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Review of *Inside the Ark: The Hutterites in Canada and the United States* by Yossi Katz and John Lehr

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Geographers Yossi Katz and John Lehr’s new book on the Hutterites provides an in-depth analysis of the social life of one of the four branches of the Hutterite Church in North America, the Group 2 Schmiedeleut. In many ways it is also an informative introduction to Hutterite life in general.

Katz and Lehr provide detailed explanations of virtually every aspect of Hutterite life in the province of Manitoba. This includes social and political organization at the colony and inter-colony levels, religious and cultural traditions, the impact of space and how it is employed (with helpful charts and images), as well as economic structures and developments. There are also discussions about how Hutterites use leisure time and about relationships with non-Hutterites. One chapter is devoted entirely to Hutterite women. The book also deals with the “runaway” phenomenon as well as the impact of globalization and other social and economic changes on colony life and operations.

Five appendixes contain impressive material. Of the book’s 430 pages, 161 are devoted to a single appendix that provides an English translation of Hutterite Church ordinances between 1762 and 2009. But this is also problematic, limiting what can be said about Hutterite history and the diversity of beliefs and practices across the North American Hutterite community. In the short historical section, for example, the Hutterites are described as “Christian perfectionists,” which is somewhat confusing since the word “perfectionism” usually implies Christian theological understandings not associated with the Hutterites.

Even more disconcerting is the fact that the book is not really a general study of all branches of the contemporary Hutterite community. Of the 50,000-plus Hutterites in North America, for example, nearly two-thirds are members of the often more conservative Lehrerleut and Dariusleut branches (whose colonies are located primarily in Montana, Alberta, and Saskatchewan), groups this book spends limited time on. And Katz and Lehr focus primarily on the more conservative of the two Schmiedeleut groups.

Not nearly enough attention is given to the vast differences between Hutterite branches, or even between colonies within the same branch, all of which anthropologist Max Stanton and I review in detail in The Hutterites in North America (2010), a text not referenced by Katz and Lehr. Austrian historian Astrid von Schlachta’s The Hutterites between Tirol and North America (2006) is also not mentioned, nor is my 2009 biography of Hutterite leader Paul Tschetter, one of the two delegates sent from Russia to “spy out the land” for all Hutterites in the summer of 1873.

In general, not enough attention is given to the progressive Schmiedeleut Hutterite group (Group 1; a division occurred in 1992) nor to the Dariusleut and Lehrerleut communities, nor in many ways to American (as compared to Canadian, and more specifically, Manitoban) Hutterites. Manitoba Hutterite colonies were evidently the ones most visited, and thus, through this work, their members become spokespersons for all Hutterites. Even the book’s photographs appear to come substantially from the Group 2 Schmiedeleut.

It is also significant that discussion of the relationship between Hutterites and the Bruderhof communities (the Hutterites and Bruderhof were merged institutionally from 1931 to 1955 and again from 1974 to 1994) relies on sources primar-
ily associated with the Group 2 Schmiedeleut, not the more closely aligned Group 1 Schmiedeleut. Sources referenced include the Saskatchewan ex-Hutterite Samuel Hofer and two members of the Group Schmiedeleut 2 James Valley Colony west of Winnipeg. Not mentioned is my study of the history of Hutterite-Bruderhof relations (Mennonite Quarterly Review, 2005). Even the latter parts of the “Hutterite” ordinances in appendix 5 (1992–2009), although extremely valuable for research or to anyone interested in the inner workings of the Hutterite Church, are not part of the Dariusleut, Lehrerleut, or even Group 1 Schmiedeleut experience.

Many important events and issues are missing in this book, including Hutterite minister Paul Tschetter’s face-to-face meeting with President U. S. Grant on Long Island in 1873. There is also no mention of the Hutterite colony in Palmgrove, Nigeria. Hutterite population statistics provided (46,000) are below official figures (50,000-plus). The authors suggest the number of people leaving the colonies exceeds the number of births, but this is uncorroborated by any academic study. The authors’ statement that “riding a bicycle is not allowed in most colonies” makes no sense to anyone in the Group 1 Schmiedeleut, nor in progressive Dariusleut colonies. John Hostetler’s dated (1974) view of the secondary role of women is supported in this work, contrasting significantly with my and Stanton’s research (2010). This and other generalizations give readers the impression that there is much more uniformity across the Hutterite world than is really the case.

In general, then, while this book is filled with extremely helpful information about the Group 2 Schmiedeleut Hutterite branch, it does not introduce the reader to the great diversity of beliefs and practices found across the Hutterite world.

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