

# The Freiberg Temple: An Unexpected Legacy of a Communist State and a Faithful People

*Raymond M. Kuehne*

ON APRIL 23, 1983, a groundbreaking ceremony for the only temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints built behind the Iron Curtain was held in the city of Freiberg, in the German Democratic Republic (GDR)—then East Germany. Henry J. Burkhardt, president of the Dresden Germany Mission and a key figure in that surprising event, provided this enduring image of the ceremony:

We had invited a long list of government representatives, Communists who did not believe in God, who did not pray. . . . President Monson told them that before we have the ground breaking ceremony, we will dedicate the land. We will bow our heads, fold our hands, and pray to our Heavenly Father. Well, I sat there across from these people and thought, I must work with them. How will they react? I prayed with only one eye, and with the other I looked upon that miracle. All the Communists sat there with

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RAYMOND M. KUEHNE was born of German immigrant parents and served an LDS mission in Germany. He majored in history at the University of Utah and studied on a Fulbright Fellowship at Marburg University, Germany, for a year. After a year at the University of Virginia, he opted out of an academic career path and went to work at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland. Presently retired in St. George, Utah, he writes a monthly column for the local newspaper. A mission call to the Freiberg Temple for him and his wife, Genie, provided a new opportunity to pursue history. After researching the origins of the Freiberg Temple, he has begun (with the help of Karlheinz Leonhardt, a local German member) to compile a history of the LDS Church in the German Democratic Republic, 1945–90.

bowed heads and folded hands. . . . At the conclusion, they came to me and said, "We've never experienced anything so beautiful as this." They were deeply impressed. The county council chairman told me, "If you ever need anything, come to me and I will help you."<sup>1</sup>

Two years later in June 1985, 90,000 visitors (in a city of 50,000) toured the completed temple and adjacent meetinghouse during a two-week openhouse. Visitors wanted to see what a small American-based church had been allowed to build in the officially atheistic GDR. Many stood in line for as long as seven hours. One evening, many visitors were still waiting outside at the normal closing time of 8:00 P.M. The doors remained open until the last visitors exited at 1:15 A.M.

How did this unusual event come to pass? And why was the government so willing to help?

For many observers, economics is the preferred explanation, for the GDR needed the western currency that the Church paid for its construction. For others, it was truly a miracle brought about by the faith of devoted members. For a few, it indicated that their local leaders had become too friendly with the Communists. This article discusses these and other explanations.<sup>2</sup> I give particular emphasis to the recollections and insights of President Burkhardt, who was the Church's main point of contact with the GDR during most of that country's existence. No general history of the Church in East Germany would be complete without reference to his experiences and perspective. Information and memories attributed to him without another source come from our informal conversations be-

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1. Henry J. Burkhardt, Interviewed by Raymond A. Kuehne, February 25, 2003, tape and typescript in English. Unless otherwise noted, I conducted and translated all of the interviews. Additional material, identified in the text but not cited, came from informal conversations with President Burkhardt, whom I saw every four or weeks in the temple during his service as an ordinance worker, with Karlheinz Leonhardt, whom I saw almost daily, and with other members as they came to the temple. I made notes on these conversations, in English, usually on the same day. Full names are not always given for German officials because it is customary to use titles and surnames only.

2. For more information about the GDR's relationship to the LDS Church, see Bruce Hall, "And the Last Shall be First': The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Former East Germany," *Journal of Church and State*, 42, No. 3 (Summer 2000): 485ff; and Bruce Hall, "'Render unto Caesar': State, Identity and Minority Religion in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989" (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 2003).

tween January and November 2003 when my wife, Genie, and I were serving as temple missionaries in Freiberg.

In 1952, at age twenty-two, President Burkhardt became a counselor to the president of the East (later North) German Mission, which covered all of East Germany and part of West Germany. He coordinated activities in the east for the next seventeen years. In 1969, East Germany was organized as a separate Dresden Mission, with Burkhardt as president. He served in that position until 1984 when East Germany was organized into stakes. He then became president of the Freiberg Temple but also continued as the "President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in the German Democratic Republic" until the demise of East Germany in 1990.

Among those present at the groundbreaking ceremony in 1983 was Elder Thomas S. Monson of the Quorum of the Twelve, who led the Church's delegation. For him the temple was to be explained as a miracle. Following its dedication in 1985, he wrote in his journal: "Frequently people will ask, 'How has it been possible for the Church to obtain permission to build a temple behind the Iron Curtain?' My feeling is simply that the faith and devotion of our Latter-day Saints in that area brought forth the help of Almighty God. . . . [I]t is only through His divine intervention that these events have taken place."<sup>3</sup>

Ten years earlier, on April 27, 1975, Elder Monson had requested that divine intervention when he rededicated East Germany from a hill overlooking the Elbe River near Dresden: "Heavenly Father, wilt Thou open up the way that the faithful may be accorded the privilege of going to Thy holy temple, there to receive their holy endowments and to be sealed as families for time and all eternity. . . . [W]ilt Thou intervene in the governmental affairs. Cause that Thy Holy Spirit may dwell with those who preside, that their hearts may be touched and that they may make those decisions which would help in the advancement of Thy work."<sup>4</sup>

Those who heard Elder Monson's prayer did not imagine that a temple would be built in their country in their lifetime. They simply hoped

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3. Thomas S. Monson, *Faith Rewarded: A Personal Account of Prophetic Promises to the East German Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 105-6. Elder Monson, the title by which I refer to him in this article, was then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; he became a member of the First Presidency in 1985.

4. *Ibid.*, 36.

for permission to leave their homes long enough to visit the existing temple in Switzerland.

### The Influence of the Swiss Temple

The Freiberg Temple may be seen as the last step in a series of previously unsuccessful attempts to make temple ordinances available to members behind the Iron Curtain. One of those was a little-known effort to build an Endowment House<sup>5</sup> in Chemnitz (known as Karl-Marx-Stadt from 1953 to 1990) in the late 1970s. However, the temple's history actually begins much earlier, with the 1955 dedication of the Swiss Temple. That event had a major impact upon the Church in East Germany and led directly to the construction of the Freiberg Temple thirty years later.

The Iron Curtain did not descend upon East Germany immediately at the end of World War II. The political isolation that would eventually befall its citizens was not obvious to everyone in 1945. Therefore, many members stayed where they were and began to rebuild their shattered homes and lives. After all, conditions in West Germany were almost as stark as in the eastern zone in the immediate postwar years. And since no one anticipated that a temple would be built soon anywhere in Europe, whether one lived in West or East Germany, a temple was still a dream for most.

But as the economy revived, West Germans could consider traveling to temples in the United States. East Germans had no such hope. Their ability to leave their country, legally or otherwise, was increasingly limited over the years. They could wait until their productive working years had ended, when the government might be glad to let them leave without their children. Or they could risk fleeing to West Berlin and waiting there until they found a way to reach the United States. But the wall between East and West Berlin, erected in 1961, soon blocked that exit route, too.

However, the dedication of the first European temple in Switzerland in 1955 changed the course of history for the Saints in East Germany. Without its attraction and influence, it is difficult to imagine that a temple would ever have been built in Freiberg. President Burkhardt wrote:

The commandment to the Saints to attend the temple . . . remained an im-

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5. An endowment house is a temporary facility of limited function in which selected ordinances normally restricted to a temple can be administered. See LaMar C. Berrett, "Endowment Houses," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1992), 1:456.

portant but unfulfilled part of the gospel plan for everyone in Europe and other parts of the world where no temple existed. Hardly anyone had the expectation of attending a temple during their lifetime, despite their faithfulness to the commandments of God. . . . [But] after the temple in Zollikofen was dedicated in 1955, the wish burned within many Saints to go there. . . . Nothing was more important to the priesthood leaders of our country than to fulfill this wish of our members. The temple in Zollikofen—so near and yet so far for the members of the GDR—was our most longed-for goal.<sup>6</sup>

The Swiss Temple brought hope to East German members and a new incentive to reach the west. Members immediately began to make the necessary spiritual preparations. Temple-related topics dominated Sunday School, priesthood, Relief Society, and sacrament meetings throughout East Germany in 1955 and 1956.<sup>7</sup>

Many East German members actually managed to reach the Swiss Temple in its first two or three years of operation. In those days, GDR citizens could request permission to visit relatives in West Germany. If granted, their travel was officially limited to West Germany. But once there, members found ways of reaching the temple. Arrangements were made for Church leaders in West Germany to issue temple recommends, and the West German government issued temporary travel documents with which members could cross into Switzerland. This process is common knowledge among the older members but not documented in the local records for obvious reasons. Some members were required to travel without their children, but couples could at least receive their endowments and be sealed. Of course, the GDR government soon learned of the illegal travel to Switzerland and stopped issuing visas to West Germany. To protect itself, the Church also stopped issuing temple recommends except in those few instances where the members could show they had permission to travel to Switzerland. Thus, travel to the Swiss temple effectively ended after 1957,

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6. Henry J. Burkhardt, "Wie es zum Bau des Freiburger Tempels kam," 1, unpublished typescript, October 1983; photocopy in my possession, used by permission. Translations mine.

7. Karlheinz Leonhardt, *Die ersten hundert Jahre: Eine Geschichte der Gemeinde Freiberg* (Freiberg, Germany: Privately printed by Karlheinz Leonhardt, 2000), 223–24. Leonhardt became a member of the local temple committee in 1982 and was called as recorder at the Freiberg Temple in 1985. Translation mine.

except for some older pensioned members who were given greater latitude for travel.

After 1957, President Burkhardt continued to seek ways to bring members to the Swiss Temple, but without success. Once, in the early 1970s, he asked all of the district presidents to assemble lists of members who were worthy and desirous of going to the temple. He hoped such information might soften the hearts of GDR officials. He took a list with the names of 300 members to Berlin but was fortunate to be allowed to return home that night. He was threatened with imprisonment because he had violated a law against collecting personal information for religious purposes.

### **“Befriend the Communists”**

On June 14, 1969, the Church established a separate Dresden Mission with Burkhardt as president. That administrative change responded to a new GDR law requiring churches to be led by its own citizens. This change was a second major event that would have a far-reaching and unanticipated influence on the future East German temple.

President Burkhardt had never attended a general conference in Salt Lake City. One year after he became mission president, Elder Monson asked him if he could imagine coming to conference. The two men have written about this conversation with some differences. Burkhardt wrote, “On the basis of my experiences in this country, I told him that there was no chance of that ever happening. Whereupon Brother Monson made a prophetic utterance: ‘When the Lord determines that the time is right, you will attend General Conference in Salt Lake City!’” According to Elder Monson’s account, “Brother Burkhardt is a man of great faith. He responded, ‘I believe the Lord will open the way.’ I [Monson] shall pursue this matter.”<sup>8</sup> The First Presidency officially invited him to the April 1972 Conference. To attend, he needed government approval. His first contacts with local GDR officials in Dresden were unsuccessful. They sent him to the State Secretariat for Church Affairs (Staatssekretariat für Kirchenfragen) in Berlin. There, he encountered more obstacles. But after driving more than 1,800 miles, repeatedly calling on East German and U.S. officials in Berlin

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8. Burkhardt, “Wie es zum bau,” 2.; Monson, *Faith Rewarded*, 16.

and Prague (the closest U.S. embassy was in Czechoslovakia), he finally received a visa.

Thereafter, he attended conference regularly. Each trip had to be approved separately. This process forced him to have frequent and direct contact with the Secretariat for Church Affairs and other senior GDR officials. At each visit, he “did not miss an opportunity to mention the wishes and needs of the church members, especially regarding the temple.”<sup>9</sup> The conference visits also provided regular opportunities to report to the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve on conditions in the GDR. During a visit with President Spencer W. Kimball in April 1973, President Burkhardt was surprised when he was told to “develop a good relationship with the government.” He received similar advice at each subsequent visit. President Burkhardt found it difficult at first to accept Kimball’s advice. He responded inwardly, “You don’t know the Communists. You can’t have a good relationship with those people. They are anti-religious, they have threatened to throw me in jail several times, and they constantly make trouble for me.”<sup>10</sup>

During one such visit, President Kimball expressed his personal philosophy that political solutions were generally ineffective—that the world changed when individuals changed. He gave President Burkhardt the following challenge: “Brother Burkhardt, if you want to see a change of things in East Germany, it must begin with you personally. It must begin with you because you are the leader of the Saints there, and you must have a change of heart, which means you must force yourself to befriend the Communists. You cannot hold any grudges against them. You must change your whole outlook and attitude.”<sup>11</sup> Eventually, Burkhardt accepted the advice. “It took a long time, from 1973 until 1976, before I came to realize that Communists were also children of our Heavenly Father, and that I should deal with them accordingly, in a friendly manner. . . . And from that time forth, miracle after miracle occurred in the his-

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9. Burkhardt, “Wie es zum Bau,” 2.

10. Burkhardt, Interview, February 25, 2003.

11. Edward L. Kimball, *The Presidency Years of Spencer W. Kimball* (working title); forthcoming. Quoted by permission; confirmed in personal conversation with Burkhardt.

tory of the Church in this country. They became friendlier and more receptive to me, as a representative of the Church."<sup>12</sup>

### Why Not Establish an Endowment Room?

On May 10, 1978, Bishop H. Burke Peterson of the Presiding Bishopric visited the Dresden Mission. During that visit, he and President Burkhardt visited several branches where the members had, at considerable personal sacrifice, created modest meeting rooms in old buildings. As Peterson and Burkhardt visited these locations, they spoke with admiration of the faithfulness of the members and their desire to go to the Swiss Temple. President Burkhardt reported:

While visiting one such building [in Groitzsch, near Leipzig], Bishop Peterson initiated a subject that I had never before considered. He said, "Why wouldn't it be possible to dedicate one or more newly renovated rooms in such a building in which members could receive their personal endowment?" He was remembering the one-time Endowment House which existed before members in Salt Lake City had access to a temple. Bishop Peterson returned and gave this report to the First Presidency. And although I never saw that report myself, he certainly reported that the possibility existed to create an Endowment Room in a selected meeting house.<sup>13</sup>

Elder Monson did not mention Bishop Peterson's report in his book, but the topic might have been discussed in a meeting between Elder Monson and the First Presidency on May 25, 1978: "President Kimball asked that I remain and meet with him and his counselors relative to a discussion pertaining to our Saints in East Germany and the inability of the Saints to receive temple ordinances."<sup>14</sup> Instead of pursuing the endowment room idea, the meeting apparently initiated a new plan to seek travel permits for six couples at a time to visit the Swiss Temple with the Church guaranteeing their return. Monson reviewed that plan with Burkhardt during a meeting on August 25, 1978, which he described in these words:

We discussed a plan whereby six specified couples' names would be provided to David Kennedy,<sup>15</sup> and he in turn would make an effort with the government to emphasize the importance of a one-time visit to the temple

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12. Burkhardt, Interview, February 25, 2003.

13. Burkhardt, "Wie es zum Bau," 2; Burkhardt, Interview, February 25, 2003.

14. Monson, *Faith Rewarded*, 47.



by every Latter-Day Saint.<sup>15</sup> The theory was that if we could establish a record of credibility, with about six couples going to the temple . . . and returning to their homes in the German Democratic Republic, and then having perhaps six other couples go, the approximately eight hundred worthy but non-endowed persons in the German Democratic Republic could receive these blessings.<sup>16</sup>

I have found records of three visits Kennedy made to East Germany before the temple was built. First, he met with President Burkhardt in East Berlin in September 1975. Second, he accompanied President Kimball to Dresden and West Berlin in August 1977. Third, on August 29, 1978, four days after Monson briefed Burkhardt about the Swiss Temple plan, Kennedy was at the East German foreign ministry in Berlin.<sup>17</sup> On September 8, 1978, Elder Monson “held a meeting with the First Presidency relative to East Germany and the visit of David Kennedy to that country. Our desire is to open up a way for faithful members of the Church in that land to gain exit visas to have their sacred ordinances performed in the Swiss Temple, after which they would return to their homeland. Our hopes are high, but realistically, we feel our prospects for gaining the necessary approval are rather dim.”<sup>18</sup>

### The GDR Suggests a Temple

Prospects for approved travel to Switzerland were not just dim. They were nonexistent. However, in the meantime, the government had proposed another, totally unexpected, option. President Burkhardt explains:

During a May [31,] 1978 meeting at the Secretariat for Church Affairs in Berlin, at which time I again raised the topic of our members traveling to the temple, I was given a different suggestion, namely, to build a temple in the GDR. That suggestion was entirely unexpected, and I tried to present

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15. Kennedy was the former U.S. Secretary of the Treasury and ambassador-at-large in the Nixon administration. He later served as a special representative of the First Presidency during the Kimball administration to improve Church relations with foreign governments.

16. Monson, *Faith Rewarded*, 47–48.

17. “Geschichte der Dresdener Mission” (History of the Dresden Mission), Freiberg Temple Archive, unpaginated. This history consists of entries at weekly or more frequent intervals. The writer is not identified but was probably Burkhardt and/or his wife, Inge.

18. Monson, *Faith Rewarded*, 48.

all possible reasons why it would not be possible. I mentioned that we did not have the required number of members for a temple district. I especially mentioned the *Unantastbarkeit* [sanctity]<sup>19</sup> of such a building once it has been dedicated. Also, that only the First Presidency could decide such a question. Despite all my reasons for declining the suggestion, I was politely requested to discuss the idea with the First Presidency.<sup>20</sup>

President Burkhardt knew that government agents often attended LDS services and assumed that some of the Church's buildings contained hidden listening devices. He did not mention the sanctity issue when he recounted Bishop Peterson's idea of an Endowment Room within a meetinghouse. But he did tell GDR officials now that unauthorized persons could not enter a dedicated temple. They told him that such restrictions would not be a problem.

President Burkhardt immediately sent the GDR's proposal to the First Presidency via Dan C. Jorgensen, the Regional Representative, who was in Dresden the following weekend. Its receipt did not alter the Church's Swiss Temple plan or influence Kennedy's contact with the GDR's foreign ministry in Berlin on August 29. It seems safe to assume that the Church preferred to bring East German members to the Swiss Temple rather than build a temple in a Communist country for the relatively few members who lived there.

However, on September 5, just a few days after Kennedy's visit to the foreign ministry, the Secretary for Church Affairs told President Burkhardt that Kennedy's visit had not been appreciated, that the plan to bring members to the Swiss Temple was unacceptable, and that all discussions regarding the Church's affairs in the GDR were to be initiated and coordinated through the secretary's office by Burkhardt alone. (That had been the government's longstanding policy, and it continued until 1990.) Moreover, the secretary told him that members' access to temple ordinances was to be accomplished through the government's proposal on May 31, 1978, to build a temple in the GDR.<sup>21</sup> In retrospect, it is clear that the Church's plan to transport 600 East Germans to Switzerland, even guaranteeing their return, was not realistic. Such an exception to the

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19. *Unantastbarkeit* translates awkwardly to "unviolable" or "inviolable." I have retained the German word or use "sanctity" throughout the text.

20. Burkhardt, "Wie es zum Bau," 3.

21. "Geschichte der Dresdener Mission."

GDR's restrictions on foreign travel would certainly have subjected the government to charges of favoritism from the country's other churches. Moreover, the GDR's recent program to rebuild historic (and some new) structures for the Lutheran and Catholic churches with western currency was a precedent that could solve the temple issue and bring in needed western currency.

One month later, Elder Monson met with President Burkhardt during the October 21–22 conference in Dresden. His first mention of the GDR's temple proposal appears in his journal a month later on November 22: "I mentioned to the Presidency that the East German government has asked why we do not build a temple in their country. . . . It appears as though the government will not permit its citizens to have visas to go to the Swiss Temple; hence, the only possible way we can provide endowment and sealing blessings for the Saints would be through providing a facility of our own in that country."<sup>22</sup>

Again, on January 24, 1979, Elder Monson wrote: "This morning I again met with the First Presidency to discuss the Dresden Mission and how our people might best receive their temple blessings. Due to their inability to leave East Germany, it may be necessary to provide some facilities there for such ordinance work."<sup>23</sup> A week later, on February 2, 1979, the First Presidency addressed a letter to Burkhardt expressing their pleasure in learning that "the authorities of your government had suggested that we build a sacred edifice in the German Democratic Republic, that our members there may receive these ordinances which mean so very much to them." Included in the letter was "a preliminary sketch of the exterior of such an edifice, as well as a floor plan. After you have had an opportunity to meet with the appropriate officials, you could so advise us [of] their response, after which more formalized drawings would be prepared."<sup>24</sup>

On February 10, 1979, Elder Monson delivered the letter and sketch to President Burkhardt in a touching meeting:

Took the plane to Berlin, Germany, where I had the opportunity to

22. Monson, *Faith Rewarded*, 53.

23. *Ibid.*

24. First Presidency, Letter to Henry Burkhardt, February 2, 1979, photocopy in my possession courtesy of Ivan R. Briggs, who obtained it from Burkhardt.

join Dan Jorgensen and Elder Theodore M. Burton. We had a special prayer at our hotel room, where I revealed to these brethren some tentative plans for a small facility to be erected in the German Democratic Republic for the purpose of temple work.

We then placed the temple drawings as inconspicuously as we could within Brother Jorgensen's briefcase and drove across the border into East Germany. There we met Henry Burkhardt. . . . [He] had tears come to his eyes when he saw the beautiful drawings of a projected building. He felt very good about the proposal and will respond to his government's invitation now.<sup>25</sup>

The proposed design was of one building with two separate functions: a meetinghouse on one side and an endowment facility on the other side with common support facilities in the middle. By placing these two functions under one roof, the endowment space could be used by the branch for other purposes if it were desecrated. Elder Monson initially referred to the endowment component as a "facility" while President Burkhardt called it an endowment house. Regardless of its name, this proposal did not provide for construction and operation of a regular temple. As President Burkhardt explained to me, ordinances would be performed only for living members. The building plans did not include a baptismal font for proxy ordinances. Interviewed in 1991, Burkhardt explained: "The First Presidency wanted to make the blessings available to the members via an Ordinance or Endowment House. The situation was so unsure, that no one could trust the government not to violate the building. They might attempt to enter it. So it was planned at first as an Endowment House."<sup>26</sup>

President Burkhardt presented the plan and sketches to the government the next month. They were favorably received. He was asked to inform the First Presidency that construction could only occur within the so-called special building program, meaning that the Church must pay the construction costs with freely convertible Western currency, a condition

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25. Monson, *Faith Rewarded*, 53–54.

26. Henry J. Burkhardt, Interview by Matthew K. Heiss, Frankfurt, Germany, October 24, 1991, James H. Moyle Oral History Program, Historical Department, Archives, Family and Church History Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter LDS Church Archives); translation mine.

that President Burkhardt and Elder Monson had anticipated.<sup>27</sup> Monson subsequently wrote on March 28, 1979: "Brother Burkhardt indicated that the government authorities liked the building plans which we have submitted and, after indicating that Western money would be required to purchase materials, seemed to give the green light for us to proceed in our steps to have a suitable building in Karl-Marx-Stadt."<sup>28</sup> This is the first reference to Karl-Marx-Stadt as the intended site for the proposed facility. President Burkhardt's record also states that the First Presidency authorized him to obtain a building permit for an endowment house in Karl-Marx-Stadt.<sup>29</sup>

### The Karl Marx Temple?

Why did the church choose Karl-Marx-Stadt (Chemnitz) as the location for the endowment house? And why wasn't it built there?

In conversations with me, President Burkhardt proposed two reasons. First, Karl-Marx-Stadt had a large concentration of members. It had once had three large branches, each with its own rented meeting hall. After the war, the remaining members were organized into the single Chemnitz Branch and met in one inadequate facility after another, as assigned by the local governments. In 1979 when the endowment house was planned, the members were still meeting in ruined buildings. Among all the needy branches, Karl-Marx-Stadt's need was especially urgent. Furthermore, its members could provide the staff for an endowment house. Of course, no one except Burkhardt knew that the proposed building included an endowment house component. But the GDR's offer to build a temple provided a way for the Church to achieve two goals simultaneously in Karl-Marx-Stadt.

When President Burkhardt returned to Berlin at the end of April 1979 to begin negotiations for the building, GDR officials asked him to make a written application. This he did on May 17 with a letter that provides considerable information about the project.

Ever since the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was restored and organized again on the earth in 1830, it has been known as a "temple building church." Ordinances, which are conducted in the temples of the

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27. Burkhardt, "Wie es zum Bau," 3.

28. Monson, *Faith Rewarded*, 58-59.

29. Burkhardt, "Wie es zum Bau," 3.

Church today as in ancient times, cannot be performed in any other place. It is the goal of every member of the church to be joined there as couples and families for eternity.

Our discussions over many years with the Secretariat have repeatedly been concerned with the possibilities that may exist for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the GDR to visit one of the sixteen temples located throughout the world, in order to receive there the ordinances that are the goal of every true member.

The nearest opportunity for members in the GDR to visit such a temple would be either the temple in Zollikofen, near Bern, Switzerland or the temple near London, Great Britain.

During our May 1978 discussion, you asked if the First Presidency of the Church would be prepared to construct such a building in the GDR. Since our present membership of about 5,000 in the GDR is not enough to justify construction of a temple, I personally met with the First Presidency of the Church during my General Conference visit on March/April of this year.

Following intensive deliberations, we came jointly to the decision to construct a so-called Endowment House in our country, that also would be available to members of the Church in other socialistic countries.

An Endowment House, as existed once at the beginning of the Church's history when it was not feasible to build a Temple, is in its functions decidedly less than a Temple, but achieves almost the same purpose.

We have decided to erect this House at an appropriate location that would simultaneously resolve the longstanding need of our branch in Karl-Marx-Stadt for a better place in which to conduct its regular worship services.

The plans prepared by the Church architects, which you have already received, is a project unique in the entire world, which provides for a building to be used partially as an Endowment House (in the east wing reserved for that purpose) and as a meeting house for the Karl-Marx-Stadt branch in the western part.

The Church, however, requires that the east wing be "unanastbar."

In further explanation, permit me to perhaps mention that a Temple (Endowment House) can be visited by the public before its dedication, but afterwards can be entered only by members of the Church who possess a valid Temple Recommend from their branch president. For this reason, I wish to emphasize once again the "unanastbar" issue—as mentioned in our discussion of May 1978.

The First Presidency of the Church has declared its readiness, after an appropriate building lot for this purpose has been found and acquired, to finance the building of the Endowment-Meeting House in the full amount of the estimated cost of about \$700,000, through a lawful method. We are thinking in that regard of the Limex building contractor, regarding which, however, further discussions with you would be necessary.

Overnight lodging opportunities with all sanitary facilities could be arranged for out-of-town visitors in the middle and western portions of this project.

Since the First Presidency of the Church, and I as mission president in the GDR, have carried this decades-long need of our members close to our hearts, we wish to quickly realize the project's completion. I would be very thankful if this great religious need of our members could have your support and assistance. Our members would then no longer search for ways to travel to one of our temples.

Since only the First Presidency and I are aware of this planned project at this time, the First Presidency requests that further negotiations be conducted only with me.<sup>30</sup>

The two years following this formal application in May 1979 were a critical period in the history of the East German temple. An understanding of this period depends on President Burkhardt's notes and recollections, because Elder Monson's journal contains little information. After the March 28, 1979, entry, Elder Monson next wrote on December 2, 1979: "The only problem seems to be the insufferable delays of government red tape."<sup>31</sup> He didn't comment on the project again for nineteen months—until June 1981.

But the plan to build in Karl-Marx-Stadt had run into more than government red tape. It had run into strong Communistic ideology in the city. A center for leftist ideology long before the creation of the GDR, the change of its name from Chemnitz to Karl-Marx-Stadt in 1953 reflected the desire of local leaders to honor their political and philosophic hero. No church building of any denomination had been built there since World War II, and local officials saw no need to make an exception for the Latter-day Saints.

After the meeting of May 17, 1979, President Burkhardt met with Frau Dr. Schumann-Fitzner, the Justitiarin (legal counsel) of the Secretariat for Church Affairs, the following August. She informed him at that meeting that his written application was in her office for review. They discussed the organization of the Church, the purpose of temple ordinances, and the dual function of the building as both an endowment house and a meetinghouse for the Karl-Marx-Stadt branch. At the conclusion of the meeting, Schumann-Fitzner promised to support the proposal and make

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30. Burkhardt, "Wie es zum Bau," 3-4; parentheses his.

31. Monson, *Faith Rewarded*, 63.

the necessary contacts with other government offices, including the district council whose jurisdiction included the city of Karl-Marx-Stadt. She said that the review process could take up to a year.

President Burkhardt contacted her again on March 7, 1980, while making preparations for travel to general conference. She promised to give him an answer within the next week. When she failed to do so, he telephoned her and was told she would be going to Karl-Marx-Stadt in late March to meet with local officials and negotiate an appropriate location for the building. Burkhardt went to the conference without a specific answer. After he returned, the Justitiarin invited him to Berlin. There, she informed him that the district council had agreed to find a suitable building location and that he should return on June 30 to receive that information. However, the site would not be within the city or county of Karl-Marx-Stadt but elsewhere within the district.<sup>32</sup>

Any location outside the city would not meet the Church's twin goals: a meetinghouse for the local members and an endowment facility in a city with enough members to staff it. Therefore, instead of waiting to learn which city the district council would choose, President Burkhardt went directly to the council to present his case. But they told him in no uncertain terms that they would not issue a building permit for any location within the city because it already contained enough church buildings.<sup>33</sup> He persisted, repeating the Church's needs. After asking several questions about the Church and its requirements, the council agreed to reconsider. He then informed the Berlin office, reminding them of the Church's requirements. Berlin also agreed to review the decision.

In the midst of these negotiations, one of President Burkhardt's counselors learned that the Lutheran Church had property in the city on which a large church had stood until 1945. Local church officials were interested in selling the land. Burkhardt returned to the district council on September 5, 1980, and proposed this option to them. They told him that they would not issue a construction permit for a church

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32. The GDR was divided into fifteen *Bezirke* (districts), each covering several *Kreise* (counties). Karl-Marx-Stadt was the name of a city, a county, and a district. The temple site would be somewhere within the district but not in the city or county.

33. Burkhardt, "Wie es zum Bau," 5.



within the city's boundaries because there were enough underused church buildings in the city. Furthermore, the council had already decided to locate the temple in Freiberg, about twenty-one miles east of Karl-Marx-Stadt. As for the local branch in Karl-Marx-Stadt, the council would try to find an existing building in the city that might be renovated to meet its needs.<sup>34</sup>

It had become clear that, even in the GDR, the strong central government was not able or willing to override the firm position of the district council. As President Burkhardt later described these events, "Karl-Marx-Stadt was at this time a major socialistic city. Atheism was thought to be moving victoriously forward. It would have been a blow against the ideology of the day to approve even one new church building in that city."<sup>35</sup>

### From an Endowment House to a Temple in Freiberg

At this point, President Burkhardt consulted with his counselors, Walter Krause and Gottfried Richter. He was concerned that, if he resisted the Freiberg location, the council might assign the Church an even more remote location. Therefore, they began to seriously consider the pros and cons of Freiberg. He wrote:

The more we became acquainted with the available facts, and as the result of our fasting and prayers, we realized that Freiberg should not be rejected out of hand. . . . This city was located between Karl-Marx-Stadt and Dresden; the Annaberg-Buchholz branch was only 56 kilometers away; an Autobahn route between Leipzig and Dresden had been recently completed, which passed near Freiberg, so that Leipzig members would only have to travel 100 kilometers to Freiberg; and there were several smaller branches in the vicinity of Freiberg. So we could not ignore our feeling that Freiberg should not be rejected. Further days of fasting strengthened this feeling, which I then shared in writing with the area president [Apostle Robert D. Hales, executive administrator of the Europe Area] and the First Presidency.<sup>36</sup>

Elder Monson did not refer to these developments in his journal, and there is no indication that President Burkhardt received any immediate response from Church officials. In the meantime, the district council

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34. *Ibid.*, 6-7.

35. *Ibid.*, 7.

36. *Ibid.*, 7-8.

had asked the Freiberg county council to accommodate the Church. On January 15, 1981, the district council asked Burkhardt to send a floor plan and an external sketch of the proposed building to Freiberg.<sup>37</sup>

The Freiberg county council and the city mayor, Dr. Werner Runge, subsequently invited President Burkhardt to meet with them on March 24. At that meeting, which was conducted in a very friendly and open manner, Runge said that the city welcomed the opportunity to build something for the Church, especially since Freiberg would be celebrating its 800th anniversary in 1986 and wanted to upgrade its appearance. The temple would be a welcome addition. However, the inner city was a cultural/historical site subject to relevant guidelines of the United Nations. It would not be possible to accommodate the type of building the Church had proposed within the inner city. The officials requested additional details about the Church's needs so they could suggest appropriate building sites. They also suggested that the Church include lodging and car parking facilities since they understood that the building would be used by members from other socialistic countries. Burkhardt left with the feeling that the city and county were proud to be able to undertake this project.<sup>38</sup>

President Burkhardt left for general conference the next day. On April 2 he briefed Elders Monson and Hales on these developments. Three days later, he met with Elder Hans B. Ringger, the Regional Representative and ecclesiastical contact for the project; Church Architect Emil Fetzer; Bishop H. Burke Peterson, a counselor in the Presiding Bishopric; and Marvin R. VanDam, a representative in the Church's Frankfurt Area Presiding Bishopric Office assigned to coordinate communications and planning between Europe and headquarters in Utah. At the conclusion of these two meetings, the plan for an endowment house had become a plan for a free-standing temple. In a letter summarizing the second meeting, Bishop Peterson wrote: "The facility, hopefully to be constructed in Freiberg, East Germany, can probably serve and be referred to as a temple." The building would include "an ordinance room large enough to hold a busload of Saints plus a few, a sealing room, a baptismal font, an area for initiatory ordinances, clothing/dressing facilities, a small en-

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37. Burkhardt sent Freiberg the same plans that had been prepared for Karl-Marx-Stadt, which provided for one building with two separate functions. He did not receive plans for a free-standing temple until June 21, 1981.

38. Burkhardt, *Wie es zum Bau*, 8.

trance foyer, an interview/instruction/office room for the president, and, a records office for the recorder." Because patron attendance would be "scheduled—by appointment in effect," there would be no need for a full-time temple president.<sup>39</sup>

After returning from Salt Lake City, President Burkhardt wrote to the Freiberg county council on April 29: "We have definitely agreed upon Freiberg as the location for our Temple, and our architects have begun to prepare the detailed project plans in accordance with the suggestions and thoughts of the mayor and city architect."<sup>40</sup>

Elder Monson had not attended the April 5 meeting. He does not mention this meeting nor any of the events in 1980 and early 1981 which resulted in Freiberg as the proposed temple site. His next entry was on June 3, 1981, when he noted: "Met with Burke Peterson and Emil Fetzner relative to schematic plans for a new temple in the German Democratic Republic."<sup>41</sup>

Two days later he wrote:

I met with the First Presidency and with Burke Peterson, there to discuss the matter of the proposed temple in the German Democratic Republic. I asked the brethren of the Presidency if they felt it was time to share with any of the other General Authorities the confidential work we are doing with regard to this building. The Presidency felt that such sharing could be deferred until we are more certain of our location and the approval of the plans of construction.<sup>42</sup>

Interestingly, neither of Elder Monson's June entries refers to Freiberg as the new proposed location, despite the letter of April 6. As for plans, President Burkhardt received a new set on June 21, which he forwarded to Berlin. Until this point, GDR officials had been in possession only of the plans previously prepared for Karl-Marx-Stadt, which reflected a single building with two separate functions. For the first time, these plans showed two separate buildings. Burkhardt wrote: "To the temple (and no one speaks any more about an Endowment House) was added a meeting house for the Freiberg branch, which should also serve as a hostel

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39. Peterson, Letter to Burkhardt et al., April 6, 1981; photocopy courtesy of Ivan Briggs.

40. Burkhardt, "Wie es zum Bau," 9.

41. Monson, *Faith Rewarded*, 69.

42. *Ibid.*, 69–70.

(Herberge) for temple visitors.”<sup>43</sup> He described these developments in a 1991 interview: “[I] received authorization from Salt Lake to enlarge that building, whereupon the concept of Endowment House began to crumble and a Temple emerged.”<sup>44</sup>

The project appears to have sat on government desks in Berlin during the summer vacation period; but on September 22, the Secretariat’s legal counsel, Dr. Schumann-Fitzner, told President Burkhardt that the state had given the “green light” to the Freiberg project.<sup>45</sup>

That news might have been a reason for rejoicing. But there is no evidence of it in Elder Monson’s journal, and subsequent correspondence shows that unnamed individuals continued to have doubts about the Freiberg location long after the apparent decisions of April 5. Konrad Nagele, Building Division Manager for Europe, strenuously attempted to dispel these doubts on October 2, 1981, in a memo which he drafted on behalf of Elder Ringger, President Burkhardt, and himself to Marvin VanDam in Frankfurt. Nagele cited the previous problems with Karl-Marx-Stadt, the decision of April 5, 1981, and Burkhardt’s subsequent success in getting the approval of the GDR government for the Freiberg project. He said that failure to continue with the Freiberg location “would mean starting all over again, and that is out of the question.” To suggest that the temple be built elsewhere ran “the risk that the project could be delayed for years, with the eventual risk of losing all that we have accomplished so far.”<sup>46</sup>

A month later, President Burkhardt sent his own letter to Elder Monson, giving additional reasons why he and his counselors supported the Freiberg location:

A long time has passed between our conversations last spring and the recent submission of the necessary documents for the Freiberg project, during which time I prayed frequently for clarity concerning this project. I now feel quite sure that the decision that has been made concerning Freiberg is the best and most correct decision that could be made. During the intervening time, I tried again and again to evaluate other options, to determine

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43. Burkhardt, “Wie es zum Bau,” 9; parentheses his.

44. Burkhardt, Interview, Heiss, October 24, 1991, 13.

45. Burkhardt, “Wie es zum Bau,” 9.

46. Nagele, Memorandum to Marvin VanDam, October 2, 1981; photocopy in my possession courtesy of Ivan Briggs.

if there were other places better suited for the establishment of this building. But every time I came back to Freiberg.

At first, the decisive factor for me was that our government had given its approval for this city. Since the city fathers of Freiberg were very friendly and receptive to this project, understood its purpose, and considered it important that we build there, a very good relationship developed between both parties. I came to understand that to reject the approval we had obtained from the government would delay for many years the opportunity to make all of the ordinances of the gospel available to our members. It would be irresponsible for me to initiate such a delay.

However, when I viewed the situation from the perspective of the entire mission, Freiberg is a more favorable decision than either Karl-Marx-Stadt or Leipzig. If Karl-Marx-Stadt had been the choice, there would have been, other than Karl-Marx-Stadt, only Annaberg-Buchholz as another large branch in the area. If we had chosen Leipzig, there would have been only the Leipzig branch itself available to manage the extensive work. . . . In the case of Freiberg, we have the nearby larger branches of Annaberg-Buchholz, Dresden, and Karl-Marx-Stadt, and in the immediate vicinity of Freiberg there are five smaller branches. These are all within 5 to 50 kilometers from Freiberg. . . . The traffic circumstances are very favorable. Freiberg can be reached easily by car via the Autobahn. . . . Since most of our members will have to come by train, we have good connections [via] the county seats of Dresden and Karl-Marx-Stadt. . . . After consideration of all these factors, I find the prospect of locating in Freiberg to be a great blessing.

I desire only that you, dear Elder Monson, understand that I am very comfortable with the Freiberg location and that I stand completely and fully behind this decision. My counselors have shared this same feeling with me and they are in complete agreement with these considerations.<sup>47</sup>

After reassuring Elder Monson about the Freiberg location, President Burkhardt's next task was to locate a specific building site. Although cars and buses are the predominant means of travel to the temple today, fewer members had cars in 1981 and Burkhardt assumed that most would come by train. Therefore, he wanted a location with access to/from the train station. On January 19, 1982, he met with Freiberg officials, who told him they had identified two potential sites. He visited those sites that day, accompanied by Frank Apel, the mission executive secretary. One site was immediately adjacent to the old town, just outside the old city wall. While it had good connections to the train station, it was rather small,

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47. Burkhardt, Letter to Monson, November 5, 1981; photocopy in my possession courtesy of Ivan Briggs. Translation mine.

was next to a heavily traveled road, and was so far below the level of that road that travelers would look down upon the temple. Moreover, the site was over a former mine shaft, with indications that the ground might be settling. The second site was on the extreme northwest edge of the city near the top of a small hill. It was farmland without nearby public transportation at that time. Utilities would have to be extended to that site at additional cost. But the site offered expansion possibilities. President Burkhardt said, "At that time, we received a very definite revelation in our heart that this was the place where a worthy house should be built to the Lord."<sup>48</sup>

President Burkhardt reported these findings to Elder Hales, who viewed the two sites on February 9. He also preferred the second site. Elder Monson visited the site on February 28 and wrote a long account of that day's events. They are noteworthy for the absence of any comment about the lot itself and for only a brief description of the city: "This morning we drove to Freiberg . . . and saw the site selected for a temple there. All of the buildings in Freiberg are ancient and dilapidated. This is a university city where Henry D. Moyle studied following his mission in Germany. New apartment buildings, though stereotyped and somewhat drab in appearance, are planned to be constructed across the street from our site."<sup>49</sup>

The last two words, "our site," reveal Elder Monson's acceptance of Burkhardt's recommendation to build the temple in Freiberg. His otherwise unenthusiastic journal entry might be explained by President Burkhardt's recollection of their conversation that day, in which Elder Monson asked him: "Have you thoroughly considered this choice? Freiberg? Is that really the right place? How will the people come here without adequate public transportation?" As President Burkhardt discussed this episode with me, he felt that Elder Monson "wanted to create doubts in our mind, that is, to challenge our conclusions." President Burkhardt did his best to answer Elder Monson's questions but felt that his best answer was to communicate the strong positive feeling he and his counselors had received following their prayers and fasts. They felt deeply that this was the place the Lord wanted, despite all the reasons they had presented earlier while trying to build in Karl-Marx-Stadt.

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48. Burkhardt, "Wie es zum Bau," 10.

49. Monson, *Faith Rewarded*, 72-73.

### Buying the Land with Local Currency

Although Elder Monson usually attributed the existence of the temple to the hand of the Lord, he also wrote in his journal on September 23, 1981: "It looks as though the public officials of the German Democratic Republic, due to their desire for Western currency, will be cooperative in the endeavor."<sup>50</sup> While most of the temple's construction costs were paid with convertible Western currency, the land itself was bought with local currency. If Western currency had been the main motivation of the GDR government, they missed a great opportunity to obtain even more through the sale of the land.

The use of land in East Germany was tightly controlled by the state, and its use for private construction projects was severely restricted. Allocation of land for the construction of new churches was virtually unknown in the GDR prior to this time. In his comments regarding the earlier Karl-Marx-Stadt effort, Elder Monson had implied that leasing the land would be acceptable. He still was willing to consider this option after visiting the Freiberg site: "The government is willing to make the temple site available on a very long-term lease, that we might construct a building."<sup>51</sup>

Given the Church's concern (discussed below) that the temple might not have a long life under Communism, land ownership probably was not a major concern for Elder Monson. But President Burkhardt felt otherwise and brought the issue to the attention of county and district officials. He described to me that when he told them that land ownership was a prerequisite, their response was positive: "No problem," they responded. "If the land must be purchased, that will have to happen."

The temple site was owned by two elderly couples. Decades earlier, the GDR had moved them off the land, which was now being used as a "people's farm cooperative." The owners had never received any income or other compensation. In the GDR, private property was assigned a value for taxation purposes, which usually became the official sales price. However, actual sale prices generally were higher. The official price of this farm land was only 17 East German Pfennig (cents) per square meter, which was a small fraction of the land's potential value as a building lot. Burkhardt said he was not comfortable taking the land at such a low price. He obtained permission from the Church to pay the

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50. *Ibid.*, 70.

51. *Ibid.*, 73.

owners 50 East German pfennig per square meter. Dr. Dieter Hantsche, the German architect assigned by the GDR to oversee the project, had researched the property records and found the original owners. He later said that it was he who suggested the 50 pfennig price to Burkhardt. The initial purchase of almost 12,000 square meters was completed in July 1982.<sup>52</sup> In any event, the extra money was given to the owners informally, as was the custom. They were overjoyed to receive it. Later, the Church bought a small additional piece of property behind the temple from the same owners. At the city's suggestion, the Church also purchased an adjacent corner lot from the city to extend the street frontage and protect the view to and from the temple.<sup>53</sup> The two additional sections of about 2,800 square meters were purchased in June 1987 and February 1990.

During the groundbreaking ceremony of April 23, 1983, Elder Monson asked President Burkhardt, "Where will the temple president live?" President Burkhardt said they had never considered that question, since the letter of April 6, 1981, had said there was no need for a full-time temple president. But Elder Monson replied, "I have one requirement. He cannot live here on the temple grounds, but may not live more than ten minutes away. Find a lot where you can build a house for the temple president."<sup>54</sup> Shortly after this conversation, Dr. Reinhard Vetter, the county council chairman, approached President Burkhardt. He had been impressed by the ceremony and had offered to help. Burkhardt immediately told Vetter that the Church needed a building lot for a single family house for the future temple president. Burkhardt related that Vetter told him, "Okay, it will be done." Burkhardt gave Vetter "the requirements and he provided the lot where the president now lives. And that at a time when individuals were rarely allowed to build private homes. They did everything possible for us."<sup>55</sup> That

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52. Both Burkhardt and Leonhardt related these developments in informal conversations.

53. Karlheinz Leonhardt, "Grundstücke der Kirche in Freiberg" (Church Property in Freiberg), February 2004, a one-page summary in my possession.

54. Burkhardt, Interview, February 25, 2003.

55. Ibid.



property, consisting of 875 square meters, was also purchased with local currency.<sup>56</sup>

Why did the East German government pass up these opportunities to acquire additional convertible currency through the sale of the property? The answer is complex, and I discuss a possible explanation later; but these purchases do not support the idea that the GDR initiated the temple project primarily to obtain western money. To President Burkhardt, these developments were the guiding hand of the Lord at work. On the day following the official announcement of the temple's construction, President Burkhardt and Elder Monson both spoke at a stake conference in Utah. Monson later recorded this comment by Burkhardt: "The building of a temple has never before been permitted in a Communist nation. In this case, the government itself suggested the building of the temple [and] our land was purchased with German Democratic Republic marks rather than with currency from the Western nations. All in all, the event has been miraculous."<sup>57</sup>

A related story about western currency is noteworthy. The initial temple plan included a heating plant to burn the highly polluting brown coal widely used in East Germany. However, its smokestack would tower far above the temple. President Burkhardt told Dr. Hantzsche that such a structure was unacceptable and that the temple would not be built under those circumstances. Hantzsche promised to review the matter. He later called Burkhardt and told him that a pipeline carrying natural gas from Russia to West Germany passed close by Freiberg. It was a major source of convertible currency for the Soviet Union. Some private homes were permitted limited access to that pipeline, but large facilities, including the nearby Bergakademie (the highly rated mining technical university) were not. Together, Burkhardt and Hantzsche requested access to that pipeline. After their initial request was denied, Burkhardt informed the Foreign

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56. Leonhardt, "Grundstücke der Kirche in Freiberg." By GDR law, all contributions to the Church stayed in the GDR, where the Church had its own account. President Burkhardt was authorized by the First Presidency to expend tithing funds and other Church contributions in-country. After the temple was announced, contributions were invited from each ward/branch. Joyfully, the members donated about twice the suggested amount, some of which was spent on temple furnishings and for operating and maintaining the temple during the GDR period. The construction itself, as noted, was paid for in western currency.

57. Monson, *Faith Rewarded*, 85.

Trade Ministry that the project would not proceed without natural gas. His request was approved, and the fuel was paid for in East German currency until reunification in 1990.<sup>58</sup>

### A Temple with a Limited Life Expectancy

While President Spencer W. Kimball encouraged President Burkhardt to establish good relations with GDR officials, Church leaders in general were strongly opposed to Communism. The most vocal was Ezra Taft Benson, who succeeded Kimball in 1985. He expressed his opposition to Communism and Communists at every opportunity, in and outside of church meetings. It is a common belief among members in the former East Germany that the temple would not have been built if President Benson had succeeded President Kimball sooner than he did.

Perhaps Benson's vocal opposition to Communism was the reason for an unusual promise that President Kimball made in 1982. Elder Hales organized the local temple committee in Freiberg on February 8, 1982 (eight months before its public announcement). As Karlheinz Leonhardt related the story to me, Elder Hales brought a personal promise from Kimball that he would remain on the earth until the temple was completed. President Kimball's health problems were widely known at that time, and he died shortly after the temple's dedication. Perhaps that promise was given to reassure East German members who were aware of Benson's attitude toward Communism. A full review of the Church's attitude toward Communism and the East German government or the GDR's attitude toward the Church in general is beyond the scope of this article.<sup>59</sup> But in light of the Church's concern that the temple might be violated, it is appropriate to ask why the Church went ahead with the project and to consider the impact of that concern on the actual construction.

The decision to proceed with a temple (or earlier with an endowment house) was ultimately a recognition by the Church that there was no other viable option whereby East German members could receive temple

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58. Burkhardt, Interview, February 25, 2003; conversation with Leonhardt.

59. See Hall, "And the Last Shall be First," and his "Render unto Caesar," as well as Gregory A. Prince, "The Red Peril, the Candy Maker, and the Apostle: David O. McKay's Confrontation with Communism," this issue.

ordinances.<sup>60</sup> But that decision did not mean that the Church trusted the government to honor the temple's sanctity. President Burkhardt had frequently raised the issue of *Unantastbarkeit* with GDR officials, and the earlier plan for the facility in Karl-Marx-Stadt would have allowed the endowment space to be used for other purposes if it were violated. Similar concerns persisted as plans for the Freiberg Temple moved forward.

Given the concern that the temple could be desecrated, priority during the first few weeks was given to members who had not previously been to a temple. Members came by appointment, with each day reserved for one or more specific LDS branches. Most members received all of their personal ordinances on that day. Therefore, even if the temple were desecrated, it would have accomplished its major purpose.<sup>61</sup> Because of this uncertain life expectancy, it is not surprising that the Church would try to limit its financial loss in the event of a violation. Several examples of cost avoidance can be seen in the temple's size, facilities, and materials. Members frequently describe the materials as "*mittelmäßig*," a word that translates to "average" quality, but which means "mediocre" in everyday German. The Church's official website states that "quality construction materials were not available during the original construction of the temple."<sup>62</sup> However, in many instances, availability was not the main issue. Both Burkhardt and Hantzsche have told me that better quality items were available within East Germany or could have been imported from the West through the foreign trade ministry if needed.

Hantzsche also added that the temple was built in strict accordance with detailed instructions from Salt Lake City. Many of his own recom-

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60. Another option might have been considered. President Kimball received a memorandum from G. Homer Durham, dated January 4, 1979, that cited examples of sealings performed in Arizona outside a temple and without a prior endowment, due to difficult travel circumstances. On his copy, President Kimball wrote "E. Germany." My thanks to Edward L. Kimball for sharing this information with me.

61. Burkhardt, Interview, July 4, 2003.

62. See Freiberg Temple page, [www.ldschurchtemples.com](http://www.ldschurchtemples.com), checked February 2004. The website also repeats a common belief that the GDR had not allowed a statue of Moroni to be placed on the temple. However, Burkhardt and others have said that Church representatives never requested permission to position a statue of Moroni, nor was it drawn in on any of the plans. They feel that the GDR would likely have approved it if they had asked.

mendations regarding temple facilities, features, and upgraded materials were rejected by the Church's architect, Emil Fetzner. For example, Fetzner specified galvanized iron for the temple's interior water system, despite Hantzsche's warning that local water quality would lead to corrosion of those pipes. More expensive alternatives, such as copper piping, were available but not authorized. As feared, the pipes quickly corroded and had to be replaced within a few years.

Hantzsche told me that he called the temple a "closed building" since none of its windows could be opened for ventilation. He knew that the limited system specified by the Church's architect (which did not cool or dehumidify the air) would not maintain a comfortable temperature on hot and humid days. He recommended the installation of a complete air conditioning system. Excellent systems were available and used in East Germany, especially when manufacturing projects required "clean rooms" in windowless buildings. Leonhardt confirmed to me that an air-conditioning system was already functioning in such a building in Freiberg at that time. Nevertheless, Hantzsche's recommendation was rejected. As a result, it was not unusual that members would faint during endowment and sealing sessions due to the high temperature, humidity, and poor air circulation. A cooling system was finally installed in 1994, after the reunification of Germany.<sup>63</sup>

It should be noted that two other European temples received air conditioning from the outset: the Stockholm Sweden Temple (also dedicated in 1985) and the temple near Frankfurt, West Germany, which was announced before Freiberg but not completed until 1987. Frankfurt weather is like Freiberg's, while Stockholm is considerably cooler. But there was no concern about the life-expectancy of those temples, which probably accounts for the discrepancy in facilities.

Hantzsche recommended that the deep excavation specified for the temple's foundation walls be used to create basement space for future expansion or for functions that could not be accommodated within the small floor plan. Basements are normal practice in German construction. However, he was told to push the dirt back into the excavation. Without a

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63. Burkhardt reported that a total of 250–300 temple patrons had become unconscious due to overheating and poor air circulation in the endowment and sealing rooms between 1985 and 1990. Regional Council meeting, Berlin, Minutes, July 14, 1990; photocopy in my possession.

basement or other options, the temple's laundry space was an interior room of seventy square feet that lacked adequate venting from the washers and dryers. Temperatures often reached 90 degrees, with high humidity, and created very difficult conditions for the temple workers who staffed the laundry. According to Hantzsche and Leonhardt, the lack of air conditioning in the temple further complicated the laundry room problem.

Hantzsche also recommended that the space under the adjacent meetinghouse be finished to provide for overnight lodging of foreign patrons or for other future needs. Again, he reported to me, he was told to push the dirt back into the excavation. Patrons who came from long distances and remained at the temple overnight or for an entire week had to be accommodated in makeshift sleeping, eating, and washing facilities in the adjacent meetinghouse or in a former meetinghouse in Grosshartmansdorf, eight miles to the south. Finally, in 1994, two additional buildings were added to provide for a hostel (*Herberge*), adequate laundry facilities, workrooms for the temple engineer and maintenance staff, changing rooms for temple workers, and the sale of temple clothing.

Lothar Ebisch, a local Church leader and regional building supervisor, participated in meetings with both Hantzsche and Fetzer during the construction of the temple. He confirmed that Hantzsche's recommendations for upgraded facilities and materials were not accepted and recalled that Fetzer expressed concern about the temple's life expectancy during those meetings.<sup>64</sup> Given this concern that the temple could be desecrated, President Burkhardt was not surprised that President Gordon B. Hinckley, when he arrived for the multiple-session dedication on June 29–30, 1985, was heard to express the hope that it would not soon become a museum. However, President Burkhardt added that Hinckley appeared to be more relaxed about the temple's future after he lunched with Hermann Kalb, who represented the State Secretary for Church Affairs.

### The Temple from the GDR's Perspective

The Ministry of State Security (known as the Stasi) was famous for its extensive spy network. In addition to its army of regular employees, it recruited thousands of citizens known as "Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter" (IM or unofficial co-workers) to covertly monitor and report on their friends and associates at home, on the job, and in their social activities. One study esti-

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64. Lothar Ebisch, Interview, November 16–17, 2003.

mates that, in 1968, “anywhere between one and two million people worked for the Stasi, a number which constituted between 8 and 12 percent of the total population.”<sup>65</sup> The Stasi thought that this American-based church might be engaged in espionage. Therefore, it was not unusual to have Stasi employees and/or IMs attend and report on Church meetings and observe other activities of local Church members. President Burkhardt himself had been designated “an enemy of the state” and at least three IMs were assigned to cover his every activity. Therefore, he always exercised extreme care in selecting places where he could hold private conversations.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, it would be expected that the Stasi would actively monitor Church members associated with the temple project. Leonhardt established from one member’s Stasi file that at least twenty-one IM informers were assigned to monitor the temple’s 1985 openhouse as well as the daily activities of local Church officials.<sup>67</sup> When the Stasi made an assignment to an IM, it had to provide a justification in writing for the record. The following justification, filed by a local Stasi office when it authorized coverage of one Church member, is typical of many and provides an interesting summary of the Stasi’s attitude toward the LDS Church:

Regarding the political-ideological orientation of the US-American Mormons, it was determined that they are to be classified as representatives of the right wing of American conservatism. There are close connections between their leadership and ruling circles within the American government. Relationships also exist between persons and institutions of the church and the American secret service. As a result, it has been determined that

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65. David Childs and Richard Popplewell, *The Stasi: The East German Intelligence and Security Service* (Washington Square, N.Y.: New York University Press, 1994), 86, quoted in Hall, ““And the Last Shall Be First,”” electronic text (unpaginated) in my possession courtesy of Bruce Hall.

66. Burkhardt told me that, while he knew some of the individuals who reported on his activities, he preferred that faithful members report factual and harmless information to the Stasi rather than have disaffected members report malicious and untruthful information. He also chose not to review his own Stasi file to avoid knowledge of others who had been required to engage in such activities.

67. Leonhardt, *Die ersten hundert Jahre*, 358–62.

the Mormon organization provides favorable conditions for the development of hostile intelligence gathering or even broader negative activities.<sup>68</sup>

But the Stasi did not view the Church's assumed "close connections" only in a negative light. One East German Church leader told me that his Stasi file showed an interesting change of emphasis over the years. While an early 1970s entry stated, "It must be assumed that the leaders of the Church, knowingly or not, could become tools of American policy," an entry in 1985 said: "With the construction of the temple in Freiberg, the Church has become more politically important to us." Or, as an official of the Secretariat for Church Affairs told this same member in 1985, "We do not judge your Church according to its number of members here but rather by its influence in the USA and increasingly in the world."<sup>69</sup>

The GDR wanted to improve its public image in the West, and the Stasi as well as other government officials had come to believe that favorable treatment of the Church might help them achieve that goal. Similar references to the Church's assumed influence appeared in the GDR's newspapers. For example, a 1974 *Wochenpost* article said, "A tiny sect has become one of the richest and most powerful churches in the USA . . . and its influence reaches into the highest government positions in Washington." It cited Ezra Taft Benson's position in Eisenhower's cabinet, which had ended more than a decade earlier in 1961.<sup>70</sup>

The extensive monitoring of Church members and research of Church doctrine and practices became a positive factor in the decision to build the Freiberg Temple. Kurt Löffler, the GDR's last State Secretary for Church Affairs, said that his government had observed the Church over many years and had determined that its members were hard working, honest, reliable, family-oriented citizens who did not participate in anti-government activities. He was especially impressed that members practiced the principles in their Twelfth Article of Faith, which speaks of "being subject" to kings and other rulers and of "obeying, honoring, and sustaining the

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68. *Ibid.*, 358. The Stasi assigned this particular informant to report on possible criminal activity, family relationships, associates and colleagues, and estimates of the number of temple ordinances from 1985 through 1989.

69. This source is confidential.

70. Wolfgang Carle, "Prophet und profit, die mormonen: Ihre geschichte und geschäfte" (Prophet and Profit, the Mormons: Their History and Businesses), *Wochenpost*, n.d. 1974, no. 51, p. 11; photocopy in my possession.

law.”<sup>71</sup> As Löffler saw it, the exemplary life of the East German members was more significant to the government than the anti-Communism rhetoric of its Utah leaders. Therefore, the Church in the GDR met two key criteria: its members were seen as “true and valuable citizens,” and the Church had a “good relationship with the state in which its members lived.”<sup>72</sup>

Bruce Hall confirmed Löffler’s opinion in his previously cited study of the GDR-LDS relationship. While the GDR was well aware of the strong anti-Communist attitude of Church leaders in Utah, Hall concluded his review of the GDR-LDS relationship with this statement: “The accommodation and cooperation exhibited by the GDR for the Mormons is astounding.” Interestingly, he also said, “What exactly their ulterior motives were has not been exactly determined.”<sup>73</sup>

In Löffler’s opinion, another essential factor was the emergence of a new generation of leaders within East Germany and later in the Soviet Union. Erich Honeker took effective control of the GDR in the early 1970s. Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in the mid-1980s. Löffler considered the new generation of GDR leaders to be more pragmatic and less doctrinaire than their predecessors. He preferred to identify them as “socialists” rather than “Communists.” They were willing to accept and accommodate the religious interests of their citizens as long as those interests did not threaten the government. According to Löffler, the temple would not have been suggested a decade earlier by the previous GDR administration.<sup>74</sup>

While most Germans would not share Löffler’s view of Erich Honecker as “more pragmatic and less doctrinaire,” Löffler cited the GDR’s initiative in the 1970s to define and establish a new relationship between churches and the state. Within that definition, churches were officially recognized and accepted as long as they did not threaten the sovereignty and authority of the state. Based on that understanding, the GDR began to rebuild (with funds provided from western sources) many historic

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71. Kurt Löffler, Interview, Berlin, Germany, May 19, 2003. Although he was appointed State Secretary for Church Affairs in 1988, he had previously been a State Secretary in the Ministry of Culture and had been involved in the GDR’s program to restore historic church buildings, which were viewed as cultural rather than religious edifices.

72. *Ibid.*

73. Hall, “Render unto Caesar,” 279.

74. Löffler, interview, May 19, 2003.



churches destroyed during the war. Löffler said that the GDR's initiative to build the Freiberg Temple was an extension of this new GDR program.

GDR law prohibited any reduction in the amount of state-owned land. While the state had begun to build a few new Lutheran or Catholic churches where no previous church property existed, in those instances the state traded its land for church-owned land elsewhere. However, the LDS Church did not own any previous church sites nor did it have other property that could be traded. Elder Monson would probably have accepted a long-term lease, but President Burkhardt wanted to buy the land. Therefore, according to Löffler, the good will that had been developed between the state and the Church caused the GDR to look for ways to help the Church. "It was a question of fairness," he said. "Other churches had their land. The LDS did not. Without land, the temple couldn't be built."<sup>75</sup>

The state found and proposed property that was privately owned, although it was being used as a state-operated farm. Therefore, its purchase did not technically reduce the amount of government-owned land. Thus, when Burkhardt told government officials that the land must be purchased, they were able to assure him that this requirement was not a problem.

But why did the GDR accept East marks? Why didn't the government use this opportunity to obtain more convertible currency? When I asked Löffler this question, he explained that land, in principle, was not for sale to outside interests. Although "Western money was needed for construction to compensate the state for the loss of its material resources, that applied only to building costs. If we had sold our land for Western money, it would have opened doors to other buyers. We didn't want that kind of precedent." Since the proposed temple property was still officially owned by the two elderly couples, the deal went forward with the fee being paid in local currency to its legal owners. I have not presented Löffler's interpretation of these events as the official GDR interpretation, but it is compatible with Hall's description of the GDR's relatively warm relationship with the LDS Church beginning in the latter 1970s. It is also compatible with President Kimball's assurance to President Burkhardt that "the world changes most effectively when individuals change."

Does an official GDR explanation for the temple exist? One has not yet been found. But even if one were found, would it be credible? Hall

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75. *Ibid.*

found an interesting one-page, undated, untitled, and unsigned document in a file on the LDS Church among the papers of the State Secretariat for Church Affairs. Because of its defensive tone, it was probably intended as background information for officials who might need to justify to its critics the government's decision to approve the temple's construction. It reads:

1. Reasons for the GDR's Decision to Authorize the Construction of the Temple.

Mormons are one of over 40 religious groups in the GDR. They are a very small group but equal under the law. Churches and religious centers are being built by many of these groups. Since funds were available, the government approved the Church's application under normal procedures. Comparable Mormon centers will be built in Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden, and Karl-Marx-Stadt by 1990.

2. Why Was Freiberg Chosen as the Location?

Freiberg was chosen following constructive negotiation because a building lot was available there which met the temple's requirements. Freiberg is exactly between two large Mormon congregations in Dresden and Karl-Marx-Stadt and an appropriate site was not found in either of those two larger cities. In the opinion of the architects, the Mormons, and the local governments, the temple fits harmoniously into this historic city and its historical landscape.

3. What Does the GDR Government Think of the Mormons?

All religious organizations within the GDR are guaranteed religious freedom and equality under our constitution. The position of the GDR government toward the Mormons is the same as toward any other religious organization.<sup>76</sup>

There is some truth to the statements in this document, but not much. Despite the claim that the temple's construction constituted "business as usual" for the GDR, the LDS Church clearly received special handling from the government. And the 90,000 visitors that came to the open-house testify to the public's perspective that this was an unusual event. The stated reason for selecting Freiberg is particularly interesting and contrary to fact. Freiberg was selected by the district council despite President Burkhardt's repeated explanation that the Church needed to

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76. Cataloged after reunification as: Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (SAPMO-BArch): DO 4/987; photocopy in Bruce Hall's possession. I express appreciation to him for providing me with a typescript copy by e-mail. Translation mine.

build in Karl-Marx-Stadt. Furthermore, the district council selected Freiberg before any building lot was identified in that city. Moreover, the Church was never a party to any “constructive negotiation” about the move to Freiberg. Finally, despite the beauty of the temple itself, no one who has visited the city of Freiberg would believe that the temple was built there because it “fit harmoniously” in that historic city or the surrounding area.

### Summary and Conclusions

Even though Freiberg was not the Church’s first choice of location, President Burkhardt often said, “The Lord held this undertaking firmly in his hand and inspired all participants in such a manner that decisions were made that would support this important event.”<sup>77</sup> Was the “hand of the Lord” evident in the failed effort to build an endowment house in Karl-Marx-Stadt? Without the doctrinaire resistance of that city’s Communists, a limited function facility (without a baptism for proxy ordinances) would have been built there. It would have been inadequate and outdated just five years later.

In that case, would a regular temple have been built elsewhere in eastern Germany? Not likely, given the availability of the Frankfurt Temple. The result would have been a major loss not only for members in the eastern part of Germany, but for the growing church membership in the Ukraine, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Byelorussia, the Czech and Slovak republics, and Kaliningrad who attend the Freiberg Temple. By being forced (or led) to Freiberg, the Church obtained enough land for the initial 1985 temple, its enlargement in 2002, living quarters for temple missionaries, and lodging for the many patrons from within Germany and abroad who stay for a week at a time. None of those facilities were included in the plan for Karl-Marx-Stadt.

The Freiberg temple as it exists today is best understood and appreciated in the context of its historical origins. It evolved out of intersecting (whether conflicting or complementing) priorities of the LDS Church and the East German government. It began with efforts of East German Saints to reach the Swiss Temple after its 1955 dedication. The GDR effectively closed that door after 1957 as part of its effort to stem the flood of emigration that threatened its very existence. The Church then tried to

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77. Burkhardt, “Wie es zum Bau,” 11.

bring a few couples at a time to the Swiss Temple with a Church guarantee of their return. The GDR rebuffed that proposal but simultaneously made its own proposal: to build a temple in the GDR. The Church somewhat reluctantly accepted that offer but proposed only a limited function endowment house in Karl-Marx-Stadt that would meet the most pressing need of its members—access to personal ordinances. That plan failed to overcome the resistance of local Communist officials to any new religious facility in that city. But the GDR's own priorities led it to find an alternative and willing host in the city of Freiberg. Local Church leaders enthusiastically accepted that offer, and leaders in Salt Lake City eventually agreed. And despite their continued concern about the sanctity of the building, the Church actually expanded its proposal to include a full-function (albeit very small) temple instead of an endowment house.

Observers of this historical process will make their own assessment of the critical or supporting factors that converged to produce this temple. They include, on the one hand, Elder Monson's 1975 dedicatory prayer; the faith of the East German members in its promises; their dedication to living the associated Church principles; their resulting reputation as honest, true, and valuable citizens; and the acceptance by their local leaders of President Kimball's challenge to establish good relationships with GDR officials.

On the other hand, one can recognize the emergence of new GDR leaders; their need for convertible currency for their faltering economy; their program to rebuild historic churches with convertible currency; their need for better relations with the West, especially the United States; and their belief that the LDS Church could help them achieve that relationship. It is impossible to replay history, removing one variable at a time, to determine which of these factors were most important. However, the available evidence indicates that the GDR's need for convertible currency was an essential but not a sufficient factor. The GDR also needed a "partner" that it could trust, a "partner" that did not present an overt challenge to its legitimacy. The Church met that criterion. And President Burkhardt said that after he accepted President Kimball's challenge to develop better relationships with GDR officials, those officials became more willing to assist him and the Church.

One factor that cannot be measured objectively is President Burkhardt's perception that "the Lord held this undertaking firmly in his hand." Elder Monson requested that help when he prayed in 1975 for divine intervention in governmental affairs: "Cause that Thy Holy Spirit

may dwell with those who preside, that their hearts may be touched and that they may make those decisions which would help in the advancement of Thy work.”<sup>78</sup>

To what extent hearts were actually touched and softened might best be known by those officials who bowed their heads during the groundbreaking ceremony and who subsequently said, “We’ve never experienced anything as beautiful as this. If we can do anything to help you, let us know.”<sup>79</sup>

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78. Monson, *Faith Rewarded*, 36.

79. Burkhardt, Interview, February 25, 2003.