

Julie K. Allen: *Danish but Not Lutheran: The Impact of Mormonism on Danish Cultural Identity, 1850–1920.* Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2017, 288pp.

Scandinavians are still overwhelmingly Lutheran, though religiosity has tended to give way to ‘believing in belonging’ over the centuries. Their national churches are still seen as custodians of culturally significant rites of passage bringing people together at life’s critical junctures. As Professor Julie Allen explains in her study of Mormonism’s impact on Danish culture and identity, Denmark was the first Nordic nation to officially decouple citizenship from Lutheranism. Being a Dane had meant being Lutheran, but the new 1849 constitution separated the two identities by legalising the activity of new religious movements while retaining the privileged position of the state church. This leap in religious freedom was preceded, for example, by Baptist activity in the kingdom.

Denmark was Mormonism’s point of entry into Scandinavia, which became one of the faith’s nineteenth-century strongholds. The constitution allowed the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormon mainstream) to enter legally ‘through the front door’ in 1850. Nevertheless, such access did not save Mormons from opposition even in the form of early violence, in addition to more commonplace theological criticism. Danish cultural identity rested on shared elements such as language, customs, history,

and, not least, religion, causing the advent of new Anglo-American religious movements to be perceived as a threat to national integrity and social order.

To a non-American scholar Allen’s work is especially welcome, because it does not focus on the well-rehearsed narrative of Mormon emigration and the converts’ new lives in Utah, as many studies of early Mormonism in non-American locales tend to. Instead, the story centres on the host nation, probing its relationship with Mormonism from multiple perspectives as a new cultural element. For example, how did the Danish elite react to its arrival? How is Mormonism’s impact seen in sources such as newspapers, books, and films? How did conversion affect the identity of Danish Mormons? To answer these questions, the author offers four chapters with chronologically and thematically diverse snapshots or case studies that emerge from a plethora of Danish Mormon and non-Mormon materials. The case studies are illustrated with relevant paintings, photographs, or silent-film stills. Given the frequent references to various localities, a map would have been helpful for the book’s non-Danish readers.

A major case study concerns the brothers Søren and Peter Kirkegaard. Whereas the philosopher Søren protested against the Lutheran church because he felt it prevented a person developing into a real Christian, he did not publish anything directly about the

Mormons. In contrast, clergyman Peter confronted two inexperienced Mormon missionaries during their preaching meeting, eventually producing an 1855 treatise about what he saw as a perversion of Christianity. He also retaliated against Mormon emigration with its promises concerning health, wealth, and salvation in Utah, thus providing a variation on a prominent theme of the 1910s, when the issue of female 'white slavery' was connected to the Mormons in politics, the press, and film.

Another snapshot portrays Baroness Elise Stampe as an early observer who took the Mormons seriously, apparently in an attempt to understand a friend's conversion. A disciple of Grundtvig, Stampe wrote a long unpublished manuscript in which she analysed Mormon history and doctrine, finding fault with some parts and giving credit where she felt it was due. In particular, and in a comparatively rare display of cool-headedness for the time, she pointed out the hypocrisy and ignorance among those who condemned a new faith without really knowing anything about it.

Mormon polygyny was a topic of constant concern in Denmark, although it was not practised there. It conjured up images of the exploitation of women, the forcing of female converts to go to Utah to join polygamous harems, and the deceptive use of sacred doctrine as a foil for immorality. Thus, street ballads and later films depicted the plight of the Mormon emigrant woman and

the intrigues of a Mormon 'priest' trying to capture gullible women. Indeed, Mormonism became so synonymous with polygyny that it could be used 'as a shorthand explanation for polygamous relationships', for example, in the silent films that Allen covers (p. 177).

In addition to such reactions by non-Mormons Allen provides snapshots into identity development and negotiation among Danish Mormon converts. The focus is on converts who emigrated to Utah, which involved major changes in family relationships and feelings of cultural belonging. As Allen demonstrates through their letters, these emigrants still felt themselves to be Danes and continued mingling with other Danes in Utah. Her examples are a reminder that despite church policy aiming at rapid assimilation, many first-generation Scandinavian Mormons in Utah clung to their native language and customs for decades.

While it may reflect the difficulty of finding good primary sources, I find it unfortunate that the book fails to analyse the lives and identity negotiations of the Danish Mormons who stayed in Denmark, that is, those who continued building and leading their church in the homeland. The lives of such non-emigrants would provide an even greater depth of understanding regarding what it meant to remain 'Danish but not Lutheran'. The sole partial exception in Allen's discussion is the well-documented case of Frederik Ferdinand Samuelson,

but even he emigrated to Utah in 1919. As the first non-American Mormon parliamentary member in the world, Samuelson's religion was seen as odd but was tolerated by his compatriots, in part because of his significant contributions to society.

As one who appreciates statistical rigor, I was disturbed by a seemingly cavalier attitude to numbers. According to earlier work by William Mulder in *Homeward to Zion* approximately 23,500 individuals converted to Mormonism in Denmark between 1850 and 1905. About a third of these became disaffected, whereas about 12,700 emigrated to the United States. Based on Andrew Jenson's *History of the Scandinavian Mission*, fewer than 2,000 additional Danes became Mormons between 1906 and 1920. Allen's work cites both Mulder and Jenson, but still erroneously claims that approximately or more than 17,000 (p. 1, p. 8, and p. 186) or more than 18,000 (dust jacket) Danish Mormons emigrated during those years. An emigration rate of about 50%, while high, thus does not reflect their 'almost universal propensity' (p. 18) to do so.

The disaffected third is forgotten when the inaccurate claim is made that roughly 23,000 nineteenth-century converts 'remained committed to [Mormonism] for the rest of their lives' (p. 186). And while the total number of converts is reported accurately at one point (p. 67), it is also variously expressed as 'approximately 30,000' between 1915 and 1920 (p. 1, with 1915 probably being an editorial oversight), nearly

30,000 between 1850 and 1900 (dust jacket), or 'tens of thousands' 'over the next decade' after 1850 (p. 15, should probably read 'decades'). However, the suggestion that F. F. Samuelson would have 'seen thousands of missionaries come and go' (p. 240) during his Mormon years in Denmark (1892–1919) is unnecessary hyperbole.

A more important issue with numbers concerns the scale of Danish Mormon membership and missionary effort during the period of study. Although the waxing and waning of the Mormon presence is discussed generally and some early numbers for Baptist membership are provided for comparison (p. 41), the reader does not get a solid comparative grasp of the various non-Lutheran movements operating in Denmark. Coupled with the practical disappearance of the other movements from the book's later discussion, the central argument about the significance of the Mormon effect on developing Danish conceptions of identity is thus not supported to the fullest extent. Statistics and comments on the development of other movements would have been useful in further bolstering the case.

Nevertheless, these are minor quibbles of a fine work of scholarship by Julie Allen. Her book exhibits the kind of sociocultural analysis to which the study of Mormonism and Mormon history can aspire. Analysing new religious movements as elements of their various host cultures in this manner offers

an abundance of uncharted avenues for study and new understanding. For Mormon studies especially it affords an almost untapped cornucopia that brings the field into increasingly productive discussion with the study of religion and culture more generally. Allen's work is recommended as a model for such research, especially when societal dynamics related to Mormonism are of interest, and Allen is to be commended for painstakingly 'walking the walk' by learning and working with a foreign language and culture.

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