

Seventh-day Adventist Publications and The Nazi Temptation

by Erwin Sicher

The nations of the world are increasingly ruled by nondemocratic regimes. As an international church, Adventism often faces a serious challenge from such governments, especially those which reach beyond simple political authoritarianism in an effort to recast all of society in a totalitarian mold. Since the majority of Seventh-day Adventists now live outside the developed West—and not infrequently under authoritarian governments—one of the most crucial questions for the church involves the attitude it should take toward such governments. Is the traditional Adventist political philosophy effective or even moral in an authoritarian or totalitarian environment?

An effective starting point in an examination of this issue would be a study of a specific case of interaction between the Seventh-day Adventist Church and an authoritarian regime. For this there is no better example than the church in Nazi Germany. The Nazi regime no longer exists. Neither do most of the Adventist contemporaries. Yet, most of the printed publications of the German Seventh-day Adventist Church do

survive. This essay focuses on these sources, including the rough equivalent to the *Review and Herald* in America, *Der Adventbote*, the church's youth publication, *Jugend-Leitstern*, the religious liberty magazine, *Kirche und Staat*, the health journal, *Gute Gesundheit*, the family paper, *Der Christliche Hausfreund*, and the evangelistic publication, *Herold der Wahrheit*.

To examine the subject responsibly, however, the nature of totalitarianism must be recognized. In a totalitarian state, the people know virtually only what the rulers want them to know. Any other knowledge depends upon chance or upon rumors which are often very distorted. Furthermore, the rulers bend the information they allow to be published to their own purposes and tell lies without reticence. Hence, some developments among Adventists in this dark period of German history may be explained or even partly excused. The lack of accurate information was particularly hard on true Adventists, who are taught to love their neighbors, even their enemies, and to look for the good in everything. Such an inclination, together with insufficient knowledge, made it easy to believe the best about the Nazi movement. Furthermore, Hitler and his party had only one aim, absolute power, and to achieve it, they were willing to use any method, including violence and repression. Naturally, therefore, the church was at a terrible disadvantage. Still, these difficulties do not com-

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pletely explain German Adventism during this period. Innate weaknesses within the German Adventist church helped make it susceptible to the Nazi temptation.

The Adventist political philosophy and its German interpretation contained one such weakness. Basically, Adventists believed that all government is established by God and every citizen is obliged to obey it, except when it makes demands against one's conscience.

In imperial Germany, the Adventist conscience allowed most members to espouse extreme nationalism and active military collaboration even on Sabbath. They sincerely believed that such an attitude was neither against conscience nor against the Bible. An Adventist author wrote in December 1915 that "the Bible teaches first, that participation in war is not against the sixth commandment; second, that fighting on the Sabbath is no transgression of the fourth law."¹

With the end of World War I, the German church leaders recognized the error of their policies; they confessed at the European Division meeting at Gland, Switzerland, on Jan. 2, 1923, that they were in complete "harmony with the general teaching of their brethren of that denomination throughout the world." But this declaration was weakened by the additional pronouncement which read: "We grant to each of our church members absolute liberty to serve his country, at all times and in all places, in accord with the dictates of his personal conscientious conviction."²

The personal convictions of German Adventists, insofar as they were reflected in church publications, were largely those of the German middle class. Adventists opposed what they regarded as the vengeful peace of Versailles, believing it had been motivated by a "satanical spirit of destruction and by a never-ending hatred against Germany." They further suggested that the attack upon Germany would in the end benefit the papacy.³

The Weimar Republic, too, came under considerable criticism in Adventist periodicals. Its constitution, they claimed, was a failure. It was supposed to build a unitary state but instead there were dissension and party squabbles everywhere. Only a radical reorientation by the demo-

cratic parties could save Germany from destruction.⁴ Pastor W. Binanzer argued that the state was without power; it could neither stop the destruction meted out to Germany nor help its own people, who were unemployed, hungry and without housing. In despair, he said, many citizens were turning to unhealthy and immoral activities, which the democratic state allowed to flourish unhampered.⁵

Adventists also criticized the Weimar Republic for granting freedom to all democratic parties, including the Catholic Center party. One writer stated apocalyptically, "the priest—today Party chairman, tomorrow chancellor of Germany. This is the outcome of ten years of

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German Republic. . . . Germany may become a province of the Papal states."⁶

Not all writers were discouraged. One noted that domestic difficulties sometimes can be overcome by a grand foreign policy.⁷ Such a foreign policy might be directed against France or the Vatican, two foes of Germany which shared a common "fear of the spiritual, cultural and economic superiority" of Germany.⁸

In this serious hour of German history Adventist writers expressed repulsion at the thought of being on the sidelines. W. Mueller, one of the most influential German Adventists, said: "Every thinking man must take a position on all questions of the present or he ceases to be. As Solon said in his day: 'Who does not participate in the battles of his people is without honor.'"⁹ Adventist participation consisted in continuing to question the shortcomings of the Republic and the sincerity of the allies,¹⁰ as well as the usefulness of the detente of Locarno and even the League of Nations.¹¹

Some Adventists, apparently, even agreed with the contemporary anti-Semitism. The

church's religious liberty magazine *Kirche und Staat* reprinted an article from the non-Adventist journal *Der Leuchtturm* which stated:

Some friends have counseled us not to fight a two-front war, not against the Jews and Jesuits at the same time. They are still being fooled by these two international enemies of Germanism. For the sad situation of Germany since November 1918 we can thank the . . . Jews and Jesuits . . . The Jesuits are no less dangerous enemies than the Jews.¹²

Catholicism, however, received the most attention in Adventist writings. In certain issues of some journals every second article dealt with Catholicism.¹³ The writers believed the conspiracy of Catholicism lurked everywhere,¹⁴ its aim being the destruction of religious liberty¹⁵ and the persecution of all who resisted Catholicism.¹⁶ Nothing was safe from Catholic machinations, neither the German nation and culture, nor the well-established evangelical church which Social Democrats and Catholics were collaborating to destroy.¹⁷

Another threat, Adventists believed, came from Socialists and Communists. The Social Democrats indoctrinated the youth with a moderate, atheistic-materialistic ideology. The Communists inculcated the same ideology in a more extreme form.¹⁸ Once these youth had been won, it was suggested, they would abolish Christianity and religion and enthrone their new secular faith. All this had happened in Russia; but it could not be allowed to occur in Germany.¹⁹

In response to these dangers, one Adventist wrote, every German, young or old, was calling for a strong "Führer." "A people, a church, a city or a land which has no good Führer is destined for perdition. Moreover, the Adventist church needs good Führers . . ."²⁰ Another writer added that "Führers" cannot be valued enough even in religion.²¹

This mystique of the "Führer," the embodiment of a movement or a nation with absolute power, permeated German writings, as well as Adventist publications. Article after article dealt with this "Führer ideal," expressing it in such combinations as "Führerschaft,"²² "Führertum,"²³ and "Führerdienst."²⁴ Even Jesus was transformed into a great "Führer."²⁵

While Adventists debated, sometimes in eschatological terms, the Versailles treaty, the Weimar Republic, the Jews and the Catholics, and while they called for spiritual "Führers," a "Führer" did arise and was even then achieving political success. Adventists were perplexed, for he was expressing many of the feelings they held. Adolf Hitler promised that through a strong "Führertum" (leadership) and a courageous foreign policy he would end the humiliation of Versailles and abolish the weaknesses of democracy. He promised to reunite under the Reich all Germans outside Germany. No one, according to Hitler, would be allowed to interfere with the reemergence of Germany. Under his leadership, Germany would check the scourge of atheistic Bolshevism and neutralize the international conspirators of Jews and Jesuits. The Catholic Church would be forced to give up its political influence and would be allowed to exercise only its religious functions in Germany. Hitler would support absolute freedom of religion—as long as the churches remained nonpolitical.

Hitler also promised economic revival and full employment. Moreover, the "Führer," the moral leader who did not drink or smoke, emphatically supported the moral rejuvenation of Germany after its many years of immorality under the Weimar Republic. Germany, he assured the people, would become one of the greatest nations on earth.²⁶

Despite Hitler's appeal, Adventists hesitated. W. Binanzer, a minister who had earlier demanded that Adventists take positions on political issues,²⁷ in 1931 stated: "The Lord wishes that we bypass political questions. We cannot give our voice with certainty to a political party. In such circumstances being quiet is better than speaking."²⁸

What made Adventist leaders call for caution and silence? It was probably their uncertainty as to the Nazi stand on religious liberty. Although Hitler promised religious freedom, there was no consensus within the party on this issue.

Hitler's personal position seemed clear and it was acceptable to Adventists. M. Busch, a departmental secretary of the South German Union Conference, approvingly quoted Hitler's statement in *Mein Kampf* that "for the political Führer all religious teachings and arrangements are untouchable . . ." Still, point 24 of the Nazi party program stated that the Party supported

positive Christianity, without tying itself to any particular confession. What was positive Christianity? Adventists were not quite sure. The same party program said: "Certainly some day the German people will find a form of confession . . . which will be in accord with its nordic blood; certainly only then will the trinity of Blood, Faith and State be complete." Pastor Busch demanded that the conflicting statements of Hitler on religious freedom "and the world view of the party program must be clarified." In the meantime, he and others counseled that the Christian must oppose the religion of the blood and instead serve God and His Word.²⁹

Hitler, of course, never clarified these contradictions. Anyway, such discussions were soon academic. The Führer became dictator of Germany.

On January 30, 1933, after a little more than ten years as National Socialist party leader, Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. With incredible speed, he transformed Germany into a totalitarian society, using terror and pervasive propaganda and taking advantage of economic progress and the support of the populace. A racist Nazi elite subverted traditional beliefs and institutions and quickly replaced the former ruling classes. After abrogating the Treaty of Versailles, Germany rearmed and then invaded the Rhineland, Austria and the Sudetenland. In 1939, Hitler plunged Europe into the second world war, conquered most of the continent, perpetrated some of the most hideous crimes in history, only to suffer in the end a dramatic defeat. In 1945, the Thousand-Year Reich collapsed after only 12 years—12 years that changed the world's history.

How could this have happened in a highly civilized country? The answers are obscure. Nazism had been difficult to understand from the very beginning: if it had been easier to understand, it might never have succeeded. Part of the answer, however, lies in the acquiescence of millions of Germans, among them thousands of sincere Christians. Adventist writers welcomed the apparent rebirth of Germany, saying that Christianity and the Word of God were again being honored.

Fresh, life-giving and creative Reformation spirit blows through German lands. With the renewal of the state, there is also a desire for a

positive transformation of the whole mental and spiritual life. . . . The movement again goes upward, toward a living goal. . . . Such thrust is truly divine, may it come from where and whosoever it wants. With this our position as youth toward the new state, the new arrangement of things has been indicated. . . . We have helped toward this new Spirit of Light, Truth, Discipline and Morality. Thus we have to continue.³⁰

Kurt Sinz, the editor of various Adventist church papers, exclaimed: "We have just experienced it . . . to be saved from hopeless sinking in the last minute . . . when God sent our land a Führer who took strong command of the controls of the ship of state."³¹ The president of the East German Conference, W. Mueller, said that the Christian

welcomes with joy the reawakening of Germany and the fight of the Hitler government against unemployment. He is happy for the defense of Christianity, for morality and order, incorruptibility and justice in government, for the attack on class consciousness and the elevation of the ethnic community [Volksgemeinschaft]. . . . The Christian is happy to know that the direction of his country is in the hands of a man like Hitler, who frequently emphasizes that he received his post from God to whom he is responsible. As nondrinker, nonsmoker and vegetarian, he stands close to our conception of the reformer of life . . . Still, some worry.

There was no need for Adventists to be concerned, Pastor Mueller advised. Jesus' statement, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and God what is God's," meant that every Adventist should be subject to the government, pay his taxes, assist the government with good works and pray for the authorities.

Yet, the Nazi regime demanded more. Mueller said that Adventists needed to adjust quickly to these new circumstances, but unfortunately some church members were slow in changing. They refused to salute the Swastika flag and to use the Hitler greeting. This refusal, Mueller argued, was bad for the church's image. Besides, every "Christian can without concern" salute the Nazi flag, the symbol of sovereign Germany. Likewise, he said, Adventists could raise their arms and give the Hitler greeting with a clear conscience.

Mueller concluded that under no circumstances did any Adventist have the right to resist the government, even if the government prevented him from exercising his faith. Resistance would be unfortunate because it would mark Adventists as opponents of the new state, a situation that should be prevented.³²

Nevertheless, Adventist flexibility was in vain. On November 26, 1933 the Secret Police dissolved the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Prussia and Hesse and ordered church properties confiscated.³³

“How could this have happened?” asked Pastor Mueller in a circular letter to all east German ministers and elders. Adventists have been faithful citizens, he argued; they have prayed for the government, they have done their welfare work, and in the Adventist town of Friedensau have voted 99.9 percent for the Nazi parliamentary state. He advised all Adventists to be

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completely quiet, to raise no objections and to wait. The church immediately retained legal assistance with the good effect that on December 6, 1933 the police rescinded the previous order.³⁴

Thankful for the happy turn of events, the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Germany submitted to the Nazi Ministry of Interior an official memorandum on Adventist teachings, church organization, social activities and attitude to the government. This document contained some deviations in addition to many of the standard Adventist statements.

It said, for example, that the Sabbath had been renamed the rest day, or “Ruhetag.” The authors emphatically differentiated the day from the Jewish Sabbath. Furthermore, they claimed that in the mission-field their mission-

aries forcefully promoted German attitudes and culture, defending the present government and effectively challenging anti-German propaganda.

Another section of the document dealt with the Reform Adventists, a group which emanated from the Seventh-day Adventists during World War I. The writers accused them of a wrong attitude toward the government and of many intemperate doctrines.³⁵ (The Nazi government banished the Reform Church and many of its leaders perished in the concentration camps.³⁶)

The concessions and explanations put forward by the church did not ultimately satisfy the government, however. The Nazi regime insisted on total control, not only of the outward man, but of his mind and soul. Independence was abolished as Germans were required to feel as the Führer felt and to think as the Führer thought.

Hitler believed that every German had to accept the Nazi world view. This world view was a form of social Darwinism, holding that life is a constant struggle in which the strong survive and the weak perish. As Hitler put it, “on earth and in the universe force alone is decisive. Whatever goal man has reached is due to his originality plus his brutality.”

The struggle involved not only individuals, or people and nations, but also and primarily races and racial communities. Success in the struggle was a consequence of “pure racial blood,” of which the Aryans possessed the best type. Because most Germans were Aryans, they alone “founded a superior type of humanity; therefore, they represent the archetype of what we understand by the term, MAN.” Hitler added that “everything that is not of [such] sound racial stock is like chaff.” Pure Aryans, in other words, have a right to subject all other inferior races, the worst of whom were the Jews. The chief task of the Nazi government, Hitler declared, was the “protection of the race and the care for the race; all other tasks are conditioned by this primary duty.”³⁷

Adventists were for some time aware of these ideological innovations of Nazism, what was called in the Adventist press the “radical spiritual revolution,” a revolution whose chief concern was the idea of Volk and race. Kurt Sinz, the editor of *Der Adventbote*, stated that his-

tory itself was being radically reinterpreted, according to Germanic, racial and “völkisch” (ethnic) concepts.³⁸

Otto Brozio stated in the same journal that the National Socialist Revolution was the greatest of all time, because it made the maintenance of a pure inheritance the basis of its ethnic life. His meaning may be detected from a framed quote by Hitler—on the question of blood—that appeared on the same page.³⁹

One Adventist wrote that, according to the Bible, the domination of the world belongs to the descendants of Japheth.⁴⁰ Another said that

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these Japhethites had replaced the Semitic people as carriers of culture.⁴¹ Then Semites, more precisely Jews, would not dominate the world, though they might strive after it. According to another writer, the Bible clearly “witnesses against the ‘chosen’ people.”⁴²

Since the Bible condemned the Jews, their fate in Germany was partially justified. Adventists hurried to affirm that such teachings as the Sabbath, which seemed Jewish, were, in fact, not Jewish. This effort had already appeared in the document the church submitted to the Nazi Ministry of Interior. Later, H. F. Schubert, president of the Central European Division, asked the question: “Is the Sabbath of Holy Scripture a Christian or a Jewish holy day?” He answered ambiguously that the Sabbath was not made for the Jews but for all men.⁴³

Some went still further. A reader of *Der Adventbote* wrote in a letter to the editor that he had heard both in his church and during a tent meeting that Christ “belonged to no nation and that he was no Jew.” The editor responded that he was born a Jew, but that Jesus rejected the corruption of his own people. He warned that too much discussion of this issue could lead

one to miss Christ’s real mission.⁴⁴ E. Gugel said that Christ was “no Jewish Savior but the Savior of the world including the German people.”⁴⁵

Outspoken racism seldom appeared in Adventist publications; writers often tried to perform a balancing act. As E. Gugel wrote, the Gospel was for all people, yet it was particularly for one’s ethnic community. He added that “the Gospel bridged all borders, languages and races, but it does not disregard the latter. . . . Happily, the evangel does not overlook the ethnic character [Völkische Art] and the national significance of the ethnic concerns [Völkische Belange].”⁴⁶

But Adventists did frequently print negative comments about the Jews. A missionary, writing in an official church paper about Palestine, said that the Jewish race was sick, for the Jews exploited one another.⁴⁷ Someone else made a slanderous report about the behavior of orthodox Jews in Hungary.⁴⁸

Adventist adjustments went still further. They were always minor for sure, but they assisted the Nazi government’s purposes. Insignificant though these contributions were, they raise serious questions about the moral strength of Seventh-day Adventism in a totalitarian environment.

German Adventists believed citizenship entailed certain responsibilities. O. Haase went so far as to tell Adventist youth that they “must under no circumstances forget the clear and justifiable responsibilities which arose for them from Germanism [Deutschtum].” The responsibilities of ethnic affinity were the more easily fulfilled since “discipline and harshness [Härte] are valued again.” Haase explained that this entailed “harshness against oneself, sin and injustice, harshness against all undecided spirits, harshness against those who live not in peace with God and the world”⁴⁹

Church leaders often attempted to transmute Nazi concepts through theological reinterpretation. The idea of discipleship [Gefolgschaft] for example, which was so popular in Germany, had supposedly originated among the Germanic tribes. Every disciple was required to accept the absolute will of his leader [Führer]. “What a sacrifice, what a subjugation of the member to the whole!” an Adventist youth leader exclaimed. The revival of this demand was con-

sidered “certainly a blessing to our generation and people.” It was also a biblical concept, because it received the greatest realization in the discipleship of Jesus.⁵⁰

Linguistic collaboration also appeared. An Adventist teacher advised his students that in German classes they must learn to “will and to think in German, to speak and write in German.”⁵¹ To will in German was a mystical Nazi concept, for the Party taught that Germans “will” differently than other nationals. Furthermore, to speak and to write in German meant not only to reject words of foreign origin, but it meant the use of words containing a Nazi meaning. Adventists used Nazi words such as *Führer* and *Gefolgschaft*. Adventists also used the words *Volk* and *Volksgemeinschaft*.

The *Volk*, according to the Nazis, was a people of common blood and soul. When organized, it formed a *Volksgemeinschaft*, or ethnic community. Adventists should be among the very best members of such a community, a church writer stated.⁵² To realize this goal, young Adventists were encouraged to study history in order to root themselves deeply in God, Volk, State and the home soil.⁵³ Then they would be able to serve successfully the family, church, Volk and Fatherland in the spirit “of our old principles . . . and in the frame of the national economy and the national socialist outlook.”⁵⁴

Belaboring the point, the Adventist welfare leader, Otto Brozio, stated that

today not the individual, but the Volk in its totality is in the center of thought. Every member of the Volk should feel himself a part of the Volksgemeinschaft. The value or valuelessness of his actions are to be judged only on the basis of their usefulness or uselessness to the whole Volk. . . .

Only the person who operates in the context of the Volk community could be considered a comrade of the people [Volksgenosse],⁵⁵ he concluded.

Adventists accepted this Nazi standard. As P. Staubert, an Adventist educator, said, “We Christians welcome happily this attitude toward life of National Socialism; it contains truth. Every good on earth comes from the idea of community; everything bad is from the I.”⁵⁶

The Volkcommunity Hitler envisioned was a heroic one. Nazis despised weakness and admired the strong and the heroic, since heroes were best

fitted for victory in struggle. “The heroic, the unconquerable is today the high goal of mankind,” an Adventist wrote, and all opposition to this goal is rightly suppressed. Although certain people claimed that Christianity produces weaklings, he argued that “Christianity is not for weaklings; it is for men with courage and strength above the average.”⁵⁷

Another writer asserted that “Christians are able through divine grace to lead a heroic life”⁵⁸ and to perform heroic deeds for Volk and Fatherland.⁵⁹ The renewal of Germany, which had changed so much for the better would continue, another author thought, if a “praying, believing group of youth matures into heroes through whom God can work, improve and complete . . .”⁶⁰

Adventists performed many “heroic” deeds for Volk and Fatherland through their Welfare Organization. At first operating independently, it soon came under the control of the National Socialist Peoples Welfare Department (NSV), the official governmental welfare authority. By 1938, the government suggested strongly that welfare workers join the NSV. Adventist leader Otto Brozio wrote that this would not only demonstrate social concern, but be a “good witness to the close relationship with the Volk. It corresponds completely with our biblical position toward Volk and State.”⁶¹ With most Adventist welfare workers in the NSV, the independence of the Adventist organization was superfluous and it was coordinated with the Nazi department.

The NSV was largely concerned with health, welfare, family and propaganda matters. It was organized, and here we see again the singularity of the Nazi pursuit, in complete accord with the National Socialist world view; the NSV considered itself the guardian of the biological inheritance and race laws of the state.⁶² This analysis of the NSV appeared in a key Adventist journal. But no one pointed out the incompatibility between the Adventist message and the Nazi aim.

The Nazi government asked the church to continue its health program, the purpose of which was to be not only the preservation of the individual “temple of God” but, as the Nazi Health leader Dr. L. Conti stated in a speech

reprinted in an Adventist health magazine, “to maintain and strengthen the German defensive might.”⁶³ The editor of the Adventist journal *Gute Gesundheit* (*Good Health*) made a similar point, writing that Germans

are mentally and technically already superior to most people. This strength of our people must be maintained and promoted by all means, so that this people might be able to defend its birthright in every situation.

The governmental policies have already proven successful, Dr. E. Schneider stated. The Germans are healthier today than they were in peacetime. It is precisely in war that the health and productivity of the Germans have to be maintained, because they are weapons of the inner Front against the enemy.⁶⁴ Therefore, every German had the responsibility to live healthfully.⁶⁵

In actual welfare work, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the needy and the collaboration with the Nazi Winter Assistance Program (WHW), the Adventists had an excellent record. Many congratulatory official declarations bear this out.⁶⁶

And yet, even in this area, the Nazi spirit revealed itself. Help went primarily to Germans. “Asocial elements,” which could have included Reform Adventists and Jews, among others, were to be excluded from assistance.⁶⁷ The ultimate aim of all the activities was the well-being of the Germans, the successful challenge of Bolshevik expansion,⁶⁸ and the victory of Germany.

Adventists assisted also in Nazi family policies. “The Nazi state has rediscovered the family,” one article exclaimed.⁷⁰ It was a significant event, Adventists said, “that the close connection between the family and the fate of the nation has been seen.” Therefore, it was again fun to raise families;⁷¹ Adventist leaders called on their young men to marry early.⁷² The leaders counseled that after marriage they should refuse to raise one-child families because it was bad for the child and the family as well as for the nation.⁷³ Willful limitation of births was to be rejected because it damaged the nation quantitatively and qualitatively.⁷⁴ Since struggle was the essence of life, a weak and underpopulated nation was continuously in mortal danger, according to Nazi ideology. Only a populous

nation, a churchman said, would discourage attack by one’s neighbor.⁷⁵

Because offspring of these unions were to be healthy and racially pure specimens, they were to be bred carefully. To guarantee this outcome, Adventists assisted in many government-sponsored programs for women, teaching not only hygiene and child care, but also such Nazi topics as eugenics, race and civics.⁷⁶

The government asked all free churches and denominations to defend these and all other Nazi policies at home and abroad.⁷⁷ There is sufficient evidence to conclude that many Adventists accepted this demand. Hulda Jost, Adventist welfare leader until 1938, stated as early as 1933 that after her return from Sweden, she reported to the Nazi propaganda ministry “that I was able to defend our present government in a choice society. . . .”⁷⁸ Another German wrote about his visit to America and how interested the Americans were about the New Germany. “It was not difficult at all . . . to produce understanding for the situation at home.”⁷⁹ It was a really “happy feeling as an Adventist and faithful citizen of the German Reich to represent the Fatherland.”⁸⁰

Even the hallowed halls of the Adventist educational institutions did not escape the corrosive Nazi influence. When the government insisted that Adventist schools nurture “the National Socialist Spirit,” educator W. Eberhardt said that Adventist schools fulfilled this requirement between class periods three and four, when they reviewed the news, studied Nazi ideas and sang German songs.⁸¹

But the pressure for greater collaboration grew. The Nazis believed that the total control, in mind and body, of every German could best be achieved by establishing a government monopoly in education and training.

Every German, beginning in childhood, was required to join the *Jungvolk*. As teenagers, they were asked to become members of the Hitler youth, later of the *Arbeitsdienst* (Labor Service) and eventually of the army.

Many Adventist boys and girls joined these clubs before it was even mandatory. This was true in the case of the Hitler youth, as Kurt Sinz, the editor of the church paper observed. Sinz declared that in such clubs youth were educated

“physically, mentally and morally according to the National Socialist world view.”⁸²

On the next level of Nazi indoctrination, the Labor Service, Adventists found a satisfying rationalization for participation. Johannes Langholf wrote that Adventists approved, in accordance with their biblical understanding, every effort that brought people closer to work. “We expect every member,” he continued “to follow the divine command, ‘pray and work.’ It would be absolutely contrary to our understanding if we refuse the Labor Service.” The author, however, was fully aware that a significant percentage of the Labor Service participants were members of the SA, SS and Stahlhelm, the most fanatical Nazi groups who indoctrinated and militarized the youth.⁸³

The outcome of all this was that most Adventist students joined the Hitler Youth, the BDM [Association of German Girls], the Labor

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Service and the German Red Cross.⁸⁴ And, in 1937, the Adventist college town, Friedensau voted 100 percent for Adolf Hitler.⁸⁵

At least some Adventists came to support sterilization, whose overriding aim, like that of most Nazi programs, was the protection of the German blood. Years before his assumption of power Hitler had demanded in *Mein Kampf* the sterilization of all physical and mental degenerates. Until July 14, 1933, however, no sterilization law existed. The issue, therefore, was open for discussion. An author in *Staat und Kirche* took a clear stand against it. He wrote: “. . . one has to warn emphatically against the promulgation of the sterilization law.”⁸⁶

After the passage of the law, though, discussion ceased and the church supported sterilization either through direct Adventist statements or through the reprinting of non-Adventist articles. The mentally weak, schizophrenics,

epileptics, blind, deaf, crippled, alcoholics, drug addicts—all were to be sterilized.⁸⁷

“This law,” an article in the Seventh-day Adventist paper *Jugend-Leitstern* said, was “a great advance in the uplifting of our people.”

Because it was for the good of the nation as well as for the individual, the article argued, the ethic of the state and of Christianity were in full accord on this point. “The national socialist state is aware of its responsibility to heighten the physical and moral values of its people through purification of its blood.”⁸⁸ Although sterilization was hard on the patient, it was said, once he understood the contribution he is making to the well-being of his people he would accept it.⁸⁹

“Only sterilization can protect a people from the decline of their race,” another article claimed.⁹⁰ Furthermore, some writers suggested, the chronically ill should be sterilized because they place too great a financial burden on the state, for the costs go into the billions of reichsmarks.⁹¹

Adventist writers also approved Hitler’s foreign policy and, eventually, the war, probably because of Nazi pressure but also because of the assumption that the Führer was a man of peace and did not want war. As Kurt Sinz, editor of *Adventbote*, said, “The Führer of the German people . . . works with truly passionate seriousness and with all his might for the understanding of nations. But do the other nations want the same?”⁹²

The other nations did not have the same peaceful intentions as the Führer. They had always opposed the rightful claims of Germany and of all German-speaking peoples, Adventist writers argued. When Germans in Austria were brought into the Reich, a German Adventist wrote, “We share the happiness over their return home to the motherland.”⁹³

The Austrian Adventists responded with enthusiasm. “The eternal God had done more for us than we ever expected. . . ,” they wrote to the *Adventbote*. Austria had been falling back into medieval conditions while Germany was rising fast. “A strong hand, an arm directed by God has saved this miserable and enslaved German land in the last hour from the abyss.” The strong hand and arm was Adolf Hitler. Through

God's choice and through "God's assistance our capable Führer Adolf Hitler became the liberator of Austria. No one else should or could fulfill this great task." The German editor then prodded the readers of the *Advenbote* in Austria and Germany to be aware as Christians of their ties with the ethnic community and of their civic responsibilities to vote on election day "for Germany and for the Führer." Urging Adventists to approve Hitler's annexation of Austria, he said "that membership in an ethnic community is a gift of God, the political organization of this people is a divine order and service to the people a divine command." He pointed out that because as German Christians, Adventists were partaking of the blessings of peoplehood, they had, in return, "a responsibility for its preservation and promotion."⁹⁴

Some writers suggested, however, that the German Volksgemeinschaft was not complete, for many Germans still were not in the Reich. Although the Sudetenland was "a German land to the core,"⁹⁵ said one article, the Germans there were separated from the homeland and their Volksgenossen by the totally unjustified Treaty of Versailles. One writer said that

"Adventists cautiously opposed the government when their vital interests were at stake Sometimes the government changed its demands."

"thanks to the will of peace of the Führer . . . and the understanding collaboration of the statesmen of Italy, England and France the way home . . . has been opened . . ." It was completely in accord with the divine will, the same writer argued, that people with the same blood, history and language should live together. After October 1, 1938, they did live together.⁹⁶

"Hard times . . . lie behind our ethnic comrades in the Sudetenland," the writer continued, and Adventists will do everything possible to

help.⁹⁷ Already the school at Friedensau was caring for many refugees, who had suffered "inhuman cruelty and destruction by a hateful enemy. . . ."⁹⁸ They were now happy to have experienced the great deed of the Führer, it was said, and they were proud to be Germans. "We thank God that he resolved things in the last hour."⁹⁹ The Sudeten German church in Goblonsz rose during the opening choir number in thankfulness for the liberation through God and Führer, the *Advenbote* reported.¹⁰⁰ The same paper said that although certain international powers had tried to prevent the work of liberation they had failed because of the unity of the German nation and the Führer's leadership.¹⁰¹

With the separation of the Sudetenland, "the new Czechoslovakia will find a greater security than she has ever enjoyed in the past," Neville Chamberlain, the British prime minister, said. Hitler had signed a contract at Munich.¹⁰² But what was a contract for Hitler? Six months later on March 16, 1939 Hitler liquidated the rest of Czechoslovakia.

Adventists did not object. Bohemia and Moravia, with their many Germanic islands, and the city of Prague, which played such a fateful role in German history, "belongs to our reunited Reich," the Adventist editor of *Der Adventbote* wrote. He said that Czechoslovakia "has been dissolved through the creation of a German protectorate." It could not have been different, for Czechoslovakia was an unnatural creation, formed through the "hateful, artificial borders, drawn by the fathers of Versailles." Now it was joined to the land to which it naturally belonged, to its own great advantage.¹⁰³

With the liquidation of Czechoslovakia, all pretense that Hitler simply wanted to rightfully unite all Germans should have vanished. Yet, Adventists agreed with the Nazi extinction of Czech sovereignty. Then came the attack on Poland, an even more brutal act. Still, an Adventist author could write that in view of the "inhuman tortures our Volksgenossen have suffered among this foreign people" the German attack was probably justified. The Führer wanted only to correct these injustices. "In the East there is now peace. Humanly everything is being done to strengthen and secure it . . . Meanwhile, the Führer has shown the way to peace also in the West. By the time this *Adventbote*

reaches the readers, the dice will have fallen. What will the enemy have decided? Certainly, there exists not a single German who does not want peace like the great Führer of our people." But if this wish should be unfulfilled, "we know that God is in control, and that things happen only through his will and permission."¹⁰⁴

God, according to this version, apparently did not want peace, because war erupted also in the West with the German invasion of Denmark and Norway on April 9, 1940.

Still, Adventists continued to support Hitler. In fact, they sang his praises on his 51st birthday, which came on Sabbath, April 20, 1940. The *Morning Watch Calendar* stated:

Trust in his people has given the Führer the strength to carry through the fight for freedom and honor of Germany. The unshakable faith of Adolf Hitler allowed him to do great deeds, which decorate him today before the whole world. Selflessly and faithfully he has struggled for his people; courageously and proudly he has defended the honor of his nation. In Christian humility, at important times when he could celebrate with his people, he gave God in Heaven honor and recognized his dependence upon God's blessings. This humility has made him great, and this greatness was the source of blessing, from which he always gave for his people. Only very few statesmen stand so brilliantly in the sun of a blessed life, and are so praised by his own people as our Führer. He has sacrificed much in the years of his struggle and has thought little about himself in the difficult work for his people. We compare the unnumbered words, which he has issued to the people from a warm heart, with seeds which have ripened and now carry wonderful fruit.¹⁰⁵

It is clear, insofar as we may extrapolate from published evidence, that Adventists supported the Nazi leadership and many of its undertakings. But Adventists also insisted strongly on their traditional teachings. "Conscientiously, we want to observe and live the traditional principles of our message. We want to give up not a single one. . . ." ¹⁰⁶ These principles, particularly the Sabbath, had to be defended even if they necessitated sacrifices.¹⁰⁷

In 1928, an outside observer, Dr. Friedrich Loofs, stated that Adventists would insist upon religious liberty, which for them meant "only the opposition to the Sunday laws."¹⁰⁸ And so it remained in Nazi times. "The Sabbath question is and remains the great question of faith."¹⁰⁹

For these and similar principles, Adventists fought and suffered. As a result, the government frequently accepted their view. For example, the Nazi Minister of War wrote to all the supreme commanders of the army, navy and air force, instructing them to excuse Adventist soldiers on Sabbath between 9 and 12 o'clock so that they might attend church. An Adventist commented on this order by admonishing his readers to fulfill their duties with exemplary devotion in return for the privilege so that they might earn the respect of their superiors.¹¹⁰

Adventists also defended the Bible (including the Old Testament)¹¹¹ and Christian missions,¹¹² both of which were being questioned by the Nazis. Yet, besides the biblical reasons for world missions, some strange justifications appeared. For example, world mission was the Christian contribution to the struggle against Bolshevism,¹¹³ Adventists argued. Adventists cautiously opposed the government when their vital interests were at stake. Sometimes their opposition was successful and the government changed its demands.¹¹⁴ Therefore, the silence of the church on many critical issues of the time is regrettable.

Adventist publications said nothing about the 1933 purges when hundreds were murdered in cold blood. Nor did they raise a voice against the persecution and execution of countless Jews. Neither the atrocities in the concentration camps or the occupied territories received mention, nor the euthanasia program, which the Catholics, largely alone, were able to stop. The war itself was never questioned.

Although some individual Adventists seemed to have resisted the Nazi temptation,¹¹⁵ no active official opposition to the inhuman Nazi regime seemed to have existed nor even to have been permitted among Adventists.¹¹⁶ Yet, many Adventists did die, unfortunately, for the diabolical policies of that state. Then it was possible to pen a parting word for the dead, saying, as happened in one instance, that in "faithful execution of his duty he gave his

young life, so that his Volk might live and prosper."¹¹⁷

Finally, even such statements ceased. There

was only silence as the government ordered all church publications to close. All raw materials, including paper, were needed for the war.¹¹⁸

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