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# Religion under National Socialism: The Case of the German Adventist Church

*Roland Blaich*

**I**N May of 1948 a letter from Major J. C. Thompson, chief of the Religious Affairs Section of the American Military Government in Berlin, arrived at the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists in Washington, D.C. Major Thompson's office was responsible for seeing that all Nazis were removed from leadership positions, and his letter was part of an ongoing correspondence about the denomination's need to come to terms with its Nazi past. The Adventist denomination, he complained, was "one of the very few in Berlin which have not cleaned house politically to date. Most of the denominations finished this task long enough ago to have forgotten about it." The letter must have been particularly embarrassing to Adventist leaders as it went on to compare Adventists to Catholics, who "actually had little housecleaning to do because of their strong opposition during the reign of Hitler to the entire Nazi regime."<sup>1</sup>

Already a year before receipt of the Thompson letter (in April 1947) General Conference president J. L. McElhany had asked the president of the German Adventist denomination, Adolf Minck, to purge the leadership of Nazi elements, and to take corrective measures to ensure that the German denomination and its 40,000 members<sup>2</sup> returned to sound standards.<sup>3</sup> Purging the leadership proved to be a difficult task, but not for lack of information. The General Conference was in possession of much documentary evidence from the prewar years. Some officers had worked closely with German leaders and were well acquainted with the predicament of the church in Germany, and in 1945, observers went to Germany to gather information and assess the situation.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, concerned church

1. Major J. C. Thompson, OMGUS Berlin, to W. B. Ochs, 20 May 1948. Archives, General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, Silver Springs, Maryland (hereafter cited as GC), RG 21/Documents: 1920s–1950s–Central and Northern Europe.

2. Membership in the German Adventist church grew between 1933 and 1945 mostly due to the acquisition of new territories.

3. J. L. McElhany to Adolf Minck, 24 April 1947. GC, see n. 1.

4. Among these was Otto Schuberth, Educational and Sabbath School Secretary of the Southern European Division, who was in Germany in 1945, and again in 1948. Otto

members in Germany and other parts of Europe volunteered evidence, and the Adventist Reform Movement had published documents that embarrassed the church.

Given the evidence, the case against German Adventist leaders seemed clear. In the main, it consisted of two charges. By collaborating with Nazi authorities, German Adventist leaders had violated the principle of separation of church and state. In doing so, the church's integrity had been sacrificed and basic denominational principles had been compromised, particularly the integrity of the Sabbath. Now, in May of 1948, a major concern of the General Conference was the political embarrassment the church would suffer in the event that U.S. military authorities ordered the dismissal of Adventist leaders, which they threatened to do as soon as the denominational headquarters in Berlin completed its move from the British to the American Sector.<sup>5</sup>

One year after the General Conference had decided to act (the spring of 1948), several pastors, one conference president, and an editor of the Hamburg Publishing House had been removed. Nevertheless, several of the top leaders who had been members of Nazi organizations remained in office. Moreover, there were no signs of church reform. Why then did the church fail to act decisively and in a timely manner in a matter so vital to its international reputation?

For German Adventist leaders, the case against them was not that clear at all. They insisted that they had followed denominational policy, and that they had not sacrificed the best interest of the church. Unable to travel to the United States during the immediate postwar years, they felt misrepresented and judged by men who lacked the experience of living in a totalitarian state. Convinced that ignorance, prejudice, and hypocrisy were at work against them, they closed ranks and resisted all outside pressure.

The controversy that ensued between German leaders and the General Conference offers valuable insights into Adventist church-state practice under a dictatorial regime. A brief survey of Adventist church-state relations during the Nazi period will provide the historical context for the contro-

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Schuberth to J. L. McElhany, 14 May 1948. Ibid. Others included L. H. Christian, president of the Northern European Division (in 1945); W. B. Ochs, general vice president of the GC (in 1947 and 1948); and D. G. Rose. On Christian, Rose, and Ochs, see W. B. Ochs, "Report to the Officers on Recent Visit to Germany (18 July-8 August 1947)," and Maj. J. C. Thompson to W. B. Ochs, 20 May 1948. Ibid. On Rose, see D. G. Rose to J. L. McElhany, 5 April 1948. Ibid.

5. Maj. Thompson to W. B. Ochs, 20 May 1948. Ibid. Thompson's office had data on membership in the Nazi party and affiliated organizations, as well as other pro-Nazi activities, based on *Fragebogen* information. American military authorities were more strict in handling the denazification process than were either the British or the Russians.

versy that flared in 1948. The Adventist story is unique in many respects, yet on the whole it is quite characteristic of several other small Protestant denominations in Germany. While focusing on the Adventist church under Nazism, this study is intended to contribute to a better understanding of the special nature of church-state relations in a totalitarian regime and encourage a reassessment of the Adventist doctrine of church and state.

Adventism had come to Germany from North America in the 1880s. German Adventists shared many of the characteristics of other pietistically oriented Protestant denominations, such as Methodists and Baptists, who, being out of the cultural mainstream, were otherworldly and largely apolitical. Three main features set the Adventists apart as unique. First, Adventists saw it as their paramount mission to proclaim and uphold the message of Revelation 14, which demanded submission to God. Secondly, strict observance of the seventh-day Sabbath for Adventists meant not merely keeping one of the Ten Commandments; the Sabbath was instituted as a memorial of creation by God, and Sabbath-keeping was a recognition of the Lord of Creation. It was the distinguishing mark of Adventism as the remnant church. The third unique characteristic was the church's holism. Body, mind, and spirit were seen as inseparable aspects of the human being. Since the human body was the "temple" of the Holy Spirit, the church recognized the importance of the physical being and placed a strong emphasis on temperance and healthful living. Most notable to the outsider, perhaps, was the Adventist opposition to the use of drugs like alcohol and tobacco, and avoidance of "unclean" foods such as pork, as outlined in Leviticus 11. This theology was—and is—reflected in the church's prominent medical, publishing, and educational establishments.

Firmly rooted in the Protestant tradition, Adventists saw themselves as part of a chain of God's church through the ages, and as the true heirs of the Reformation. Missionary minded, Adventists were inspired by a sense of apocalyptic urgency as they awaited the closing events of history they were about to witness. They studied biblical prophecy and the signs of the times that might herald its fulfillment.<sup>6</sup> They shared with many other Protestant groups a strong anti-Catholic bias, and saw in the papacy the establishment of Antichrist who plotted to persecute God's remnant church. German Adventists believed that the Vatican conspired to bring about the ruin of Protestant Germany.<sup>7</sup> While it inspired them to champion

6. Some of the themes that were featured as signs of the times in their publications during the twenties and early thirties included the League of Nations, Locarno, and the idea of a United States of Europe (which were opposed), disarmament, the "yellow peril" and the coming war between the races, resurgent Islam, the Great Depression, and Bolshevism.

7. German Adventists were particularly concerned about efforts to negotiate a concordat

religious liberty and the separation of church and state, it may have been their fear of Rome that left them blind to the peril from the political Right.<sup>8</sup> In 1933 the Seventh-Day Adventist church in Germany had a membership of 38,000. It was by far the largest Adventist body in Europe, and employed approximately 500 pastors, and 800 persons in its publishing work. Additional denominational employees worked in three educational institutions, the church-owned health-food company, and its hospital in Berlin.<sup>9</sup>

In Nazi Germany Adventists were among a number of small denominations who found themselves in jeopardy from the very beginning. A small American sect whose religious practices resembled those of the Jews in many respects, they were particularly vulnerable in a state that emphasized nationalism and anti-Semitism. The presence of radical Adventist offshoots, among these the Reformed Adventists who categorically refused military service, could well cause authorities to confuse one with the other. General ignorance about Adventists might easily be exploited by enemies of the church.<sup>10</sup> In a state where the Gestapo—a state within the state—held seemingly unlimited powers, individual leaders and the church as a whole were continually at risk. A careless statement, a single accusation of opposition by a party member, might lead to the dismissal or arrest of a church worker or even the dissolution of the church.<sup>11</sup>

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between the Reich and the Vatican. Two examples are found in *Kirche und Staat*, no. 2 (1923): 19ff, and no. 5 (1930): 67. It is interesting that the Adventist press commented on the Hitler Concordat of 1933 only in positive terms, noting that the Catholic priest was finally removed from the “political pulpit.” *Der Adventbote*, 15 February 1934 (hereafter cited as AB).

8. This was the assessment of Fritz Holl in an interview with the author on 28 July 1986. He found Adventists “too narrowly informed.” They had not considered “the broad currents of time and thought.” Holl was treasurer of the Baden-Württembergische Vereinigung.

9. The membership of the church in Germany fluctuated significantly during the Nazi period. In 1933 there were 37,769 members. Even though many members left the church during the thirties, membership increased to 38,282 by 1939 due to the incorporation of the eastern territories. W. B. Ochs, “Report to the Officers on Recent Visit to Germany (18 July–8 August 1947).” GC, RG 21/Documents: 1920s–1950s—Central Europe and Northern Europe.

10. Adventist leaders were rightly concerned about possible confusion with other Adventist groups. Friends in the Propaganda Ministry caused the *Völkischer Beobachter*, the main Nazi paper, to publish, on 10 December 1937, an article clarifying the difference. A reference to this is found in a letter by Braeckow, Reich Ministry for Propaganda and Public Enlightenment (ProMi) to Gestapo Berlin, 11 September 1940. Bundesarchiv Potsdam (hereafter cited as BA), Files of the Reich Church Ministry (RKM) 51.01/23388, Nr. 00251–52. Some government insiders who were enemies of the church used their position to bring about a ban. One such official denounced Adventists as “much worse” than Jehovah’s Witnesses. J. Schlichtig, Prussian Ministry for Art and Education, to Reinhardt, RKM, 4 May 1933. The letter is part of a file containing materials pertaining to an investigation of church leaders. RKM, 51.01/23387, Nr. 00272.

11. An example is the case of Georg Dürolf, president of the Rhenish Conference. His case is documented by the Gestapo. Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf, RW 58/10820.

Church leaders and members were keenly aware of this, and in word and in print they used great caution not to offend the Nazi authorities. A notable exception was the 1 July 1933 issue of *Kirche und Staat* (*Church and State*), which contained the so-called Altona Declaration—it was described as “a courageous word in difficult times”—in which Lutheran pastors expressed concern about some developments in the Nazi state. Asserting the line of separation between church and state, the Declaration reserved the right to resist the authorities where they crossed that line, or when they threatened the vital interests of the nation: “When that is the case . . . then everyone has to decide for himself where he has to obey God more than men.” It is perhaps no coincidence that the journal ceased after the next issue. Generally, however, the Adventist press abstained from any news or commentary on developments in Germany. When it offered such, it was usually quite positive, sometimes coming close to an outright endorsement of the Nazi state. Adolf Minck, who was then director of Adventist youth ministries, was almost jubilant in an article that appeared in the July 1933 issue of *Jugendleitstern*, the journal for Adventist youth, in which he described the Nazi era as a time of renewal, comparable to the Reformation:

A fresh, enlivening, and renewing reformation spirit is blowing through our German lands . . . This is a time of decision, a time of such opportunities for a believing youth as has not been for a long time. The Word of God and Christianity shall be restored to a place of honor. There is a demand for Christians. And that, my dear youth, is a call for us . . . We are not unprepared for the new order. After all, we have helped bring it about.

Other writers advised caution. Emil Gugel, then president of the South German Union, in an article entitled “True Vigilance,” warned of the consequences of a negative attitude toward the new regime, citing several examples from biblical history. From various sides, he wrote, “I have received letters inquiring whether we were now also going to have difficulties like the Jehovah’s Witnesses and others.” “Don’t do or say anything that could be damaging to us,” was his advice. “Don’t look for the time of martyrdom<sup>12</sup> or even seek it yourself.” Should God permit oppression of church members, “then stand fast in the faith.”<sup>13</sup> Articles such as this emphasized the Christian’s duty toward the political authorities which, it was always stressed, were instituted by God.<sup>14</sup> Disobeying the authorities was, therefore, nothing less than disobeying God.

12. Adventists believe that in the latter days will come a time of persecution, a “time of troubles,” which will end with the special intervention of God.

13. AB, 1 August 1933. This article is remarkable as one of the very few statements calling on members to remain loyal to principle.

14. One of these made the point that when Paul wrote the injunction in Romans 13,

Several documents from the early Nazi years are noteworthy because they addressed the specific issues faced by many Adventists living under Nazi rule. Basically, they urged Adventists to adapt to the new order. One of these was written in August of 1933 by Wilhelm Mueller as a circular for the East German Union. Reviewing the Adventist tradition of keeping out of politics, he argued that the new situation called for a changed attitude:

Then came the National Socialist revolution. Overnight things changed. It became necessary to take a stand. A mere religious confession was no longer sufficient. What was needed was a clear decision for or against the state. Issues arose that were altogether new. The Christian had to decide where he stood on *Gleichschaltung* and on the swastika, on the German- or Hitlersalute, on the *Reichsarbeitsdienst*, and more.

Mueller argued that Nazi symbols and programs were no longer those of a political party, but of the state, and as such deserved active support. After all, he reasoned,

the Christian rejoices that his country is in the hands of a man who has received his office from the hands of God, and who knows himself to be responsible to Him—as Adolf Hitler has emphasized more than once. As an antialcoholic, non-smoker, and vegetarian he is closer to our own view of health reform than anybody else.<sup>15</sup>

Mueller's circular was selected by the Central European Division in Berlin for printing and distribution to every member of the church in Germany.

The 15 October issue of the *Adventbote* (the German Adventist equivalent to the American *Review and Herald*) brought a similar message under the title "The Christian as Citizen." Emil Gugel wrote about governmental authority and the biblical principle of *Führertum*, or leadership; and about the accomplishments of the new state and the need for Adventists to accommodate the new political order, including its political symbols, the swastika and the Hitlersalute. The last statement in an Adventist journal exploring the Christian's duty to God in contrast to his duty to country was in the July issue of *Aller Diener*, the journal of the clergy. Its author, Adolf Minck, acknowledged the duty to obey God more than men.<sup>16</sup>

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Rome was governed by a monster, Nero. How much more ought they to obey Hitler. "Be Subject to All Human Authority." AB, 15 February 1934.

15. Archiv für Europäische Adventgeschichte, Darmstadt (hereafter cited as AEA), U1-2, Nr. 0113.

16. In *Unser Dienst am Volk*, the report on Adventist welfare for 1934, Hulda Jost made a similar point. While offering a series of proof texts demanding subordination to the authorities, she also reserved the right of conscience: "The sanctuary of conscience must be beyond the reach of the state; it is holy territory." Arguing for the *Rechtsstaat*,

On 30 October 1933 a circular “concerning our position toward nation and fatherland”<sup>17</sup> marked a clear departure from church tradition. Addressing the church elders and ministers of the East German Union on Germany’s decision to leave the League of Nations, Michael Budnick wrote:

Nations bristling with arms surround our fatherland, and not with the most peaceloving designs. Even though Germany is disarmed . . . they do not want to believe its peaceful intentions . . . All of the governmental declarations, made before all the world to witness, were insufficient to convince them that the German people love peace. The government therefore calls on us to demonstrate to all the world that the German people are unanimous in their commitment to peace. No one should be missing, ourselves included. Other governments have postponed their decision on which policy to adopt toward Germany until after 12 November. They are waiting to see whether the entire nation supports the Führer, united in the defence of its long-abused honor and in unshakable will to peace . . . Every weakness among our people will be noticed and ruthlessly exploited to the detriment of Germany. I call on every Adventist who loves his people, to support the peaceful intentions of the Reich government on 12 November . . .

This call to vote “yes” in the 12 November plebiscite was the first among many. These circulars were to be read to the congregations on 4 November, the Sabbath preceding the plebiscite. They were not the product of a few errant conference leaders. Rather, the writers were following instructions from the leadership in Berlin who had made commitments to the Nazi Propaganda Ministry,<sup>18</sup> and the arguments used to justify this departure from past practice were similar. The president of the Rhenish Conference, Georg Düroff, put it this way:

Since we ministers have usually abstained from any politics, some might think that we should not give any instruction this time either. That would be wrong, however. For this is not a matter of party politics . . . Surely, as Christians you want to have the right attitude toward the great and difficult tasks of the government. And this is why we think it our duty to give you the appropriate guidance.

Things had changed, Düroff wrote; the time of party politics was past. Moreover, all state power was of God, and St. Paul had written in Romans

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she added: “No despotism deserves the name state.” AEA/B9–7.

17. Johannes Hartlapp, “Die Lage der Gemeinschaft der Siebenten-Tags Adventisten in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus.” Thesis at the Friedensau Seminary (unpublished), 1979, 107–8 (appendix).

18. Minck Circular, “To the Union Conference Secretaries of the German Union Conference,” 26 October 1933. AEA/MED, Abteilungen. Berichte und Rundschreiben, 1933–35.

13: "Whosoever resisteth that power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." Clearly, it was the Christian's duty to support the government in whatever it did.<sup>19</sup>

Given all these efforts to demonstrate their patriotism and support for the regime, it came as quite a shock when the denomination was outlawed on 26 November 1933.<sup>20</sup> The ban came at a particularly bad time, since the German Adventists were then effectively without a president.<sup>21</sup> Emil Kotz, who had been elected at the 1933 Spring Council of the General Conference, had not arrived in Germany at the time of the ban, and then resigned for personal reasons without actually serving. Fortunately the ban lasted barely three weeks, and was rescinded 6 December 1933.<sup>22</sup>

The prohibition marked a turning point in the church's policy toward the Nazi state. After the ban was lifted the church reorganized its leadership. It sought to reinforce the hierarchical principle and speak with one voice. G. W. Schubert became president of the Central European Division, and Emil Gugel became president of the German denomination,<sup>23</sup> and since it was suspected that the prohibition was due to misconceptions about the church among Nazi officials,<sup>24</sup> both men were designated to represent the church to the government.<sup>25</sup> Using Nazi terminology to explain the new policy, Schubert wrote in the *Adventbote*: "Here, as well, *Gleichschaltung*."<sup>26</sup>

It was clear to church administrators that they had to try harder to convince the Nazi state of their support. Gugel sent to the state authorities a "Memorandum" that defined the denomination's beliefs, and stressed what set the church apart from Jews and several small sects: the church's

19. Circular to the churches of the Rhenish Conference, 2 November 1933. Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf, RW 58/10820.

20. The decree was effective in Prussia and Hesse only, but was understood as a general ban by the church.

21. On Kotz's delay and resignation, W. A. Spicer to M. E. Kern, 11 December 1933. GC, RG 21/1933-, Spicer, W. A. Also, Auszug aus dem Protokoll des Ausschusses der MED, 10 August to 12 December 1933. AEA, U1-2, Nr. 0079.

22. Gestapo Berlin to H. F. Schuberth, 6 December 1933. AEA, U1-2/0361. Evidence for the events and reasons for the ban is sketchy. Much of the credit for working behind the scenes to reverse the ban belong to Hulda Jost, director of the Adventist Welfare Work. Due to her valuable political connections in the Reich Propaganda Ministry, Jost's influence among the German Adventist leadership grew significantly.

23. The Central European Division included Switzerland, Austria, and several Eastern European countries in addition to Germany.

24. According to one theory the prohibition was the work of Lutheran government officials who were enemies of the Adventist Church. M. E. Kern to C. H. Watson, 13 December 1933. GC, RG 21/1933—Watson, C. H.

25. AB, 1 February 1934. Also G. W. Schubert to C. H. Watson, 29 July 1934. GC, RG 11/1934-36—Schubert, G. W.

26. AB, 1 February 1934, carries an article by G. W. Schubert explaining the reorgani-

emphasis on a healthy body, and its active welfare section which, the document noted, was a part of the NSV, the National Socialist People's Welfare, were cited as proof that the church served the nation in a significant way. Book evangelists, it noted, sold not only literature on healthful living published by the denomination, but also *Neues Volk*, the journal of the Race Political Office of the NSDAP. The section in the "Memorandum" that defines the denominational position toward the state is particularly interesting in that it cited Christ's famous "render unto Caesar," omitting the second part. Gugel's article on "The Christian as Citizen" was offered as proof that the church supported the Nazi state, and so was the appeal to the church membership to vote "yes" at the November plebiscite, when, it noted, 100 percent of the residents at the Adventist colony of Friedensau had voted in accordance with the regime's wishes. The "Memorandum" was printed and distributed among the churches.

The new course of the denomination was evident in several ways. From this time on, Adventist journals commented more frequently on political developments in Germany. The December 1933 issue of *Gegenwartsfragen* (*Contemporary Issues*) is indicative of the new journalistic policy. Entitled "Volk and State," it endorsed the *völkisch* state as being in keeping with biblical principles. The *Adventbote* of 15 February 1934 carried an article which defined the Adventist position toward the Nazi state. Under the title "We and the New State," it reviewed the record of the liberal and "materialistic" Weimar Republic, where selfishness and license had led to crime, fornication, and blasphemy. German cities, it said, were then "in competition with Babylon, Sodom, and Gomorrha." Only the Nazi revolution had saved Germany from disaster, and brought about the renewal of the nation and a healthy *völkisch* life. Proudly it proclaimed: "We are part of this revolution as well—as individual Christians and citizens, and also as a corporate denominational body." Beginning with this issue, there were more frequent articles on the duty of the Christian actively to support the state.

At ministerial conferences and in circulars, gospel workers were told to use their influence to put the church on a progovernment course. "In all your speeches and services, as well as in private conversations," read one 1936 circular addressed to the gospel workers of the West Saxon Conference, "you will of course be sure to support our government and to influence our members to do the same."<sup>27</sup> Church leaders often submitted these circulars to the government along with statements of support as proof of the church's loyalty. In one such letter Minck, who was by then president of the German denomination, stated:

zation. The Division Committee met 11–19 December 1933.

27. F. Hambrock, President of the West Saxon Conference, 14 January 1936. AEA, U2-1/0261.

At this occasion I may once again assure you that the members of our denomination stand loyally by the Führer and the Reich. They are continually encouraged and supported in their basic attitude. The leadership of the denomination considers this as one of its most noble duties.<sup>28</sup>

Supporting the state meant, of course, endorsing National Socialism. In later plebiscites the leadership repeated its call for a positive vote: 19 August 1934 (combining the offices of president and chancellor), 29 March 1936 (Reichstag elections, and to endorse Hitler's policy and occupation of the Rhineland), 10 April 1938 (*Anschluss*), and 4 December 1938 in the Sudetenland issue (*Ergänzungswahl*). As in 1933, the leaders assured their members that no religious tenets were being sacrificed. Quite to the contrary, argued Gugel in his August 1934 circular to all churches: "In view of the fact that our present government, and at its head the chancellor and Führer, are constantly working to promote the security and welfare of our German fatherland in every way, we may participate in this plebiscite in good conscience."<sup>29</sup> The Division Committee wrote concerning the 1936 elections: "We trust that all our members will participate in this plebiscite, and vote affirmatively, as in the past. We remind you of the divine injunction: 'Seek to serve the country's best interest and pray for its well-being.'"<sup>30</sup> Adolf Minck in his 1938 circular welcomed the plebiscite about the *Anschluss* as

a special opportunity to show our loyalty toward Volk, fatherland, and Führer. That is on 10 April, when every citizen of our beloved fatherland will have the opportunity to express his gratitude to the Führer Adolf Hitler, and for his achievements, by voting "yes." . . . On 10 April we Adventists will hand the Führer a thankful and trusting "yes."<sup>31</sup>

It should be noted that this plebiscite was not merely about the *Anschluss*—which virtually every German welcomed—but was also coupled to an endorsement of Hitler's policies.

During the time of the ban the Adventist welfare work and its energetic leader, Hulda Jost, had shown how vital it was for the church to work closely with the state.<sup>32</sup> From 1934 on, the Adventist welfare work

28. Minck to the Gauleiter of Danzig-Westpreussen, copies to the Reichssicherheitshauptamt and the Reichskirchenministerium, 24 June 1941. BA Potsdam, RKM 51.01/23388, Nr. 00268–69.

29. Dated 9 August 1934, to be read 18 August. AEA, U1–2/0113.

30. Signed by E. Gugel for the German denomination, and A. Minck, H. Fenner, G. Seng for the East German, West German, and South German Union, respectively. AEA, MED/Hannover Vereinigung.

31. Circular to all presidents, ministers, and elders, 4 April 1938. AEA, U1–2/0131.

32. G. W. Schubert gave Hulda Jost credit for saving the church. Schubert to C. H.

was more fully integrated into the NS welfare organization. As the Adventist welfare mission became entwined with its Nazi counterpart, National Socialist propaganda entered the church. Events sponsored by the Adventist Welfare Society in Adventist churches offered visible proof of this integration with the appearance of Nazi flags, speeches by Nazi officials, Hitlersalute and Nazi anthem, and Adventist Hitler Youth in uniform.<sup>33</sup>

Support for the Nazi state reached beyond German borders as German Adventist leaders took advantage of their foreign ties to promote the Third Reich abroad. They informed the government authorities about their pro-German activities by filing detailed reports. Particularly noteworthy is the American lecture tour by Hulda Jost and other members of the German delegation on the occasion of the 1936 General Conference Quadrennial Session. This tour was carefully planned and orchestrated by German Adventist leaders in conjunction with the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, the Ministry of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment, and the German Foreign Office.<sup>34</sup> Personal ties to Nazi officials that were expanded during these collaborative efforts with the state later proved invaluable when the church came under pressure.

At the same time the church took other steps to conform to the new order. Like other churches, it adopted Nazi terminology. Adventist educational institutions introduced the *völkisch* concept. In 1939, L. H. Christian, president of the Northern European Division, reported to the General Conference officers how scandalized he was after listening to a speech by a leading Adventist educator extolling the racial principle. How, he had asked Minck, can we do mission work and base our training and service on race?<sup>35</sup>

The church sought to remove anything that might prove offensive to the Nazi state. Gone were the days when the church used press and pulpit to proclaim prophetic issues, the signs of the times, the Second

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Watson, 29 July 1934. GC, RG 21/1934—Central Europe. The Gestapo later confirmed that the welfare work of the church was the primary reason why the church was spared. Gestapo (Müller) to ProMi, 1 October 1940 (copy). BA Potsdam, RKM, 51.01/23388, Nr. 00177.

33. One example is the report on a welfare program in Planitz. AB, 1 April 1935.

34. One example is the visit by several teachers from Friedensau. Thomalla (ProMi) to RKM, 5 January 1939 (includes copies of reports filed with the ProMi by the teachers). Also, see the report on his visit to the United States filed by F. Hambrock, president of the West Saxon Conference. BA Potsdam, RKM 15.01/23388, Nr. 001–108. The most significant examples, however, are the reports on Jost's visit in 1936. These are found at the Auswärtiges Amt, Politisches Archiv, R62293. See Roland Blaich, "Selling Nazi Germany Abroad: The Case of Hulda Jost," *Journal of Church and State*, Autumn 1993.

35. GC, RG 2/General Conference Officers, 23 July 1939. The educator in question was Dr. Wilhelm Michael of Marienhöhe Seminary. He was a past president of the Friedensau Seminary. Also, see the Report of the CED Committee, 31 May to 5 June 1939, AEA, U1–2, Nr. 0069.

Coming, and the Sabbath.<sup>36</sup> In some parts of Germany earlier Adventist publications, such as *The Great Controversy*, that might prove offensive to Gestapo officials were voluntarily removed from church libraries.

This policy affected even American publications. After an article that was critical of the Nazi regime appeared in a 1935 issue of *Ministry*, German Adventist leaders protested to the General Conference. An apology which M. E. Kern sent to Schubert was clearly written for the benefit of Nazi authorities. It said,

that the statement does not represent our sentiments regarding your government. While we may not agree with everything the Hitler government is doing, we greatly respect Mr. Hitler and his government for the many excellent things that have been accomplished, and for the liberty accorded to Seventh-Day Adventists. As enjoined by our Lord, Seventh-Day Adventists are loyal to the various governments under which they live, and we pray for those that have rule over us.<sup>37</sup>

Eager to assist their German brethren, the General Conference adopted and enforced a policy that prevented publication of any commentaries about Nazism or even fascism.<sup>38</sup>

The church in Germany also cracked down on “fanatics” and speculators in its ranks by counseling them and refusing them the right to speak,<sup>39</sup> and only those who were “politically reliable” were allowed to hold office in the church.<sup>40</sup> Anyone with leftist political views was considered as a definite liability; “incorrigible fanatics” who refused to heed the counsel of the leaders had to be reported to church administrators;<sup>41</sup> Jewish Adventists were shunned, and, in some instances, members were forbidden to visit them.<sup>42</sup> While individual Adventists assisted Jews and sheltered them at

36. L. H. Christian to C. H. Watson, 23 April 1934. Christian was the president of the North European Division.

37. Kern to Schubert, 23 September 1935. GC, RG 21/Box 94 (MED).

38. New policy adopted by General Conference Committee 10 March 1938. GC, RG 21/1939 McElhany, J. L. See also Circular by J. L. McElhany, 14 March 1938. *Ibid.* An example discussed in this document is the book, *The New Caesars*, published by Pacific Press for missionary outreach in the United States. Even though already printed, the General Conference Committee held that the book would be damaging to the church in Europe, and had the book withdrawn and destroyed.

39. One such is the “Circular to Gospel Workers and Church Elders of the Hanover Conference,” of 20 March 1935. AEA, MED/Hanover.

40. Circular, Rhenish Conference, November 1934. Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf, RW 58/10820, BL 106.

41. Circular, Hanover Conference, 20 March 1935. It asked to report the names of “incorrigible fanatics to our office.” AEA, unnumbered.

42. In fairness it needs to be pointed out that there were Adventists who sheltered and otherwise helped Jews. Among these were G. Seng and M. Budnick, presidents of the South German and East German Union, respectively. On Budnick, see Budnick to W. K. Ising, 25 July 1947. GC, RG 21/Documents: 1920s–1950s—Central and Northern Eu-

the risk of their own lives, normal church policy is better illustrated by the case of a member in the Berlin Conference, who wanted to assist a Jewish family: the Conference warned him not to expect any support, should he get into trouble.<sup>43</sup> After Reform Adventists were outlawed in 1936,<sup>44</sup> the church exercised great caution to prevent Reform Adventists from joining the Adventist church.<sup>45</sup> Political loyalty to the regime had to be established prior to baptism.

That holding the right political attitude was even more important for the ministry became apparent when a number of gospel workers had to be dismissed in response to direct Nazi pressure. "Here we are," complained G. W. Schubert to E. D. Dick of the General Conference about the dismissal of two of their "best" conference presidents because the Gestapo considered them politically unreliable. "When the party says: The man is unbearable [*sic*] to be a leader, the conferences are compelled to dismiss him."<sup>46</sup>

Increasing pressures from Nazi authorities led church leaders to consider the benefits that might be derived from membership in the Nazi party and its subsidiary organizations.<sup>47</sup> Members of certain professions, such as teachers and editors, were required to hold membership in the respective Nazi organizations in order to practice their profession. But membership in Nazi organizations offered advantages also to ministers and book evangelists that could hardly be ignored. It was evidence of loyalty to the Nazi regime, and lapel pins were a visible sign of support. In dealing with the authorities, it could open doors that might otherwise be closed, not only doors to government officials, but also to prisons to minister to Adventists there. Later on during the war, it would allow travel into closed areas where the denomination was banned.

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rope. On Seng, author's interview with Otto Gmehling, 7 September 1978. Gmehling was president of the West German Union, 1949–62, and president of the Central European Division, 1962–1970.

43. Cited in Hartlapp, 75.

44. Reform Adventists were outlawed 29 April 1936. Ernst Christian Helmreich, *The German Churches under Hitler: Background, Struggle, and Epilogue* (Detroit, 1979), 383.

45. Circular to the Gospel Workers of the Hanover Conference, 23 July 1936. It was based on a decision by the Division Committee, Nr. 454, of 14 July 1936. This decision is also cited by Minck in a letter to the War Ministry of 26 August 1936: "That under no circumstances should members of the Reform Movement be granted fellowship, nor should they be permitted to take refuge in our ranks." Minck to Field Marshal von Blomberg. GC, RG 21/1936—Central Europe. Minck was concerned that the loss of Sabbath privileges in the military was due to confusion of Adventists with the Reform Adventists who had just been outlawed. Minck claimed after the war that "most of them came to our services and were happy to find *refuge* in our midst." Not surprisingly, the German copy of his letter bears a pencilled question mark next to this claim. Minck to McElhany, AEA, D/1, Nr. 0386.

46. G. W. Schubert to E. D. Dick, 1 April 1937. GC, RG 21/1937—Central Europe.

47. Unsigned letter by unidentified officer of the East German Union to Budnick, 25 November 1936. AEA, U1–2, Nr. 0450.

Although this policy of accommodation and demonstration of support did not convince all Nazi authorities, it is clear that on the whole it did work to preserve the church organization and allow the church to function—albeit in a much reduced and altered way. A new ban was evidently in the offing in late 1935, and again in early 1937, and church leaders lived under a “shadow of fear,” taking all kinds of precautionary measures.<sup>48</sup> Intervention by the Propaganda Ministry seems to have saved the church. In response to inquiries by the denomination about rumors of the impending ban, the Reich Church Ministry asked the Gestapo about the status of the Adventist church. Remarkably, the Gestapo attested to the denomination’s loyalty, that church services were of a purely religious character, and that statements in church services verified its “loyal” stance toward the National Socialist state.<sup>49</sup>

How did the membership react to the new course of the leadership? While it is not possible to be precise, it is clear that a number of Adventists were disturbed by the church’s endorsement of the Nazi regime. Wilhelm Mueller indicated in his August 1933 circular that he had received a “largely” positive response; the implication being that there were also some protests. L. H. Christian reported in 1934 that “quite a large number of our laity” were “very dissatisfied because so many of our preachers have gone in so strongly for politics the last few months.”<sup>50</sup>

To German Adventists the issue of the Sabbath was the most critical since it was at the very center of their identity. From the beginning the church spared no pains to ensure that German Adventists enjoyed full Sabbath privileges. To be sure, there were some adaptations to accommodate Nazi sensitivities. Thus, Sabbath became the *Ruhetag* (day of rest), and *Sabbatschule* (Sabbath School) became *Bibelschule* (Bible School), and eventually *Schriftbetrachtung* (Study of the Word).<sup>51</sup> There were also efforts to separate the biblical from the Jewish Sabbath, and even to establish a pre-Christian, Aryan and Nordic, Sabbath.<sup>52</sup>

At first the Adventists’ efforts to win Sabbath privileges were remark-

48. On the 1935 crisis, see Hulda Jost to Reich Minister of the Interior, 16 December 1935. BA Potsdam, RKM 51.01/23387, Nr. 00294. Much of the credit for saving the church goes again to Hulda Jost. McElhany to Watson, 30 January 1936. GC, RG 11/1934–36: I—McElhany, J. L. On the 1937 crisis, see G. W. Schubert to R. Rühling, 15 March 1937. GC, RG 21/Central Europe.

49. Gestapo Berlin (Müller) to Reich Church Ministry, 23 January 1936. BA Potsdam, RKM 51.01/23387, Nr. 00292. No measures against the denomination were planned. It might be noted that “purely religious” meant that no resistance to Nazi designs was detected. In the Nazi state all resistance, including the religious, was always seen as political opposition. See Helmreich, *The German Churches under Hitler*, 132.

50. L. H. Christian to C. H. Watson, 23 April 1934. GC, RG 11/1920s. Christian was president of the Northern European Division.

51. 18 March 1942. AEA, U1–2/0146, 0260.

52. One example is “Saturnalia,” an article in the *Adventbote* of 1 February 1933.

ably successful. At a time when their children in other European countries had to attend public schools on the Sabbath, in Nazi Germany they were able to attend church.<sup>53</sup> The same was true of Sabbathkeepers in the military and in government service.<sup>54</sup> In the spring of 1936, however, just as the German delegation was in the United States on a goodwill tour for Germany, the Interior Ministry issued a decree that made school attendance on Saturday mandatory.<sup>55</sup> In 1937, Sabbath privileges for government employees were revoked,<sup>56</sup> and in the same year, Adventists in the military lost their Sabbath as well.

Adventist leaders left no stone unturned to regain their religious liberty.<sup>57</sup> There were numerous appeals and meetings with government officials. Hulda Jost even had an audience with Hitler's aide-de-camp, who promised to bring the matter before the Führer. In one of his numerous appeals, Minck invoked the National Socialist commitment to religious liberty, and argued that the Sabbath decree would lead to "conflicts of conscience of the greatest magnitude" as Adventists were forced to choose between their daily bread and their conscience.

Is there not the danger that . . . a number of capable and productive men, who thus are of value to the state and the *Volk*, will be discouraged, perhaps even broken, because they have obeyed so they would not lose their bread, and are thus violating their conviction and their most holy religious sensitivities?<sup>58</sup>

Except for a few individual cases, the appeals went unheeded, even though the Propaganda Ministry wielded its considerable influence in behalf of the church.<sup>59</sup> Instead, pressure increased on Adventists to work on the Sabbath as the Nazi regime geared up for war. Soon private companies as well, particularly in heavy industry, cancelled previous arrangements to

53. In his defense after the war, Gugel argued that, while in Switzerland his children were compelled to attend school on the Sabbath, they never did so in Nazi Germany. Gugel to Minck, 17 July 1947 (trans. W. K. Ising). GC, RG 21/Documents: 1920s-1950s—Central and Northern Europe.

54. At one point Hitler intervened personally on behalf of some postal workers. Jost to Capt. Wiedemann, Reich Chancellery, 6 April 1937. GC, RG 12/1937—Central Europe. Gugel had negotiated with Field Marshal von Blomberg's office to secure Sabbath privileges for Adventists in the military. Gugel to Minck, 17 Jul 1947. GC, RG 21/Documents: 1920s/1950s—Central Europe and Northern Europe Files. Blomberg's letter was published in AB, 1 November 1935.

55. Decree of 18 May 1936. Kerrl, RKM, to ProMi, 9 September 1936. BA Potsdam, RKM 51.01/23387. Also, Jost to Thomalla, 5 August 1936.

56. Ministerialblatt des Reichs- und Preussischen Ministeriums des Innern, Jg. 1937 Nr. II, 17 March 1937. Decree issued 8 March 1937. See Circular, Hanover Conference, 25 March 1937. AEA/Vereinigung Hannover/MED.

57. G. W. Schubert to E. D. Dick, 27 April 1937. GC, RG 21/1937—Central Europe.

58. Minck to RKM, 22 March 1937 (copy). Private archive of the author.

59. On ProMi intervention and failure, see J. L. McElhany to E. D. Dick, 1 December

grant the Sabbath off, sometimes under Nazi pressure. In some areas, notably in the industrial districts of the Rhineland and the Ruhr, the Gestapo took the initiative to investigate whether Adventists were working on the Sabbath.<sup>60</sup> Ministers, conference presidents, and even local elders were questioned by the police and Gestapo to see if church members working on the Sabbath were censured or expelled by the church. If that were the case, it would be compelling grounds for action against the church.<sup>61</sup>

By 1939 the leadership faced a serious crisis as the Gestapo tightened the screws further. Minck was called to Gestapo headquarters, where he was told to order church members to work on Saturday, and that he would be held personally responsible for the conduct of Adventists in Germany. He refused the order, and for the time being the Gestapo did not press the issue.<sup>62</sup> General Conference leaders became alarmed when church leaders estimated that, by this time, the percentage of German Adventists who worked regularly on the Sabbath had grown to 10 percent: "Unless we do something about it, we are facing a great apostasy in Germany."<sup>63</sup>

With the start of the Second World War governmental pressure became overpowering. The refusal of some members in the Rhineland to work on the Sabbath in war-related industries provoked the Gestapo once more, and in March of 1940, Minck was called again to Gestapo headquarters. As Michael Budnick, president of the East German Union, reported to his conference presidents, "the official told Brother Minck in unmistakable terms, that such conduct will not be tolerated, and that the leaders of the churches, the conferences, and unions will be held accountable."<sup>64</sup> Budnick asked that all ministers be instructed accordingly, "so that our members will not cause more trouble for themselves and the church. We know," wrote Budnick, "that in total war there can only be total investment and sacrifice."

The circular which the division issued in response to Gestapo demands was addressed to all presidents and ministers of the Adventist church in

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1936. GC, RG 21/1936—McElhany, J. L. According to a 7 February 1937 letter by Hulda Jost to the General Conference Committee, many lost their jobs with the government, while others began to work on the Sabbath. GC, RG 21/1937—Central Europe. In one instance, Joseph Goebbels himself intervened in a letter to RKM of 29 August 1936, asking that "for reasons of effective and clandestine foreign propaganda" the denomination's request should be granted. BA Potsdam, RKM 51.01/23387, Nr. 00359.

60. Examples are problems with the Gestapo in Lüdenscheid and Düsseldorf in 1939. AEA, V/1-1, Nr. 0091.

61. G. W. Schubert to the General Conference Committee, 7 February 1937. GC, RG 21/1937—Central Europe.

62. Minutes, 602d Officers' Meeting, 23 July 1939. GC, RG 2/General Conference Officers.

63. *Ibid.*

64. Circular to the Conference Presidents of the East German Union, 27 March 1940. AEA, U1-2, Nr. 0250.

Germany. Alluding to problems caused by some members who refused to work on the Sabbath, it stressed the necessity to “once again instruct our members in the duties we owe according to the Scriptures to our nation and fatherland, as well as to the authorities.” It affirmed “on Biblical grounds” the service in the armed forces, which included “that we perform all duties associated with it,” as God commanded: “Submit yourselves, for the Lord’s sake, to every authority . . .” it quoted from 2 Peter. The more loyally Adventists performed their duty during war, it argued, the more they could expect respect for conscience after the war. Resorting to an interesting dialectic, it said:

By 20 May, ministerial meetings must be held in all conferences. On that occasion it should be pointed out that we consider as binding the principle laid down in the epistle of Romans 7:12: “The law itself is holy, and the commandment is holy, and right, and good.” In addition, it is to be emphasized and sufficiently explained that in obedience to God’s rules and commandments we will show understanding by accommodating the needs of this time of war, and will obey the authorities as commanded in God’s word (Rom. 13:1–5).<sup>65</sup>

While the circular did not meet Gestapo demands, it seems to have appeased them for a while. Still, problems continued as individual members in the military and on the home front exercised their right of conscience and refused to work on the Sabbath. Some of these were sentenced to prison or hard labor, others were sent to concentration camps.<sup>66</sup> Most, however, conformed after counseling and pressure. Even though the above circular fell short of Gestapo demands, it has been the object of much controversy, and was used as prominent evidence in the General Conference’s case after the war.

By 1943, after Stalingrad and Goebbels’s proclamation of total war, pressures increased once again to satisfy the Gestapo. Minck issued yet another circular to the Union- and Conference presidents, in which he asked for understanding in regard to the necessary war measures. These were only temporary, he assured them, and did “not touch our fundamentals.” The counsel of scripture was to “adapt yourself to the times.”<sup>67</sup>

65. GC, RG 21/Documents: 1920s–1950s—Central and Northern Europe. The circular was signed by Minck. A general ministerial conference was held at Friedensburg in June.

66. The case of Erwin Bauermann may serve as an example. He was sentenced to three years penitentiary for refusing military service on the Sabbath. Upon his release from prison he was transferred to Sweibrücken concentration camp. Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf, RW 58/26380. Emil Biegmann was sent to Dachau for refusing to work on the Sabbath, and used for medical experiments. He died there in 1943. Hartlapp, “Die Lage der Gemeinschaft,” 66–68. Hartlapp lists several other cases. Rudolf Nettelroth, a church elder, spent one year in army prison for refusing service on the Sabbath. Schildhauer to Dangschat, 24 October 1940.

67. Rom. 12:11. This phrase from the Luther Bible is not found in English versions.

Performing one's duty on the Sabbath was not disobedience, he said, but a virtue, for "Christian faith must be proven by Christian deed."<sup>68</sup> Union and conference presidents followed through with circulars of their own. In his circular for the South German Union, G. Seng argued that total mobilization in total war demanded adaptation: "If the [soldier on the] front can have no day of rest, then the warriors on the home front . . . should not ask for it, either."<sup>69</sup>

Nazi pressures increased further as the war went on. Repeatedly the church was banned by regional Gestapo officials or party administrators in provinces like East Prussia, or the new territories of former Poland, Sudetenland, and Alsace-Lorraine. Most of these prohibitions were temporary.<sup>70</sup> Each local ban gave rise to renewed fears that a general ban was in the offing. Somehow the leaders managed to keep the church organizationally intact, until the effects of the war gradually destroyed any semblance of organization by late 1944. By that time most ministers had been drafted into the armed forces, most institutional and many church buildings had been confiscated, and many others had fallen victim to the terror bombing.<sup>71</sup>

Nevertheless, the organized church did survive the Nazi era, and after the fall of Nazism it grew faster than ever. Happy at first to have survived the war and the Nazi regime, and grateful also for American relief shipments, German Adventist leaders were shocked when the General Conference charged them with apostasy and demanded substantial reform.

The issue of party membership was the most pressing. McElhany's letter had mentioned specifically that those whose affiliation with Nazi organizations had been "voluntary" should be removed. Those who refused to resign did so on the grounds that their affiliation with Nazi organizations had not been "voluntary." They had joined, they insisted, under pressure, and only to protect the church.

The case against Michael Budnick, president of the East German Union, was particularly difficult. Budnick had first joined the NS subdivision, the "Sacrificial Circle," in 1936 while president of the Saxon Conference,

68. Copies were sent to RKM and Gestapo "as proof that leaders, ministers, and members stand loyally by Führer and Reich." Attached were also statistics on Adventist servicemen, including their rank and awards for bravery.

69. G. Seng to the presidents of the South German Union, 4 February 1943. AEA, V/1-1, Nr. 0154-55.

70. In most cases the denominational leadership was able to bring about a reversal of the ban by appealing to the authorities, oftentimes with the assistance of the Propaganda Ministry. An example is the prohibition in Alsace (1941). Stillhaltekommissar Elsass to RKM, 10 September 1941. BA Potsdam, RKM 51.01/23388, Nr. 00290.

71. By July of 1944, 83 church buildings had been confiscated, 282 ministers had been drafted into the armed forces, and others had been pressed to work in the defense industry. Minck to RKM, 7 July 1944. BA Potsdam, RKM 51.01/23388, Nr. 00369-73.

as he claimed, to remove the “enemy of the state” label from the church. While president of the East German Union he had become a member of the party. Budnick stubbornly refused to admit his error and step down voluntarily. He outlined the specific circumstances that led to his joining the party,<sup>72</sup> and how it was carried out in the interest of the church. A collection of affidavits certified that he had always been an antifascist, and that his party affiliation allowed him to do much good that otherwise would have been impossible. Several sworn statements credited him with assisting Jews and saving some twenty persons from being sent to concentration camps. Budnick refused to be judged by the division committee since he had acted within divisional policy. After all, he argued, at the Friedensau Minister’s Convention of June 1934, and with the silent assent of a General Conference representative, the counsel on whether gospel workers should join the party had been: “I would advise no one against it. Some of us have done so for practical reasons.”<sup>73</sup> Indeed, as Budnick pointed out, the denomination had paid for membership fees in Nazi organizations, whether it was in the party itself, or supportive membership in subsidiary organizations like the SS, the Labor Service (RAD), or the National Socialist Teachers’ Union. And after all, it had taken pride in its pro-Nazi voting record.<sup>74</sup>

The Budnick case highlights what may have been a critical flaw in the application of General Conference policy: the General Conference spoke with more than one voice. While his case was being considered by the Division Committee in the presence of General Conference representative W. B. Ochs, a letter arrived from Washington assuring Budnick of continued General Conference support. The effect, recounts an exasperated Ochs, was that the committee reversed its decision, and recommended that Budnick stay on.<sup>75</sup> Pastoral sentiments in Washington, loyalty to an

72. Budnick to W. K. Ising, 25 July 1947. GC, RG 21/Documents. 1920s–1950s—Central Europe and Northern Europe.

73. Among these was a statement by a Russian official that Budnick had served the antifascist cause. *Ibid.* Also see Albert Thomas to J. L. McElhany, 8 April 1948. *Ibid.* Thomas, who testified in behalf of the accused leaders, was a prominent Adventist layman and government official. He had also been a party member and political functionary in the NSDAP. In 1936 Thomas had assured the Gestapo that the “members and leading men of our denomination are on the side of the government.” Letter to Gestapo, November 1936. Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf, RW 58/10826.

74. Among other memberships paid for by the denomination was that of the director of the Friedensau Seminary. Budnick to Ising, 25 July 1947, and attached dossier. See also the denomination’s “Memorandum” to the government, which points to the Friedensau voting record as proof of loyalty.

75. W. B. Ochs, “Report to the Officers on Recent Visit to Germany” (18 July to 8 August 1947), GC, RG 21—Documents: 1920s–1950s—Central and Northern Europe. In reversing its decision, the committee was persuaded by Budnick’s concern for his personal safety, since he lived in the Russian Zone. The dismissal, it was feared, might cause Russian authorities to be alarmed and deport him to Siberia.

old fellow-worker, and compassion for a brother who had gone through difficult times may have been the motives.

With few exceptions, German leaders felt that they were being singled out unfairly, as it became increasingly clear that not only the entire leadership was on trial, but along with it the entire Adventist church in Germany. Adolf Minck's second and "personal" response to McElhany's letter is worth quoting: "If I may express a special request it is this: to consider and to treat us . . . like the members in other countries."<sup>76</sup> In his passionate defense that admitted of no specific mistake, he said: "I have it in my heart to free our fellow believers in Germany even of the appearance of unfaithfulness."

After an initial attempt to comply with the General Conference request to clean house, Minck, who was known in Germany as "the man with the oil can,"<sup>77</sup> did everything he could to smooth things over. "He spends most of his time defending the actions of the members rather than trying to change them," complained D. G. Rose, who spent much time in postwar Germany as an observer for the General Conference. He told of a public meeting in Hanover where Minck, "for my benefit, tried to excuse Brother Gugel for his party affiliation by saying that it was a surprise to the brethren from the outside how one could belong to a certain organization without actually believing in it." He saw people in the audience smiling because, as Rose put it, "it was all so very obvious." Rather than admit guilt, Minck criticized others who did. And Rose reports how Minck called Martin Niemöller a blockhead for his confession of guilt on behalf of the German people.<sup>78</sup>

Membership in Nazi organizations was only one of the General Conference's concerns. More serious was the charge that the denomination had been misled in its attempt to accommodate the demands of the Nazi state. Most of all, it was the erosion of Sabbath-keeping in Germany during the Second World War that disturbed the church's leaders. So much, in fact, that the 1946 Autumn Council passed a resolution on "Faithfulness and Sabbath-keeping." While expressing sympathy for those who, "under threat of death," had yielded, it called on them to "repent and seek forgiveness for this transgression, and to return unto the Lord." When he informed Minck of this action, McElhany left little doubt about what needed to be done to reform the German church.<sup>79</sup> In a clear allusion to the persistent refusal by German leaders to admit their mistakes, their habit of resorting to situational ethics where absolutes were concerned, and their use of questionable exegesis, he said:

76. Minck to McElhany, 17 September 1947. *Ibid.*

77. Albert Thomas to J. L. McElhany, 8 April 1948. *Ibid.*

78. D. G. Rose to J. L. McElhany, 5 April 1948. *Ibid.*

79. McElhany to Minck, 24 April 1947. *Ibid.*

But in our opinion such help will not come through any attempt to justify from the Scriptures the position taken by some of our German leaders on Sabbath observance in war time. Our best Bible students in other parts of the world totally disagree with such a position. It may be that with the close of the war and the destruction of the Nazi regime, the brethren can now view the matter in a clearer and calmer light, and that they would desire to retract what has been taught and written on the question of Sabbath-keeping.

However, Minck and his associates did not believe they had compromised any biblical principles. After searching their hearts, wrote Minck to McElhany, "we do not have the feeling that we have departed from the rules of the word of God and the holy Ten Commandments in the past difficult years, especially during the time of war." He only allowed that they might have, as Minck put it in English, "lived out the one and the other commandment a little different [*sic*]" than in times of peace. "But holy did they remain to us."<sup>80</sup>

Minck's statement is indicative of the reasoning German Adventist leaders had resorted to during the Nazi years. How far they were sometimes prepared to go in interpreting the Scriptures can be seen in a paper that A. Sachsenmeyer, president of the Hesse Conference, presented to his gospel workers in 1943. Translated after the war by W. K. Ising, the paper was part of the body of evidence used by the General Conference, and is an example of what McElhany had in mind when he admonished Minck.

Entitled "Our Way in the Storm of the Times," the paper sought to map a course that would neither place the church in harm's way nor betray the cause of the gospel. Searching the Scriptures, Sachsenmeyer had found that freedom was the mark of God.

But freedom consists only in the law. God's law is therefore called the law of freedom. In the law therefore is mobility and no rigidity, in spite of all legality . . . In times of distress, more than ever, there is a mobility and not rigidity, which makes it possible to bring the *Adventboat* [*sic*] and ourselves through the cliffs without questioning the obedience to one of the commandments or to abolish it.

Following the same line of thinking that Minck subsequently was to use in his defense, Sachsenmeyer argued for the necessity of working on the Sabbath in times of total war. "The unshakable principle is: the seventh day of the week is and remains the holy day of the Lord and it is to be recognized and kept holy as such. The time of distress does not abolish the law of God." But Scripture and Jesus taught clearly that the application

80. Minck's second response to McElhany's letter of 14 April 1947, dated 17 September 1947. GC, RG 21/Documents: 1920s-1950s—Central and Northern Europe.

of the law, rather than being absolute, was dependent on the circumstances. Nature, he thought, offered an important lesson:

When a storm sweeps over the land it is the law of nature that the tree will bend itself according to the law that is in itself, it is strong to return to its natural position . . . If this ability to bend does not exist, the storm will uproot the tree and destroy its existence.

Just like a tree suffered stress while it bent, Sachsenmeyer said, so a Christian must not give up the day of rest “without distress” when the authorities demanded work on the Sabbath. The “rule,” he maintained, was always to keep the Sabbath day holy. “Mobility does not abolish principle.” The apostate Reform Movement had not bent with the wind and was banned. “We are still here thanks to mobility.”<sup>81</sup>

Minck used yet another interesting concept in explaining German Adventist policy to David G. Rose, who was in Germany on a fact-finding mission after the war. There are two German words for apostasizing: *abfallen*, to fall away, and *abweichen*, to deviate. They had not apostatized, he explained, but had merely detoured. According to Rose, Minck told him: “As soon as the war is over, we will come back to the principles. It is not apostasy, but merely turning out of the road to go around an obstacle and then to come back into the road.” These two words, Rose observed, had no counterparts in English, nor did these concepts exist in Adventist thinking.<sup>82</sup>

Ultimately Minck claimed that the German leadership had followed denominational policy. When, after the First World War, German Adventist leaders had been accused of apostasy for their policy of service in the armed forces and on the Sabbath, world leaders had met in 1920 at Friedensau to discuss these problems. General Conference President A. G. Daniells, who presided over the meetings, had advised that in the future each member should be allowed to follow his own conscience, and the 1923 Gland decision confirmed this course.<sup>83</sup> This, Minck claimed, was the principle that guided their decisions, but the General Conference remained unconvinced.

Had the church been misled? Should they have followed a different course? Minck and his colleagues thought not. If they had to do it over

81. Presented 13 February 1943. Among the documents translated by W. K. Ising. *Ibid.* Gugel used similar arguments. In a circular to be read in all churches, he said about sending children to school on the Sabbath: “Since we have tried everything, the Lord will not view it as a real violation of the Fourth Commandment, it seems.” Instead, he commended the government for desiring a good education for their children.

82. D. G. Rose to J. L. McElhany, 5 April 1948. *Ibid.*

83. “To each of our church members we afford absolute liberty to serve their countries according to their personal conviction at any time, and any place.” As quoted by Minck in his letter to McElhany, 17 September 1947. *Ibid.*

again, Minck said, they could not imagine any strategy other than the one that had guided them. The Adventist boat was safely in port. They believed that God had given them wisdom to steer the right course. In a passionate defense of their policy Minck argued that the alternative was not simply the prohibition of the church and its institutions, but untold suffering and even death for thousands of Adventists. "No widows and orphans accuse us today" because they lost husband or father.<sup>84</sup> "Believe me, Brother McElhany," he wrote,

it would have not been difficult to make martyrs of the 500 ministers and 43,000 members . . . More than once, a mere shrug of the shoulder would have been enough and the entire denomination would have been outlawed and the work smashed . . . *My associates and I were not ready to make such a decision, and I believe to this day that we have acted correctly.*<sup>85</sup>

Indeed, it would not have been difficult to make martyrs. The documentary evidence available today is quite clear that in spite of all governmental contacts the church's legitimacy was tenuous at best. What former members of a banned organization could expect at the hands of Nazi authorities is well known, and is best illustrated by the case of the Jehovah's Witnesses.<sup>86</sup> Like these, Reform Adventists suffered severe persecution, and many of their members perished in concentration camps.<sup>87</sup>

Should a policy be judged by principle or by consequences? D. G. Rose was convinced that if the leaders had told church members to defend Adventist principles, they would have done so. What if the Nazi state would have responded with a crackdown? Rose felt that the compromises of church leaders made it "unnecessary for God to intervene."<sup>88</sup>

What should have been Adventist policy under a totalitarian regime? Emil Gugel argued after the war that, when defining church-state relations, we must take the form of government into consideration.<sup>89</sup> Was

84. Minck in his defense before the president and vice presidents of the General Conference, San Francisco, 18 July 1950. Minck's notes on the meeting. Private papers of Adolf Minck, property of Gunther Minck. Copy in author's possession.

85. Minck to McElhany, 17 September 1947. Emphasis in original. AEA, D-1/0384-0390. Emphasis in the original.

86. According to one estimate, 97 percent of Jehovah's Witnesses were subjected to Nazi persecution. Friedrich Zipfel, *Kirchenkampf in Deutschland, 1933-1945* (Berlin, 1965), 176.

87. In some cases the authorities placed the children of Reform Adventists to be brought up by party members. Christine E. King, *The Nazi State and the New Religions: Five Case Studies in Non-Conformity* (New York, 1982), 110ff.

88. Rose to McElhany, 5 April 1948. GC, RG 21/Documents—Central European and North European Files.

89. Gugel to Minck, 17 July 1947 (trans. by W. K. Ising). GC, RG 21/Documents: 1920s-1950s—Central and Northern Europe.

the line of separation between church and state in the totalitarian state different from that in a liberal state? Where should one draw the line that separated good citizenship from compromising the integrity and mission of the church? As Minck put it, German leaders found it “*very hard to see the boundary where exigency ends and disobedience begins.*”<sup>90</sup> Along with other Christian groups, German Adventists failed to understand the nature of the totalitarian state. As Martin Niemöller had explained in 1935 in one of his sermons, in such a state it was no longer possible to determine which things were God’s and which were Caesar’s. Caesar wants it all.<sup>91</sup>

Perhaps the problem also lay in the very way German Adventists viewed the authority of the state. The biblical injunction “Be subject to the authorities. There is no authority but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God” tended to be taken as an absolute. Calvinists and Catholics, on the other hand, saw state authority as conditional, and had less difficulty in defining the Nazi state in its murderous policies as non-authority that must not be obeyed because it was contrary to God’s law and natural law.<sup>92</sup> Passive resistance to evil was part of church doctrine, and active resistance a possibility. Strange as it may seem—given the church’s original apocalyptic vision—the Adventist doctrine of church and state did not allow for the possibility of a criminal state and as a result, Adventists in Germany were ill prepared for the Hitler state.<sup>93</sup>

Yet whatever may have been their understanding of church–state separation, by their own admission German Adventist leaders were guided by one consideration above all others: to keep the church from being outlawed. This is why they lent pen, pulpit, and church institutions to the Nazi cause. This is why respect for conscience applied only when it did not endanger institutional interests.<sup>94</sup> It was institutional reasoning that led to compromise: “*We wanted to be loyal to God, and yet obey the authorities as God’s*

90. Minck to McElhany, 17 September 1947. AEA, D-1/0384-0390. Emphasis in the original.

91. Sermon on 15 November 1135, as cited in James Bentley, *Martin Niemöller* (New York, 1984), 119.

92. On Catholics, see the papal encyclical of 20 October, *Ad Summi Pontificatus*, or the “Pastoral Word by the German Bishops on the Religious Situation in Germany,” of 22 March 1942. The letter described Nazi measures as those of a state without the rule of law, and opposed to God’s expressed commandments, thus lacking authority. A Protestant example is the Barmen Declaration of 29 May 1934. Helmreich, *The German Churches under Hitler*, 162.

93. “I may reject the party with its ideology, but I cannot reject the authorities,” explained Otto Gmehling in a 7 September 1978 interview by the author.

94. In his letter of defense, Minck argued: “*After all, each individual is himself responsible to God, how he lives his faith.*” A pencilled note in the margin (possibly by W. Mueller?) asks: “*Why disfellowshipped? [Warum ausgeschlossen?]*” Minck to McElhany, 17 September 1947. AEA, D-1/0389.

*servant*. And we wanted to protect the church from harm.”<sup>95</sup> German Adventist leaders were caught in a three-way tug between God, the state, and the church. They chose the church.

Since they could not see any acceptable alternative, it was only natural for the German leadership to continue the same policy after the war when Communism replaced Nazism in the Soviet Zone. At a meeting of the Central European Division in the spring of 1946 Minck argued: “For the sake of the cause brethren should be willing to join the SED [Socialist Unity Party].”<sup>96</sup> And so it continued until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

“One thing we can learn,” wrote D. G. Rose to J. L. McElhany about this episode in Adventist history, “is that cooperation of the Adventist church with the state is one-way. This is not as theoretical as it might sound,” he cautioned. “Already the Communist party in eastern Germany is restricting our movements.” Noting the establishment of totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe, he added: “We can already apply this warning in other lands of Europe.” Unfortunately this warning was not heeded. Troubled by the attitude of German leaders, who knew not how to do “better in the future than to repeat their compromises of the past,” Rose recommended that the German branch be reformed from the outside by world church leaders.<sup>97</sup>

Ultimately the General Conference completed its own denazification process, and U.S. military authorities did not intervene. Emil Gugel retired after the 1948 constituency meeting, while Michael Budnick continued in his post until his death in 1954. At the General Conference Session of 1950 in San Francisco Adolf Minck was replaced by Wilhelm Mueller as president of the Central European Division.<sup>98</sup>

95. Minck to McElhany, 17 September 1947. AEA, D-1/0384-0390. Emphasis in the original.

96. One minister asked cynically: “And who shall become the scapegoat this time?” Budnick to Ising, 25 July 1947. GC, RG 21/Documents: 1920s-1950s—Central and Northern Europe.

97. Rose to McElhany, 5 April 1948. GC, RG 21/Documents—Central European and Northern European Files.

98. Minck became ministerial secretary of the CED. The circumstances of Minck’s removal at San Francisco are peculiar. Evidently the nominating committee had voted to reconfirm him, but GC officers failed to bring the nomination to the floor. It is interesting that, after Minck had been nominated, Mueller led an attack on Minck, faulting him for not being firm enough toward the Nazis. The day after Minck’s nomination had been passed over, General Conference officers convened another nominating committee which supported Mueller, and Mueller’s name was presented to the floor for ratification. Some members of the German delegation questioned the legitimacy of the process. Author’s interview 7 September 1978, with Otto Gmehling, a member of the German delegation at San Francisco. Also, author’s interview with R. Kluttig, Bad Aibling, 15 July 1986. Kluttig was treasurer of the East German Union and a member of the German delegation.

The controversy over Adventist policy in Nazi Germany was not settled to everyone's satisfaction. National pride<sup>99</sup> and continued rationalization of their actions kept German leaders from admitting any serious mistakes. What made it even more difficult was the knowledge that the very officers of the General Conference who condemned them now had aided and abetted their policy in prewar years. This was perceived as hypocrisy, and it has left traces of bitterness to this very day.<sup>100</sup>

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99. According to Otto Schuberth the spirit of nationalism was "at the root of everything." He argued for reorganization of the German division, combining it with other European countries. Schuberth to McElhany, 14 May 1948. GC, RG 21/Documents: 1920s-1950s—Central and North Europe.

100. A notable exception among the top wartime leaders was Wilhelm Mueller, who claimed to have resisted the policy of compromise. D. G. Rose to J. L. McElhany, 5 April 1948. *Ibid.* More typical for the attitude of the German leadership since the war is that of Ernst Denkert, successor of Gmehling as president of the West German Union. Responding on 30 August 1989 to a draft of the history of the congregations in Hanover, he protested: "I detect insinuations of adaptation. I have to protest that." Ernst Denkert, "Korrekturen und Ergänzungen zur vorläufigen Chronik der Adventgemeinden in Hannover." Private archive of the author. Only recently has there been some concession of mistakes by the present, and new, leaders. Cf. Erwin Kilian, "Hundert Jahre Adventisten in Hamburg," AB, December 1989. Kilian spoke as president of the German Adventist denomination.