

*Danish but Not Lutheran: The Impact of Mormonism on
Danish Cultural Identity, 1850–1920*

By Julie K. Allen

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Reviewed by Jason A. Kerr

In keeping with the title *Danish but Not Lutheran*, I will begin by saying what Julie K. Allen's book is not. It is not a history of the Latter-day Saint mission to Scandinavia; see Andrew Jenson's 1927 *History of the Scandinavian Mission* for that. Nor is it a history of the mass emigration of Latter-day Saint Danes to Utah; see William Mulder's 1957 *Homeward to Zion* for that.¹ Rather, as the subtitle advertises, it is a history that studies "The Impact of Mormonism on Danish Cultural Identity"—that is, this book uses The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to understand Denmark, not the other way around.

The context, then, in which the book's historical work unfolds is not the familiar story of the Restoration from its beginnings in New York to the Saints' eventual settlement in the Great Basin, augmented by missionary journeys around the world. Instead, the book's context is the religious milieu surrounding Denmark's 1849 constitution, which transitioned the government from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional one and also, for the first time since the Reformation, decoupled the Lutheran national church from the state and allowed Danes de facto religious freedom. Allen, a professor of comparative literature at Brigham Young University, uses Latter-day Saints in Denmark to explore the time before the constitution, when to be Danish was also to be Lutheran, and the complex dissociation of those identities in the constitution's aftermath.

1. Andrew Jenson, *History of the Scandinavian Mission* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1927); William Mulder, *Homeward to Zion: The Mormon Migration from Scandinavia* (1957; repr., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

As Allen shows, the architects of Danish religious freedom were powerful members of the religious establishment: Ditlev Gothard Monrad, a Lutheran bishop and statesman, was a driving force behind the drafting of the constitution. The pastor and influential thinker Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig developed a powerful cultural vision of a capacious secular church in which there was room for all Danes. The Lutheran pastor (and eventual bishop) Peter Christian Kierkegaard gave the new church its name: *Folkekirken*, or “the People’s Church.” Collectively, they thought that freedom of religion could lead to greater religious conviction among the Danish people while also freeing pastors from government duties like collecting taxes. Additionally, the constitution ended the call for forced baptism occasioned by the Baptist Crisis of 1842.

The Baptist Crisis is a key part of the background for both the religious freedom provided by the constitution and the arrival of Latter-day Saint missionaries. Beginning in 1839, Baptists formed congregations independent of the national church. An 1842 law granted them protected status but nevertheless required that their children be baptized into the Lutheran church. When they refused, Bishop J. P. Mynster called on Lutheran ministers to baptize Baptist children by force—a call that all three men mentioned above refused to enact. Religious freedom followed, as did the growth of Baptist congregations, which proved a ready source of converts for Latter-day Saint missionaries, who first arrived in 1850.

Allen catalogs a variety of Danish cultural responses to the Latter-day Saint missionaries and their success: She studies a painting—Christen Dalsgaard’s 1856 *Two Mormons Visiting a Country Carpenter*, which depicts, in realist style, missionaries at work in a craftsman’s home. She studies the two Kierkegaard brothers, Peter Christian and Søren Aabye—one a Lutheran pastor and the other a figure critical of the Lutheran establishment as inimical to Christian life. Allen studies depictions of Latter-day Saints in popular culture, from street ballads to silent film. Finally, she studies the complex cultural identities of Danish converts themselves. Her aim is to show that Danish attitudes toward Latter-day Saints provide an index to the development of Danish secularization over the course of seventy years, as the constitution moved from novelty to settled reality.

A brief consideration of three of these cultural responses will serve to outline Allen’s case. Peter Christian Kierkegaard was a pastor in western

Zealand when Latter-day Saint missionaries arrived in his parishes of Pedersborg and Kindertofte in 1854 and began to hold meetings. Kierkegaard arranged to attend one of these meetings to counter the missionaries' arguments. A highly educated man, he found the missionaries' knowledge both of scripture and of Christian history wanting. He then developed his rejoinder into a public lecture, which he delivered at schoolhouses in both towns before publishing it, first in a newspaper and then as a book entitled *Om og Mod Mormonismen* (*About and Against Mormonism*). Beyond Kierkegaard, Allen documents other sources that expressed cultural concern about the new religion, including ones that cast polygamy and emigration as the "white slave trade" (135–36).

Allen reads Kierkegaard's polemic against the Latter-day Saint church alongside his younger brother Søren's attacks on the Danish church, which opened up the possibility of being Christian and Danish, but not Lutheran. This indirect dialogue between the brothers captures the cultural tensions following the creation of the constitution, centered on an inherent debate of just how much tradition is required to maintain cultural continuity. As Allen's argument proceeds, the balance shifts, with constitutional secularism replacing Lutheranism as the tradition grounding continuity. Attitudes toward Latter-day Saints track this shift, as Allen shows by referencing early Danish cinema in particular. One film stands out in this regard: Lau Lauritzen's 1917 *Min Svigerinde fra Amerika* (*My Sister-in-Law from America*), which uses polygamy as a joke to rescue a husband from the discovery of his adultery. Here, critiquing the Latter-day Saints is beside the point; polygamy has become little more than a familiar cultural trope—a far cry from the seriousness of Peter Kierkegaard's earlier earnest theological rebuttal of Latter-day Saint teachings. By this time, religious freedom (and the mass emigration of Latter-day Saints) had diminished the sense that the Saints posed a religious or cultural threat, signaling a shift in Danish culture away from Lutheranism.

Allen's most fascinating archival find is an unpublished manuscript from the 1850s by Baroness Kirstine Marie Elisabeth Stampe simply titled *Mormonismen* (*Mormonism*). Stampe had a close relationship with both Grundtvig and the Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen (copies of his *Christus* grace many Latter-day Saint temple visitors' centers). Stampe came into contact with Latter-day Saints through a friend who converted to the faith, and her manuscript documents her resulting study of this new religion. Unlike Peter Kierkegaard, Stampe made a sympathetic effort to understand Latter-day Saint practices and beliefs before laying

out her points of disagreement. This document affords a rare window into how such beliefs appeared to someone who made a serious study of them but decided not to convert.

Allen's final case study involves three Danish emigrants with varying relations to their homeland. I will focus on Hans Jørgensen and Wilhelmine Bolvig, emigrants who met and married in Utah and who corresponded during Hans's two missions to Denmark. Living in the heavily Danish enclave of Pleasant Grove, Utah, Wilhelmine never learned much English, and the couple wrote to each other in Danish. Allen shows, however, that they thought of themselves more as Latter-day Saints than as either Danes or Americans, even though their cultural ties to Denmark remained strong. Their case shows how the complexities of cultural identity trouble the easy narratives we might assume.

Allen's book is compellingly argued and well sourced, drawing on fascinating archival materials that illuminate her topic. Switching the focus from Latter-day Saints to Danish culture is a salutary corrective to the American-centric perspective that often colors scholarly treatments of the broader Latter-day Saint movement and (it must be said) the mindset of missionaries, who may be more concerned with the message they bear than the cultures in which they are called to live during their periods of service. *Danish but Not Lutheran* will appeal to people interested in questions of religious liberty and secularity (although it could have engaged more with recent theoretical work on the subject), but it will also appeal to the many Latter-day Saints who, like me, descend from Danish emigrants and find their hearts turning back to the place from which their fathers and mothers came.

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