



Ground-breaking research into the courageous life of the seventeen-year-old Mormon boy who dared to expose Hitler's lies and atrocities and was beheaded for it.

THE FUHRER'S NEW CLOTHES : Helmuth Hübener and the Mormons in the Third Reich*

*This essay is part of a book on the same subject which the authors are writing. Material has been drawn from a variety of sources: 1) The Helmuth Hubener file compiled by the Gestapo and made available to us by the American Document Center—Berlin (Citations are from our own pagination of the file. A film copy of these documents is in the BYU Library.); 2) Extensive interviews over several years with Helmuth's co-conspirators Rudolf Wobbe, Karl-Heinz Schnibbe, and Gerhard Duwer. We are especially grateful for their interest and information. 3) Extensive interviews in October 1974 with Otto Berndt, acting District President in Hamburg at the time; 4) Interviews with Helmuth's brothers Hans and Gerhard Kunkel, his friend "Aunt" Maria Sommerfeldt and nearly a dozen other German Saints in Germany and in the U.S. who knew about and were affected by the case; 5) Interviews with missionaries—some of whom wish to remain anonymous—whose diaries give valuable insight into the policies pursued by West German Mission leaders. Copies of obscure documents and transcripts of taped interviews are available from the authors upon request.

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I

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus drew the division between secular and religious life with a single sentence: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." But the precise location of that boundary has proved to be a continuing problem for members of the Mormon church. Whereas earlier Latter-day Saints often faced the challenge of anarchic violence unchecked by civil authorities, in our own time Saints have more often faced the opposite dilemma: how should they respond to a totalitarian government's demands for total, exclusive allegiance? Nowhere has this problem been posed with greater clarity than in Nazi Germany, where a young man named Helmuth Hübener was one of many Saints who struggled to sort out their conflicting loyalties. His decisions as a devout Latter-day Saint ultimately led to his execution for high treason against the German state.

Helmuth Hübener was born in Hamburg on January 8, 1925, the illegitimate son of Anna Emma Guddat Kun-

geography, and that he showed an early interest in politics.² But Hübener's appetite for knowledge extended to many other areas. He spoke fluent English, loved music, and even took extracurricular courses in stenography and typing—"women's work" in pre-war Germany. When he left school to begin an apprenticeship with the Civil Service he continued to read voraciously, relishing access to the administrative archives of his new office. These archives held material that Helmuth could have seen nowhere else, including forbidden books about Russia, the United States, and other topics, books that the Nazis had banned.

Although Hübener apparently got along well with most people he met, his two closest friends were two young Latter-day Saints, Rudolf Gustav Wobbe and Karl-Heinz Schnibbe. The three had grown up together, taking the same Sunday School classes, the same Primary classes before Primary was banned, and joining the same Scout troop before Scouting, too, was banned in

The precise boundary between "things that are Caesar's" and the "things that are God's" has proved a continuing problem for Mormons.

kel and a man named Vater, her co-worker at the Hamburg Mint. Hübener's mother had two sons, Hans and Gerhard, from a previous marriage to Johann Kunkel. Hübener also bore the Kunkel surname during his early life, although a few members of the Church in Hamburg preferred to call him Helmuth Guddat, from his mother's maiden name. In 1940 Emma married a non-Mormon construction worker named Hugo Hübener. Hugo Hübener legally adopted Helmuth, thus giving him the name by which he is remembered today.¹

But Hübener did not live with his new stepfather for long. Gerhard, the younger of the two Kunkel boys, was strongly opposed to Nazism and detested his new stepfather, a Party member and a *Rottenführer* (file leader) in the local Storm Trooper battalion. This friction, and the fact that his mother worked long hours away from home, led Gerhard to move in with his maternal grandmother at 137 Louisenweg, a few blocks from the Hübener apartment at 42 Sachsenstrasse. When Gerhard left Hamburg early in 1941 to join the para-military *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (National Work Corps), Helmuth moved to his grandmother's house shortly thereafter and settled into Gerhard's old room there.

All sources agree that Hübener was a gifted, intelligent student, who was promoted to the most accelerated course of studies soon after he entered school. His teachers reported that he especially loved history and

1934.³ It was through his activities with Rudi and Karl in the St. Georg Branch that Hübener first began to notice the dark side of German life under Hitler. Like many Germans, Hübener initially welcomed the Nazis' rise to power as a sign that Germany had recovered a sense of national purpose after the political chaos and economic collapse of the Weimar years. But this early enthusiasm faded as Hübener and his friends began to see the racism and brutality of National Socialism. All three of them, for instance, were disturbed when in 1938 a sign went up on the door of their branch meeting-house reading "JUDEN IST DER EINTRITT VERBOTEN!" (Jews not allowed to enter.) The boys realized that the sign had been put up by Branch President Arnold Zollner, known by members to be sympathetic to Nazism. Zollner apparently wanted to discourage visits by a Jewish convert, Salomon Schwartz, a member of the Barmbeck Branch, to the combined monthly priesthood meetings held at St. Georg. Hübener also had heard that Zollner had warned Schwartz—who eventually died in the Theresienstadt concentration camp—and his half-sister Marie to stay away from his branch.⁴

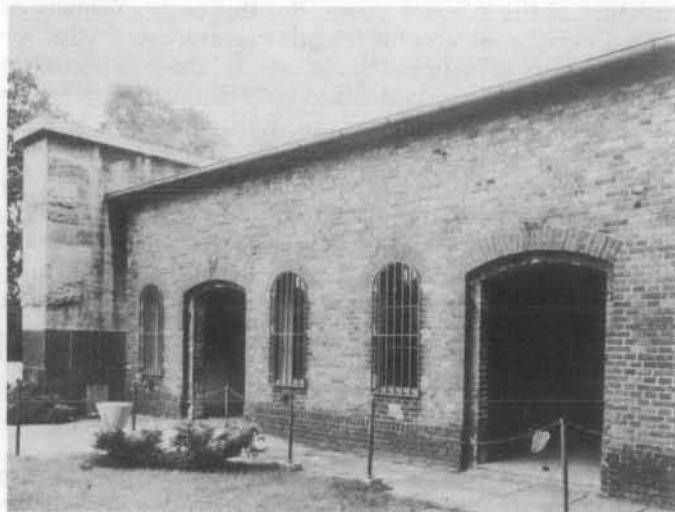
Later Rudi Wobbe saw Zollner reprimand another member of the branch for reading a propaganda leaflet dropped from a British plane. Sister Emma Hase had found the leaflet on her way to church, and she was showing it to some other members of the branch when

**fictitious name*

Zollner came up to her. Tearing the leaflet from her hand, he allegedly said, "If you ever bring anything like that in here again, I'll personally see to it that you're sent to a concentration camp." Too, there was the case of Heinrich Worbs, another branch member, who had been denounced for making disparaging remarks about a new statue in honor of "another Nazi butcher." Worbs was sent to a concentration camp where he suffered various tortures. At one point Worbs was placed in the camp's outdoor stocks while freezing water dripped onto his hands. When his hands were encased in ice, a guard pounded the ice away with a length of rubber hose, cheerfully explaining that this was done "to keep your hands warm." Worbs returned to Hamburg emotionally and physically ruined; he died a few months later. He described his ordeal to a few branch members⁵ and the rest heard about his story through whispered rumors. Hübener heard these rumors as well, and he began to form his own opinion of Germany's Nazi renaissance.

There were other irritations. It was reported that Zollner brought his radio to church whenever Hitler or Goebbels were scheduled to speak. Some recall that during these broadcasts the chapel doors were locked so that no one could leave. On occasion a swastika was displayed outside the building, but the suggestion that branch members use the "Hitler greeting" among themselves had been rejected by a majority vote. Whatever the precise annoyances, it was not long before Hübener and his two friends found themselves united in their growing dissatisfaction with Nazism. Of the three boys it was Karl-Heinz, the oldest and the most brash, who first made his dissatisfaction public. After he saw a Jewish family arrested with particular brutality, Karl-Heinz got himself expelled from the Hitler Youth for "insubordination." Wobbe also began to skip his Hitler Youth meetings. One day he even knocked over one of the group's leaders with his bicycle when he was asked to stop and join in a demonstration, but he was never disciplined for the action and thereafter the Hitler Youth left him alone. Hübener too, began to act; but even Karl and Rudi could not guess the final depth of his resolve.

In March or April of 1941, Hübener's half-brother



Plötzensee Prison (site of Hübener's execution), now a memorial dedicated to victims of the Hitler dictatorship, 1933-1945

Gerhard returned from his assignment with the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* in occupied France. He brought back a multi-band superheterodyne radio manufactured in France. Unlike the ubiquitous but purposely primitive German *Volksempfänger*, this instrument could easily pick up the illegal broadcasts of the BBC in both English and German. Gerhard was about to be inducted into the Army, so he locked the radio and a few other personal belongings into a cabinet at his grandmother's house. Shortly after Gerhard left, Helmuth opened the cabinet, removed the radio, and listened to his first BBC broadcast.

By the summer of 1941, shortly after Hitler launched his Russian offensive, Hübener was convinced of the wrongness of the Nazi program, and he decided that he must actively oppose it. He invited Karl and Rudi up to his room, where they listened at low volume to one of the BBC broadcasts. After it was over, Hübener presented his plan: he would use his typing and shorthand skills to take notes on the broadcasts and work the material into handbills. After he had typed duplicates with carbon paper, the boys would undertake together the dangerous job of distribution: dropping the leaflets into mail boxes, posting them on public bulletin boards (some were to be disguised as official Party announcements by using a fake letterhead bearing a swastika), leaving them in phone booths, and so on.

Hübener produced a wide variety of leaflets during the months that followed. Through the diligence of the Gestapo twenty-nine different pamphlets⁶ have been preserved, including those the police labelled "leaflet p" and "leaflet w". These two leaflets indicate the tone of the rest. In the first, after discussing sarcastically the Party's Wool Collection Program, Hübener composed seven verses of doggerel (given here as closely as possible in the original meter and with similarly forced rhymes) that satirize the propaganda of Josef Goebbels. "Leaflet p" goes on to address "the working soldier on the home front" as well as the military forces in the field, assuring them that the Allies are as serious as the ancient Swiss in their struggle against the aggressor. Next Hübener quotes six lines from the end of Act II, Scene 2 of Schiller's *William Tell* which make up the historic oath sworn by the Swiss Confederates at Rutli. The pamphlet concludes by denying that the attack on Pearl Harbor has removed America's ability to interfere in the European Theater and predicts that Allied deeds on the battlefield will soon give the lie to Axis propaganda (see sidebar).⁷

Hübener's own title for "Leaflet w" was "The Voice of the Homeland." The Gestapo regarded this pamphlet as an "attempt to involve theological issues in behalf of the enemy's seditious efforts." The pamphlet does indeed seem to show that Hübener saw his opposition to Nazism as a necessary consequence of his religious beliefs (see sidebar).⁸

Hübener drew the inspiration for his pamphlet campaign from his own perception of the meaning of Mormonism, combined with a precocious interest in politics and a child-like faith in the eventual triumph of good over evil. All the evidence indicates that the boys were acting entirely on their own, with no guidance or assistance from any adult.

But if Hübener's naive confidence in the basic goodness and educability of mankind was a major factor in

motivating him to begin his pamphlet campaign, it was also the fatal flaw that led to his arrest and subsequent beheading. Early in 1942, after the three boys had been distributing leaflets for eight or nine months, Hübener decided they should expand their operations. He approached a few other young Mormons—which was logical, if he did indeed believe that some of his own insights were based in Mormon doctrines. Although a few came to his room and listened to the BBC broadcasts, none were willing to take the risk of actually distributing the leaflets. From there he turned to his circle of friends in the Civil Service, with whom he had often discussed the war and other current events, although he never revealed to them the source of his “inside information.” (Still, some of them must have guessed that he was involved in illegal activities, for they called him “the man with connections.”)⁹ One apprentice, 18-year-old Gerhard Düwer, agreed to take a few pamphlets home and show them to some friends. Helmuth also approached another apprentice, Werner Kranz, and asked him to translate one of the pamphlets into French, ostensibly so that he could show it to French prisoners of war working in Hamburg. But Kranz wanted nothing to do with the idea. A few days later Hübener tried to press a piece of paper into Kranz’ hand. When Kranz refused to accept the paper and both Hübener and Düwer left the room, supervisor Heinrich Mohns questioned Kranz about the mysterious episode. Next he called in Düwer; when Düwer was finally persuaded to produce a leaflet, the whole case was turned over to the Gestapo.

On Thursday, February 5, 1942, Gestapo Commissioner Wangemann and Officer Müssener arrived at the Civil Service office to question the two boys. Afterwards they searched their homes. Düwer’s home naturally yielded nothing, but Hübener had had no warning. They found the radio, a pile of assorted leaflets, and some notebooks with manuscripts for handbills written out in longhand and shorthand. The typewriter—loaned to Hübener by Branch President Zollner for the purpose of typing letters to LDS servicemen at the front—held seven half-finished carbon copies of Leaflet I, “Who’s Inciting Whom?”¹⁰ At five o’clock that afternoon Düwer and

fellow conspirators. But at their own interrogations several weeks later, both boys admitted enough to be arrested. On March 25th the Attorney-General of the High Court of the State of Hamburg turned the files on the four boys over to the Attorney-General of the Reich at the feared “Blood-Court,” the *Volksgerichtshof* in Berlin. Such a procedure was required for serious crimes. On May 28th they were formally charged with conspiracy to commit high treason; the trial was set for Tuesday, August 11, 1942. For ten weeks the boys sat waiting in their cells.

Back in Hamburg Hübener’s arrest set off another chain of events. On the Sunday after the arrest, Karl, Rudi, Hübener’s mother, and grandmother all attended the St. Georg branch, where they heard Brother Friedrich Jakobi say: “I’m glad they caught him. If I’d known what he was doing, I’d have shot him myself.”¹³ The next Sunday, February 15th, President Zollner wrote “Excommunicated” on Hübener’s membership record. He did this with the apparent consent of Interim West German Mission President, Anton Huck, although there is no evidence that a Church court was convened.¹⁴ Nor is it clear that external threats to the survival of the Church necessitated the excommunication.¹⁵ (At least one other branch president felt that Hübener’s actions created no immediate danger to the Church’s well-being.)¹⁶

These events, however, can only be understood in the context of a tense, suspicion-filled situation. Gestapomen had been attending branch meetings, contributing to the long-standing fears of some members for the continued existence of the Church as well as for their very lives. Additionally, there were no American Church authorities available to whom the local German leaders could turn for counsel in this time of near-panic. Having had little previous experience in Church government, some now tended to see Hübener’s actions, not as the religious and patriotic idealism he claimed, but as an almost criminal disregard for Mormon doctrine.

Even District President Otto Berndt, considered by most to be a liberal and therefore under close scrutiny by the Gestapo, did not wish to compromise himself by openly opposing or even overturning this

Nor is it clear that external threat to the survival of the Church necessitated the excommunication.

Hübener were formally arrested. The same day three more pamphlets were turned in to Cell-leader Herr Weltien by a Frau Bertha Flögel, a Herr Schwedlick, and a Herr Frehse. All three leaflets were found within one block of Helmuth’s grandmother’s house in the Louisenweg.¹¹

After two days of torture Hübener signed the first of several confessions.¹² He only mentioned Rudi and Karl in passing, describing them more as curious friends than

“excommunication”—though he did refuse to actively support Zollner’s decision by co-signing the excommunication statement. It wasn’t until well after the war when, on 11 November 1946, he and the new mission president, Max Zimmer, wrote “excommunication done by mistake” on Hübener’s membership record. Later, Zimmer’s successor, Jean Wunderlich, notified the Salt Lake leadership of the affair, and on 24 January, 1948, the First Presidency ordered a similar notation placed on the

membership record. (Neither Schnibbe nor Wobbe suffered similar excommunications, although Schnibbe assumed during his more than six years of Nazi and then Russian imprisonment that he too had been cut off when he heard of Hübener's fate.)

Throughout their investigation of the case, the Gestapo strongly suspected that Hübener had been acting as a "front" for some mysterious agent. Hugo Hübener, the Storm Trooper who had always distrusted the Mormons, told the police that he suspected "that liberal" Otto Berndt of corrupting his stepson. Berndt was picked up for questioning and held for four days at Gestapo headquarters.¹⁷ As president of the Hamburg District, Berndt knew that the Gestapo's judgment of him could affect every Church member in Germany. He prayed earnestly for guidance and, as he reports, the Lord supplied the right words throughout his four days of detention. Finally, at the end of that time, the Gestapo apparently satisfied, he was released. Although Berndt remembers nothing he said or did during those four days, he does vividly recall his release, when a Gestapo officer accompanied him from his cell to the exit. "Make no mistake about it, Berndt," the man told him. "When we have this war behind us, when we have the time to devote to it and after we have eliminated the Jews, you Mormons are next!"¹⁸ The statement brought home to Berndt an idea often forgotten or misunderstood: the jealously religious nature of National Socialism, and its ultimate intentions



Helmuth Hübener, taken from a Plotzensee Memorial brochure commemorating Nazi persecution and resistance in Berlin

LEAFLET P

"I've calculated for everything"

It's been a month now since both radio and the press in Germany grandly announced the results of the wool collection program. Over 70 million articles, Goebbels proclaimed, over 70 million! But where are these 70 million articles? The soldiers on the Eastern Front, the soldiers in the Far North, in any case, haven't received them. They do not write about them, only that they are freezing, freezing, and freezing some more, and vainly waiting for warm winter clothing.

Where then are the 70 million articles—furs, sweaters, gloves, underwear and skis? Maybe that which an unnamed neutral journalist wrote in his paper was right? Is he correct in writing about increasing shortages of raw materials in Germany, when he mentions that woolen articles are to be issued only in the most pressing cases and only on ration cards? Time will tell whether or not the government cheated the people out of their woolens and furs only to graciously allow them to buy them back later on ration cards. Time will tell!

Poor "Josef" stands at the microphone;
Entirely unable to bring forth a tone.
'How am I going to convince the Volk
that Hitler's figures aren't just a joke?
How could he have said—so embarrassing—
That he's calculated for everything?

What Josef says sounds pretty slack;
Oh woe is us, alas, alack:
'It's winter now and bitter cold.'
(Even chillier when you sit in a hole,
'cause shooters always seem to freeze.
Didn't Hitler calculate for these?

'We're engaged in a struggle with hands and feet,
It won't last much longer 'til the enemy's beat.

They've been running along on their last breath
—So Goebbels says—soon comes their death.
(For the fact that Stalin has won of late
I suppose the Führer could also calculate!?)

'We're engaged in a battle, at the turning place
So everyone step up the wool-collection pace!
That's what Goebbels begged for, and he also believed
That you'd follow his orders and be deceived.
That everything you own you would quietly give,
and keep nothing at all on which to live.

The results were poor, oh how that forebodes!
So we'll say that they donated many trainloads.
Whether half-full, full or completely hollow,
The Volk is too dumb to really follow.
'Cause the radio and Fritsche, they speak with clout:
'The Führer has calculated everything out!'

Yes, Hitler's the reason the people must share
From their meager belongings whatever they'll bear!
For Hitler's mistakes the Volk must now pay,
What good now is Russia, it's lost anyway.
And that Stalin now marches the victor in the war,
The Führer neglected to calculate for.

But in '41 the big break will come,
That's how the Führer's speech last year did run.
The soldiers now know of his tendency to err,
While Hitler keeps promising, "This is the year."
When the Allies all get moving there will be a rout
But then Mr. Hitler will be "calculated out".

toward competing religious systems. Thereafter, when Church members hoped for victory in the war, Berndt would reply: "You be grateful to God that we will not win it."¹⁹

National Socialism was not a simple political, economic, or social phenomenon. It was an entirely new world-view based on an eclectic conglomeration of astrological, gnostic, millennialist, Christian, and Teutonic cults and myths. The Nazi inner circles were steeped in

be called forth to usher in the millennial *Reich*. As Hitler and his party watched, the Untersberg was bathed in a brilliant red light, which Speer later decided was a rare and remarkably vivid southern display of the Aurora Borealis. The light shone on the assembled faces like a divine show of approval for the historic events of that day. Speer reports that Hitler was deeply moved. Watching the light, he said: "It looks like this time much blood will be shed."²⁰

When we have this war behind us, after
we have eliminated the Jews, you
Mormons are next.

this collage of mystical lore. Albert Speer, for example, writes in *Inside the Third Reich* that Hitler and a few colleagues were celebrating his greatest diplomatic coup—the signing of the non-aggression pact with Russia—on the scenic mountain peak of the Obersalzberg, when they looked across to the Untersberg, a place associated with many Germanic legends. There, say the legends, the Emperor Charlemagne sleeps in a cave until he shall

During the months of confinement and torture before his trial, Hübener and his friends were forced to think about the implications of their actions. The boys' responses varied considerably. Düwer flatly denied any involvement with the others, while Schnibbe tried to portray the whole episode as a childish prank. But Hübener became steadily more convinced that he had chosen the right course. His first suspicions of the brutality that hid

LEAFLET W

"The Voice of the Homeland"

"The Bible not God's word. Merely a scheme of the Jewish world to enslave mankind. The product of an overactive fantasy!"

This is the red thread which is found in each of the "free-spiritual" or "neo-heathenistic" filth-pamphlets. "The Bible not God's word." That is the title of one of the filthiest and most intemperate brochures of the great Anti-Christ, General Ludendorff.

Why all this campaign against the Bible, holy writ? The answer to this question should not be too difficult if one knows the contents of the Bible, especially the many prophecies which pertain mostly to the latter days, to the days when heathenism and idolatry will take the upper hand, when the great Anti-Christ will arise in the midst of a peaceful period and will conquer with power or with cunning one country, one kingdom after another.

This time has now come, the Anti-Christ has established his "Reich." Ludendorff knows this just as Hitler does, and they are attempting to take the Bible away from the German Volk, so that it will not be able to see through the insidious plans of Hitler and his followers in advance.

Christians, arise, open the Bible, read what it says in the Book of the Prophet Daniel, 11:20:

And in his place shall
Stand up a vile person, to
Whom they did not intend to
Give the honor of the kingdom,
But he shall come in the midst of peace,
And obtain the kingdom by flatteries.

To whom does that apply better than to the *Führer*: by means of bold phrase-mongering and grandiose promises he and his comrades succeeded in winning the majority in the Reichstag.⁸

Soldiers on the home front! Soldiers on all fronts! The Führer has promised you that 1942 will be decisive and this time he will stop at nothing to keep his promise. He will send you by the thousands into the fires in order to finish the crime he started. By the thousands your wives and children will become widows and orphans. And for nothing! The European Front stands fast and the Rütli-oath is unanimous, unanimous the promise—the promise of all Allied peoples:

We want to be united now as brothers,
Not separate in danger or in need!
We wish to live in freedom like our fathers
Preferring death to living servitude!
We place our highest trust in God Almighty
And fear no kind of wicked human power.

The European Awakening has begun: in reply to the laughably audacious contention of the Axis propagandists that in a month or so the U.S. has already been badly damaged by the Japanese attack and that "Roosevelt's dream of having a say on the continent of Europe is nothing more than a dream", American air, land and sea forces have now taken up positions in the north of Ireland. Berlin, Rome and Tokyo may try to veil the dimensions of this landing and may gloss over it with sneering gestures, but time will tell who spoke the truth. And then, when the Allied and American forces set foot on the continent, when American and British squadrons bring death and destruction over the Reich, when the Allied and U.S. fleet enters the battle of the Atlantic with fresh reserves; then deeds will speak a more eloquent language; then with Hamlet, our only reply to the illusionary soap bubble-blowers in the Wilhelmstrasse will be:

"Words, words, words!"⁷

behind the Nazi mask of order had been partially supported by events he had seen in his community. But his experiences in prison confirmed Hübener's worst fears about the true nature of the Nazi state. The constant degradation of prison life did not make him want to recant; it merely confirmed his beliefs and strengthened his resolve to oppose the system to the very end. During his interrogations, the boy told his questioners that he "had no choice"; he "had to listen to the broadcasts," and when he learned the truth, he "had to disseminate it."²¹

All the available documents seem to show that Hübener understood the significance of his confrontation with Nazism; his appreciation of the moral and theological context of his case appears to have outweighed any desire to delay the end by cooperating with his jailors. Interestingly, in their own way the Nazis apparently shared Hübener's estimate of the broader importance of his case, and they held him up as an example before the country. After his death, thousands of red posters announced his execution.

At first sight, Hübener looks like an odd choice for a Nazi scapegoat. He belonged to a family officially adjudged "Aryan" by the party; his stepfather was a leading Storm Trooper; and his family members conducted themselves "perfectly." The leadership of the Hitler Youth even appealed to the Führer on his behalf. In many ways, Helmuth Hübener would seem perfectly suited for success under the Nazi regime. Ironically, the Nazis perceived Hübener as a danger precisely because of his many positive qualities. Hübener was a thoroughly in-

I am very thankful to my Heavenly Father that this agonizing life is coming to an end this evening. I could not stand it any longer anyway! My Father in heaven knows that I have done nothing wrong. I know that God lives and He will be the proper judge of this matter. Until our happy reunion in that better world, I remain,

your friend and brother in the Gospel,
Helmuth²³

Helmuth Hübener was beheaded at 8:15 that evening. He was seventeen.

II

Since the war, Hübener's career has assumed larger-than-life significance among those Germans who have been interested in analyzing the causes of dictatorship, particularly the "engaged" writers of the German "Group of 47" such as Günter Grass, Paul Schallück, Nobel laureate Heinrich Böll, and others. The character of Helmuth Hübener has found esteem among these writers greatly out of proportion to his actual historical importance and his lack of subsequent recognition among Latter-day Saints.²⁴ For these writers, Hübener's importance lies in the fact that he was neither an adult intellectual nor a member of some anti-Nazi authoritarian group like the Communists. He was an individual, a naive young man whose response to an immoral regime was not enthusiasm, apathy, or violent re-

The Führer himself seemed to embody many of the most basic LDS virtues.

doctrinated schoolboy who had little to fear and much to gain by conforming to the system. Instead, he freely chose to search out the lies beneath the facade of Nazism, and to show others the truth. If Nazism could not hold a Helmuth Hübener, it could hold no one. And so it was necessary that Helmuth Hübener be tried, convicted, deprived of his citizenship, and condemned to death.

At the boys' trial in August, after they had been sentenced and given the customary opportunity to have the last word, Hübener was the only one who spoke. He stood before the judges, who sat on their high bench in their famous blood-red robes, and told them, "Wait. Your turn will come."²²

On October 27, 1942, a few hours before his execution, Hübener was allowed to write three letters. He wrote one to his mother, one to his grandmother, and one to Sister Maria Sommerfeldt, who had always treated him like a son. Sister Sommerfeldt's letter was the only one to survive the Allied bombing raids of the following year. In that letter he continued to express certainty that he had chosen the proper course:

volt; instead, he made a sincere attempt to change things by educating his fellow citizens. And precisely because these principles of nonviolent, democratic, individual political initiative and a sense of personal moral responsibility failed before 1945, these writers believe they must succeed now. If Hübeners are common in postwar German literature, it is precisely because there were so few in real life before.

Hübener's significance for Latter-day Saints has been more ambiguous. Many German Saints who would have given their lives for the gospel believed that Hübener was a heretic, for he had violated the Twelfth Article of Faith: "We believe in being subject to Kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, and in obeying, honoring, and upholding the law." These people found support for their attitude in the admonitions of the New Testament. Jesus himself had counseled: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." Peter exhorted his friends to "submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake." Finally, Paul admonished the Romans: "Let every soul be

subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God."

But the German Saints had other reasons for viewing Hübener as a traitor. For decades they had been stigmatized as members of an "American sect," the implication being that someone who did not belong to the established churches was not a real German. This ostracism on the part of the major churches persisted through the Weimar period. Indeed, when the Nazis came to power it may not be going too far to say that some Saints enjoyed a certain amount of thoughtless *Schadenfreude* (malicious enjoyment of others' misfortune) at the treatment they meted out to the established churches. Now the Protestants and Catholics were receiving the same treatment they had given the "sects."

Hitler enjoyed at least as much popularity among German Saints as he did among the population in general. His apparent dynamism and self-confidence seemed to show a way out of the chaos and weakness of the Weimar years. Moreover, as "good Germans," the Mormons were acutely aware that Hitler had risen to power through legal channels. The Nazi Party had won a plurality—although by no means a majority—in the last general election, and Hitler had been appointed Chancellor by the ancient and venerated President Paul von Hindenberg. And although the Weimar Reichstag had voted Hitler extraordinary powers on both February 28 and March 23, 1933, Hitler never formally abrogated the Weimar Constitution. In the years before the death-camps, the terrible food shortages, and the massive casualties of late World War II, many Germans saw the Nazis as a major force for good in German society.

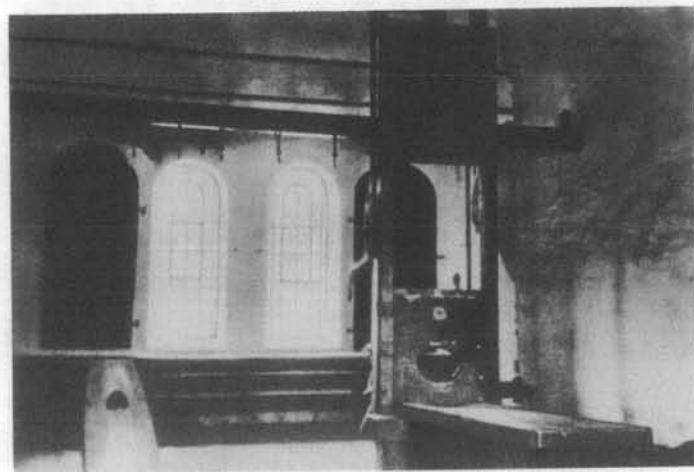
So, for that matter, did many Americans. The unfairness of the Versailles Treaty was generally recognized, and in isolationist America of the thirties few Americans were concerned as Hitler overturned one provision of the treaty after another. If anything, they felt a degree of sympathy for some of the Nazis' goals.

This sympathy was apparently shared by some members of the Church leadership. The Church's German magazine, *Der Stern*, reminded its readers in 1935 that Senator Reed Smoot had long been a friend of Germany,²⁵ and this attitude seemed to receive official sanction during President Grant's 1937 visit. The message to the German Saints was clear: Stay here. Keep the Commandments. Try to get along the best you can, even under some limitations. We want to keep the Church intact and the missionaries working.

The German Saints were not eager for a confrontation with their national government, and they were happy to follow President Grant's advice. By and large, the Mormons and the Nazis coexisted comfortably. Some Church members even saw Hitler as God's instrument, preparing the world for the millennium. Superficial parallels were drawn between the Church and the Nazi Party, with its emphasis on active involvement by every member. The women's auxiliary of the Party and the Hitler Youth were regarded by some as secular equivalents to the Church's Relief Society, MIA, and Scouting programs. The vital importance of "Aryan" ancestry gave new significance to genealogical research. And the Führer himself, the non-smoking, non-drinking vegetarian who yielded to no one in his desire for absolute law

and order, seemed to embody many of the most basic LDS virtues.²⁶

In their eagerness to coexist with the government, American officials of the German Church resorted to public relations efforts which suggested all of the above. Probably the clearest example of this tendency is an article by West German Mission President Alfred C. Rees entitled "In the Land of the Mormons." The article appeared in a special issue of the Nazi Party organ *Der Völkische Beobachter* dated April 14, 1939.²⁷ In the Editor's Preface to the article, President Rees is called "the representative of the Church in Germany," who "paints for our readers a portrait of Mormonism today, a church which views the New Germany with sympathy and friendship." Whether President Rees originally wrote the article in German or not, the language of the piece abounds in such loaded terms as *Volk* and *Rasse* (race); and a picture of Brigham Young bears the caption, "Führer der historischen Mormonenpioniere." But the significance of these linguistic gaffes is magnified by hindsight. More disturbing is the way President Rees blatantly parallels Mormonism with Nazism. As Rees warms to his topic, Mormonism begins to sound like a fulfillment of Nazi teachings, providing "the practical realization of the German ideal: 'the common good takes



Execution room at Plötzensee Prison showing the guillotine and infamous strangulation hooks

precedence over the individual good.' " Rees concluded by assuring his readers that "Mormons are people who put this healthy doctrine into action." Reading articles such as this, it would have been easy for a German Saint to mistakenly conclude that the seal of official Church approval had been placed on the Nazi regime.

This policy of appeasing the Nazis worked well until the war broke out. Despite the classification of Mormonism as a sect "dangerous to the state . . ." ²⁸ according to Gestapo reports, the Church was not summarily dissolved as many others were.²⁹ The missionaries remained; the Church continued. Even during the war, Mormon life was disrupted more by bombing raids, supply shortages, and travel restrictions than by official harassment.³⁰ By and large, the German Saints lived through the Thousand-Year Reich much like the rest of their countrymen.³¹

But among those Germans who recognized the true nature of Nazism were a few Latter-day Saints. Many

were simply tired of the war (Germany's second in twenty-five years); others, like Hübener, began to see through the pervasive Nazi propaganda. Rosa Böhringer, Johannes Kindt, Walter Krause, and President Willy Deters of Bremen were among the Saints who either overtly opposed the regime or else dragged their feet while praying for German defeat in the war and the regime's early demise,³² basing their position in part on Mormon scripture. In Section 98 of the Doctrine and

principles. That *every man* may act . . . according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment. Therefore, it is not right that *any man* should be in bondage to another. And for *this purpose* have I established the Constitution of this land; by the hands of wise men whom I raised up for this very purpose.

After emphasizing "every" and "all" as key words, he offers a statement by the Prophet Joseph Smith:

My Father in Heaven knows that I have done nothing wrong. He will be the proper judge of this matter.

Covenants, for example, it reads:

And now, verily I say unto you, concerning the laws of the land, it is my will that my people should observe to do all things whatsoever I command them. And the law of the land which is constitutional, supporting the principle of freedom in maintaining rights and privileges, belongs to all mankind, and is justifiable before me. Therefore, I, the Lord, justify you, and your brethren of my church, in befriending that law which is the constitutional law of the land; and as pertaining to law of man, whatsoever is more or less than this, cometh of evil. I, the Lord God, make you free, therefore ye are free indeed: and the law also maketh you free. Nevertheless, when the wicked rule, the people mourn. Wherefore, honest men and wise men should be sought for diligently, and good men and wise men ye should observe to uphold; otherwise whatsoever is less than these cometh of evil.

And in Section 34 one reads:

We believe that governments were instituted of God for the benefit of man; and that he holds men accountable for their acts in relation to them, both in making laws and administering them, for the good and safety of society. We believe that no government can exist in peace, except such laws are framed and held inviolate as will secure to each individual the free exercise of conscience, the right and control of property, and the protection of life.

These verses clearly state the duty of Latter-day Saints to diligently seek out good and wise leaders and outline their moral responsibility in the governing process.

Hugh Nibley, commenting on the universal character of the rights of man guaranteed by the American Constitution, observed:

The Founding Fathers were convinced that their liberal teachings were for the benefit of *all men*, not only for their own times, but for endless generations to come, ensuring the blessings of liberty not only to themselves but especially to their posterity, and not only in this land but eventually to the whole world.

He then continues: "Note the sweeping language of D&C 101:77ff:

The laws and constitution of this people . . . I have suffered to be established, and should be maintained for the rights and protection of *all flesh* according to just and holy

We deem it a just principle, and it is one the force of which we believe ought to be considered by *every individual*, that *all men* are created equal, and that *all men* have the privilege of thinking for themselves upon all matters relative to conscience. Consequently, then, we are not disposed, had we the power, to deprive *anyone* of exercising that free independence of mind which heaven has so graciously bestowed upon the *human family* as one of its choicest gifts. (TJS-49)

Finally, Nibley offers one more observation from the Prophet: " 'It is a love of liberty which inspires my soul—civil and religious liberty to the *whole human race*. I will lift them up, and in their own way, too, if I cannot persuade them that my way is better; and I will not compel any man to believe as I do.' " (TJS 113. All italics are Nibley's.)³³

It would be difficult for anyone who lives under a free system that owes its continued existence to these principles to condemn Helmuth Hübener for his dedication to them. But Latter-day Saints may question whether Hübener might not have done better—from a strictly tactical viewpoint—to have recognized the hopelessness of the German situation and waited a few years for external forces to bring about the collapse of the Nazi regime. Some similar consideration no doubt lay behind President Harold B. Lee's remarks to the East German Saints at the Munich Area Conference in 1973, when he told them to return quietly to their country and to refrain from agitating against Communism.³⁴ It does seem possible that from time to time, Mormons in various countries might face situations where the survival of individuals or of the Church as an institution would seem to dictate a policy of close-mouthed neutrality.

But no one should conclude from this that Mormons have abandoned their commitment to "seek for and uphold good, honest and wise men." Members have been consistently counseled to guard with particular care those principles of freedom they hold dear.

So it seems clear that if Helmuth Hübener's legacy is to have any meaning, it *must* inspire others to follow his courageous lead in this and other free countries of the world *before* and *lest* the wicked rule, making such acts illegal, hopeless, and suicidal.



Helmut Hubener. Courtesy of the LDS Church Archives

Notes

1. See Ulrich Sander, "Helmut Hubener Gruppe" in *Streiflichter aus dem Hamburger Widerstand 1933-1945*, ed. Ursel Hochmuth and Gerhard Meyer (Frankfurt: Roderberg Verlag, 1969), pp. 325-341; Annedore Leber, Willy Brandt, and Karl Dietrich Bracher, eds., *Das Gewissen steht auf*, translated into English as *Revolt of Conscience* (Berlin: Mosaik Verlag, 1954); Stephen Hermlin, *Die erste Reihe* (East Berlin, 1951); Franz Ahrens, *Helmut Hubener: Vorbild, Opfer, Verpflichtung* (Hamburg: Richard Herman Verlag, 1945); Terrence Prittie, *Germans Against Hitler* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1964); Joseph M. Dixon, "Mormons in the Third Reich, 1933-1945," *Dialogue* 7 (1972), 70-78; Gilbert Scharffs, *Mormonism in Germany*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1970); Jay M. Todd, "The Church Among the German-Speaking Peoples," *Improvement Era* (March 1969), 4-10.
2. Teacher August Meins. Sander, 326. See comments before the Gestapo by Hubener and his mother. *Hubener File*, p. 34. Interview with Mary Panitsch in Hamburg, April 1974.
3. See *Der Stern* 66 (1934): 47, 142-143.
4. Such signs were not common on Mormon meeting places. There were few Jewish members and even fewer investigators. Views of the local Church authorities and pressures on the Church by local Nazi party officials varied. A wide spectrum of political opinion existed in the St. Georg branch. Paul Hase, counselor in the branch presidency, was a member of the SA (Storm Troopers) and came to meetings in uniform. Some members favored the Social Democratic party. Some members believed the branch was "punished" during the war for the way it had treated its Jewish members. Hans Gurtler, *Hamburger Gemeinde Geschichte*, p. 33.
5. Interviews with Otto Berndt, October 1-15, 1974.
6. The Gestapo file lists twenty-nine different compositions; there may have been over sixty. Ahrens, p. 10.
7. Leaflet p. *Hubener File*, p. 292-293.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 284, 287.
9. *Hubener File*, p. 34.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-16.
12. *Hubener File*, pp. 33-42, 61-62, 322. According to Schnibbe and Wobbe, a letter of "recantation" to Helmut's parents calling his work "a foolish mistake" was primarily a means of communicating with his family and was extorted through torture.
13. Interviews with Wobbe, Schnibbe, Berndt, and Hans Kunkel.
14. Manuscript History of the West German Mission, LDS Historical Archives, Salt Lake City.
15. Some witnesses believe President Anton Huck was a party-member, others that he was sympathetic to National Socialism but had not officially joined. In 1943 the Gestapo conducted a thorough investigation of the West German mission home in Frankfurt/Main and found nothing incriminating. Douglas Alder, "German-Speaking Immigration to Utah 1850-1950," MA thesis, University of Utah, 1959, p. 18.
16. According to Mrs. Rudolf Wobbe, whose father Alfred Schmidt was president of the Barmbech Branch.
17. Interview with Otto Berndt. Also Otto Berndt's letter to *Improvement Era* (May 1969): 100-101.
18. Hitler's professed attachment to his German Catholic heritage and the Nazi party platform promise to support "positive Christianity" reassured many. But Hitler made his real intentions clear on many occasions:

As far as Churches go, they're all the same. They have no future. Not among the Germans, at any rate. Italian fascism can go ahead and make its peace with the church. I'll do it too. Why not? That won't prevent me from exterminating Christianity in Germany, with

all its roots and branches, lock, stock, and barrel. See Hermann Rauschning, *Gespräche mit Hitler* (New York: Europa, 1940), p. 50.

19. Interviews with Otto Berndt.
20. Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 103, 194.
21. *Hubener File*, 41.
22. Wobbe received ten years, Schnibbe five, and Düwer four. *Ibid.* 191, 192, 201, 202.
When asked why by the government prosecutors, Helmut replied, "I wanted others to know the truth." The prosecution then taunted, "Are you suggesting we are lying." Helmut answered, "Jawohl, ihr lugt" (using the somewhat contemptuous form of the familiar "you"). Interviews with Wobbe and Schnibbe.
23. *Hubener File*, p. 337.
24. Helmut plays significant roles in Günter Grass's novel, *örtlich betäubt* (*Local Anesthetic*), his play *Davor* (*Up Tight*), and Paul Schallück's radio play, *Helmut Hubener* (both plays have been widely performed). Hubener-types also occur in works by Böll, Rolf Hochhuth, and others. Visitors to Berlin's Plötzensee prison, where Hubener was beheaded, are given a booklet which contains a picture of him and a short sketch of his life.
25. An article entitled "A Friend of Germany" chronicles Smoot's "unremitting and energetic [work] for the freeing of Germany from the unjust and unfulfillable demands of the Versailles Treaty." According to Smoot, "France was acting like the Jew, Shylock, in demanding the last pound of flesh . . . of Germany." *Der Stern* 67 (1935): 338-342. Just after Hitler had come to power, *Der Stern* had editorialized against the "slandorous news reports" from the American press and reassured the German-Mormons in America that the majority of the people supported the regime and traditional German "law and order." *Der Stern* 65 (1933): 109.
26. In addition, many Mormons believed that Hitler had read the Book of Mormon and that the Nazi party local organizations derived from the Mormon block-teaching programs. There is no evidence to support such claims. Dr. Max Haenle from Tübingen, a non-Mormon, visited Utah in the late twenties and became a friend of Anthony W. Ivins. In 1936 he traveled throughout Germany speaking to District Conferences on "Utah, Land of the Mormons." *Der Stern* reported that in Dresden on 16 May 1936 Haenle made "comparisons . . . throughout the whole lecture between the Mormon state founded 86 years ago by Brigham Young in Utah and Adolf Hitler's Third Reich . . . In its political productivity, its organization forms, and its unswerving successes in the various areas of governmental, social, and communal life," he proclaimed, "Utah bears a really striking similarity to our Germany of today. Here as well as there, the unshakable faith in and willingness to die for their Führer [respective leaders] is the foundation and prerequisite for all further development." *Der Stern* 68 (1 September 1936): 172-172.
The *Millennial Star* also commented on Josef Goebbels' plan announced in September 1933 that the German population "fast" monthly for the poor:

It is indeed singular that a comparison of the details of the two systems of organized fasting shows them to be so nearly identical. Perhaps that part of the message of the Restored Gospel may have been either directly or indirectly the inspiration and the model for the new scheme adopted by the German Government—perhaps not. But evident, at least, is the fact that consciously or unconsciously, the people of the world are discovering the Lord's way is best. The heaven of the Gospel is spreading. "All Germany Will Fast," *Millennial Star*, vol. 95, (Sept. 28, 1933): 638-39.

The wife of mission-president Roy A. Welker had a close association with Gertrud Scholz-Klink, *The Reichsfrauenführerin* of the National Socialist Women's League and a personal friend of Adolf Hitler, with whom Sister Welker rode in Hitler's car on several occasions. Richard Jensen, *Oral Interview with Roy A. Welker on February 2, 3, 1973*, LDS Church Historian's Office.

27. Alfred C. Rees, "Im Lande der Mormonen," *Völkischer Beobachter* (April 14, 1939): 1-7. President Rees, who had achieved some prominence in the United States as head of the Small Business Administration, undoubtedly believed he had a special "calling" to work with the Nazi government on behalf of the Church.

President Heber J. Grant had visited Germany in 1937. German Saints were calmed by his assurances. He discouraged emigration and between 1933 and 1939 only 91 members from the German-speaking missions did so. In the decade prior to 1933, 2683 left Europe for America, and after 1945 many more did. Alder, p. 76.

28. *Sonderbericht über die Lage in den Protestantischen Kirchen und in den Verschiedenen Sekten und deren staatsfeindliche Wirkung*. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

29. *Ibid.*

30. In 1941 the Nazis tried to eliminate other groups such as the Christian Scientists and the Salvation Army.

31. The Mormon record decrying the slaughter of the Jews is, unfortunately, as disappointing as that of the Protestants and Catholics. John Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1968), p. 265. Gunter Lewy, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 268ff.

32. Letter from Rosa Bohringer to Albert R. Bowen, 19 June 1948; Max Zimmer File, LDS Historical Archives; Interviews with Johannes Kindt and Walter Krause.

33. Hugh Nibley, "The Uses and Abuses of Patriotism." Unpublished manuscript, quoted by permission.

34. Report of First Area General Conference held in Munich, Germany, August 24, 25, 26, 1973 (Salt Lake City, 1974), p. 111.

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