



Nazi Race Hygiene And the Adventists

A German-born Adventist scholar recounts how many Adventists equated health reform with racial purification.

by Roland Blaich

GERMAN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS ENTERED the Nazi era with apprehension.¹ As a foreign sect which resembled Judaism in many respects, Adventists were particularly threatened by a society based on the principles of *völkisch* racism.² Yet the new state also had much to offer them, for it held the prospect of new opportunities for the church. The Nazi state banished the scourge of liberalism and godless Bolshevism, it restored conservative standards in the domestic sphere, and it took effective steps to return German society to a life in harmony with nature—a life Adventists had long championed.

One of Adventism's most distinguishing marks was—and is—its theology of health reform. Adherents perceive body, mind, and spirit as inseparable aspects of the human

being. Since the human body is the “temple” of the Holy Spirit, Adventist theology recognizes the importance of the physical being and places a strong emphasis on temperance and healthful living. This emphasis is most visible in the church's radical opposition to the use of alcohol and tobacco, and avoidance of “unclean” foods such as pork. In Germany, as elsewhere, the Adventist “health message” strongly affects all aspects of denominational work. This is evident not only in an extensive health care and welfare system and in the manufacture of health foods, but also in publishing, education, evangelism, and pastoral ministry. An evangelistic auxiliary, the Adventist health message is the “right arm” of the church.³

Nazi leaders were also committed to health reform.⁴ Men like Gerhard Wagner, head of the National Socialist Physicians' League, believed that a healthy, more natural diet would result in a healthier, fitter nation. They demanded a reduction in consumption of meat and fats, and emphasized the use of natural

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foods such as fruit, high-fiber vegetables, and whole-grain bread. Germans, they contended, should avoid caffeine, food colorings, and preservatives, and replace chemical fertilizers, DDT, and other environmental hazards with natural or organic methods of farming. Leaders also opposed drugs such as alcohol and tobacco as “genetic poisons” which were ultimately to be banned.⁵ The new state thus placed its health-care emphasis on prevention rather than cure.

However, healthful living represented only one part of prevention; the other was genetic uplifting (*Aufartung*), or purifying the genetic substance of the German people. For some time German scholars had endeavored to employ the Darwinian principles of selection to halt a perceived degeneration of the human species.⁶ In the 1890s a eugenics movement developed in Germany that by the 1920s had become a respectable part of biomedical science called race hygiene.⁷ Race

hygienists argued that in the civilized West the principle of natural selection, which was assured in primitive societies, had ceased to function. In the 1920s particularly, a variety of German academics, as well as health care professionals and politicians, were concerned about the proliferation of physically, mentally, and criminally degenerate elements. In caring for the “weak” through its health care and social welfare system, a paternalistic state took valuable resources from the productive elements and gave them to the unfit, thus “in a tragic circle diminishing the number of the healthy, and proliferating the inferior.”⁸ Population planners, biologists, jurists, doctors,

psychiatrists, as well as theologians, demanded that the state must act to halt the decline.⁹ Otherwise, they predicted, society would soon be ruled by the inferior and the entire race would ultimately be extinguished.¹⁰

The Nazi state adopted the principles of racial hygiene as part of its political and social agenda. Indeed, these were at the very core of the social-Darwinist power ideology of National Socialism.¹¹ In *Mein Kampf* Adolf Hitler had argued that persons found to be physically and mentally “unworthy” must not be allowed to perpetuate and thus “eternalize their suffering in the body of their children.” It

was the duty of the state to ensure that only those with healthy traits be allowed to procreate.¹² Less than six months after taking power, on 14 July 1933, Hitler’s government instituted eugenics—or “race hygiene,” the preferred German term—with the Law for the Prevention of Genetically Defective Progeny. This was their first in a series of steps taken

to return the German people to harmony with natural principles and to ensure the survival of the German race.¹³

In this new state, the work of their “right arm” seemed to Adventists more significant than ever. For the Nazi state offered Adventists the chance to build on their strengths, to work with the state toward a common goal, and at the same time find security. Adolf Minck, later president of the German Adventist church and then director of Adventist Youth Ministries, crystallized this attitude: “We are not unprepared for the new order. After all, we have helped prepare the way for it, and have helped to bring it about.”¹⁴ Anxious at first,

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—Adolf Minck, 1933 youth director of German Adventists, later division president

Adventist leadership soon welcomed the new order as a time of opportunity.

Over some time the Adventist church in Germany had built a well-organized, efficient welfare system that seemed particularly well suited to work with state authorities. It had no equal elsewhere in the Adventist world church, and was primarily the result of the dynamic and charismatic leadership of Hulda Jost. Jost also served as leader of the Adventist Nurses Association (*Friedensauer Schwesternschaft*), which operated several nursing homes and provided staff for numerous hospitals, including an Adventist hospital in Berlin. She used her position to establish ties with prominent social and governmental leaders, not only in Germany but across Europe, to a degree that had not been matched by any European Adventist leader.¹⁵

Jost's contacts with important persons abroad and government officials at home gave her stature and made her a good choice to represent the interests of the denomination to the government. Early in 1933, as the Nazis began the process of *Gleichschaltung* (the term describing the implementation of the Nazi totalitarian state), Hulda Jost advocated a closer association of her organization, Adventist Welfare (AWW), with the work of the *Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt/Winterhilfswerk* (NSV/ WHW), the National Socialist *Volk* welfare organization. She argued that this would offer opportunity to achieve "great things" for the denomination, predicting that it might prove critical to the survival of the church.¹⁶

When the Nazi state outlawed the denomination on 26 November 1933, Hulda Jost successfully used her contacts to bring about a reversal of the ban. This lifesaving episode confirmed the church leadership in their view that in the new state the health and welfare work was critically important. By mid-1934, Hulda Jost had streamlined the Adventist welfare work according to the *Führer* principle

(which required complete obedience to a single central authority), had placed it under the authority of the Main Office for Volk Welfare (*Amt für Volkswohlfahrt*), and had affiliated with the NSV.¹⁷ She saw in this affiliation a sign of "God's leading."¹⁸ Because of this affiliation, she was able to expand her contacts to include high officials in both the Propaganda Ministry and the NSV, contacts which time and again would prove valuable to her church.¹⁹ Under the Nazi umbrella, she felt, Adventist welfare was safe.

The Adventist press introduced its readers to the purpose of Nazi welfare, which was to restructure the entire welfare system "according to the National Socialist *Weltanschauung*. Above all it [was] the ordained guardian to ensure that the genetical-biological and race hygienic legislation of the coming years [was] carried out."²⁰ It was the "guardian of the nation's eternal life," of the "genetic traits that originate in eternity and flow like a river through our generation," through which every German was "connected and obligated." Its work was "not a mission of mercy" but instead was to carry on the "struggle for the inner strength and greatness of the German *Volk*."²¹ As with everything else in the Nazi state, the racial question figured centrally in the NSV's work.

Before long it appeared that Adventists had adopted the principles of Nazi welfare. Hulda Jost spoke of "charity on a *völkisch* basis" and of "*völkisch* social work for the family."²² She stressed that the goals of the church and those of the National Socialist state were the same. "Love for one's fellow man unites Christian and National Socialist thought in the most splendid way," and "practical Christianity means National Socialism," she assured her readers.²³ Previously Adventists had practiced charity simply on the basis of where it was needed. In 1935 *Der Adventbote*, the main church journal, stated that whereas charity extended "to all

Germans, without exception,” “asocial elements who prove . . . unworthy” could be denied care.²⁴ In keeping with the Nazi ethos, “not the individual, but the *Volk* in its totality,” was now the object of welfare.²⁵

Jost was a powerful speaker and writer because she delivered her message with the power of conviction. She evidently saw it as part of her mission to introduce her people to the social gospel, which she thought should be the main focus of the church’s work.²⁶ One of her cardinal texts was Isaiah 58, which speaks of social justice as the true worship. Because of her effectiveness the Propaganda Ministry soon enlisted her services. She frequently spoke at welfare and women’s conferences in Germany and abroad. These assignments enabled her to further develop her contacts with dignitaries, which included Swedish nobel laureate Selma Lagerlöf, Neville Chamberlain, and Joachim von Ribbentrop, then German ambassador to Britain and later foreign minister of the Reich.²⁷

Jost used her frequent public engagements to promote the Nazi state. In 1936 she made a special propaganda mission to the United States. Ostensibly there to attend the quadrennial session of the Adventist General Conference in San Francisco, she toured much of the country lecturing on the accomplishments of the Nazi state in the social welfare sector. Her lecture tour was coordinated by the Propaganda Ministry, the German Foreign Office, and the General Conference working in concert. While she failed to win all of her objectives—she had hoped for a meeting with Eleanor Roosevelt, which never came about—the tour did much to establish her credibility with the Third Reich. As a high official in the Propaganda Ministry attested, she “carried out effective cultural-political propaganda work abroad for the new Germany.”²⁸

In the field of health reform Adventists found themselves for once joined by the

mainstream. They could even claim they were there first. Adventists could join in the work of the government since they were in agreement with the National Socialist state on just about every lifestyle issue, whether it concerned alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, and natural diet, or whether it was exercise, organic farming, or raising a family in the country. That the leader of the Nazi state, Adolf Hitler, was himself an advocate of health reform who practiced what he preached, was cause for celebration. A circular of August 1933 expressed it this way: “The Christian rejoices in the fact that his country is in the hands of a man who has his office from the hand of God, and who knows himself responsible to Him. As anti-alcoholic, non-smoker, and vegetarian he is closer to our own view of health reform than anybody else.”²⁹ In the Third Reich, Adventism’s time had clearly come. As one conference president put it, “Today we will succeed to win over wide circles to a God-ordained lifestyle if we point to the Führer and Reich Chancellor as the example of our people.”³⁰ As well, Adventists joined other Christians in praising Hitler as a model to emulate, especially in appeals to youth.³¹ Sales of health food by the Adventist-owned company De-Vau-Ge grew. In some categories, like flakes and whole grain bread, they doubled between 1928 and 1938.³²

By 1937 Adventists associated with other health reform-minded Germans in a Nazi-sponsored German Movement for Health Reform. The Adventist journal *Gute Gesundheit* (*Good Health*) reported at length about the proceedings of the organization, where speakers left no doubt that “the unshakable platform for the common task” was the Nazi *Weltanschauung*.³³ “The Third Reich begins with the laws of nature,” the journal quoted one speaker, “and that is why the *Weltanschauung* of the Health Reform Movement is National Socialism.”³⁴ As Adventists joined with the National Socialist state in a common task, their health

message came to reflect that of National Socialists. Good health was no longer just a concern for the individual, but it was a matter of state. The state needed healthy people, and every German was dutybound to live healthfully. Already mentally and technologically superior, Germans needed to maintain good health to defend this birthright.³⁵ Smoking was no longer merely unhealthy, it was un-German (*nicht angemäss*). Along with many other vices, smoking had been introduced by the Jews.³⁶ As well, alcohol should be avoided as it was the enemy of the *Volk*.³⁷ In war, it interfered with one's patriotic duty and, more significantly, it "endangered genetic selection" and thus was "racially tainting."³⁸

With this kind of reasoning Adventists entered into the main current of National Socialist thought. One can learn much about the Nazi vision of a more viable society based on natural law and the principle of selection simply by reading Adventist literature.

Though one Adventist journal raised questions about the principles of race hygiene as late as March 1933, from then on Adventist publications endorsed the *völkisch* state.³⁹ A whole series of articles in various Adventist journals sought to establish the racial principle on biblical grounds. "What is the biblical view of the national renewal?" asked one article that appeared in *Gegenwartsfragen* (*Contemporary Issues*) in 1933. The answer was reassuring: "The biblical historical view is not materialistic, but *völkisch*."⁴⁰ The youth journal *Jugend-Leitstern* taught young Adventists that the *völkisch* order was God-given, an order of creation, and "revealed by God in history."

That is why "the liberalist idea of the brotherhood of nations" could "never have been in harmony with God's will and Holy Scripture."⁴¹ No nation could disregard the *völkisch* principle without dire consequences. The Jewish nation served as a warning to those who violated it. Jews, the author argued, had mixed with other nations and thus incurred God's punishment.⁴² Racially mixed marriage of Aryan and Jew was a "violation" of "God's genetic law," and the "doctrine of the pure blood [*Blutreinhaltung*]."⁴³ Some authors defended the racial principle on historical and cultural grounds as well.⁴⁴

Adventists commended the state on its efforts to improve the genetic substance of the German people. They condoned forced sterilization so that resources saved might be invested in the "healthy and productive" elements of the German people.

The church's periodicals also joined the mainstream in support of "natural law," or Darwinian principle. *Der Adventbote*, in an article entitled "Forward in the Opposite Direction," blamed the liberal state for having ignored natural law, which had led to "biological decline" (*Verfall*) of the German people. "We positive Christians," it said, "can

count ourselves among those who respect natural law and moral law, and seek to live accordingly."⁴⁵ Adventist literature praised the new state for its success in reversing the population decline of the Nordic race, which had been the victim of bourgeois and materialist civilization.⁴⁶ "The decline of the West, as prophesied by Oswald Spengler, seemed to be an unavoidable fate," wrote the Adventist physician Ernst Schneider. "Even among the German *Volk* the characteristics of *völkisch* disintegration were manifest at an increasingly alarming rate, and evident in the bastardization of races, with the inevitable consequences of physical and intellectual-spiritual degenera-

tion.”⁴⁷

As the government’s new eugenics law went into effect, Hereditary Health Courts applied forced sterilization not only to those with inherited problems such as epilepsy, schizophrenia, or mental deficiency, but also to those considered social, political, or sexual deviants.⁴⁸ This law alarmed many Christians, who voiced concern that it violated Christian principles. Nazi authorities sought to allay their concerns with an educational campaign, and Adventist journals supported their efforts. One example is the edited version of an article from the Nazi journal *Neues Volk* reprinted in *Jugend-Leitstern*. Its author described eugenics as a preventive measure, designed to benefit not only society but the individual as well. “What is a political necessity for the state turns out to be humane, and a blessing as well, in every individual case,” he assured the reader. “To prevent an evil is better than to eradicate an existing one,” and “in this case state ethics and Christian ethics are completely synonymous.” Comparisons with the barbarian practices of Sparta were out of place, since the individual was not hurt in any way. The difference was one between annihilation and prevention. Far from being questionable, the writer concluded, the eugenics program was indeed a noble cause. To reinforce his argument he cited the words of Jesus: “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” And, “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” Clearly, the National Socialist state followed Christian principle.⁴⁹

Adventist authors supported the eugenics law and commended the state for its efforts to improve the genetic substance of the German people. They expressed satisfaction that since eugenics was regulated by law, there would be no misuse.⁵⁰ They condoned forced sterilization so that resources saved might be invested in the “healthy and productive” elements of the German people.⁵¹ Some ex-

plained their support in Christian terms: “Especially the Christian knows of the divine demand for purity and sound strength.” Holy Scripture taught us to keep the people from harm, “and much is being done today to increase health and intellectual potential according to the will of the Creator.”⁵² Others sounded more Darwinist. “Nature is harsh and cruel,” one writer asserted in *Gute Gesundheit*. “It is bent on ensuring the extinction of inferiority. It’s time to stop interfering with nature’s process.”⁵³ And another author in the same journal stated: “Above all smallish concerns there is the great goal of the genetical uplifting of our *Volk*.”⁵⁴ Hulda Jost was among those who voiced support for the eugenics law, and she lectured widely on this and related subjects before women’s organizations and also in Adventist circles.⁵⁵

Articles in the Adventist press stressed the importance of a “genetically healthy family” and the need to guard the purity of race as “the precondition for the preservation of every state.”⁵⁶ It was not sufficient to increase the birth rate by calling for a return to a larger family.⁵⁷ More genetical research was needed in the struggle for the purity of race to single out the best traits, argued *Gute Gesundheit*. It endorsed specifically the work of Professor Otmar von Verschuer of the Frankfurt Institute of Hereditary Biology and Race Hygiene.⁵⁸ Verschuer, who himself contributed an article to an Adventist journal, is also remembered for his close working relationship with Dr. Josef Mengele, who provided him with specimens from Auschwitz for his work.⁵⁹ Adventists even considered race science useful to the work of the church. Genetics and an understanding of inherited traits were the key that would unlock the secrets of the human soul.⁶⁰ Knowledge of the racial types could be of value in the ministry, and useful in determining a church member’s suitability for church office.⁶¹ Of course, the “Nordic type” was best suited for a leadership role.

A solution to the Jewish question was of critical importance to the German race hygienist. Although generally not racist, nevertheless German Adventist periodicals had at times described Jews as enemies of German and Christian values. An issue of *Kirche und Staat* in 1923, for example, charged that the “internationalist” Jesuits and Jews collaborated to bring about Germany’s ruin. Of the two, the Jew was seen as the greater threat.⁶² It is thus not surprising that the Adventist press extended the concept of racial purification to include the Jews. One example of this is an issue of *Gegenwartsfragen* in 1943 which blamed Jews, “a foreign body in our blood,” not only for provoking the war but also for “harming the German soul as well.” The Jew, the editorial claimed, “who is devoid of any morality, almost succeeded in making world powers into Jewish fortresses. It was rather late when those who had preserved healthy blood managed to halt the Jewish flood.” The reader was cautioned not to “grow weary in the struggle against the enemy of our race, who lives among the nations.”⁶³

Adventist authors explained away apparent conflicts between biblical tradition and Nazi racial doctrine. The Bible had predicted the domination of the Aryan race, and “Mindful of its destiny the Germanic race strove to achieve the domination which was theirs according to the Bible.”⁶⁴ The author of one article in *Der Adventbote* depicted Jesus as only partially Jewish, from his mother’s side, since his father was, after all, God. Since Christ had died for all of humanity, he was also born for all, belonged to no nation, and thus was not Jewish. The author further argued that Jesus himself had opposed Judaism.⁶⁵ And did Paul really mean to say that there was no difference between Jews and Greeks? Whatever Paul might have meant, he certainly never questioned the divine order of races.⁶⁶

Only rarely did the Adventist section of the

German chorus sound a sour note.⁶⁷ In 1937 Emil Gugel, past president of the German Adventist church, questioned the validity of racial science. It was still young, he cautioned, and “unsupported assertions” proved nothing. Gugel considered humanity as having been one unit, and he warned of the dangers which race science might pose to the concept of world missions.⁶⁸

How dangerous such criticism could be to the church is clear from an incident in 1937 involving Horst Müller. A physician at the Adventist sanitarium at Gland, Switzerland, Müller had sent letters to the editor of a German medical journal, cancelling his subscription. He made scathing remarks about German medical science which, he said, had “fallen on hard times.” Having yielded to a “rule of mediocrity,” the intellectual level of German medical journals had declined significantly: “I am of the opinion that this race nonsense and race euphoria, into which Germany has fallen, no longer permits scientific work, including in medicine.” Protesting the growing persecution of Jews, whose ranks included some of the best physicians, he predicted that the hour of retribution would surely come! Such dissent and open criticism,

Adapted from a cover illustration of *Neues Volk*, the journal published by the Nazi Party’s Office of Racial Policy. From 1933 on, Adventist publishers were under contract to distribute 10,000 copies of the journal each month.



however, was extremely rare and actively discouraged by church leaders. As it was, Adventist leaders feared that Müller's "unwise" letters, which had fallen into the hands of the Gestapo, had provoked the government into preparing a case against the Adventist church for "high treason."⁶⁹

While the main tenor of Adventist publications reflected the Nazi vision of a healthier, happier, purer Aryan nation, Adventist endorsement of race science and racial hygiene extended beyond intrachurch circles and publications. From 1933 on the Adventist publishing work was under contract to distribute ten thousand copies monthly of *Neues Volk*, the journal published by the Nazi Party's Office of Racial Policy (*Rassenpolitisches Amt*), through the church's denominational network of colporteurs.⁷⁰ In this way, as Hulda Jost wrote to the Gestapo, Adventist workers did their part to carry "National Socialist ideas" into "the most distant village."⁷¹

The Office of Racial Policy, one of the most important Nazi institutions, sought to educate the German public on the need for a racial policy.⁷² Its articles, films, and training courses promoted population growth, racial purity, and an anti-Semitism that claimed to be based on science. What cause Adventist book evangelists served when they sold *Neues Volk* may be illustrated by the following example of an 1941 article that sought to prove that a high criminality rate among Jews was racially based. It concluded:

We know what it takes to protect the German *Volk* against Jewry once and for all. There is no room for misplaced compassion. The Jew might otherwise show his true face overnight and mercilessly take his revenge on the German people. There is a kind of spiritual race crime as well. It is no less despicable than the physical one. Every kind of compassion, and be it only momentarily and toward a single person, is a waste of spiritual energy. The fate of the Jew is being carried out according to the law of justice which does not

consider smallish sentiments but serves the welfare of humanity with consistency. For Judah in world history the day of judgement has come."⁷³

The Final Solution had begun.

The final solution in the gas chambers clearly followed from the scientific system.⁷⁴ Purifying the German gene pool through sterilization was only the first part of the vision of the general racial uplifting [*Aufartung*]. The next steps came during the war, with the Nazi euthanasia program and the elimination of alien elements as "health hazards" to the German population.⁷⁵ Because they expected widespread opposition, Nazi authorities conducted the euthanasia program in great secrecy. Nevertheless, Lutherans and especially Catholics offered active opposition.⁷⁶ Adventists, however, remained silent.

Adventists instead used their strengths in health reform as a basis on which to work with the Nazi state and to court its goodwill. As the church joined with the state in working for health reform, its "health message" underwent a transformation. While continuing the traditional emphasis on healthful living, Adventist publications soon adopted elements of the Nazi racial agenda as well, thus in effect contradicting the church's characteristically anti-Darwinist stance. A curious path led from *caritas*, the caring for the less fortunate and weak, to elimination of the weak, as the work of God. Their strong right arm had led German Adventists to a *völkisch* position.

Why Adventists followed this path may be explained in part by Nazi pressures and regulations. For example, the editorial law of 4 October 1933 regulated what could be published, and subsequent guidelines forced editors to accept certain articles or be denied publishing rights. In 1934 *Der Adventbote* cautioned church members that henceforth the "presentation of Bible truths for our time requires special consideration."⁷⁷ G. W. Schubert, president of the Central European

Division, writing to a General Conference colleague, expressed his fear of an eventual takeover of the Adventist press. "The work of the Lord has ceased," he lamented, and "it seems to me as if the government is trying to capture our well-organized colporteur work, using it for the distribution of their own literature which contains the new ideals of the government with regard to nutrition."⁷⁸

While the church had little choice but to conform to Nazi standards if it wanted to publish and continue to share its health message, it is also clear that German Adventist leaders eagerly courted Nazi goodwill by accommodating the new order. It seemed prudent to join with the new state in the area of health reform, where the interests of church and state converged. Numerous documents show plainly that the church's service to the state was intentional, not incidental, and that it was anxious to convince the authorities of this. For example, in a letter of 10 December 1935 to the Gestapo in Berlin, speaking of Nazi policy on racial hygiene, Hulda Jost wanted "to prove [that our colporteurs] have put themselves completely at the service of the Third Reich. Our periodical, *Gute Gesundheit*, regularly contains articles of the same tendency to enlighten the people on healthful living and racial hygiene. In this way we, too, energetically support the propaganda work according to the National Socialist philosophy of life." This was done, she said, because "the Adventist denomination, the Advent Publishing House, and the Adventist Welfare Work" were "supporting the Führer and his plans without reservation."⁷⁹ While Jost's statement may be questioned since it was written for Nazi consumption, G. W. Schubert had no reason to equivocate when he explained German Adventist policy to a fellow vice president of the General Conference. "The main thing," he wrote, "was to keep the publishing house and the colporteur work going, because it was no little perplexity for us what to

begin with 600 regular colporteurs of our work aside from the many employees of the publishing house." He expressed the faint hope that this might be "the way of the Lord to get the same freedom later on for the distribution of our religious literature."⁸⁰ Naively, perhaps, Adventists hoped that somehow their collaboration would free them to carry out their unique evangelistic mission.

While this collaboration seemed to clash with the traditional Adventist principle of separation of church and state, German Adventist leaders evidently believed that special circumstances warranted collaboration.⁸¹ In a variety of ways they sought to educate the membership on the need for flexibility in adapting policy to fit a new political reality. Things had "changed overnight. It became necessary to take a [political] stand. A mere religious confession was no longer sufficient. What was now needed was a clear decision for or against the state."⁸² Leaders assured church members that in making this decision no tenets of faith were being sacrificed. Quite to the contrary, argued G. W. Schubert in his report to the 1936 quadrennial General Conference session in San Francisco, it had been "God's plan that there should be from time to time a special connection between his

Adapted from an illustration in the racist Nazi journal *Neues Volk*, entitled "Jüdisches Erbe" (November 1938).



people and the state authorities for the blessing of his children.” Citing examples from Scripture, Schubert referred specifically to Joseph, Nehemiah, and Esther, and noted that the “increasing difficulties that will come with the close of probation [makes] it necessary that the people of God cooperate closely with state authorities in times of distress.”⁸³

The record of this session contains no sign of protest. While privately some Americans advised caution, to German Adventist leaders, at least, it seemed that survival of the organizational structure was more important than some long-held Adventist principle.⁸⁴ Perhaps, since Adventist apocalypticism had so long focused on the enemy in Rome, they may have been blind to the growing menace on the political right.⁸⁵

Collaboration led to the inclusion of the agenda of race hygiene and racism in the German Adventist health message and its justification on biblical grounds. Evidently German Adventist leaders did not see the inherent contradiction with the church’s traditional anti-Darwinism. Much of what the Adventist press published was neither the product of pressure nor of accommodation; articles actually expressed the genuine views of Adventist authors. Eugenics and racial science may have appealed to Adventists because they offered better health through prevention. Moreover, Adventist health care and welfare professionals shared the same training and read the same journals as did their non-Adventist colleagues; that they would come to reflect the views of their academic disciplines should not be surprising.

Nor, if that were the case, would Adventists

be unique among their colleagues in other churches.⁸⁶ The erosion of liberal humanitarian values in the health sciences was extensive, and symbolic of liberalism’s demise, something underway long before Nazi racism took control. As racial science matured and the Nazi state implemented its agenda, time-honored Christian values and taboos faded. Longstanding European anti-Semitism combined with a *völkisch* interpretation of the Bible. This may help explain why in the end there was little compassion for the Jews. When eugenics reached the stage of exterminating the weak, the church was in no position to protest. Once Adventists ventured onto the

slippery slope of collaboration it was difficult to turn back. Thus the church was almost naturally silent on the final solution.

Whether or not church publications reflected what common Adventists believed, they led the reader to conclude that Nazi policies were in the people’s best interest and in keeping with God’s commission to

the church. Willingly or unwillingly, Adventist thought leaders lent their support to Nazi propaganda. As insiders, leaders had the confidence of their people, which made their propaganda more effective than the Nazi Party’s own.

In the end its well-conditioned “right arm” may well have been what impressed the Nazi state and saved the church.⁸⁷ While the state closed down nearly all church presses for the duration of the war, *Gute Gesundheit* continued through 1941, and *Gegenwartsfragen* through the autumn of 1944.⁸⁸ That Adventist periodicals were permitted to run this long

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testifies to the importance of friends in the Propaganda Ministry, and may also prove that they served Nazi purposes well. The distinction of having the longest-lived publications of any church for general distribution, however, was dearly bought. The price

was an Adventist press stripped of virtually all religious content. Moreover, it was a betrayal of Adventist doctrine and Christ's charity. The Nazi episode raises questions about the church's ability to escape the powerful normative forces of society.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Adventist church membership in Nazi Germany was about forty thousand, and the church employed some five hundred pastors and eight hundred staff in its publishing work. See Johannes Hartlapp, "Die Lage der Gemeinschaft der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus" (Predigerseminar Friedensau, unpublished thesis, 1979), p. 92. On Adventist apprehensions, see "An unsere Gemeindeglieder in Deutschland," circular by Wilhelm Mueller, *Der Adventbote* [hereafter AB] (15 August 1933).
2. *Völkisch* nationalists believed that cultural superiority is a function of race. In Nazi usage, the word carried strong anti-Semitic, chauvinistic, and nationalistic connotations.
3. The "right arm of the message" has long been used in Adventist circles as a metaphor for the denomination's medical work. The prophetess of Adventism, Ellen G. White, used the metaphor repeatedly; an example is found in *Christian Service* (Takoma Park, Md., 1947), p. 134. The initial historian of the church, tracing the origins of the church's medical work, refers to it as "that which afterward should be as the right arm and hand to the body in the rapid advancement of the work"; J. N. Loughborough, "Sketches of the Past—No. 129," *Pacific Union Recorder*, 22 August 1912, p. 1.
4. Hitler was a vegetarian, and did not smoke or drink. Rudolf Hess, the deputy of the Führer, supported natural homeopathic medicine. Heinrich Himmler, chief of the SS, believed in an "organic" lifestyle. Julius Streicher, a fanatical anti-Semite, was head of Germany's largest organic health movement. See Robert N. Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine Under the Nazis* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), p. 225.
5. Proctor, *Racial Hygiene*, pp. 223-241.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-45.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 17. Eugenics movements flourished also in England, Norway, France, Sweden, the Soviet Union, and the United States; see *ibid.*, pp. 285-286, and Paul Weindling, *Health, Race, and German Politics Between National Unification and Nazism, 1870-1945* (Cambridge, U.K., 1989), pp. 432-433.
8. Hermann Muckermann, S.J., "Rassenforschung und Volk der Zukunft," in Ernst Klee, ed., *Dokumente zur Euthanasie* (Frankfurt, Germany, 1992), p. 50. Muckermann was director of the Department of Eugenics at the Kaiser-Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Genetics, and Eugenics in Berlin-Dahlem. In the wake of World War I, and particularly during the Great Depression, eugenics offered a means of easing overcrowded conditions and cutting costs, which led to demands for the primacy of biology in social policy. See Weindling, p. 445 and Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: Euthanasia in Germany, 1900-1945* (Cambridge, U.K., 1994), pp. 11-42.
9. Klee, *Dokumente*, p. 42.
10. Joseph Mayer, *Gesetzliche Unfruchtbarmachung Geisteskranker* (Freiburg, Germany, 1927); excerpts reprinted in Klee, pp. 40-46. Mayer was a Catholic moral theologian.
11. In a speech of 28 June 1933 which was cited in the Adventist health journal, Nazi Interior Minister Wilhelm Frick described the genetic uplifting of the German race as the chief task of the Nazi government: *Gute Gesundheit* [hereafter GG] (December 1935), p. 179. Rudolf Hess defined National Socialism as "nothing but applied biology"; quoted in Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), p. 31.
12. Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Boston, Mass., 1943), pp. 403-404.
13. For a listing of other laws, see Proctor, p. 103.
14. Adolf Minck, "Reformation," *Jugend-Leistern* [hereafter JL] (April 1933).
15. Eberhard Fischdick, *Helfende Hände: Die Geschichte des Advent-Wohlfahrtswerkes* (Darmstadt, Germany, 1988), pp. 38-40. On Jost's activities, see also Roland Blaich, "Selling Nazi Germany Abroad: The Case of Hulda Jost," *Journal of Church and State* 35 (Autumn 1993), pp. 807-830.
16. AB (1 November 1933), p. 327; and AB (1 September 1933), p. 261.
17. Directives for the AWW, 16 July 1934. Ungeordnet (Bestand Hannover). Archiv für Europäische Adventgeschichte [hereafter AEA], Darmstadt, Germany; and Fischdick, p. 45. Jost was responsible to the government; see AB (1 April 1934), p. 103; and Supplement to AB (15 October 1934), 4 pp.
18. AB (4 April 1934).
19. Among her contacts in the Propaganda Ministry were Dr. Curt R. Thomalla, head of its Health and Social Services section and also the author of several films on eugenics; see Weindling, pp. 380, 412. Judging from Jost's reports about the often informal nature of their meetings, Jost and Thomalla were probably friends. Jost also developed a close relationship with Reichsleiter Erich Hilgenfeld. In the judgment of German Adventist leadership, the AWW was now under the protection of the government; G. W. Schubert to C. H. Watson, 29 July 1934, RG11 (Presidential) 1934-1936—Schubert, G. W., archives of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists [hereafter GC], Silver Spring, Maryland. For a discussion of several instances where Jost's connections to Nazi leaders proved invaluable to the church, see Blaich, "Selling Nazi Germany," pp. 820-825.
20. AB (1 November 1933), p. 329.
21. "Berlin, Ende August 1933," special four-page issue of AB. The "Guidelines for Evaluating Genetic Health" of 18 July 1940 is an example of how this principle was formalized. In

March 1941, rules governing appropriations for children stated: "The aim of this population policy is to strengthen the German people. Therefore, *considerations of charity and social welfare must be avoided* in decisions on granting or refusing children's allowances" (emphasis added); cited in Götz Aly, "Medicine Against the Useless," in Götz Aly, Peter Chroust, and Christian Pross, *Cleansing the Fatherland: Nazi Medicine and Racial Hygiene* (Baltimore, Md., 1994), p. 52.

22. Hulda Jost, "Was tun die Adventisten in der Wohlfahrtspflege? Jahresbericht für 1935," RKM 51.01, No. 23387. Bundesarchiv, Abteilung Potsdam [hereafter BA Potsdam].

23. Ibid., No. 00059-60; and Hulda Jost, "Was tun die Adventisten in der Wohlfahrtspflege? Jahresbericht für 1936/37."

24. Hulda Jost, "Winterhilfswerk 1935-1936," in *AB* (15 November 1935), pp. 346-348.

25. Otto Brozio, "Volksgemeinschaft," *Herold der Wahrheit* [hereafter *HW*], 55, no. 8 (1938), p. 117.

26. For a summary of Jost's work and thought, see Johannes Hartlapp, "Die Lage," pp. 52-57.

27. Other acquaintances were King Boris III of Bulgaria, Czech president Thomas G. Masaryk, and Lady Aberdeen; Fischdick, p. 46; Blaich, "Selling Nazi Germany," p. 824; and Hartlapp, p. 56, n. 4.

28. Friedrich Mahlo, Propaganda Ministry to Reich Ministry of the Interior, 23 July 1938. RKM 51.01/23388, No. 00062, BA Potsdam. Mahlo certified that the denomination "affirmed the National Socialist state and served it as best it could."

29. Wilhelm Mueller, "Berlin, Ende August 1933," *AEA*, U1-2, No. 0113.

30. W. Edener, "Volksfeind Alkohol," *AB* (15 February 1935), p. 45.

31. This was particularly the case during 1939, the "Year of Healthful Living"; *GG* (March 1939), p. 34.

32. Report by W. Luehr at the presidents' convention of the MED, 31 May to 5 June 1939, *AEA*, U1-2, No. 0075.

33. *GG* (December 1937), p. 188.

34. "Bericht über die Reichstagung der Deutschen Lebensreformbewegung," *GG* (October 1938), pp. 158-159.

35. E. Schneider, "Arbeitswille und Arbeitskraft: Die Waffen der inneren Front," *GG* (June 1940), p. 43.

36. *GG* (December 1941), p. 95.

37. "Ein Volksfeind," *Gegenwartsfragen* [hereafter *GF*] (January-February 1939), p. 14.

38. "Du und der Krieg," *GF* (July-August 1942), pp. 53-54; and *GG* (December 1935), p. 189.

39. In 1932 at least one Adventist journal, *Kirche und Staat* (*Church and State*), still rejected the principle of racism and race hygiene. "Not *völkisch* imperatives, a return to the concept of blood [*Besinnung aufs Blut*], not racial hygiene and eugenics will bring the hoped-for salvation," it cautioned; *Kirche und Staat* [hereafter *KS*] (April 1932), p. 55. See also Max Busch: "Here is the idea of self redemption through race and blood, which is in crass contradiction to redemption through Christ"; "Völkische Weltanschauung," *KS* (February 1932), p. 25. The last implied rejection of the racial state appeared in *Kirche und Staat* in March 1933. Without comment it reprinted the text of the Altona Confession of January 1933, a declaration of concern and protest by Lutheran pastors: "Ein mutiges Wort in ernster Zeit." *KS* (March 1933),

pp. 43-44. The journal ceased publication after the next issue, perhaps the price paid for an indiscretion.

40. "Volk und Staat," *GF* (December 1933), pp. 179-181.

41. "Heimat und Volkstum," *JL* (July 1933).

42. W. Leschowsky, "Judas Fluch," *AB* (1 April 1938), pp. 102-104. "God had already stigmatized Abraham's sin against the blood, which he committed in his union with the Egyptian Hagar. It was then that [God] taught him the principles of the purity of blood."

43. *AB* (1 April 1938), p. 103.

44. See, for example, "Die kulturgeschichtliche Aufgabe der Rassen und Völker," *GF* (August 1934), pp. 120-122; for examples from history of the destruction of nations which ignored the laws of nature, see Hulda Jost, "Was tun die Adventisten in der Wohlfahrtspflege? Jahresbericht für 1935," p. 32, *AEA*, B9-7.

45. S. R. D. Haeseler, "Vorwärts in der umgekehrten Richtung," *AB* (15 January 1934), p. 18. Otto Brozio, the leader of Adventist welfare after Jost's death in 1938, called the Nazi revolution "the greatest of all time" because it made the laws of heredity the basis of its ethnic life. A blocked quote from Hitler on the significance of blood served to reinforce his argument; in "Der Tätigkeitsbericht des Adventwohlfahrtswerkes," *AB* (15 August 1938), pp. 250-251.

46. Willy Brehm, "Das Heimatgebiet der nordischen Rasse durch Geburtenrückgang im Kern bedroht," *GG* (May 1937), p. 69. For other articles on population policy see *GG* (September 1938), p. 133; and *GF* (March 1936).

47. E. Schneider, "Volk, Kraft und Gesundheit im Kriege," *GG* (May 1941), p. 35. Schneider argued that "The higher the health standard of a race, the higher its strength, which is best and most reliably evidenced in a high birth rate [*Kinderreichtum*]." For other articles on the role of genetics in the survival of a fit race, see "Familie und Staat," *GF* (February 1934); and *GG* (May 1935), p. 74-75.

48. The gruesome inhumanity sanctioned by this law is amply detailed in Klee, pp. 60-325; Proctor, pp. 177-222; Burleigh, pp. 43-161, 220-266; Weindling, pp. 522-574; Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1995), pp. 23-186; and Aly, pp. 22-98.

49. A. von Rohden, "Verstößt das Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses gegen das Gebot der Nächstenliebe? [Does the Law for the Prevention of Genetically Defect Progeny Violate the Commandment to Love One's Neighbor?]," *JL* (February 1934), p. 20.

50. *GG* (October 1933), p. 147.

51. *GF* (January 1934), p. 8; *GF* (November 1933), pp. 170-172; and *GG* (October 1933), pp. 146-147.

52. *GF* (January 1934), p. 8.

53. "Das soziale Bleigewicht der Minderwertigen [The Inferior: A Social Millstone]," *GG* (December 1934), pp. 170-171; see also "Gesunde Eltern—gesunde Kinder," *AB* (15 April 1934), p. 122.

54. "Wohnsiedlungen, Bevölkerungspolitik und Rassenhygiene," *GG* (May 1935), p. 74.

55. One example is her lecture, "Die Mutter und das Erbgut innerhalb der Familie als Keimzelle des Staates," presented to the convention of the German Women's League in Berlin: Jost, "Was tun die Adventisten in der Wohlfahrtspflege, Jahresbericht für 1934/1935," p. 19. For other lectures, see

Jost, report to Gospel Workers Meeting at Friedensau, 7 June 1934, GC, RG21 (SDA Documents—General); and Jost, “Was tun die Adventisten in der Wohlfahrtspflege? Tätigkeitsbericht 1. Januar bis 31. Dezember 1935,” p. 9; RKM 51.01/23387, BA Potsdam.

56. *GF* (January 1934), pp. 8-10.

57. “Kinderamut” and “Gesunde Eltern, gesunde Kinder,” *AB* (15 April 1934), pp. 122-123; also, “Familienschicksal ist Volksschicksal,” *AB* (15 May 1934), p. 161.

58. The author of one article wrote: “Scientific research in genetics and knowledge of the laws of inheritance are of utmost importance in our struggle for the purity of our race.” Research on twins was considered particularly useful; “Zwillingsforschung und Erblehre,” *GG*, (April 1939), pp. 51-53.

59. *GF* (September 1933), pp. 124-125.

60. “Warum Sippenforschung?” *GF* (May-June 1939), pp. 40-41.

61. “Rassenlehre und Diakonie,” *GF* (May-June 1939), pp. 36-37.

62. “It is indeed true that the German *Volk* has been deceived by Jews and Jesuits, and still is led around by the nose like a fool by these international enemies of Germanism”; “The Vatican’s Great Power Politics Among States,” *KS* 2 (1923), pp. 19-21.

63. D. [Fritz Daniel, the editor of the journal?], “Zwischen den Nationen,” *GF* (July-August 1943).

64. *AB* (1 November 1937), p. 327; and *HW* (February 1939), p. 26.

65. *AB* (1 February 1939), p. 34.

66. *AB* (15 February 1935), p. 59.

67. Published statements did not necessarily reflect the views of church members. For example L. H. Christian, a vice president of the General Conference on visit to Germany, reported considerable restiveness among members over the policy of collaboration with the state; see GC, RG2/General Conference Officers, 23 July 1939. See also Wilhelm Mueller’s circular of August 1933, which takes great pains to justify the new policy; AEA, U1-2, No. 0113.

68. Emil Gugel, “Evangelium, Rassenfrage und christliche Mission,” *HW* (February 1937), p. 23.

69. W. Ising to McElhany and Nelson, 2 July 1937, GC, RG21/1937—Central Europe. See also action by the Central European Division Committee, 23 June 1937, GC, RG21/Special Files, Central European Division, 1937 FLD.

70. Hulda Jost to Gestapo, Berlin, 10 December 1935, GC, RG11 (Presidential) 1934-1936—Schubert, G. W.

71. *Ibid.* See also Hulda Jost, “Was tun die Adventisten in der Wohlfahrtspflege, Jahresbericht für 1935,” p. 12, RKM 51.01/23387, BA Potsdam.

72. Proctor, p. 87.

73. The original quote reads as follows: “Wir wissen, was notwendig ist, um das deutsche Volk für alle Zeit gegen das Judentum zu schützen. Für falsches Mitleid ist kein Platz; denn über Nacht könnte sonst der Jude sein wahres Gesicht hervorkehren und mitleidslos seine Rachegefühle am deutschen Volke auslassen. Es gibt auch so etwas wie eine seelische Rassenschande. Sie ist nicht weniger verabscheuenswürdig als die körperliche. Denn jede Form des Mitgeföhls, und sei es auch nur vorübergehend und auf

eine einzelne Person bezogen, ist eine seelische Kräftevergeudung. Das Schicksal des Juden vollzieht sich nach den Gesetzen einer Gerechtigkeit, die nach kleinlichen Empfindungen nicht fragt und dem Wohle der Menschheit unbestechlich dient. Auch für Juda ist Weltgeschichte Weltgericht.” See “Ahasver: Ein Blick in das Verbrecheralbum,” *Neues Volk* (December 1941), p. 9. *Neues Volk* may be found in the Bundesarchiv Koblenz, NSD17/1-1941.

74. Among the most notable recent studies are those by Klee, Proctor, Burleigh, Weindling, and Aly; see note 48.

75. Proctor, p. 7.

76. See Lifton, pp. 90-95; and Ernst C. Helmreich, *The German Churches Under Hitler* (Detroit, Mich., 1978), pp. 305-315.

77. “Zionswächter” (editorial), *AB* (1 April 1934).

78. G. W. Schubert to C. H. Watson, 5 January 1936, (Basel), GC, RG11/1936(I)—Schubert, G. W. To forestall a Nazi takeover, the church privatized its publishing house.

79. Jost to Gestapo, Berlin, 10 December 1935, GC, RG 21/1936—Central Europe.

80. G. W. Schubert to C. H. Watson, 5 January 1936, GC, RG11/1936(I)—Schubert, G. W.

81. When charged with apostasy in 1945 by American Adventist leaders, Adolf Minck, then president of the German denomination, claimed the policy of flexibility was not apostasy but mere “detouring” around an obstacle; D. G. Rose to J. L. McElhany, 5 April 1948, GC, RG 21/Documents: 1920s-1950s—Central and Northern Europe.

82. Wilhelm Mueller, circular, August 1933, AEA, U1-2, No. 0113.

83. 1936 General Conference Report No. 8, 1936; “The Central European Division,” *The Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald*, 5 June 1936, pp. 168-170.

84. Louise Kleuser, translator during Jost’s speaking tour in the United States, tells of several leaders who voiced concern, adding that “On some points, principle must be above expediency”; Kleuser to J. L. McElhany, 18 May 1936, GC, RG11/1936(II)—Jost, H.

85. Adventists were “too narrowly informed,” and had not considered the “broad currents of time and thought,” according to Fritz Holl, a retired church administrator, in an interview of 28 July 1986.

86. Klee, pp. 36-59.

87. G. W. Schubert described Hulda Jost as a modern-day Esther who had been called to save the church; on Jost’s role, see Fischdick, pp. 41-62. “The only reason why the sect has not been the target of [Gestapo] measures” was that it had proven “useful in the area of welfare work”; Gestapo (Müller) to Haugg, 1 October 1940, RKM 51.01/23388, No. 00177, BA Potsdam. By contrast, the schismatic Reform Adventists, who refused to either conform or collaborate, were outlawed in 1936 and subjected to severe persecution. Adventists carefully distanced themselves from the “Reformers,” denying them refuge. See Roland Blaich, “Religion Under National Socialism: The Case of the German Adventist Church,” *Central European History* 26 (3), p. 267 n. 45.

88. John S. Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches* (New York, 1968), p. 258. The last issue of *Gegenwartsfragen* appeared 30 September 1944; *Gute Gesundheit* ceased with the December 1941 issue.