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*Mormonism in Germany: A History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Germany* Gilbert Scharffs

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GILBERT SCHARFFS. *Mormonism in Germany: A History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Germany*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1970. 256 pp. \$5.50.

(The reviewer, Douglas F. Tobler, is an assistant professor of history at Brigham Young University. A specialist in modern German history and European intellectual history, Dr. Tobler has also published in *Proceedings of the Utah Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters*.)

The recent laudable movement within the Church to discard a traditional parochialism for a more universal appeal is very much in evidence. Pronouncements and travels of Church leaders, the establishment of seminary and institute programs outside of North America and the expanded use of the mass media in the missionary effort all dramatize the new thrust. Undoubtedly, this worldwide emphasis has also been one of the stimuli behind the interest in exploring the history of Mormonism in foreign lands. An additional motive is that former missionaries sometimes take this route to express their affection for the areas and people of their service. The book by Gilbert Scharffs, *Mormonism in Germany: A History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Germany* falls into this category, attempting, in the author's words, ". . . to relate the dramatic, untold story of the growth and survival of the Church . . . in Germany. . . ." Such studies, if well done, should be welcomed by the Church membership, not only as a reflection of the vigor of the Church, but for their potential contribution toward a greater mutual understanding and brotherhood among Church members the world over.

Although the author has apparently labored diligently in researching the material for the present volume, especially in the manuscript histories of the several German missions, and has assembled a formidable body of statistical data on the rate and number of conversions, the presidents of the missions, the numbers of missionaries, the comparative productivity of Church missions, etc., it is doubtful that *Mormonism in Germany* will satisfy either the need for an acceptable history of the Church in that country or measurably enhance our understanding of the German Saints.

The primary obstacles to the book's success include the acceptance of an outdated concept of the nature of history, a

narrow research methodology, superficial knowledge of the history, culture, laws and institutions of Germany, and a tedious writing style, typical of Ph.D. dissertations, but no more conducive to being read by the Mormon, let alone, non-Mormon public. I should, therefore, like to consider these weaknesses in greater detail.

Unfortunately, there was a time once when the mere linking of historical facts into grammatical sentences to form a bloodless chronicle was accepted as history. But first the literate public, and, belatedly and ironically (or perhaps not so), the historians themselves discarded the form in favor of its more critical, interpretive and realistic successor. Contrary to the author's stated desire, the truly "dramatic" real-life story of accepting, living and defending the Church and its teachings in an often hostile environment fails completely to emerge into the narrative from the sanitized, uncritical reporting of the manuscript histories, and from the failure to analyze in some depth the possible explanations for the mercurial ups and downs of Mormonism's German experience. For example, what effect did the emigration of the German Saints to the United States have on the Church there, both over the short and long range? Why did these Saints continue to disregard the advice of Church leaders to remain in their homeland and help build up the Church there? What instructions did the Saints receive from Church authorities to guide them in their relationship to the Nazi State? How do we account for the pendulum-swing variations in the rate of conversion in Germany since World War II? (These range from 215 in 1951 to 2,457 in 1961). The citing of administrative changes, personalities of mission presidents or even welfare assistance hardly seem to suffice as adequate explanations for the conversion statistics. Finally, have not the German Saints contributed more to the Church than their numbers, certain mission presidents and Karl G. Maeser? These and other relevant questions require answers if a serious history is intended.

Secondly, this reviewer is puzzled by the author's research methodology. Why the excessive reliance upon the manuscript histories when other sources were available? As a suggestion, the author might easily have interviewed hundreds of active and disaffected former German Saints living in the Rocky Mountain area whose accounts might well have offered a dif-



ferent perspective and interpretation, and helped bring the narrative to life. Instead, recourse was had to the statements of former Mission Presidents and a very few native Germans. Mention has been made earlier of Karl G. Maeser. The author rightly esteems Brother Maeser's contributions to Mormonism; but, with the single exception of one quotation from Bro. Maeser in *Der Stern*, (p. 18), the author relies on secondary accounts. There is, indeed, no evidence that he considered Reinhard Maeser's biography of his father or the file of Bro. Maeser's letters, some of which date from the 1860s, available either at BYU or the Church Historian's Office. Moreover, the author notes that Bro. Maeser was "caught up with the materialistic philosophy that was becoming so popular among scholars of the day," but does not tell us where he found this idea. Parenthetically, it should be noted that the author often cites quotations (pp. 17, 18, 21, 37, etc.) without proper documentation.

The failure to fully exploit available Mormon sources and evaluate them critically is, however, only a part of the methodological problem. How is it possible to write a history of the confrontation of Mormonism with German society and institutions, as the author purports to do in the Preface, without a thorough knowledge of German history and a study of the relevant German documents? The author has not consulted even the standard secondary texts in German history, undoubtedly helping to account for some of the distortions and errors in factual material. The statement on page xi that "Otto von Bismarck led the German people to great economic heights, especially in the field of industrial production" is a distortion through oversimplification. Or, the assertion that "From 1815 to 1870 the German federations formed loose associations of states" (pp. x-xi) is blatantly garbled. So is the contention that "36,000,000 Germans reside in the territory, which is behind the Iron Curtain, now administered by the Soviet and Polish Governments." (P. xiii.) Recent German government statistics show less than 700,000 Germans now living in the areas under Soviet and Polish control with an additional 16,000,000 in the German Democratic Republic and East Berlin.

More important, however, than this lack of familiarity with German history and the inaccuracies is lack of concern for the German documents which might bear on the subject. What

were the laws of the various German states concerning religion in the 19th Century? (Apparently, the author was unaware that even after the unification in 1871, religious matters still rested in state, not federal hands.) What was the position of the Protestant State Church in the various states? Did Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* against the Catholics in Prussia in the 1870s have any effect upon the Church? What was the Nazi policy vis à vis religion in general and toward the Mormons in particular? Such questions cause one to wonder if Mormonism in Germany can be studied in a vacuum. To have failed to deal with them is to misunderstand the most fundamental axioms of the historian's profession.

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