

Smith had admired the German language and the Luther translation of the Bible. In addition, there was by 1933 a sizable, active, and respected first- and second-generation German community in Salt Lake City as well as literally thousands of former German missionaries.⁴⁶ These men and a few women had lived in Germany for at least three years, had learned the language, and had come to love the people who had fed, sheltered, and encouraged them. Many Mormons felt a strong identification with the country and people, admired many of the national character traits, and lauded its culture as one of the greatest in the world. Even the most prominent Jews in the community, both those like Alexander Neibaur of Salt Lake City who had converted in England in 1837 and Moritz Rosenbaum, originally from Posen, Prussia, who settled in Brigham City, as well as Zucker, Bamberger, the Simons, and the Auerbachs—all stalwarts in Salt Lake City's Jewish community—were German emigrants who took pride in their heritage. In the Mormon community as elsewhere, before 1933, there was an unusual compatibility between being pro-German and pro-Jewish.⁴⁷

Mormon leaders were also sympathetic. J. Reuben Clark believed, with John Maynard Keynes and others, that Germans had not received a fair deal from the Allies in the Versailles Treaty and thought he understood why Germans, in their desire for recognition and the restoration of their injured national pride, had turned to Hitler.⁴⁸ But although Mormon leaders or members could support some ideas like the restoration of national pride, the opposition to Communism, and the desire to overcome the moral decadence of the Weimar era, there is no evidence that Mormon leaders or members generally ever believed in or sympathized with National Socialist doctrines. They lamented the behavior of the Nazis toward the Jews but, like countless others, did not understand the central role of the murderous anti-Jewish hatred in Hitler and his Third Reich policies until it was too late.

⁴⁶ See Allan Kent Powell, "The German-Speaking Immigrant Experience in Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 52 (Fall 1984): 304–46, and Davis Bitton and Gordon Irving, "The Continental Heritage," in *The Peoples of Utah*, edited by Helen Papanikolas, 221–50 (Salt Lake City: Utah Historical Society, 1976).

⁴⁷ Watters, *The Pioneer Jews of Utah*, 22–27.

⁴⁸ Frank W. Fox, *J. Reuben Clark: The Public Years* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1980), 288–90, 605. See also the speech given to the Rotary Club at the Hotel Utah and reported in the *Deseret News* (24 October 1923), in Edwin B. Firmage and Christopher L. Blakely, "J. Reuben Clark, Jr.: Law and International Order," in *J. Reuben Clark: Diplomat and Statesman*, edited by Ray Hillam, Charles Tate, and Laura Wadley (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1973), 55 note.

sided over some 6,500 German Mormons and 90 American missionaries. When they asked for the Mormon position “so far as the present National Socialist government is concerned,” Budge felt that a conciliatory reply was appropriate: “We have our own Church and our own convictions concerning what it advocates, and we expect to carry our convictions through for the sake of our eternal salvation, so long as we do not come in conflict with the fixed laws of the government.” Clearly, Budge suggested, certain Mormon principles could not be relinquished even in the face of death, including belief in God and Jesus Christ, the restoration of true Christianity, loyalty to Church leaders, and being part of the house of Israel. But it was also true, Budge told his interlocutors, that Mormons are “taught, especially, to be able to class themselves with the best citizens of the country, and to support, in the fullest sense of the word, the ordinances and laws of the town, the state, and the country in which they live. The authorities of our church have no advice to give regarding party politics, leaving the members free to identify themselves with whatever party they choose; but, in any event, we teach that the present party in power, and the laws governing the country, be supported by the church.”⁵⁷

In March 1933, six months earlier, Budge had written a letter to his missionaries spelling out a neutral position for them and asking them to inform German Mormons about the Church’s official position:

By this country’s officials and citizens we have been and are still being treated with respect. You are hereby notified to refrain from discussing or giving your opinion concerning the political situation, either in private or in public. You are also warned against writing anything whatsoever concerning politics or concerning the present situation in any of your local or foreign correspondence, including letters to your parents and friends. Anyone of you who fails to take this advice *will* have occasion to *regret it*.

There is no immediate occasion for uneasiness on your part. Just be wise and humbly go about your business. Anything concerning our missionaries will be handled from this office, if occasion requires.⁵⁸

Thus, throughout the years of the Third Reich, the Mormon position vis-à-vis the Hitler regime was rigorously nonpolitical. The leadership in Salt Lake City, to whom all Mormons looked for guidance, considered the

⁵⁷ Letter to the First Presidency, German-Austrian Mission History, 8 September 1933, LDS Church Archives.

⁵⁸ Circular Letter #2, German-Austrian Mission History, 30 March 1933, LDS Church Archives; emphasis Budge’s.

Hitler regime legitimate if, as J. Reuben Clark called it, “detestable”;⁵⁹ it appeared to have the support of the German people, a powerful factor because of Mormon respect for democracy. Moreover, what the German government did to the Mormons was more an internal political matter than an international moral one. The First Presidency’s primary objective was not unlike the Catholic position: to keep the Church in Germany intact, to continue to try to gain converts among the Germans, even though the increasing political turmoil made proselyting progressively more difficult and unrewarding, and to avoid giving the government cause either to dissolve the Church or persecute its members. In 1985, I sent a five-page, twenty-two-question survey to sixty former German missionaries living in the United States, querying them about their experiences with Jews before the Holocaust, and followed up with several oral histories.⁶⁰ The survey results confirm that the mission presidents and missionaries in Germany fully supported the Church’s position, as did Mormons in the United States. It did not keep some missionaries from developing animosities toward the regime; it was also true that some were positively impressed by Nazi achievements, especially in counteracting the impact of the Depression, bringing optimism back to the people, and bringing order back to the country.

German Mormons were generally, as they had always been, more Mormon than German, as established in a series of interviews and oral histories with members that I have conducted since the middle 1970s. German Mormons came overwhelmingly from the lowest social classes and were almost completely unpolitical. They supported the Church’s position, although a small minority was nevertheless drawn to National Socialism and another minority quietly—except for Helmuth Huebener—opposed Hitler from the beginning.⁶¹ Only gradually and very belatedly did Mormons

⁵⁹ In Quinn, *J. Reuben Clark*, 202.

⁶⁰ I gathered names from *Der Stern* and from the mission histories, queried personal acquaintances among these missionaries in the Provo and Salt Lake City areas, and collected the names of other missionary friends from them. The questionnaires and survey results are in my possession. Some of the interviews have been transcribed and are in the LDS Church Archives.

⁶¹ Interviews and surveys in my possession. Members repeatedly emphasized their disinterest in—and often disdain for—politics. Many were offended when political matters were brought up in any Church context. Roy Welker, German-Austrian mission president, emphasized in 1936 that both members and missionaries were “disinterested in politics, but tremendously interested in life and life’s happiness.” “How Fares the Church in Germany?” *Improvement Era* 39 (October 1936): 608. A year later, George D. Pyper of the Sunday School general presidency, toured the