

# Major J. Reuben Clark: Conflicted Patriot

## Outline

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Background: J. Rueben Clark, Jr., lawyer, statesman, apostle, and Army officer, was one of the most prominent Latter-day Saint attorneys, besides being a Church and government leader. He was a staunch scholar and defender of the US Constitution, and thereby a strong patriot and advocate of American values and principles; but, over his life he became a pacifist and anti-war advocate and on occasion collided with LDS Church doctrine, Church leaders and policy.

Thesis: J. Rueben Clark, once a strong supporter of American military policy and the principles of national defense, overtime he became a conflicted patriot of Constitutional values, who often vacillated in his personal beliefs from militarism to isolationism, to pacifism and anti-war activist; and then sometimes he back-tracked to earlier personal beliefs. His personal beliefs affected his ecclesiastical pronouncements and teachings, which at times caused conflict with Church leaders and official policy. This was a major transformation in the space of two decades.

### I. J. Rueben Clark's early life and Family background

A. Son and descendent of Quakers and German pacifist sect, the Dunkards.

B. Schooling and Education in Utah

C. Columbia University Law School and Editor of Law Review.

### II. World War I Service and Patriot Fervor

A. Comments about American Intervention when necessary; about the time the US intervened militarily in Mexico in 1916; including his son-in-law naval Lieutenant Mervyn Bennion.

B. Clark's declarations against Isolationists and Pacifists, including former Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan.

C. In 1917, Clark was commissioned as a major in the US Army Judge Adjutant General Corps dealing with conscription law and procedures.

D. Served as ambassador to Mexico.

- III. A Review of Just War and Morality of War, and Mormon Doctrine.
  - A. The Christian ideals of Just War, Thomas Aquinas and the Just War Theology.
  - B. The Definition of *jus ad bella* and *jus in bellum* and modern warfare
  - C. Teachings and Doctrine from LDS theology:
    - 1. Overview of Teachings from the Book of Mormon on war.
    - 2. Review of the Doctrine of Covenants section 98.
    - 3. Modern interpretation of LDS War theory.
  - D. There is no basis for Pacifism in Mormon doctrine, except individual conscience.

*J. Reuben Clark's post-war Transformation to an Isolationist and Pacifist*

- IV. A. Slowly Clark came to realize the futility of war because of the disillusionment of the Great War.
  - B. Clark's criticism of the Versailles Treaty and its punishment of Germany.
  - C. The great distress and despair of the Great War affected art, film, and popular mode.
  - D. Clark too was affected by political failures, especially the League of Nations and the movement toward a one world government. He was critical of the League of Nations.
  - E. In May 1923 Clark became chairman of the New York Committee for the Outlawry of War.
  - F. The rise of European militarism and the Great Depression were breeding grounds for Clark's political and moral evolution regarding Pacifism.
  - G. In 1934 Marine general Smedley Butler's testimony before Congress about a plot by veterans groups to establish a military dictatorship and the fear of America's growing militarism. This revelation shocked and impressed Clark immensely.
  - H. Clark espoused Pacifism joining anti-war societies and publishing pieces against war in 1938.
- V. Clark's call in the First Presidency of the LDS Church and his Vacillation
  - A. As Fascism rises in Europe, Clark is called into the First Presidency in 1933.

B. In 1938, Clark joined the American Peace Society, the oldest pacifist organization in America.

C. Clark visited Europe and met with senior Nazi leaders, Hjalmar Schacht. During this time he adopted anti-British views.

D. As war begins in Europe Clark stressed Isolationism and Neutrality.

E. German Saints fight for Nazi Germany.

F. Clark in a talk to the Young Republicans in 1940 warned that President Roosevelt was trying to manipulate a war with Japan.

G. In August 1941 Clark joined former President Herbert Hoover in a public appeal to not intervene to assist Great Britain.

VI. America declared War on Japan and Germany.

A. Japanese attack American territory in Hawaii and the Philippines.

B. Captain Mervyn Bennion was killed commanding the USS *West Virginia* at Pearl Harbor.

C. Conflicts with the First Presidency over official policy and pronouncements. In 1943 the First Presidency stated, "the Church leaves the matter of conscientious objecting to the war to the individual."

D. Though he often defended Germany publicly before the horrors of the death camps were known, Clark had in his library many works dealing with Nazi crimes.

E. Prior to the Normandy invasion of 1944, Clark recommended a negotiated peace with Germany that would halt the deaths in war. This would have left the Germans with control of most of Europe.

F. Clark wrote in September 1945 in the *Deseret News* praising those citizens who acted on their religious beliefs as conscientious objectors.

VII. Post-war Politics and Clark's hardening Pacifism.

A. In 1946 Clark condemned the US for bombing Dresden and killing some 250,000 German civilians (the total was some 40,000 to 50,000).

B. President George A. Smith and Clark complained to U.S. government authorities that American conscientious objectors were treated “as prisoners of war” and garrisoned in work camps. David O. McKay did not sign the document.

C. Clark, though opposed to Communism and Marxism, refused to support a group of former ambassadors in 1941 who made a public appeal to provide arms and equipment to Nationalist Chinese fighting Mao Tse-tung’s Red Chinese.

D. In 1947 he was an outspoken critic of America’s move to what he saw as militarism that echoed Nazi Germany’s military dictatorship.

E. In 1948 Priesthood Conference, he equated the draft and military service with murder.

F. He opposed the establishment of NATO in 1949, and opposed US intervention in Korea the next year.

## VII. Conclusion and Clark’s Final Fights for Pacifism.

A. In 1951 David O. MacKay who was a strong anti-communist Church leader.

B. McKay and Clark differed strongly on the national policies of the Cold War.

C. Though there was conflict at time especially in public pronouncements, President McKay greatly needed J. R. Clark’s firm and inspired counsel during the dark years of the 1950s.

D. J. R. Clark died in 1961 true to the LDS faith and his personal beliefs of a peaceful existence without war and destruction, the hope of the eternities.

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