


We hear of arrivals, marriages, departures, and deaths, but the number of people is simply too large to get to know any of them well. The effect is to give the book an epic quality that makes the movement greater than any of its leaders, and is a conscious decision by the author, who quotes Georg Simmel to define a movement as “individuals connected by interaction” (358). While this style of organization is arguably the best way to approach a movement that eschewed centralized institutions, it occasionally left me feeling unclear as to who among these many people was actually important to the book’s narrative.

This remarkable study will be especially prized as a book of record—a history of the movement in the straightforward sense. While the book avoids the hagiographic tone that afflicts many religious histories, the reliance on insider sources and accounts inevitably means that DeBernardi is recounting the movement’s own story in its own words. Since the structure is one that departs at the point of disagreement, the book necessarily replicates the same “mutual forgetting” of roads not taken, and more significantly, of how the movement is perceived from the outside, notably by its detractors and competitors.

That said, I return to the author’s remarkable access. With her four decades of observation and interviews, as well as access to family libraries and personal memorabilia, DeBernardi presents us with an unmatched account of a movement, including a significant portion of which she witnessed firsthand.

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***The Gates of Hell: An Untold Story of Faith and Perseverance in the Early Soviet Union.* By Matthew Heise. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022. 496 pp. \$14.39 Kindle; \$26.39 hardcover.**

In the fall of 1929, Bishop Arthur Malmgren, the head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia, wrote to one of the main sponsors of the Church abroad, in this case John Morehead, the head of the Lutheran World Convention, founded in the German city of Eisenach in 1923, and the National Lutheran Council in the United States. Malmgren thanked Morehead for the financial aid sent for Lutheran Churches in the Soviet Union but reminded him that since clergy could not legally enter, much less purchase goods in, state-run grocery stores, they had to pay much for food at the small number of grocery stores that were not state run. He also mentioned rumors that, beginning October 1, the Red Army would start blocking access to the cities from the countryside. As the 1920s came to an end, the Soviet Union stood on the precipice of Stalin’s revolution from above, which would sweep away the limited economic and religious freedoms of the New Economic Policy (NEP) over the next five years and exact a horrible toll on the Soviet population. Among those who bore some of the highest tolls were the USSR’s religious believers, of which the Communist regime’s Lutheran population, not only because of their faith in an

officially atheistic regime, but also due to their largely German ancestry, which, as conflict with Hitler's regime loomed, made them clear targets of Stalin and his political police.

This anecdote at the beginning of chapter thirteen, like many others from Matthew Heise's recent monograph, illustrates the precarious position of the Lutheran Church in the Soviet Union after the Russian Revolution. Although the faith and in many cases the personal courage of Lutheran clergy was considerable, and assistance from Lutherans in the United States, the Baltic states, and Germany was a valuable asset for a time, the twenty-two years between the Russian Revolution and the start of the Second World War, the time period Heise focuses on, pushed the Evangelical Lutheran Churches to the brink of extinction, one it never fully recovered from in Soviet Russia. Heise chronicles this grim story through thirty-one relatively short chapters, many of them focusing on one calendar year. After providing a background of how the Lutheran Church emerged in the Tsarist Empire, Heise moves to the experience of the Revolution and the subsequent Civil War. The Lutheran community under the Romanovs, already in a difficult position during the First World War because of their German background as Russia went to war with the *Kaiserreich* and its allies, strived to take a neutral position between the Reds and the Whites, and following the Bolshevik victory, not engage in, for the most part, open opposition to the Soviet regime, unlike some high-ranking clergy in the Orthodox and Catholic churches. They did have considerable success in working with the American Relief Agency (ARA) and other charitable agencies in providing aid to the victims, especially in Lutheran communities, of the massive famine in Volga River region in 1921–1922, a famine brought about by the Bolshevik policies of War Communism.

Lenin, in one of his last major policies before his final physical decline, halted the attempts to build a fully communist economic structure by implementing the NEP, which allowed for a mixed, but largely state-run, economy. In the religious sphere, this also marked a temporary retreat from, but not full abandonment of, the plan by the Communist Party to forge a fully atheistic society in the Soviet Union, with religious faith criminalized and religious institutions destroyed. This allowed the Lutheran Church to continue to operate a seminary in Leningrad (formerly Saint Petersburg), which trained students from Russia, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, and Latvia to lead parishes throughout the USSR, from Leningrad and Moscow to the Caucasus and the Volga River region, the Siberian cities of Tomsk, Irkutsk, and Omsk, and even Vladivostok on the shores of the Pacific. Despite the continued obstacles placed by the Soviet regime, such as bans on using Churches for social events or educational work, by the end of the 1920s, Lutheran parishes had been able to recover some of their pre-1917 numbers.

This limited degree of freedom was not to last, as the almost unfathomable darkness of Stalin's rule in the 1930s, which involved the collectivization of agriculture at the beginning of the decade, leading directly to another state-run famine that killed millions, and by the end of the decade the massive bloodletting of the Great Terror, as millions of Soviet citizens were arrested and over a million executed for imaginary crimes against the state, either under the elastic charges of counterrevolutionary activity or espionage for "hostile" nations. During this decade, the Lutheran Church in the Soviet Union found its activities, even basic religious services, increasingly curtailed, while ever-increasing numbers of its clergy were arrested by the Soviet secret police and were either imprisoned in the Soviet network of thousands of labor camps, the Gulag, where many did not survive, or faced execution at the hands of Stalin's henchmen. With the rise of Hitler's regime, even having German ancestry made one a criminal in the eyes of Moscow.

Heise makes impressive use of primary sources found in archives in either the United States or Russia, including, amazingly, documents from the FSB (*Federalnaya Sluzhba Besopastnost*, Federal Security Services), the successor agency in the Russian federation to the Soviet secret police in all of its various manifestations. Much of the focus of the work is on the Russian German communities in Leningrad and Moscow, as this is where much of Heise's sources come from, although these cities also contained some of the Soviet Union's largest Lutheran communities. His database of photos, especially the haunting images of Lutheran clergy and laity during their imprisonment, is also an impressive asset. The book will have particular interest to those interested in the history of Lutherans and more broadly, the ethnic German communities in the USSR, and compares favorably to works such as William Husband's *Godless Communists* and Paul Gabel's *And God Created Lenin*.

If there are any weaknesses in the book, it is the somewhat informal nature of the writing, as Heise is not a professional historian. Sentences start with "And," contractions are used throughout the text, slang such as "kids" as opposed to "children" is common, and the exclamation mark is used in places where it is not necessary. Despite these issues, *The Gates of Hell: An Untold Story of Faith and Perseverance in the Early Soviet Union* is an important resource on a nearly vanished, but historically important, community in the heart of Eurasia.

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***Mormon Studies: A Critical History.* By Ronald Helfrich, Jr.  
Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2022. x + 229 pp. \$39.95 paper.**

In a revision of his 2011 dissertation, Ronald Helfrich, a peripatetic, non-Mormon academic with extensive graduate work in history and sociology, chronicles and critiques Mormon studies approaches from the early nineteenth century through the end of the twentieth century. In the process, Helfrich covers everything from the earliest polemical history written about Latter-day Saints, a book by Ohio publisher Eber D. Howe (1834), to the postmodern musings on Mormonism by Harold Bloom (1992). In a book that is part bibliographic essay, part exploration of social theory, and part explanation of early Mormonism, Helfrich ultimately advocates for a cultural studies approach to the study of Mormonism, one suffused with Weberian *verstehen* that centers "emic" Mormon understandings of themselves with "etic" or outsider contextualization.

Helfrich begins and ends his book with chapters that examine apologetics and polemics within Mormon studies, with the first chapter addressing what he sees as the ultimately apologetic ends of studies that emphasize Mormon "exceptionalism" and "otherness" and the final chapter addressing Mormon studies within the "culture wars" of the late twentieth century Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. These chapters include unforgettable anecdotes about the high stakes of studying Mormon origins, at least for Mormon "insiders" who fell afoul of church administrators committed to exceptionalist, apologetical explanations of the Mormon past. For example, Helfrich recounts the late