

# One Hundred Eighteen Years of Attitude: The History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in the Free and Hanseatic City of Bremen<sup>1</sup>

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[M]ost areas in Germany are not ready for the Church, but eventually many of the German nations will embrace the Gospel.

—Daniel Carn,  
*First mission president in Germaý, 1853*<sup>2</sup>

Bremen is in many respects the freest German city I have so far visited, although city officials did not want to permit me to hold a public service, because there is a great fear of the Mormons. ... Although it was difficult to get started I am sure that a great work will be performed in that area, sooner or later."<sup>3</sup>

—Abraham H. Cannon,  
*Founder of the Bremen Branch and later an Apostle, 1882*

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1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the MHA-Conference in Aalborg, Denmark, 29 June 2000.

2. Gilbert Scharffs, *Mormonism in Germany* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), 12 f.

3. Albert Riedel, *Die Geschichte der deutschsprachigen Missionen der Kirche Jesu Christi der Heiligen der Letzten Tage, Teil I* (Salt Lake City: Service Press, 1971), 394. A planned second volume never appeared.

## PARS PRO TOTO

I BELIEVE THE HISTORY OF THE BREMEN WARDS to be a good example of LDS history in Germany. The first branch was founded in January 1882 with seven members, and by the year 2000 there were 400 members in two wards. After a slow beginning there was in Bremen, as in all of Germany, a great deal of missionary success from the 1920's to the Second World War and again in two periods after the Second World War (1946-1964, 1972-1987).<sup>4</sup> Since the second half of the eighties, no real progress has been made in terms of missionary success. At first this circumstance was concealed by the baptisms of a number of foreign visitors from Africa and Eastern Europe. As these converts subsequently left to return to their home countries, it has become very clear that the membership numbers since the mid-eighties have stayed nearly the same (or have even shrunk) at least in northern Germany.

At the same time, member retention has undergone specific changes as well. From the church's beginnings in Germany up to the mid-1960s, emigration had been very high (except for a pause during the Third Reich). Meanwhile, the loss of membership through apostasy has come in waves, often destroying small branches in the beginning,<sup>5</sup> and—as we will see in the case of Bremen—it is hindering growth in some areas still today.

Both emigration and apostasy have been persistent problems in all of Germany, but they seem to have become especially acute in northern Germany with many young members moving either out of Germany altogether (especially to Brigham Young University to obtain a higher education) or to Southern Germany in order to find better opportunities to make a living. They leave behind very small congregations where tensions may rise very high very quickly, leading to high frustration and waves of apostasy.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, there are persisting differences between East and West Germany. As a culture, East Germany itself is burdened with the unresolved Stasi-problem. The "Stasi" was the East German secret police organization, which coerced countless citizens into spying and reporting on their neighbors, leaving a legacy of deep mistrust and finger pointing about who, in fact, was collaborating with the government to spy and report on whom. This problem is compounded by deeply held prejudices which East and West Germans harbor toward one another. One ironic result of Germany's reunification is that we are likely to see a mosaic structure arising in the German Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (*Kirche Jesu Christi der*

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4. The hiatus between these two periods of success may be typical only of Bremen as it was caused by local difficulties which I will explain.

5. For example, in Hamburg, Karlsruhe, and Bremen in 1883.

6. According to Prof. Kelling at the MHA Conference, Copenhagen/Aalborg 1990: "In small wards people know each other well and get on one another's nerves more easily." Personal problems between members tend to enlarge or sharpen conflicts over doctrine or policy. From author's personal notes.

*Heiligen der letzten Tage*), which up until recently had been quite homogeneous.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the development of membership in Bremen is, so far, typical for Germany in general, and it also exemplifies the main obstacles to lasting success.

### OBSTACLES TO LASTING SUCCESS

There are three main difficulties hindering lasting success in Bremen and in Germany generally:

1. There are harsh misconceptions of the church and its policies that, before the Second World War, led to police actions and to this day continues to produce a mountain of anti-Mormon literature, published by other churches, which damage the public reputation of the church to an extent that seriously hinders missionary success, especially among educated people. A recent truly blatant example occurred in the 1997 request by the "Enquete Kommission" of the German Federal Parliament (Deutscher Bundestag) to include the Mormon church in a hearing on dangerous cults. (The politicians involved later apologized for not having noticed that the church had been recognized by the state as an official and authorized "church" since 1953 [1954 in Berlin]).

2. Emigration to the United States, massive up to the sixties, but continuing steadily today, robs the church in Germany of well educated potential leaders.

For example, the man who just a few years ago was ward mission leader in Bremen is today an elders' quorum president in Salt Lake City.

3. Internal quarrels block decisions at different levels of leadership and lead to waves of disaffection and apostacy. Such waves tend to start with tensions among leaders or between leadership and members. It has always been a problem in Germany to find leaders who are both qualified by the standards of the institution and accepted by the members.

### PERIODS OF THE WARD HISTORY

Bremen's 118 years of ward history can be divided into six instructive time periods:

1. The founding: between 1862 and 1902 the branch struggled into existence, having, in fact, to be founded twice (1882 and 1899).
2. The period of police harassment, 1902 to 1922.

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7. Greater missionary success in eastern Germany through the 1930's led to Melchisedec Priesthood growth and a kind of independent leadership that in western Germany came only later and of necessity during the war.

3. The first period of success, 1922 to 1939.<sup>8</sup>
4. The period of struggle after World War II.
5. The second period of success, 1968 to 1993 under the leadership of three outstanding men.
6. The current time of troubles dating from 1997 during which nearly one-fifth of the active members have left.

### THE FOUNDING: THE SECOND TIME IS THE CHARM

The first LDS missionary to Bremen was Friedrich Müller, who arrived in 1862. He was not very successful. The police would not allow him to preach the gospel. But Josef Zollinger, whose family Müller baptized in Switzerland, became a rather successful missionary in Bremen 45 years later.<sup>9</sup> In Bremen there has always been some success in spite of a number of impressive obstacles.

Meanwhile, the first successful LDS missionary came to Bremen directly from prison. Ludwig Suhrke had been imprisoned in Hamburg for sixty days until mid-December 1881. He refers to his visit in Bremen as "a very pleasant one"<sup>10</sup> and recalls a lot of interest. He was joined by fellow missionary Abraham H. Cannon, who got him out of prison and then went to visit the branches further north. Suhrke had been jailed for visa violation. He had no official permission to preach or proselytize. It was Abraham H. Cannon, who founded the Bremen Branch sometime between December 27th when Suhrke left and January 20th when Cannon was forbidden to preach in Bremen. He had asked for police permission to hold meetings on January 7th, 1882: "I intend to give religious lectures in the house of the Meinsen family, Wacht-street 14. I . . . never encourage to emigrate to Utah, but I am teaching the pure doctrine of Christ. In doing so, I refer to the teachings of a prophet Mormon, having been in America approximately 1,400 years ago. In his teachings polygamy is not praised and I am not touching it in my sermons neither."<sup>11</sup> An expert's report was requested, and a senator named Dr. Mohr declared it questionable that Mormonism was in accordance with state laws (context made it clear that he referred to polygamy<sup>12</sup>). He continued that it didn't make a difference whether or not these things were explicitly stated in sermons. Moreover, in as much as Cannon was a foreigner, permission should surely be denied to him that would have been denied to a citizen.

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8. The reasons for this period of success are described in Bruce Van Orden, "Warum die Kirche im Deutschland der zwanziger Jahre erstaunliche Erfolge hatte," *Betrachtungen* 5 (Spring 1997): 34-37. *Betrachtungen* was an independent Mormon magazine published in Germany from 1995 to 2000.

9. Riedel 1971, 181.

10. Manuscript history of the Swiss and German Mission 1868-1883, Historical Department, LR 8884:2, Vol. 5.

11. State Archive of Bremen, Rep. VI E. 33 4, 14/ 11, 7th file.

12. Cannon didn't help matters by introducing himself as one of 25 children of four wives of his father George Q. Cannon.

Abraham H. Cannon founded the branch anyway with seven members, but it didn't last long without the assistance of missionaries. The next missionary to visit Bremen was Ward E. Pack, Jr., who came the following September. He reported to the spring conference in 1883: "I found the members of the branch divided and had to excommunicate the branch president."<sup>13</sup> After that things went better but I had very little success. I could find only two people still accepting the gospel, and one of these did emigrate."<sup>14</sup> He drew the balance for the end of the year 1883: "Bremen: 1 member, 3 emigrated, 3 excommunicated."<sup>15</sup> This is a balance which for Germany has in some ways remained emblematic.

In October 1898 missionaries were again sent to Bremen. They went believing themselves to be the first missionaries there.<sup>16</sup> On 9 May 1899, A. A. Thomas requested police permission to hold a meeting with the mission presidents of the German (Arnold Schultheß), the Swiss (Henry E. Bowman), and the European (Platt D. Lyman) Missions. Permission was granted, and thereafter in May 1901 permission was given as well for regular (conference) meetings under the condition that the missionaries would take care to ensure "*Ruhe und Ordnung*" (peace and order—a typical phrase stating the primary goal of the government). And indeed, police reports of the meetings state: "No infringement of the regulations occurred."<sup>17</sup>

One example of the popular perception of Mormons at that time comes from an article in the local newspaper *Bremer Nachrichten*, reporting on the conference: "It was poor and simple people listening to the sermons of similarly simple preachers. Much as the unfortunate once listened to the fisherman of Nazereth in the days of the Apostles. . . . How strange to modern man is such belief, however strong, in miracles."<sup>18</sup> At this time church members were officially recognized by the government<sup>19</sup> as can be seen in the census of the year 1900, which counted Mormons along with all other religious denominations.<sup>20</sup>

#### THE PERIOD OF POLICE HARASSMENT, 1902-1922: MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE CHURCH AND ITS POLICIES LEAD TO PERSECUTION.

My studies of Prussian files have given me the clear impression that Prussian officers in Berlin at the end of the nineteenth century were generally quite well informed about the early years of Mormonism in America. Often they requested further information through the German consulate in Denver, especially

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13. The branch president was a lay member without priesthood.

14. Manuscript history of the Swiss and German Mission 1868-1883, Historical Department LR 8884:2, Vol. 5.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Der Stern* 31:167.

17. State Archive of Bremen, Rep. VI E. 33 4, 14/ 11, 7th file.

18. Riedel 1971, 554 f.

19. It is significant that the German members never had problems with the police (accept for emigrating illegally from Prussia). Only proselyting was prohibited.

20. However, they counted only three of the sixteen members.

in the first years of the twentieth century. Two main questions occupied the minds of the officers: First, what was the relationship between the Mormon church and the national government in the USA, which, during the time of the first information gathering, was still pre-occupied with the anti-polygamy bills directed against Utah Mormonism? Second, what exactly was the Mormon concept of marriage? It was the missionary Orson Spencer, who awakened this latter interest when he gave a talk on the "patriarchal order of marriage" during a court hearing in Berlin in January 1853.<sup>21</sup>

As a consequence of Spencer's talk and of government inquiries, on 26 April 1853 the Prussian Department of the Interior issued a decree<sup>22</sup> that Mormon missionaries were to be kept under surveillance, expelled immediately, or brought before the court if grounds could be found. Two explanations were given: The missionaries advocated emigration (which was illegal before young men had completed several years of national service), and they taught against the legal order of marriage. These two accusations, together with the charge of causing civil unrest, have been the basis for police actions against the Mormons ever since. The behavior and attitude of Mormon missionaries toward state laws have been called into question, but never their religious opposition to the Lutheran state church. Police action has, in other words, never been religious persecution *per se*. This can be seen in the limitation of police actions against Mormons to the missionaries. These were never directed against the German members.

Nonetheless, Prussian officers never considered any change in policy toward the missionaries. After 1871 all of Germany had come under Prussian rule, and the Prussian state agencies became German national agencies (this double function was not changed until an administrative reform carried out by the Third Reich). The protests of American ambassadors against the expulsion of LDS missionaries at the beginning of the twentieth century were always ignored.<sup>23</sup> It took a trade treaty<sup>24</sup> between Germany, by then a republic, and the United States in 1923 to convince the government to change its policy toward the missionaries.

Meanwhile, it took until 1902 before Mormon missionaries in Germany were again detected by the Prussian police. Then the Prussian officers worked swiftly. Within weeks every part of Prussia itself had been notified, had reported any missionaries within its boundaries, and expelled them.<sup>25</sup> Outside Prussia, things moved at a different pace although Prussian officers worked hard to force their colleagues into action. For example, the chief of police in Hannover wrote

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21. See his report: "The Prussian Mission of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day saints" (Liverpool/ London, 1853).

22. State Archive of Bremen under Senatsregistratur 3.- A.10.63, also in the Secret State Archive of Prussia.

23. Letter of the Prussian state department from August 7th, 1903, in State Archive of Bremen; Senatsregistratur 3.- A.10.63.

24. State Archive of Bremen, "Senator für die innere Verwaltung" 4, 13/ 1- P.1.f. Nr.11.

25. Secret State Archive of Prussia.

to the Senate of Bremen on 18 April 1903, regarding a missionary expelled from Hannover.<sup>26</sup> But it took Bremen officers until June 20th to come to the conclusion that they should expel the three missionaries then in the city of Bremen. According to records, they found no proof for accusations against them. The police president had accused the Mormon missionaries of tempting young unmarried women to emigrate. The results of police investigations with neighbors and the landlord of the meeting place in Bremen didn't yield much: They described the missionaries as very quiet people, not receiving visits often. The members would drink only water, said the disappointed landlord. Only one unemployed man had emigrated to Utah for sure.<sup>27</sup> However, the authority of the "Reichskanzler" invoked by the police chief in Hannover weighed more heavily than evidence. So in January 1903 the police department began surveillance in earnest by opening a new file.<sup>28</sup> Still, the yield remained poor. The first missionary put under investigation was the Swiss Friederich Albert Rindlisbacher, who was married to but a single wife and had no previous convictions. He made such a good impression on the police that he was regarded as trustworthy, even when he claimed to know nothing about American missionaries passing through Bremen.<sup>29</sup>

The police report of an LDS meeting on January 25th reads as follows: "The attendees followed the sermons reverently. The conduct of the meeting did not seem likely to provoke scenes like those found at Salvation Army meetings in their first years here. Nothing was said about polygamy or emigration."<sup>30</sup> The number of young women was counted in every meeting visited, but without leading to any conspicuous result.

On 1 February, a police officer visited a testimony meeting and reported the members had given "testimonies, which were generally similar." He continues: "In these testimonies they expressed their reasons for believing that they had found the true doctrine that leads to God in Mormon doctrine. These meetings were peaceful; the attendees were very reverent. Nothing was said about polygamy or emigration in the meetings."<sup>31</sup>

As far as the ward files<sup>32</sup> indicate, the congregation consisted mostly of working class people, of whom nearly two-thirds were not native to Bremen. It was not an intellectual or a revolutionary gang, according to the officer, but rather a few hard working families meeting to listen to explanations of the Bible or the books of a certain "Josef Schmidt" mostly in poor German.<sup>33</sup>

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26. State Archive of Bremen, Rep. VI. E. 33 4, 14/ 11.

27. Ibid.

28. State Archive of Bremen, Rep. VI. E. 33 4, 14/ 11, 3rd file.

29. State Archive of Bremen, Rep. VI. E. 33 4, 14/ 11, 2nd file.

30. State Archive of Bremen, Rep. VI. E. 33 4, 14/ 11, 3rd file, p. 12.

31. Ibid.

32. Historical Department Salt Lake City, CR 375 8: "Bremer Mitgliederliste 1899-1920."

33. State Archive of Bremen, Rep. VI. E. 33 4, 14/ 11, 3rd file, p. 15.

Yet on 14 August 1903, the Senate decided once again to expel the foreign missionaries without having found any proof of accusations that they were "tempting to emigrate" or "disturbing the public order." The Prussian conception of the church as polygamous and disrespectful toward state authority—true in the time of Orson Spencer and the Utah War, but not in 1903 and certainly not in Germany—prevailed despite the good impression made by individual missionaries and members.

Ironically, the missionaries countered by going underground, working without visas or permission. In the following years, there was a lively, unsung competition between missionaries and police officers: The missionaries tried to go unnoticed about their work while the police tried to track them down before they were able to preach a word or distribute a tract. By all accounts, the missionaries won this game.

On their own and without *inside* informers, the police apprehended a missionary just three times over the next ten years: One missionary caught the eye of a policeman while passing out pamphlets in public. Asking what kind of "advertisement" the man was passing out, the policemen found he'd caught a missionary sought by the police department for several weeks.<sup>34</sup> Another policeman got lucky on a night patrol. He noticed a man crawling out of a basement window at 2:30 a.m. Believing he had caught a burglar, the officer was quite surprised to have snagged a Mormon missionary who had secretly been visiting a member.<sup>35</sup> You might say he was caught home teaching.

The third case was even more unusual: Two citizens came to the police to inform the officers of a sexual crime they believed had taken place at a public pool in the middle of the night (9:45 p.m.). It turned out that a baptismal service had taken place. Two children of a pool employee had been baptized. The foreign missionaries found in this way were expelled.<sup>36</sup>

But the police learned the most from informants close to the members in Bremen. On 20 November 1904, a master painter named A. Ahlhorn sent in a letter<sup>37</sup> requesting police action against "the mischief of a cult," which was dealing with "the great stupidity of young virgin girls." "I am able to prove," he insisted, "that they swindled ten marks from a young girl named Friederike

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34. State Archive of Bremen, Rep. VI. E. 33 4, 14/ 11, 3rd file, p. 127.

35. State Archive of Bremen, Rep. VI. E. 33 4, 14/ 11, 7th file.

36. State Archive of Bremen, Rep. VI. E. 33 4, 14/ 11, 3rd file, p. 55 f.

37. "[Die] hochlöbliche Polizei ersucht der Unterzeichnete ganz ergebenst veranlassen zu wollen, das des unfugmäßige[n] Treiben einer Sekte, welche sich die letzten Tage der Heiligen [nennt] und und [sic] welche auf die koloßale Dumheit [sic] jungfräulich junger Mädchen rechnet einhalt [sic] getahn wird. Ich habe den Beweis, dazu junges Mädchen namens Friederike König, geboren zu Lenglern, dient bei. . . . Keubler hier, welche auf den Leim dieser Menschen eingegangen ist, zyn Mark abgeschwindelt und in Oslebshausen in die Weser geworfen, wie sie sagen, getauft haben (zwei Männer), also direkt gewisser grober Unfug verübt. Die Bande haust in einem Hause der Steinbachstraße und bin ich zur weiteren Auskunft, da die Verhaftung des Gesindels sofort erfolgen kann, gern bereit."



König. . . who fell for their tricks, and was thrown in the Weser [river] at Oslebshausen to get baptized, as they say (two men) [ T]his is surely great mischief. The gang lives in a house on Steinbacher Street, and I would be glad to give further information, so these riff-raff could be arrested immediately."<sup>38</sup> It turned out that Mr. Ahlhorn was the half-brother of the girl and that she had come into contact with the church through a young man whom she often met "in the kitchen" of the home she worked in as a maid. The girl earnestly attempted to demonstrate to the police that her baptism had not been a "gross mischief": "In the home of a member, the elder of the group, who also preaches the gospel, accepted my request for membership. On the same day, or rather that evening, I was baptized on the bank of the Weser at Oslebshausen. Therefore, I went to this place with six members of the group, including one woman. After I had undressed, the woman gave me the baptismal dress, a long, white gown. The male members were far away from me while I changed dresses. I was baptized by the elder, and I had to be completely under the water for this."<sup>39</sup>

On 17 November 1909, a man informed the police that four Mormon preachers had been in Bremen for six weeks to recruit men and women to be transported to Utah the next day.<sup>40</sup> His wife, he said, would be one of the women. But he had not been allowed to participate in the meetings. The police investigated and found out that the meetings had been announced in the local newspaper, the *Bremer Nachrichten*. The meetings were public with free admission. Married couples had apparently not been prevented from attending together. No one had been denied admission. Mostly complete families attended the meetings. The missionaries or preachers sat at a table across from the attendees. "Religious songs were sung to the tune of 'Hinaus in die Ferne' and 'Deutschland, Deutschland über alles'." The file further states: "The missionaries held religious meetings, dealing with a certain Josef ~~Schmidt~~ Smith." Question-and-Answer sessions were held: "The meetings are supposedly all civilized and peaceful. Everyone calls each other 'brother' and 'sister.'"<sup>41</sup> Missionaries attending the meetings were expelled from the city. No transport of German citizens to the USA was detected. Later the police found that the man, who twice brought charges accusing the Mormons, was or had become a member himself.<sup>42</sup>

The third important incident came through a tip by a master painter named Johannes Tegtmeier<sup>43</sup> on behalf of a colleague, Georg F. Schulze, who had been a member of the church for a couple of years and became dissatisfied when he asked to get part of his tithing back during a time of financial stress. Tegtmeier declared that "the sect" was only concerned about collecting tithing money and

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38. State Archive of Bremen, Rep. VI. E. 33 4, 14/ 11, 6th file.

39. See n. 37.

40. State Archive of Bremen, Rep. VI. E. 33 4, 14/ 11, 3rd file, p. 61 f.

41. State Archive of Bremen, Rep. VI. E. 33 4, 14/ 11, 3rd file, p. 63-65.

42. State Archive of Bremen, Rep. VI. E. 33 4, 14/ 11, 3rd file, p. 112 f.

43. State Archive of Bremen, Rep. VI. E. 33 4, 14/ 11, 3rd file, p. 91 f.

used biblical quotations and sermons so that "people are influenced gladly to give everything they have without regard to whether they can afford it or not, and it often happens that the families suffer thereby." From Schulze and from books he had previously owned, Tegtmeier said, he had found out that "people, mostly young girls" were convinced to emigrate "since everything there is as it is preached here." City officials also recorded that "members of the sect were required to kiss each other as the kiss of brotherhood is highly-prized by the sect." Tegtmeier testified that Schulze feared revenge. He said there were people posted during the meetings to warn of approaching police. The police tried to prove these accusations but without any success. And Georg F. Schulze, who apparently had left the church, became a member again shortly thereafter.

In all of this we can see that the understanding of the church, its teachings, and policies was hindered not only by the official Prussian misconception of Mormonism, but also by prejudices brought to the attentions of the police by citizens, often with their own conditioned prejudices, who were harboring grudges or pursuing personal agendas. And these accusations and stories were readily believed because they fit neatly with the official concept sustained by the authority of the government.

Two other sources of misinformation are also apparent from the police files: newspaper articles and movies. There is, for instance, a newspaper article from November 1909 with the headline, "The Mormon State is dissolved!"<sup>44</sup> It is full of mistakes about dates and persons in early church history and goes on to exclaim: "According to the new religion, there are numberless Gods since every saint becomes a god after his death and also has the possibility of promotion in heaven through the different ranks found in eternity. Polygamy was an excellent tactical move by the first prophet since his cult had to grow faster and obtain more power." The article describes a U.S.-government ban calling Mormonism "a remnant of barbarism, which contradicts civilization, morals, and the laws of the land," but the article goes on to point out that Mormons have, in fact, finally been tamed and have had to adjust to civilization. They are now living like every other American. Hence, the former state of the Mormons has indeed been formally dissolved.

For 21 October 1911, we find a formal complaint by George F. Schulze recorded in the police archives against a movie called "Das Opfer des Mormonen" (The Victim of the Mormon). An advertisement for this film called it "A first-class sensation! A hit like 'The White Slave, Part I'. . . a tremendous drama in three acts." A young woman ("an attractive blonde") is seduced by a young Mormon missionary into sailing to America and then taken by him to Utah although she has changed her mind. Eventually she is rescued by her fiancé and her brother. Schulze protested that the movie was misleading and offended his religious sensibilities.<sup>45</sup> The police, however, found nothing to say against the

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44. State Archive of Bremen, Rep. VI. E. 33 4, 14/ 11, 3rd file, p. 73.

45. State Archive of Bremen, Rep. VI. E. 33 4, 14/ 11, 3rd file, p. 80 f.

movie because it merely showed what they already believed to be true—even though they hadn't ever been able to prove it.

To contemporary readers the accounts from both sources sound funny, over-the-top inaccurate in their description of Mormonism even in its wildest days. To the Bremen police, however, such information was trustworthy. The impression the police officers got from visiting the reverent and orderly Mormon meetings was never strong enough to thrust this lurid picture aside.

### THE FIRST PERIOD OF SUCCESS, 1922-39: IN THE SHADOW OF WORLD WAR II

Beginning in the 1920's, the number of baptisms went up to a record in 1921 of 18 baptisms and approximately ten in the following years. During that period the membership in Bremen rose from 91 members in 1924 to 140 just five years later. They met in a rented room at the "lodge of the Guttemplers,"<sup>46</sup> Sunday mornings (Sunday school) and afternoons (sacrament meeting) and on Wednesdays for Bible study.<sup>47</sup>

During that time Wilhelm Deters was baptized, who later became branch and then district president and the leading figure during the war and right after it. He describes his conversion in a way that sheds light on the situation of Mormons in Bremen:

In 1922 my aunt Johanne became a member of the church. I still remember her going to the meetings during the summer of 1922 with a neighbor. After she visited the meetings regularly for several months, she persuaded me to accompany her to a meeting. I was at once impressed by the kindness with which I was welcomed and came again on the next Sunday. After I attended the meetings a couple of times, I felt comfortable enough to go there alone when my aunt was not well or was otherwise unable. I noticed that I enjoyed it even more if I met with the Saints often—even more after I befriended some of the young people.<sup>48</sup>

What convinced him to join the church was the Doctrine and Covenants: "I still recall exactly that I began reading this book of the church at 9 p.m., and it turned 3 a.m. when I put the book aside and fell asleep. Never had a book fascinated and impressed me like the book Doctrine and Covenants. . . I couldn't get these sayings out of my head, and as if written by a burning pencil, it stood on my heart: This is the church of God!"<sup>49</sup> He was baptized on a bitter cold day in December in the Weser river, which had just started to freeze.

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46. Located around the corner from the former meetingplace in a pub, all in the working class quarter of Walle.

47. State Archive of Bremen Rep. VI E.33 4, 14/ 11, 3rd file.

48. "Life-story of Wilhelm Deters," privately circulated manuscript, copy in author's possession.

49. *Ibid.*

The missionaries now worked without hindrance in the city, and, pursuing lines of kinship and friendship, they had a lot of success. The church was officially recognized and reported in Bremen's "Statistisches Jahrbuch" (census yearbook of the city) with the number of members, baptisms, funerals, and confirmations.

Within the branch, friendships helped the members to progress as Wilhelm Deters remembers: "I received a lot of help in my calling [as a deacon] from my best friend Ernst Milbredt. We worked together in the Priesthood and the Mutual." Later these two formed a group of four friends with Johanna Schubert and Paul Schwarz. During a time of growing economic troubles, the church provided stability for the members as Wilhelm Deters recalls: "The church has always been my anchor and especially now all my hopes and dreams were connected with the gospel of Jesus Christ. I never lost my courage and always tried to fulfill the charges of my church callings."<sup>50</sup> To some the solution to economic troubles was to emigrate, but the branch grew nonetheless due to an even greater number of baptisms. The Mutual and the scout program<sup>51</sup> were started. The first church services were held in Bremerhaven, a city some 50 kilometers to the north at the mouth of the Weser river.<sup>52</sup>

But there are also reports of internal quarrels, even fights.<sup>53</sup> Wilhelm Deters recalls: "Surely, we had also our problems, mostly because of lack of unity, gossip, and working against each other instead of working together, but we overcame these conditions through much prayer and fasting."<sup>54</sup> He says it was especially difficult for some brethren to cope with receiving authority when the leadership was turned over from missionaries to local members: "Some local brethren, now elevated to responsible church positions, had the impression that they were better than the others and started to act accordingly in their relations with other people."<sup>55</sup> He describes one brother whose whole family began to interfere with the branch business.

Despite such problems, in general the church had become strong and well organized in Bremen by the time World War II began. There had, in fact, been only isolated incidents of harassment by the National Socialist (Nazi) government. Wilhelm Deters reported as late as the end of 1939: "The conditions in the branches in the Bremen District are generally good. Those members who have always fulfilled their obligations to the Church still do so even under these trying circumstances." During the war, only one sister lost her life although a great deal of property was destroyed.

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50. Ibid.

51. See "L.D.S. Boy Scout Gruppe Löwe" in *Der Wegweiser*, October-December, 1928.

52. In fact, one session of district conference was held there in May 1929 because of "the great number of friends" who lived there (Historical Department, District Bremen, LR 963 2).

53. Reported by of a former missionary in the mid-twenties.

54. "Life-story of Wilhelm Deters."

55. Ibid.

## THE PERIOD OF STRUGGLE AFTER WORLD WAR II: MISSIONARY SUCCESS IS DWARFED BY EMIGRATION AND INTERNAL QUARRELS

Even before American missionaries returned to Germany in July of 1949, German members had started to take up missionary work. Interest in the church was very high, and Otto Berndt, president of the Hamburg district, warned that this might merely be a product of the welfare goods being sent from the United States to help the German saints.<sup>56</sup> Whatever the reason, the Sunday school classes, opening during that time in areas where no church services had ever been held before the war, had more non-members than members (the Sunday school in Bremen-Burg began with only 12 members among 73 participants<sup>57</sup>). A great number of members also appeared from the east where the church had had large branches and well organized districts before their expulsion (*die Vertreibung*) from what is now Poland and Russia ended German settlement east of the Oder and Neisser rivers. The eastern refugees even opened their own dependent branches, usually within the branch boundaries, such as the first dependent branch in Delmenhorst,<sup>58</sup> a small city close to Bremen.

Prospects could have been very bright for the church in Bremen, but there was the matter of emigration. The First Presidency of the church tried as early as 19 February 1948 to discourage emigration<sup>59</sup>—but without success. Nearly all the members known for leadership and service in the first years after the war soon emigrated to the United States, such as the two district presidents in North Germany, Wilhelm Deters and Otto Berndt, and one of the first missionary couples in Germany, Werner and Elfriede Schmidt, who served a mission from 1946 to 1948. Interestingly, all four returned to Germany later on missions.

The annual branch report for 1951 states that "because of emigration" there were only six priesthood holders, three elders and three priests, left.<sup>60</sup> Before the war, there had been more than 140 members, in 1945 around 50 active members (before the arrival of refugees); now there were 66 tithe-paying members. In 1956 the attendance at sacrament-meetings for the first quarter ranged between only 17 to 39 persons.<sup>61</sup>

By the end of 1958, the numbers had stabilized: 181 members, 7 elders, and 22 Aaronic Priesthood holders were counted.<sup>62</sup> By this time the branch already had its own meetinghouse (dedicated 6 May 1956) because during these years more than 70 people (that is 70 were still on the membership list in 1958) had been baptized in Bremen.

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56. Church Historical Department, Manuscript History of the West-German Mission, LR 10045.

57. Church Historical Department, LR 11024 15.

58. Personal testimony of Brother Skwara sen.

59. Church Historical Department, Manuscript history of the West-German Mission, LR 10045.

60. Historical Department, LR 962 2.

61. Ibid.

62. Historical Department, LR 2428 30 fd.6.

The increase in members over 30 years, however, was just 41 (140 members in 1929 to 181 members in 1958) although more than 40 families from Silesia had come to Delmenhorst alone and more than 70 people had been baptized. Emigration was the problem, and emigration continued up to the mid-sixties, though with decreasing numbers. Membership by the end of 1959 had gone up by 22 members in just one year to 203, including seven baptisms.<sup>63</sup>

While emigration was the principal factor affecting numbers and growth, a second main issue was internal quarrels: In January 1950 we find the first official trace of this when the entire branch presidency in Delmenhorst was released "because of various difficulties in the branch."<sup>64</sup>

The mission history praises the members of the Bremen Branch for their sacrifice to accomodate the visitors to a district conference in 1951,<sup>65</sup> but the branch history of the same date warns about "jealousy of some members with regard to the missionaries" and "gossip."<sup>66</sup> In 1963 things appear to have deteriorated severely: A sister asked for her release because of "too much spitefulness" against her husband, first counselor to the mission president.<sup>67</sup>

The mission president tried to intervene, called for more charity, politeness, and respect and spoke against gossip, contention, fault-finding, etc. Tension was palpable between some of the "brethren" in Bremen and a mission counselor and former branch and district president. The crisis came at a district conference in January 1964 when a brother from Bremen voted against sustaining the first counselor to the mission president. The branch recording secretary commented on this as follows:

The secretary allows himself to note that Brother B, within a conspiracy against Brother N, sticks his neck out for brothers who are too cowardly to raise their hands against Brother N and would rather continue to agitate in the darkness. Members of the conspiracy include elders O (a literally continuous agitator), who may have been driven to this by his wife; elder Z, who fears Brother N and is also opposed to the secretary, Brother K, who has been influenced by this brother and has been blinded by a lasting hate for the N family. On the same evening, following a baptismal service, he attacked Brother N junior. Sister B is possibly the motivator, Brother B the acting part. Brother G must at this time also be counted a member of this group—influence of Brother N. Brother A apparently plays an unexpected and ugly role as careful advisor.<sup>68</sup>

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63. "Almanach Bremen" (1960), internal ward publication, copy in author's posession.

64. Church Historical Department, LR 20736.

65. Historical Department, Manuscript History of the West-German Mission, LR 10045.

66. Historical Department, LR 962 2.

67. Ibid.

68. Historical Department, LR 963 2.

The secretary seems over-zealous (describing himself as "Christ's guardian"<sup>69</sup>) and not a little paranoid. An inquiry into the faults of the late and much opposed leader turned up his strict opposition to American missionaries' marrying German girls<sup>70</sup> and a predisposition to vanity (detractors called him the "the Little King"<sup>71</sup>). Divisions appear to have been less about substance and more about style, but whatever the reasons, the priesthood unity and respect for authority demanded of and widely habitual among Mormons were clearly in tatters.

On 11 October 1964, the mission president acted to deal with this situation, calling a missionary to serve as branch president and to be "absolutely neutral" as "a temporary solution until a German brother in the branch could be found for the calling."<sup>72</sup> This arrangement lasted until 1968. Different missionaries led the branch and trained new leadership around the recently baptized (December 1964) brothers Johann-Friedrich Dierking and Dietrich Behl, supported by an American high school teacher now living in Bremen named Roy Lynn Pugmire.

So we see that during the first part of the years from 1945 to 1958, missionary success was quite remarkable, but too many members emigrated. During the years from 1959 through 1968, inner quarrels and dissention effectively countered missionary success and hindered internal growth. Therefore, the overall success of the branch during this period was much smaller than might otherwise have been possible in a time when there was no strong external opposition from the state or German religious culture. Soon, however, the oppositional awareness of other churches would rise again during the time of hippie "flower power" when the LDS church would be counted among dangerous "youth cults."

## THE SECOND PERIOD OF SUCCESS, 1968 TO 1993: SUCCESS IN (MOSTLY) CALM WATERS

The conditions in the branch improved under the leadership of Dietrich Behl, who on November 10th, 1968 became the first local branch president in four years. He and his successors and co-workers in the branch and district presidency worked along specific lines,<sup>73</sup> which proved to be successful. They tried to consolidate resources and concentrate effort (for instance, by closing the small branch of Delmenhorst in December 1969), and they removed from membership lists members who were no longer interested in the church. (On 11 June 1977, there were 16 excommunications.) Under their leadership the full church program was developed. They began seminary and genealogy courses in 1970, regular home teaching in 1973, and eventually a genealogical library and scouting in 1977. Contact with church headquarters intensified. General conference

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69. Historical Department, LR 962 2.

70. Personal testimony of Sister H. Rögner.

71. Personal testimony of a former missionary, Brother Jensen.

72. Historical Department, LR 963 2.

73. All information taken from the ward files, Historical Department, LR 962 2.

had been broadcast to Germany by radio since 1969, and after 1978 there were regular regional conferences with general authorities. The relationships among members improved greatly through a wide range of activities from socials (regular meetings at the homes of members) and outings (some for the elders quorum and some for the whole branch) to lectures (in April of 1979, for instance, on travel to Turkey and on gardening) and projects of various kinds (a 1978 study project on famous composers, in the same year, the branch newspaper "Sternschnuppe" was begun. A communal "Elders garden" was maintained from 1977 to 1983.) to branch trips to the Swiss temple. (Before 1969 only missionaries had made such temple trips).

Members gained a more intense feeling of belonging to a well organized, international church, not a small, obscure sect and were kept busy by a great diversity of activities. It appears to me that this creative diversity shrank decisively after the church's "correlation program" was fully implemented in 1980. It is at least the case that many members complain that they do far less together with their relief society sisters or fellow quorum members since correlation. And, in fact, the organizational strength of those pre-correlation years was also reflected in the number of missionaries sent out by the branch in Bremen. That number reached its peak in 1978 with five local members concurrently serving full-time missions. The congregation never approached this number again, not even in the mid 1980s when the membership began to grow again.

Public relations for the church in Bremen improved significantly during this period. Press coverage increased and became more positive in the early seventies and then through the efforts of Peter Kemmereit into the early eighties. Relationships with city officials were established and cultivated. Mormon missionaries appeared at the city *Senat* in 1968, and Senator Scherf attended the opening of the reconstructed chapel in 1985. The missionaries sponsored an annual "Week of Missionary Work" (*Missionswoche*) from 1975 on as well as a number of open houses. Although the church was still counted among "dangerous youth cults," especially by other churches, it was well accepted and fairly well known in Bremen during that period.

In early 1980 the question of opening a branch in Delmenhorst became the subject of the only documented disagreement between brother Behl, then district president, and the then current mission president. The recorded account shows that Behl "resisted the idea very much,"<sup>74</sup> but was able to clear the air in a long conversation with Mission President Schreiber, so that "feelings between Pres. Behl and Pres. Schreiber had been restored."<sup>75</sup>

A second disagreement arose between President Behl and Branch President Karl-Friedrich Förster in 1980 over the question of whether the chapel should be remodelled (Behl) or rebuilt (Förster) and ended in a row in a membership

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74. Manuscript History West-German Mission, Historical Department, LR 10045.

75. Ibid.



meeting in January of 1981. Brother Förster was released immediately, but shortly thereafter called as mission secretary and then later as branch president in Bremerhaven.

Both incidents show an ability to solve conflicts quickly and with limited damage. No extended period of contention has been reported from that period. Although Brother Behl tended to make decisions on his own, he was not perceived as a dictator, and was well accepted as a moral authority.

In 1980 and 1981, some people from Sri Lanka and Liberia were baptized and integrated fairly well into the congregation through English classes on Sundays. In the beginning of the nineties, the integration of non-German speaking members from Africa and Eastern Europe proved to be much more difficult, but by this time there were no more foreign language classes. Instead there were translators on Sundays.

On November 8th, 1981, the Bremen congregation became part of the Hamburg Stake, Branch President Roy Lynn Pugmire was ordained a bishop (to be followed by Johann-Friedrich Dierking and Dietrich Behl), and the Bremen Branch became a ward.

An interesting project from the latter part of this period (1985-1989) was the periodic "HLT-Forum,"<sup>76</sup> made up of members of the Bremen Ward: Ulrike and Uwe Drews (daughter and son-in-law of Johann-Friedrich Dierking), R. Lynn Pugmire, and Marcus v. Wellnitz. The purpose of the forum was to provide members with translations of articles published in magazines like *Dialogue* or *BYU Studies* and with similar articles by German members. This seemed part of a self-confident regional church culture, which had developed in Germany during the two periods of success (from 1920s to 1945 and from the mid-1960s to end of the 1980s) but has vanished almost completely since.<sup>77</sup>

### THE CURRENT TIME OF TROUBLES FROM 1997: RASH ACTIONS RUIN THE WORK OF YEARS

This period began in 1991 with a new stake president pushing for more missionary success, the goal being division of the stake. He was also very leery of intellectual activity.<sup>78</sup> In 1992 Bishop Behl was released, and the newly called bishop promised to change everything. He attempted to gain more control of the auxiliaries (the women's and youth organizations) that had formerly operated with a good deal of autonomy. He also called for new missionary efforts and methods (new street displays). But missionary success failed to materialize. There were still just a handful of baptisms each year, except for the baptisms of

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76. HLT (Heiligen der letzten Tage) is equivalent to English LDS (Latter-day Saint).

77. During the latter half of the nineties, the independent magazine *Betrachtungen* resisted this dissolution, but, in the face of stark, conservative opposition from within the church, soon turned antagonistic.

78. He had lost a brother to apostasy because of controversial scholarly writing.

people from Africa and Eastern Europe. These baptisms were strongly opposed by the new bishop, who saw the new converts as being "not fully converted" and mostly interested in financial and legal help from the church. Tension soon arose between the new bishop with his "team," on the one hand, and the old bishop, his team, and the missionaries on the other. The accustomed unity and warmth in the ward faded away. At the ward conference in 1994, three members (two former branch presidents with significant ward and stake callings) voted against sustaining the bishop. They were subsequently calmed down by the stake president, but this time the animosities remained.

Then, in 1996, a member of the ward encountered a couple of disturbing articles about the early history of the church from the *Utah Lighthouse Ministry*, a conservative Protestant organization with an anti-Mormon mission. Attempting to come to terms with these, he asked friends in the ward for help and, in so doing, unintentionally started a wave of apostasy. Another brother translated parts of these articles into German and distributed them to members. In the fall discussion circles formed and letters were written to local and regional church authorities, questioning the official version of church history. The issues at stake were, first, the different versions of the First Vision as evidence of a developing concept of God rather than an initially clear and complete picture through revelation; second, differences between the Book of Commandments and the Doctrine and Covenants as evidence of changed (or possibly forged) revelations; and, finally, controversy over whether the Book of Mormon was a fiction or a genuinely ancient record. The members were especially upset because these papers had been written twenty years earlier (when most of them had just begun their membership in the church), but evidently no church response or explanation had ever been made available.

In February 1997 the mission president tried to solve the problem in one stroke by inviting everyone to a question-and-answer evening. During that meeting tension became acute between the group questioning the church's truthfulness regarding its history and members affirming their testimonies and high esteem for the Book of Mormon and the First Vision. The mission president did not answer the questions specifically, but called for a spiritual approach when hard historical facts were placed in question. When he defined truth as "whatever the prophet says, if he is not mistaken," some members decided to leave the ward. Two former bishops and a former branch president were among those who left. All together thirty people left, most of them long active in responsible church positions such as branch and district presidencies, district and stake high councils. The wards, of course, were left in an uproar and are still trying to regain composure. The Delmonhorst Branch was subsequently dissolved. The remaining dwarf units continue to struggle.

## CONCLUSION

I have tried to show what can be learned from a single ward history about

the parameters of success for a new religious movement, at least in Germany. Even though it is difficult for a centralized religion to cope with cultural specifics at the periphery—and perhaps especially if that culture is German—two means to growth and improvement seem clearly visible in this case:

1) Acceptance by the host culture through good public relations conducted by persons familiar with the culture. In Germany it might really help to seek legal recognition in all federal states, but only if this were done in working cooperation with wards and branches and with an openness to interdenominational institutions and projects<sup>79</sup> so that the church is recognized positively by the general public—and not just legally by some state lawyers.

2) Maintenance of qualified leadership, especially in areas with small membership, by keeping experienced and educated members active in the country and by training members, not just in doctrine, but in a whole variety of leadership skills (not least of all, conflict management). And in connection with this, more openness to a less-correlated diversity of opinions and leadership/fellowshipping methods would help enormously, especially in small German "units" where, in order for the congregation to survive, it is necessary to *invent* synergy. All the members who are there must learn to get along.

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79. One example is the good cooperation with the "Rat der Kirchen in Groß-Berlin" (Council of Churches in Greater Berlin) that helped the church gain legal recognition in Berlin 1954.