

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

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

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

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

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

historian D. Michael Quinn's resignation from BYU due to the controversy over Quinn's book on Mormon origins and the magic worldview (1988) and Quinn's later excommunication from the LDS Church (1993) (136–137). Other anecdotes illustrate the intensity of polemical exchanges between scholars during the Mormon “culture wars” of the 1980s and 1990s. For example, in 1994 BYU scholar William Hamblin published a scathing critique of an essay by an independent scholar, Brent Metcalfe. The latter championed a critical approach to the Book of Mormon that contextualized it within nineteenth-century America, a move that Hamblin could not countenance. Consequently, Hamblin, who had a reputation for writing long, polemical critiques of his intellectual opponents, structured his essay as an acrostic that spelled, “METCALFE IS BUTHEAD” (32).

Unlike these colorful opening and closing chapters, Helfrich's middle chapters are staid in tone and content. In chapters three and four, for example, Helfrich examines what he terms the “Old Mormon History,” produced by mainly American academics before World War II, with the “New Mormon History,” a movement started in the 1960s by mainly American scholars who were looking for a new, non-apologetic approach to the study of Mormonism. Helfrich maintains that there was not, in fact, much new in the New Mormon History compared to the Old Mormon History, with the exception that there was simply a lot more of the New Mormon history. Both intellectual movements, he maintains, utilized the academic tools of sociology and history to grapple with the Mormon past, trying to avoid the ever present “prison house” of apologetic Mormon history. Helfrich also documents the formation of Mormon studies associations, conferences, journals, and Mormon studies chairs at universities. In doing so, he deftly situates the academic study of Mormonism within the evolving bureaucracies of American academe and its supporting organizations.

Helfrich makes his most important contribution in two other middle chapters—one on social theory and Mormon origins and the other on a cultural studies approach to Mormon origins. Here, Helfrich guides the reader through a variety of twentieth-century social scientific theories of religion and their application to Mormonism, from church-sect theory to relative deprivation theory. In doing so, he does not simply recount and critique what Paul Johnson, Jan Shipps, or Lawrence Foster said about Mormon origins. Helfrich also intervenes to offer his own preferred methodological approach for thinking about Mormon origins.

In the broadest strokes, Helfrich favors explaining Mormon origins through a cultural theory approach rather than a social theory approach. By this, he means that early Mormonism was first and foremost an interpretative act undertaken by people who worked through varied Biblically inspired symbols and rituals available to them (culture), and, in doing so, were shaped by, but were not fully determined by economic, geographic, demographic, and political forces (social forces). Thus, while he never states it, Helfrich takes a position famously championed by Clifford Geertz in which culture has a realm of autonomy to itself, even if it stands upon a “social ground.” Furthermore, Helfrich, like Geertz, thinks that scholars should first seek to understand the “cultural scripts” (what Geertz called “cultural texts”) of a people before fitting those same people into pre-existing social theories (147). If this culture versus social debate sounds a bit dated (or unfamiliar) to contemporary ears, Helfrich forthrightly admits in his introduction that he is “old school,” and he is “all right with that” (x).

Helfrich's book is not an unalloyed success. He published with a smaller press that gives authors little copy-editing support, and his text shows this, with numerous punctuation errors and occasional repeated phrases. More substantively troubling, in his short conclusion, “Whither Mormon Studies?” Helfrich opines that Mormon studies

scholars will likely “trod over the same well-worn paths they long have” and “offer little in the way of theoretical novelty” (147). I disagree. Ann Taves (cognitive social psychology), Sonia Hazard (new materialism), John Durham Peters (media studies), Melissa Wei Inouye (organizational studies), William Davis (performance studies), Fennella Cannell (kinship studies), P. Jane Hafen (Indigenous studies), Caroline Kline (global feminist studies), and K. Mohrman (queer studies) are just a few of the contemporary Mormon studies scholars who offer theoretical or methodological innovation in the field with applications far beyond it.

Even so, Helfrich provides an insightful synthesis of Mormon studies up until the turn of the millennium. Like very few scholars, he expertly situates these works in the world of sociology as well as within the oeuvre that constitutes American religious history. And, as an adjunct professor for his entire career (and now retired even from that), he offers his readers an academic labor of love that will result in virtually no remuneration or career advancement for himself. Whether you believe in reading works simply for academic insight or reading works as part of an activist practice (that is, lifting up the voices of scholars marginalized in the contemporary academy), Helfrich’s work deserves your careful attention.

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***Reformed and Evangelical across Four Centuries: The Presbyterian Story in America.* By Nathan P. Feldmeth, S. Donald Fortson III, Garth M. Rosell, and Kenneth J. Stewart. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2022. Xix +364 pp. \$29.99 paper.**

This study primarily explores the history of evangelical Presbyterianism in America over the past four centuries. The first four chapters provide important background information. These chapters review the rise of Protestantism in the British Isles, the emergence of Puritans and Presbyterians within Stuart England, Presbyterians’ role in the English Civil War, and the impact of the restoration of the monarchy upon Presbyterians in England and Scotland. Subsequent chapters examine the growth of Presbyterians in the middle colonies and southern colonies during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the organization of the first national body in 1729, the roles Presbyterians played during the First and Second Great Awakenings, and the Revolutionary War. These chapters pay particular attention to how theological commitments informed Presbyterians’ involvement in these events, as well as how they impacted theological beliefs. Subsequent chapters analyze Presbyterians leaders’ involvement in debates over slavery, the Civil War, and church schisms and reunions and their response to Darwinism, immigration, urbanization, and industrialization, and the impact of the German university model of higher education upon American Protestantism. Chapters covering the twentieth century analyze the fundamentalist-modernist controversies, Presbyterian missionary efforts during the first half of the century, debates over women’s ordination, the Civil Rights Movement, and changes to the confessional standards of