



**Michael Tyldesley.** *No Heavenly Delusion?: A Comparative Study of Three Communal Movements.* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003. XII + 211 S. \$30.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-85323-608-5.



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### M. Tyldesley: No Heavenly Delusion?

The book of Michael Tyldesley on the twentieth century communal movements of Bruderhof, Integrierte Gemeinde and Kibbutz appeared in the Liverpool studies on regional cultures without any apparent connection to the topic of this series. Yet this is the least problematic issue with this work. The problems begin with the book's subtitle that defines it as a comparative study. The selection of movements for the study labeled as "comparative" is justified with the claim of the common historical root of all three movements which, according to Tyldesley, lays in the German Youth Movement of the early twentieth century. As one proceeds through introduction it becomes obvious that Tyldesley falls into a common trap of many an attempt at comparative studies - the confounding of research objectives. In fact, theoretical and conceptual interests are mixed up with substantive and empirical objectives with the result that the final product is ambiguous and non-cumulative. Instead of delineating a hypothesis or a gap in knowledge that this study intends to fill using comparative method, the introduction only sets two basic questions of inquiry - the impact of the movements on their host societies and their success in constructing an "alternative society".

Tyldesley should be commended for dedicating the whole chapter to the German Youth Movement and its place in the development of the communalism, which was previously noted but never properly evaluated. Doing so, the author suggests that the movements advocating communal living with roots in the Youth Movement are far from being its fringe aspect, but rather the continuation of one of its central preoccupations linked to its distinctly unfavorable view of contemporary society, social fragmentation and the isolation of the individual. Yet asserting the root of Bruderhof, Integrierte Gemeinde and Kibbutz in the German Youth Movement, Tyldesley overlooks much wider historical and intellectual context of the emergence of modern communal movements, especially the number of religious movements in the German speaking lands, which were contemplating and practicing the communal way of living. Thus, only in passim we read about Bruderhof references to other Christian communal movements and their connection to Hutterians, whom they joined and remained in community for almost three decades. Insisting on the link with the Youth Movement Bruderhof is taken out of the long tradition of Christian sects in Germany, whose

seclusion from the society and big churches often begun with the making of *ecclesiolae in ecclesia*, that is distinct communities of faith and deed. Similarly, the developments in the Catholic theology, socialism and Zionism in the twentieth century, the primary forces behind the other two movements considered, are only glanced over. Furthermore, anti-Semitism, the raising of children, homosexuality or relationship to nature, all issues that were plaguing the Youth Movement throughout its existence, are not consequently traced and causally inferred in the otherwise detailed description of the movements which, as the author aspires to demonstrate, represent some of its derivatives. Even when some issues are compared such as the notion of private life or the attitude towards education, the comparison hardly goes beyond noting similarities and dissimilarities.

Although announcing that the study was based on the qualitative research, including observation, interviewing and documentary research, Tyldesley relies overwhelmingly on the literature produced by the movements themselves or their prominent members. The author rarely questions its bias or critically examines the practical reality of certain beliefs or rules of a movement under scrutiny. Moreover, heavy reliance on English language literature deprives us of apprehending the real impact of the Germany Youth Movement in ideas, lives and everyday practices of movements' members. All we are left to contemplate with are references to books or ideas of some members of German Youth Movement and traces of some personal connection, correspondence and reminiscences. Only at the very end of his book Tyldesley mentioned his interviews with Bruderhof veterans, which stressed the importance of the ideas of the German Youth Movement. Yet there is no similar testimony from the other two movements. The author also points at the newly established, but in the case of Bruderhof already broken, relationship among these movements. The connection to some people in Kibbutz for Integrierte Gemeinde is evidently important yet given the magnitude and diversity of Kibbutzim these contacts are, as the author admits, marginal.

Chronologically describing the development of each of the movements Tyldesley concentrates on changes in their views on communalism and attitudes to host soci-

ety. There is an attempt, although in *passim*, to explain the conditions or particular historical context of change. Each of these objectives is appropriate and, if comparisons were carried out properly, could have brought significant and innovative conclusion. Yet not separating descriptive work from rudimentary typological analysis and mixing of interpretative modes produced results that did not lead to the revision of accepted historical explanations. Eventually, the same basic features are presented in the introduction and conclusion of the book in addition to being developed three times over in the core chapters. Endless repetitions make one wonder whether there was a reader or editor of the volume at all. Only in the last two albeit shortest chapters Tyldesley enters the debate on communal movements' strategies of inclusion in the host society. This is necessary for fostering social change, which is at least theoretically and formally the desire of all three movements. At the same time a degree of seclusion is needed in order to build one's own communal group and save it from pernicious influences, which in turn seriously limits group's interaction with the society. As the author shows, their influence is felt only in small if not marginal circles such as pacifists and German urban Catholics, or in the case of Kibbutz, where the impact is the greatest, a Israeli society. As for the success in the establishment of an alternative society Tyldesley observes a clear distinction between the two smaller movements, which per definition need to set up their own 'alternative' economies and the large Kibbutz movement, which by its sheer size cannot exist outside the parameters of Israeli economy.

In his conclusion the author modestly proposes that all three movements bear the mark of 'German' ideology, defined by Louis Dumont as community holism plus self-cultivating individualism. As a sort of a post scriptum, Tyldesley also brings in French sociologist Michel Maffesoli, who challenges the notion of the fragmentation and individualization of the contemporary society. Instead Maffesoli stresses the recent growth of active collectivities, groups, or 'tribes', as he calls them, and their power of integration, inclusion and solidarity in face of contemporary challenges. Viewed from this perspective the communal movements of Tyldesley's interest are 'backward' looking and he rightly doubts in their being the precursors of 'modern tribes'.

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