

regime. *Moroni and the Swastika* is not the book upon which to base a reconsideration of Mormon dealings with government powers, however. Its treatment of its sources is too unreliable, its attribution of motives is too fanciful, and its aim is too firmly directed toward condemnation without understanding.

### Notes

1. Christine Elizabeth King, *The Nazi State and the New Religions: Five Case Studies in Non-Conformity* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1982), 184.

2. *Ibid.*, 194.

3. *Ibid.*, 200.

4. *Ibid.*, 84.

5. Alan F. Keele and Douglas F. Tobler, "The Fuhrer's New Clothes: Helmuth Hübener and the Mormons in the Third Reich," *Sunstone* 5, no. 6 (1980): 24.

6. See Douglas Peifer, "Commemoration of Mutiny, Rebellion, and Resistance in Postwar Germany: Public Memory, History, and the Formation of 'Memory Beacons,'" *Journal of Military History* 65 (2001): 1015–16.

7. Otto Berndt, letter published in "Bufs and Rebufs" in response to "The Church in Germanic Lands," *Improvement Era* 72, no. 5 (1969): 100–01.

8. Keele and Tobler, "The Fuhrer's New Clothes," 29 no. 25.

## Guilty as Charged? Mormonism in Nazi Germany

David Conley Nelson. *Moroni and the Swastika: Mormons in Nazi Germany*. Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015. 432 pp. Hardcover: \$29.95. ISBN 978-0806146683.

*Reviewed by Saskia Tielens*

*Moroni and the Swastika* arose, in part, as a response to a query put to the author about the persecution of Mormons in the Third Reich. David Conley Nelson describes how his stepson, raised on the stories of Mormon persecution and Latter-day Saints'

willingness to endure much for the sake of the gospel, made the inference that Mormons must have been among the victims of Nazi Germany. This query led to a research paper, a presentation at the Mormon History Association's annual meeting, and ultimately a doctoral dissertation and a book.

Nelson's book centers on a bold premise: that Mormonism in Germany did not only survive the Third Reich relatively unscathed but actually benefitted from it. Nelson, who has a PhD in history from Texas A&M University, asserts that the Church, helped by faithful historians, is invested in promoting a picture of German Mormons as suffering for the sake of the gospel. However, a more accurate picture would be one of careful collaboration. Nelson claims that German members and their American leaders and missionaries were skillful enough to ensure survival while the Nazis were in power and avoid retribution once the war was over at the same time. Throughout the book, Nelson uses the rhetorical devices of "memory beacons" and "dimmer switches" to illustrate the construction of memory sites and the ways in which realities of collaboration, then, were transformed into memories of appeasement and survival.

The book has a dual focus, dealing both with the history of Mormonism in Germany before and during World War II and the ways in which Mormonism remembers said history. It has three parts, discussing the Mormon *Sonderweg*, the pre-war years, and finally the cultural memory that has come out of those years. Nelson opens with the memory of Max Reschke, a German Mormon who was instrumental in saving Jewish friends and co-workers, yet is not remembered as a hero because his resistance did not match the directive for German Mormons to obey the twelfth article of faith, which prescribes obedience to civil powers at all times and in all nations. According to Nelson, Reschke stands out because he saw a clear conflict "in being a good Mormon and a good citizen of the Nazi State" (5). Reschke is held up as the counter-example of Helmuth Hübener, a resister now heralded for his courage in dissenting.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the book, Nelson includes plenty of biographical examples to support his narrative. This not only humanizes this vast and complex subject but also illuminates one

of the questions at the heart of his book: who gets remembered and who is doomed to be forgotten?

The first section of the book traces the advent of nineteenth-century Mormonism. Nelson places particular emphasis on the importance of foreign, and especially German, converts to the cause of Zion. The first thirty years of Mormonism in Germany is a story of relentless proselytizing in the face of clerical and governmental opposition and the continuous emigration of converts to the United States. The era of unification, followed by World War I and the Weimar Republic, brought more permanence to the Church and provided a useful training ground in how to negotiate with hostile governments, giving Mormons the opportunity to develop the tools they would need to survive the Third Reich. Americans were able to regain ecclesiastical control of local units after the Great War, and the new democratic freedom of the Weimar Republic gave Mormons the right to preach unmolested. Mormonism's connection to America meant German Mormonism could rely on American diplomats, consular officials, and other friends in high places when needed, and the ability to negotiate with German authorities would be the most useful tool available to German Mormon leadership in the coming years.

Part two, then, sets up the pre-war years as the history Mormonism has conveniently chosen to forget. Here and elsewhere, Nelson uses the Jehovah's Witnesses as a counter-example, discussing the ways they opposed the new regime and suffered for that opposition. It is made very explicit here that the charge, as it were, is not that Mormonism survived but that "sometimes their enthusiastic embrace of Hitler's regime exceeded the necessities of survival" (xvi). That Mormonism endured, Nelson claims, has in part to do with selective morality: the twelfth article of faith was hardly obeyed in the United States during the era of polygamy, yet it was held up as the gold standard in Nazi Germany. This apolitical stance went so far as to exploit common interests between Hitler's system and Mormonism, such as a common interest in genealogical research. That Hitler's emphasis on genealogical research had more to do with proving biological purity than offering deceased relatives a form of salvation is conveniently ignored

by Mormons both in America and Germany, Nelson argues.<sup>2</sup> Other “Hitler myths” are discussed as well, such as the (fancied) connections between Hitler’s teetotalism and the Word of Wisdom or *Eintopfsonntag* and fast Sunday, for example. Another chapter deals with the topic of “basketball diplomacy,” or how Mormon missionaries used basketball as a proselytizing tool and ended up helping train the German Olympic basketball team despite the anti-Semitic and fascist character of the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Nelson argues that this helped Mormonism win friends among German officials and position itself as not-an-enemy in the Third Reich. In a similar vein, Mormonism surrendered its Boy Scout program in favor of the Hitler Youth.

Throughout the book, Nelson builds up to an important assertion: that though the Nazis certainly punished individual Mormons, the Church as a whole was not persecuted, despite persistent collective memories that say otherwise. Nelson goes further, however, and argues that Mormon leaders ably navigated life in Nazi Germany, disobeying authorities only when doing so would not bring about any serious consequences. He discusses two men in detail to prove this point, namely mission president Alfred C. Rees and apostle J. Reuben Clark. Rees is characterized as a mission president that is more interested in the political than the spiritual. Clark represents the American interest and, more importantly, the American power that German Mormonism had at its back and that was instrumental for its collaboration and survival.

In part three, Nelson engages with Mormon cultural memory. Opening with the story of Karl Herbert Klopfer, an East German mission president, he discusses the construction of Mormon cultural memory. Klopfer, he argues, is particularly suited to be a “memory beacon” because “Klopfer obediently answered the call of his country while maintaining service to his church” (225). The chapter discusses a variety of memory beacons, from men involved in the evacuation of American missionaries before the war to German Mormon soldiers saved in battle to post-war relief efforts. The last two chapters deal with the legacy of Helmuth Hübener, the teenager caught distributing anti-Nazi leaflets who was executed by the authorities, excommunicated by local leadership, and posthumously

reinstated in the Church in 1946. According to Nelson, Hübener's popularity stems from the "stark contrast [it provides] to a mission president who rendered the 'Heil Hitler' greeting . . . to a church hierarchy that hastily purged Semitic references from its liturgy and ignored the pleas of Mormonism's Jewish converts" (288). What makes the Hübener example interesting for the purposes of this book is the "dimmer switch that allows his commemorative light to be brightened or darkened according to the self-interest of the Salt Lake City church leadership" (288–89). Nelson uses the circumstances surrounding the production of several plays to explore cultural memory surrounding Helmuth Hübener and ultimately concludes that Hübener and the memory of others like him are merely a smoke screen or distraction from the reality of (German) Mormon accommodation.

Throughout the book, Nelson takes on questions of culpability by placing the blame firmly on the shoulders of the institution, not rank-and-file German Mormons. From policies set into place before World War II that denied help to German Mormon Jews to the post-war "dimming" of inconvenient memory beacons, Nelson pushes for a reading of culpability on the part of American Mormon leadership. He demonstrates how cultural memory is constructed and why particular examples are foregrounded and others are forgotten. If I have any criticisms about this section, it is that his theoretical framework of memory beacons serves his book well, but only minimally acknowledges prior scholarship on the construction of memory, even as it builds on said scholarship. Acknowledging this would have lent both credence and depth to his analysis, and I would have been interested in knowing how, for example, the subject of Mormon memories fits in with the larger field of study relating to memory and the Holocaust, or the Second World War more generally. Stripping out the dissertation's theoretical framework may have been a choice necessitated by the book's intended popular audience, and it must be said in that case that this book is very accessible to non-specialists.

Reflecting the priesthood leadership structure of the LDS Church, Nelson's research and analysis focus almost entirely on males. The instances where women make an appearance in the book serve to reemphasize this, as their position in the narrative

is marginal at best, placed there to reinforce their male counterparts' decisions and actions. This omission may be explained by Nelson's dependence on mission records, in which women usually only make a peripheral appearance, but it is a meaningful—and telling—absence in a book of this scope.

This area of study has been long dominated by faith-promoting narratives that do little justice to the complexities of life—and religion—in wartime. This book, however, ultimately swings too far the other way: Nelson seems determined to counter the existing narratives by systematically interpreting historical evidence in the worst possible light. Nevertheless, I would urge readers to ignore the book's sensationalist cover: the branding does not accurately reflect the book's content and more careful readers may still find much to interest them in the book.

### Notes

1. Further complicating his status in Mormon memory, Reschke, a branch president, was eventually excommunicated for adultery—not exactly the conduct becoming of a hero featured in the *Ensign*.

2. Here, as elsewhere in the book, while the rank-and-file face questions of culpability (Nelson brings up Hannah Arendt's concept of the “banality of evil” [113]), it is Church leaders who are condemned—as men in the position to know more, there is less room for moral ambiguity. Nelson does say that after the *Kristallnacht*, favorable articles in the *Deseret News* about genealogical research in Germany no longer appeared and “Mormons on both sides of the Atlantic then began to take another view of genealogical research in Hitler's Reich” (115).

## Families are Forever and Ever and Ever

Families Are Forever, DVD. Directed by Vivian Kleiman. San Francisco: Family Acceptance Project, Marian Wright Edelman Institute, San Francisco State University, 2013.<sup>1</sup>

*Reviewed by Robert A. Rees*<sup>2</sup>

*Families Are Forever* is a short film about a Latter-day Saint family, the Montgomerys, living in central California who have a gay son