

SDA Leaders Supported Hitler

Seventh-day Adventists supported and praised Adolph Hitler in pre-war Germany and did not try to help the Jews who were being persecuted by Hitler. They also said it was not wrong to break the 6th commandment by killing, in time of war. And it was also ok to break the Sabbath by fighting on the Sabbath.

In fact, these were the statements made by the leaders of the Adventist Church in Germany during Hitler's reign of terror.

Adventists in Nazi Germany

The Silent Church, Human Rights, and Adventist Social Ethics

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Adventists in Germany

The German Adventists seem to have fallen short of their proclamation of religious liberty at the time of World War I, between the two wars and during World War II. In imperial Germany, most Adventists espoused extreme nationalism and active military collaboration. An Adventist author argued in December 1915 that 'the Bible teaches first, that participation in war is not against the sixth commandment; second, that fighting on the Sabbath is no transgression of the fourth law'. The German church leaders, however, recognized the error of their policies after the war and confessed their loyalty to the worldwide Adventist community at the European Division meeting at Gland, Switzerland on 2 January 1923.

This declaration, however, was weakened by an additional pronouncement which recognized that each member possessed 'absolute liberty to serve his country, at all times and in all places, in accord with the dictates of his personal conscientious conviction'. This statement allowed German Adventists to repeat the mistake from the First World War during Hitler's regime under the Third Reich.

As Erwin Sicher has rightly observed in '*Seventh-day Adventist Publications and the Nazi Temptation*', Adventists failed in numerous ways in regard to the Nazi regime. As early as 1928, before Adolf Hitler came to power, Adventists were calling for a strong Führer. Article after article dealt with this Führer ideal in German writings as well as in Adventist publications.

Later, Adventist writers welcomed the apparent rebirth of Germany in their publications and also by vote. The Adventist town of Friedensau had voted by 99.9 per cent for the Nazi parliamentary state. When some Adventists refused to salute the Swastika flag and to use the Hitler greeting, the President of the East German Conference, W. Mueller, argued that it was bad for the church's image. He concluded that 'under no circumstances did any Adventist have the right to resist the

government, even if the government prevented him from exercising his faith. The resistance would be unfortunate because it would mark Adventists as opponents of the new state, a situation that should be prevented. Another prominent Adventist writer and the editor of various Adventist church papers, Kurt Sinz, saw Hitler's strong command at the beginning of National Social rule as designed by God. Otto Bronzio went a step further, saying in the official Adventist paper, *Der Adventbote*, that 'the National Socialist Revolution was the greatest of all time, because it made the maintenance of a pure inheritance the basis of its ethnic life'. Some suggest that what he meant may be gleaned from a boxed quotation from Hitler "on the question of blood" which appeared on the same page.

This idea of a 'pure inheritance', instigated by Hitler and carried throughout the German nation, also afflicted German Adventists. Although blatant racism seldom appeared in Adventist publications, Adventists did frequently print negative comments about the Jews, they tacitly supported sterilization of the mentally disabled, and many were caught in the quickened pride of German nationalism. The same doctrine of German superiority to other nations was carried into Adventist education in Germany where students were encouraged to learn to 'will and to think in German'. To will in German was a mystical Nazi concept; for, the Party taught, Germans 'will' differently from any other nationals. Educator W. Eberhardt insisted, in addition, that Adventist schools nurtured 'the National Socialist Spirit' between class periods, when they reviewed the news, studied Nazi ideals and sang German national songs. With growing pressure for greater collaboration, many Adventists of all age groups joined Nazi organizations such as the Hitler Youth, the BDM (Association of German Girls), the Labour Service and the German Red Cross. All these clubs were designed for the purpose of Nazi indoctrination, and although Adventists knew that a significant percentage of the Labour Service participants were members of the SA, SS and Stahlhelm, the most fanatical Nazi groups who indoctrinated and militarized the youth, they approved of participation in the clubs. Johannes Langhoff strongly supported the Labour Service. He wrote in *Aller Diener*, 'We expect every member to follow the divine command, "pray and work". It would be absolutely contrary to our understanding if we refuse the Labour Service.' Patt suggested that the principal reason for Adventists joining the Nazi Labour Front was unemployment and other economic hardships and that 'most Adventist workingmen succumbed to the pressure and became members of the labor service to save their families.' Yet, joining a party organization was not obligatory, and some joined the party as well.

In Germany Adventists supported Nazi foreign policy and, eventually, the war. Possible lack of access to reliable information and, as a result, a misconception of the real situation led them to believe that their Führer was 'a man of peace'. When Austria was incorporated into the Reich, German Adventists 'shared in the happiness over Austrians' return home to the motherland'.

They believed that by God's help and through 'God's assistance our capable Führer Adolf Hitler became the liberator of Austria'. After the liquidation of Czechoslovakia on 16 March 1939, Adventists still raised no objections.

Even for this act of cruelty and oppression they found some justification. Then came the attack on Poland which the whole of Europe recognized as an act of aggression. Nevertheless, in an editorial Sinz could write that in view of the 'inhuman tortures our Volkskomrads have suffered among this foreign people', the German attack was probably justified. Adventists continued to support Hitler and celebrated his 51st birthday 11 days after war had escalated in the West with the German

invasion of Denmark and Norway on 9 April 1940. The Adventist Morning Watch Calendar although printed four months earlier stated: Trust in his people has given the Führer the strength to carry through the fight for freedom and honour of Germany. The unshakable faith of Adolf Hitler allowed him to do great deeds, which decorate him today before the whole world. Selflessly and faithfully he has struggled for his people; courageously and proudly he has defended the honour of his nation. In Christian humility, at important times when he could celebrate with his people, he gave God in Heaven honour and recognized his dependence upon God's blessings. This humility has made him great, and this greatness was the source of blessing, from which he always gave for his people. Only very few statesmen stand so brilliantly in the sun of a blessed life, and are so praised by their own people as our Führer. He has sacrificed much in the years of his struggle and has thought little about himself in the difficult work for his people. We compare the unnumbered words, which he has issued to the people from a warm heart, with seeds which have ripened and now carry wonderful fruit.

It is ironic that while Adventists had insisted upon religious liberty, they did not raise a voice against the persecution of countless Jews. Instead, they even disfellowshipped those of Jewish background. At a time when German Adventists were publishing the religious liberty magazine Kirche und Staat (an outside observer noticed its primary purpose as being the opposition to the Sunday laws), they kept quiet about the 1933 purges when hundreds were murdered, and they said nothing against the persecution of Jews or about the occupied territories. Although some individual Adventists apparently resisted the Nazi temptation, Sicher has shown from contemporary publications that 'no active official opposition to the inhuman Nazi regime seemed to have existed nor even to have been permitted among Adventists. Sicher's is an unfortunate but honest portrayal of German Adventism in the first half of the twentieth century.

The German Adventist Compromise with the Nazi Regime

(<http://www.history.ucsb.edu/projects/holocaust/Research/Proseminar/corrieschroder.htm>)

Church Leaders Say "We're Sorry"

(<http://www.adventistreview.org/article.php?id=92>)

The Master SDA Index

(<http://www.everythingimportant.org/seventhdayAdventists>)

The Editor

(<http://www.everythingimportant.org/viewtopic.php?t=34>)

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