend them. These are infrequent, however, and the entire sect opposes the public dances and those sponsored by the Catholic and Protestant churches.

Only movies which deal with Biblical topics are considered proper entertainment. Many of the younger children do go to other secular movies and while this is not condoned, since they are not officially baptized, it is permitted.

One comment should be made regarding the prohibition of work on the Sabbath and the celebration of "pagan" holidays. Even though the Bible expressly states that the Sabbath is a day of rest as opposed to work, some of the members are unable to arrange this with their employers. Here the sect has yielded to pressures from the larger society and also reinforced its value on work. Often a member, unable to attend services because of work, will apologize publicly during the announcement period on the following Saturday. The celebration of "pagan" holidays is intolerable to the sect. In fact, the sect's only case of excommunication (besides Mago) involved a woman who celebrated Christmas with a pine tree in her home. Another woman knew about it but remained silent. The congregation found out and, after questioning the two before the entire body of members, asked them both to leave.

The excursion constitutes the only nonreligious (or semi-religious) activity in which the entire membership participates. Excursions are rare, primarily because of the difficulties in coordinating free time but also because of the expense. They are, however, anticipated with much joy. On these occasions the congregation charters a bus and journeys to a nearby village or city. Excursions provide a chance to visit, sing hymns, eat together, and generally enjoy the company of the other brothers.

Studying in different homes is continually taking place among the Spiritual Jews. The study group usually consists of two, three, or more members with one brother leading with a prepared lecture. The others follow his theme reading the Biblical passages he quotes. Frequently, at such sessions, discussions arise concerning the Bible's treatment of particular issues of interest--moral, theological, political, etc.

The Spiritual Jews also visit each other's homes to chat, sing secular songs or hymns, or eat. During singing sessions, unconverted spouses join in if they are sympathetic to the sect. If not, the house is avoided. Sick and aged members are also frequently visited by many of the congregants.

Occasionally, one or more members will visit an acquaintance in order to evangelize. This is not done too often, however, as the sect regards itself as very selective,

demanding initial inquisitiveness and genuine personal religious quest before revealing its truth and attempting to convert an individual. Most of the time people are simply invited to attend the Sabbath service. Visitation has proven the most effective evangelizing method. The sect never practices wholesale evangelism as a communal activity.

All the members of the sect claimed their closest friends were also members; in many cases these were mentioned as their only friends.

#### Classification of the Sect

Regarding its circumstances of origin, the Spiritual Jews emerged initially as a result of a doctrinal schism within the Church of God (Seventh Day)--quite obviously an adventist sect. In addition to this, however, Juan Mago, a charismatic leader until his own excommunication, played a major role in importing Mexican Jewish ideals and rituals (in altered form) into the sect.<sup>15</sup>

The mission of the original sect, for my purposes, may be characterized as maintaining the typical adventist

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<sup>15</sup>Wilson, it appears, presents the charismatic leader and the schismatic sect as two "distinct" circumstances of origin (Ch. I, p. 17). It will be noted that in my explanation of the Spiritual Jews I include both factors. In Wilson's understanding then one might be led to consider Mago a reformer rather than a charismatic leader as some authors have proposed, i.e., Rudolf Obto in The Idea of The Holy; but I have rejected this in view of Mago's overbearing personality and influence on the movement.

response to the world which focuses attention on the coming overturn of the present order, places emphasis on the Bible, and particularly on its exegesis of the allegorical and prophetic books from which the time and circumstances of the second advent of Christ is discerned. The conventional eschatological ideas of Heaven and Hell were regarded as false, and the resurrection of the dead for judgment was accepted as the principal eschatological event. Participation in the new kingdom was limited and only those who had maintained doctrinal and moral rectitude would be eligible; admission to the fellowship was by thorough understanding of necessary doctrine and not by affirmation of conversion--quick conversions were not sought and revivalism was despised as emotional and misguided. The Established Church was regarded as fulfilling the role of the anti-Christ; clerical learning was despised and the professional ministry opposed. Separation from the world was a more crucial interdiction than was restriction placed upon certain worldly activities. The sect was hostile toward the wider society and looked forward to its overthrow.

The Spiritual Jews also fit clearly within this description but there is a noticeable change from its original emphasis on the impending advent of Christ, the destruction of the world, etc., to its present emphasis on obedience to the Ten Commandments. This change in theological emphasis and its sociological implications may be directly attributed to the Mexican Jewish influence introduced by Juan Mago.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE PROCESS OF SECTARIAN DEVELOPMENT AND THE FUTURE OF THE SPIRITUAL JEWS

##### Introduction

Thus far in the essay, I have presented a general typology of sectarianism and then described and briefly classified the Spiritual Jews within it. Such classification of empirical material constitutes a major aspect in the understanding of any social phenomenon. However, by itself, it is incomplete since it fails to account for process. As Wilson has stated and as I have quoted earlier, ". . . typologies are not explanations in themselves, although they are sometimes mistaken for such . . . only as types are useable to explain processes are they really justifiable."<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, armed with an operable typology of sectarianism and the position of the Spiritual Jews within it, we can attempt to speculate about the future course of the Spiritual Jews by turning our attention to an analysis of sectarian development.

The processes in the development of any particular sect are directly influenced by various social factors.

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<sup>1</sup>Wilson, Patterns of Sectarianism, p. 4.

Among them, the internal structure of the sect, the degree of separateness from the external world, the coherence of sect values, and the circumstances of the sect's origin.<sup>2</sup>

Beyond these factors, in the traditional literature on sects, only two possible future courses were recognized: that of the sect developing into a denomination, or its alternative, the total disbanding of the sect. Recent scholars have proposed three additional possibilities in the light of expanding literature.<sup>3</sup> First, even if a sect does not develop into a denomination, it need not dissipate either. Some sects persist as such over several generations, with no apparent tendency toward denominalization or dissipation. Second, there are well known cases of sects merging with another religious movement--either another sect or a larger organization. Third, the process of schism and subdivision appears habitually among certain sects; a process which neither dissolves the sect nor necessarily directs it toward denominalization. In our discussion of the Spiritual Jews' future we must consider all five possibilities as alternative courses along with the various factors that influence them.

#### Internal Structure of the Sect

The internal structure of the Spiritual Jews so far has followed the typical adventist pattern in avoiding strong

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>3</sup>O'Dea, op. cit., pp. 90-97.



centralization. In the initial stages of the sect, when there was no longer a charismatic leader, the occupation of offices was most probably held by members in rotation, by lot, or by seniority, and subsequently the institution of the lay leader chosen for his particular abilities. The Spiritual Jews still maintain a hold over form of status by seniority in perpetuating the concept of "anciano" (elder) and offering respect to members of long standing. The five keys to the chapel, however, are held by members with specific duties, not by seniority.

Greater centralization exists today in the concept of "rabbi" or "predicador," who is regarded as knowing more of the religion than other members. While traditional notions of total equality are still basically intact recent events attest to the growing importance of the position of the rabbi. The reader may remember that before Vegas left to become secretary-treasurer of his labor union, he shared the ministry with Alberto Fiel. After he left, Fiel naturally became the minister. Recently Vegas called a special meeting of the congregation after Sabbath services and offered to present a formal ceremony wherein he would "officially" pass the "held-over authority" of his old position to Fiel. His proposal of an "official" installation for Fiel, who had already been unofficially recognized by almost everyone, was rejected by most of the adherents who saw no necessity for it. Hence the sectarian ideal was maintained for

the moment but, it should be noted, that Vegas' term with the labor union is now ending (1968) and, in view of his personal ambition and growing friendship with Mago, he is likely to aspire to his old position. In my opinion such a move is certain to result either in another schism or his own excommunication, depending on the strength of his following.

Another aspect of the sect's organization which I have so far only briefly mentioned concerns the sect's relationship to the centralized agency of the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Mexico City. While this agency in no sense controls the activities of the sect it is obvious that Mago's group has separated from the organization while Fiel's group explains and rationalizes the activity of the central agency forming a local elite. The existence of such elites, however, has no specific implication for the development of sect into a denomination since, ". . . the crucial matters are whether the elite is specially trained and whether its function becomes that of a professional ministry."<sup>4</sup> It is clear for the present that the Spiritual Jews still maintain no professional ministry although the position of rabbi has become more important because of the increasing necessity to articulate the sect's position vis a vis its rival.

Here one should remember my previous discussion

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<sup>4</sup>Wilson, Patterns of Sectarianism, p. 35.

wherein I asserted that centralized movements appear to be better able to prevent schism than movements in which the central agencies are less well articulated and in which centripetal responsibility has not developed. Since I have emphasized the fact that the Spiritual Jews are not centralized schism appears a likely possibility. Wilson's statement on this is appropriate, "Successful schism usually finds its leader in the very elite of the movement. Schism of this kind serves to preserve the distinctive sectarian character of the organization since schismatic groups tend to become the keepers of each others' consciences in relation to the maintenance of traditional values. The two groups compete for the same public, and frequently appeal to the same sources and authorities in legitimation of their position, thus engendering a competitive struggle to prove the purity of their doctrine and social practice."<sup>5</sup>

#### Degree of Separateness from the External World

The degree of separateness of the Spiritual Jew from the world has been dealt with in passing. I made mention of their endogamous ideal, antagonism toward the Catholic Church, refusal to participate in local religious events, isolation from social events in the larger society like drinking and dancing, and strong commitment to finding

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

friends within the group. Their separateness is limited, however, by a number of factors such as their ethnic homogeneity with the larger population (including Catholic origins and the Spanish language, etc.), lack of vicinal isolation, and lack of distinctive dress which sects maintaining greater isolation often develop.

During one particular dinner engagement a woman mentioned that it would be wonderful if the Spiritual Jews could acquire some land and become communal farmers. In my understanding such isolation would be out of keeping with the sect's values of individual achievement in work and religion not to mention their fundamental adaptation to urban life, and, therefore, definitely not a possibility for the future.

One of the possible influences on the course of a religious sect involves the degree of coherence of its values with respect to its internal structure and the larger society. By far the most pressing value which acts like a force field of continuous conflict is the value of separation from the external world.

Evangelizing sects must expose themselves to the world at the risk of alienating their evangelizing agents. Adventist sects, like the Spiritual Jews, are rarely threatened by this particular problem, however, since they send evangelizing agents into the world only after their doctrinal understanding has been thoroughly tested and their allegiance

well tried. Equally, because they stress a distinctive Biblical exegesis they do not look for immediate and emotionally prompted conversions, but subject those who wish to join the movement to an examination of doctrinal knowledge. The recruitment of the second generation is also an aspect of evangelism. It is an oversimplification, however, to say that the second generation makes the sect into a denomination because such development depends on the standards of admission imposed by the sect, the previous rigor with which children have been kept separate from the world, and on the point at which a balance is struck between the natural desire of parents to have their children included in salvation and their awareness of the community view that any sort of salvation depends on the maintenance of doctrinal and moral standards. Since the Spiritual Jews, like other adventist sects, tend to attract family members (only two individuals in the entire group have no blood relative in the sect), and also tend toward exacting standards of admission, they are likely to hold a considerable proportion of their second generation without damage to sect identity.

Some other issues of potential conflict of values include: the refusal of sects to recognize the legitimacy of society's legal arrangements and the refusal to accept conventionalized sacred practices like oath-swearing; withdrawal of the sect from the political arrangements of society, refusal to vote, conscientious objection to participation

in military activities of the state, disregard of economic institutions of society; the refusal to recognize the marital and familial regulations imposed by the state.

The Spiritual Jews defer to the state on all these issues though there is much covert dissent. Members, for example, do not vote unless they are government employees in which case they are obligated to vote by Mexican law.

#### Coherence of the Sect's Values

If a sect is to persist as an organization it must not only separate its members from the world, but also must maintain the dissimilarity of its own values from those of the secular society. It is not necessary to reiterate all the rituals and beliefs which the Spiritual Jews maintain in order to perpetuate their marginality but a few such devices which have already been noted include: chosen people status, the negative attitude toward the rituals of the larger society and the fact, previously mentioned in passing, that status is aspired to within the sect (on the basis of seniority and Biblical knowledge). In my opinion the Spiritual Jews maintain a viable separation of values from those of the external society.

The Spiritual Jews offer resistance to the broadening process which is implied in becoming a denomination by the strength of their exclusiveness. Most adventist sects accept the command to preach the truth, but nevertheless make truth difficult to obtain thereby offering further

resistance to expansion and the denominalization process.

### Circumstances of the Sect's Origin

Three major elements with regard to the circumstances of the sect's emergence must be considered: 1) the method by which the sect came into being, 2) the external social conditions prevailing or the larger social processes involving the significance of the Protestant movement in Mexico, 3) the specific factors of stimulus. I have already mentioned the method of the Spiritual Jews' emergence when I discussed Mago as a charismatic leader, his influence on the movement, and the final subdivision which abandoned him after he "divorced" his wife. Sects seem to remain vigorous as long as their protest against the parent body is significant. In the case of the Spiritual Jews that particular protest ended when the rivalry between the two daughter groups began. Hence today rivalry with Mago's group acts as a cohesive factor, as evidenced by my earlier presentation of the Church discussion concerning Mago's invitation to his conference on the Middle East war. If the issues of disagreement should wane, the possibilities of adjusting to continuance as a sect, decaying in the absence of opposition, or partially rejoining the parent body, would be open to the Spiritual Jews. I feel that in their case adjusting to continuance as a sect seems more likely than decaying in the absence of opposition from the rival group. After all, the Catholic Church still would remain a major target

of their wrath as would all other Protestant groups of which the sect is cognizant. In addition, recently an Israeli vessel docked in Veracruz, and the Spiritual Jews sent a welcoming committee to invite the Israeli sailors to Sabbath services. When the committee arrived on board it was shocked to find the traditional Veracruz prostitutes striding about. The report of the incident to the congregation (although in somewhat diluted form) obviously engendered disillusionment regarding the Jews of the Flesh. This may yet provide another outlet for their wrath as well as encourage cohesiveness although with respect to this particular incident changes in attitudes and doctrine towards Jews of the Flesh may also ensue.

The fact that the sect maintains a chapel is another factor indicative of perpetuation. As I mentioned earlier in a note many sects have not yet attained a chapel because of the expense. Once acquired, however, the adherents are loath to disperse entirely, regardless of the degree of doctrinal or organizational strife, since dispersal would mean relinquishing the chapel to the government. It is my contention that this factor of the legal setting plays an important role in the development of sects in Mexico since, in my understanding, the great majority of sects are neither registered with the government, nor own chapels in the early stages of their development.

The possibility of reunification with the other



Spiritual Jews led by Mago is slim so long as Mago remains their leader. If for some reason he would separate from his group, reunification would be a possibility because many individual friendships crosscut church boundaries leaving close channels of communication open.

#### Important External Social Processes

Sects always emerge as a reaction to some larger social processes, and, of course, the prevailing external conditions which reflect those processes. In order to identify the larger social processes which directly stimulated the emergence of the Spiritual Jews it would be necessary to present a clear portrayal of the growth and significance of the Protestant movement in Mexico and also its history in Veracruz. A proper discussion of this development of Protestantism in Mexico and the resultant Mexican Protestantism would demand much scholarship, the details of which venture beyond the bounds of this essay. It is appropriate here, however, to mention at least a few of the external social factors which contributed to its growth and development. Primarily Mexican Protestantism emerged from conflict within Mexican political and religious spheres. The Protestant Movement had been present in Mexico since the middle of the nineteenth century. But, its real growth began only after the revolution of 1910 when the Catholic Church was officially stripped of all political powers. With the

dichotomy of church and state legally completed, the state encouraged the growth of Protestantism in order to consummate its victory and thwart any future attempt by the Church to reclaim power.

Secondly, foreign influence played a major role. North American and also some European Protestant groups had long been anxious to gain a foothold in Latin America. When the Mexican government opened its doors to foreign missionaries in the 1920's the entrance of Protestant missions was immediate and their growth rapid. This process became especially pronounced during the 1930's and 40's. At that time China,<sup>6</sup> the dominant missionary field, was closing rapidly, displacing much personnel; Latin America compensated for the loss, offering a new area of emphasis as well as an outlet for these individuals.

From the 1930's through the present, Protestantism in Mexico continues to increase its membership. The wide variety of sects and denominations further attest to its success and it is now apparent that many Protestant influences which opposed the Catholic Church or were alien to it are now well established in the Mexican religious system.

Two of the most prevalent of these influences bear mentioning although their elaboration is beyond the scope

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<sup>6</sup>Richard Adams, The Second Sowing: Power and Secondary Development in Latin America (Chander Publishing Company, U.S.A., 1967), p. 214.

of this essay. First, the Protestant movement established educational and welfare agencies in many of Mexico's rural and urban areas. The establishment of such agencies, especially after World War II, was encouraged by the Mexican government and, for the most part, welcomed by the people. The Protestant movement is also often credited with introducing an egalitarian ideal to Latin America, a doctrine of great transformative potential. Adams mentions this fact with reference to the Protestant association with the agricultural reform program in its early years in Mexico. Because of this association Protestantism was wrongly condemned by its enemies for an alleged involvement with the Socialist movement.<sup>7</sup> Willems mentions the Protestant doctrine of egalitarianism in his discussion of the transformative effects of Protestantism on Chile and Brazil:

The almost revolutionary content of Protestantism becomes apparent when compared to the traditional structure of Latin American society. In Protestant communities, 1) All members, regardless of wealth, education, and occupation, are considered ethically equal; 2) all members have the intellectual and moral ability to solve mutual problems in a responsible manner; 3) the leaders should not restrict the freedom of opinion and decision-making of the members nor stand in the way of individual initiative.<sup>8</sup>

To a great degree these ideological doctrines were also introduced in Mexico and they certainly had an effect in that denominations and sectarians, to varying degrees,

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>8</sup>Willems, op. cit., p. 185.

became responsible for the maintenance of their religious institutions. But, we must remember here that Mexico presents quite a different cultural setting from Chile or Brazil and the "revolutionary" content of Protestantism which Willemss asserts for these countries seems to be lacking in Mexican Protestantism at the present time.

The final factor facilitating the growth of Mexican Protestantism must be visualized within the broad concept of social change and unrest resulting from the related processes of modernization and nationalism which Mexico has experienced since the beginning of this century.

Unfortunately, the specific factors which stimulated the emergence of the Spiritual Jews are unknown. I can only speculate on the origins of its parent adventist movement and consider its own emergence as a continuation of that process. Two of the possible factors of stimulus in a broad sense may include: the disturbance of normal social relations because of industrialization and urbanization, and the marginality of particular age, sex, and status groups because of this and other social processes. Adventist groups often arise in the midst of persisting deprivation and this sect may have been one of many which began during the depression of the thirties. Clearly during rapid social change such stimulus factors are more likely to become operative, since it is well established that sects proliferate in periods of social unrest.

In conclusion, my argument regarding the near future of the Spiritual Jews underplays the possibilities of its becoming a denomination, dispersing totally, or merging with another religious body. Continuing as a sect certainly remains a possibility but, in the light of recent trends already noted, I have emphasized schism as the most likely future of the Spiritual Jews.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

#### Summary

The major purpose of this essay has been to introduce the reader to a specific religious sect which I studied in the port city of Veracruz, Mexico. I have classified the sect into Wilson's typology and also predicted its future course on the basis of the theory of Protestant sectarian development from the sociology of religion. In general, I mean to assert that this framework can be utilized for classification and prediction of the development of specific Protestant sects which have recently emerged and increasingly gained adherents throughout Mexico. The framework is particularly valuable for classifying sects in that it offers an excellent way of handling areas with great sectarian diversity, but unfortunately, it provides only a very basic introduction to the larger social processes at work in Mexico, which generated and encouraged the growth of Protestant sects.

#### Some Related Problems for Further Investigation and the Value of Protestantism as a Vehicle for Further Study

Going beyond the theory of sectarianism, then, I would assert that these larger social processes of Mexican

cultural evolution may to some extent be observed and identified by studying the various problems associated with the rise and growth of Protestantism in Mexico. Naturally, in the preceding material I was unable to develop this assertion since the bulk of my efforts concentrated on explaining a specific sect. Were I to continue investigating, however, I would turn immediately to such problems as the larger transforming effects of Protestantism on Mexican culture, rural and urban; the ideological, political, and social re-statement of Protestantism by Mexican culture; the evolving political and religious role of the Catholic Church, with special emphasis on its attitudes and behavior towards rival religious movements; and the role of the charismatic leader in the formation and growth of religious and political movements in Mexico. Finally, I assure the reader that my projection of Protestantism as a particularly advantageous vehicle for studying Mexican religious and cultural evolution has not been arbitrary. Some fundamental reasons convince me of its value to the anthropologist.

In the first place, the growth of Protestantism in Latin America has been rapid. While at the beginning of this century Protestantism in most Latin American countries could claim perhaps 1% of the population, most probably less, now figures range between 5-10%.<sup>1</sup> In his discussion of the

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<sup>1</sup>Willems, op. cit., pp. 190-191. Willems' figures are for Chile and Brazil. See also Pedro Rivera for further statistics.

growth of Protestantism in Chile and Brazil, Willems notes:

The marked increase in growth rates of Protestantism runs parallel with the rhythm of change in the traditional social structure of both countries. This change consists primarily of a slow disintegration of the feudalistic agrarian structure, the settlement of new agricultural lands, the urbanization and industrialization of some regions, as well as the development of a new class structure.

If there really is a functional relationship between culture change and Protestantism, one would expect to find the largest Protestant concentrations in those regions which have shown the highest rate of culture change, while the smallest percentage of Protestants would be located in the most tradition-bound areas.<sup>2</sup>

Willems proceeds to prove this hypothesis for Brazil and Chile and I suspect it would hold true for Mexico as well.

Such growth, really over the past forty years, has indeed been phenomenal and even more significant since the number of its adherents continues to climb so quickly that any attempt to assess its real demographic and ideological impact on Mexico would be premature at present. The estimates on the number of Protestant conversions, however relevant to Protestant growth, do not represent so significant a fact as does the very short time in which this growth took place. This fact implies a major advantage for contemporary study of Protestantism in Mexico since, as a sociological and historical phenomenon its origins and growth can be specifically identified both temporally and spatially and its future effects and relationships to other institutions

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<sup>2</sup>Willems, op. cit., pp. 190-191.



(political, ideological, economic, etc.) assessed in this light.

In the second place, literature concerning the growth of Protestantism is extensive offering great possibilities for comparative research. The circumstances of origin and development of Protestantism have been revealed for pre-modern and post-modern European nations. Some studies have even called attention to general elements of its growth within predominantly Catholic European nations. The development of Protestantism in the 19th and 20th century United States and Canada has already been presented by Niebuhr, William Mann, and others, and recent works on African Protestant movements, whether they emerged as separatist churches,<sup>3</sup> prophetism,<sup>4</sup> or cults, have forged a path on that continent.

Within the framework of cultural evolution, the historical sequence of the spread of Protestantism through many

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<sup>3</sup>G. Shepperson, The Politics of African Church Separatist Movements in British Central Africa (Africa, XXIV, 3, 1954).

Bengt G. M. Sundkler, Bantu Prophets in South Africa (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1961).

Walter H. Sangree, The Dynamics of the Separatist Churches in Changing Africa and the Christian Dynamic (Chicago University, Seminar for Mission Board Executives), 1964.

J. W. Dougall, African Separatist Churches (International Review of Missions, XLV, 1956).

<sup>4</sup>C. Baeta, Prophetism in Ghana (Liverpool & London, England: Charles Birchall and Sons, 1962), Introduction.

areas of the world has often been linked with the related processes of economic and religious evolution returning us to Weber's original insights. If such a link exists it would offer possibilities for determining general principles revealed in the similarities of Protestant diffusion all over the world in the past two centuries. It would also allow illustration of the differences of national response to Protestantism resulting from uniquenesses of culture context and historical period. When the development of Protestantism in Mexico is contrasted with its development in other areas of Latin America and the world, the resulting Mexican uniquenesses will reveal an important part of the course of development of Mexico's religious institutions in turn reflecting a major aspect of the evolution of Mexican culture. Thus, for example, when we contrast Mexican Protestant groups with African Protestant groups, one element of differentiation which emerges almost immediately concerns the direction of Protestant sectarian antagonism. All Mexican Protestant movements, because of their historical subordination to the Catholic Church, present themselves as alternatives to the Catholic Church, maintaining articulate and covert antagonisms toward that institution. African movements are largely lacking in this particular antagonism although they often demonstrate sublimated nationalism because of their history of colonialism and racial

discrimination.<sup>5</sup> The picture of the evolution of Mexico's religious institutions becomes clearer once this fact is established for we know that in Mexico the Protestantism movement must be considered within the same religious and political framework as the Catholic Church, and the future of both institutions interwoven. The African illustration, on the other hand, places these organizations in somewhat different spheres implying somewhat different processes at work for their futures.

Finally, Protestantism, having originated in a 16th century European culture, is often regarded as a single religious form affecting all areas and cultures of the world in the same way. Although Protestantism definitely does demonstrate certain uniformities in its ideology and development, the social scientist must remember that every cultural context and every historical period which in some way has responded to its diffusion, has also modified its form, elaborating those culturally translatable elements and omitting, or at least disregarding, those elements carrying little or no significance for their new context. In this rapidly secularizing world where all religious institutions transform or perish Latin America offers a fascinating field

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<sup>5</sup>This is most pronounced for East and South Africa as opposed to West Africa since White colonization was greatest in those parts. See Sundkler, who deals with this sublimated nationalism in South African religious movements.

for the observation and explanation of emergent religious forms. The Spiritual Jews are particularly exciting in this regard because of their highly syncretistic rituals and beliefs resulting from a unique commingling of Seventh Day Adventist and Catholic elements with those of an ethnic minority--the Jews of Mexico City. Today in Mexico, Protestantism is being translated for the ideological adaptation to an evolving modern world. It is this world which we seek to understand.

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