

ADVENTISM AND MILITARY SERVICES: AMERICAN CIVIL WAR, WORLD WAR I, AND WORLD WAR II

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Abstract

The Adventist Church's history demonstrates that it may survive significant conflicts by using noncombatant service. As a Member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, sometimes have to meet the challenge of conscription as the country is going through a crisis. Violence is not by God's word and is contrary to the concept of God's love. But on the other hand, church members must be good citizens. Therefore, the principle that must be upheld by every member of the church is to remain loyal to the country's constitution as long as it does not violate God's law. However, the church is not recommended that members volunteer for military service. Yet, Adventists can provide support through prayer, medical assistance, and food, provide space for the homeless, and actively spread the call for peace.

Keywords: *God's law, military service, noncombatant service, principle*

INTRODUCTION

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has various difficulties in maintaining its way of life. One of them is the issue of war which demands military service. War has occurred since the beginning of human civilization and continues to occur until today's modern world. Starting from using the most traditional weapons to the use of biochemical weapons, war always has a negative impact.

In the Old Testament, warfare was a constant part of Israelite life. The location is one factor, despite Palestine's lack of natural resources, it was a vital commercial and military route since it served as a land bridge connecting Egypt and Mesopotamia.¹ In the early church, the pagans who lived in the various provinces under Trajan's reign suffered at the hands of the Jews during the Jewish war, but the Roman government was the main target of the rebellions.² In the medieval ages, the crusades to the Holy Land between 1096 and 1291 are the subject of this topic, particularly the First Crusade. But throughout the sixteenth century, the church continued to finance, with an indulgence attached,

¹ Allen Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p.1043–1044.

² David Rokeah, *Jews, pagans, and Christians in conflict* Jerusalem (Leiden: Magnes Press Hebrew University; E.J. Brill, 1982). Vol. 33, p. 52.

military action against atheists and bad believers.³ Until the twenty-first century, wars continue to occur, including the Russian and Ukrainian conflicts, the Iraq war, and other conflicts that can be seen in the Table 1:

Table 1. 21st Century War

War List	Year
Russian Invasion of Ukraine	2022- Present
Israel- Palestine Crisis	2021
Turkish coup d'état attempt	2016
Yemeni Civil War	2015- Present
Gaza War	2014
War in Donbas	2014- Present
Operation Pillar of Defense	2012
Libyan Crisis	2011- Present
Syrian Civil War	2011- Present
Boko Haram	2009- Present
Operation Cast Lead	2008- 2009
Second Lebanon War	2006
Iraq War and Insurgency	2003- 2011
Global War on Terrorism	2001- 2013
War in Afghanistan	2001- 2014
Second Intifada	2000- 2009
Second Chechen War	1999- 2002
Sierra Leona Civil War	1991- 2014
Operation Epervier	1986- 2014
France in the Central African Republic	1979-2015

Source: Hellion Company, <https://www.helion.co.uk/periods/21st-century.php>

The data proves that war has hit every part of the world, such as America, Asia, Africa, and even Europe. “In quick succession, the judgments of God will follow one another, fire and flood and earthquakes, with war and bloodshed. Something great and decisive will soon of necessity take place.”⁴ Ellen White has written on this matter that one of the signs of the end of the world will be the roaring of wars everywhere. But even before Ellen White wrote that down, the Gospel of Matthew 24 had mentioned that wars would break out everywhere before the coming of Jesus. According to SDA doctrine, the church will exist as a final-days movement of the remnant. However, the question that must be faced is, how is the attitude of SDA members toward military service? To answer this, we need to look at the history of wars that the SDA church has gone through, the American Civil War (1861-1865), World War I (1914-1918), and World War II (1939-1945).

³ Mark Galli, “The Crusades”, *Christian History Magazine-Issue*, (Illinois: Christianity Today, 1993), P.40.

⁴ Ellen White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1915), 413.

American Civil War (1861-1865)

This major event in American history had a significant effect on the Adventist church. At the time, the Compromise's ban on slavery was deemed illegal since it deprives citizens of their property without providing them with a fair process.⁵ The division caused by different views on slavery gave birth to a war between the states at that time. The abolitionist emotions are still evident and felt in the 1860s when the Seventh-day Adventist Church was formally establishing itself.⁶ The issue of these rights was indeed strong at that time so there was a civil war in America.

Men were driven to violence by military rage when patriotic sentiment peaked.⁷ The patriotism of the people emanated from the participation of the people who joined the war. More than three thousand died in the battle, and over sixteen thousand were wounded.⁸ The divisions that occurred in keeping the slaves or releasing the slaves had tragic results. Many lives were lost due to the brutal violence that broke the hearts of many people. The war destroyed and devastated several Southern states, cost the country billions of money, claimed more lives than any other in American history, and left a permanent legacy of racial and sectional animosity.⁹ With the atmosphere of division that arose from 1861 to 1865, while during that period the Adventist Church was organized in 1863, of course, the church had a response to this. SDA church has a different response from Christian churches in general.

It is difficult to learn to fight and to be a Christian at the same time, therefore how could a real Christian pick up arms to slaughter his fellow human beings?¹⁰ The dilemma of killing in war does not only appear to Adventists but is also present in Christian discussions in general. However, the concept of the Just War theory used in the crusade was adopted in such a way as to answer the dilemma faced by Christians in general. The concept of a just war has enabled millions to overcome such scruples but not without trauma.¹¹

Adventists Responses

In the Adventist church, two questions were raised at the time; Are Adventist men allowed to join the military? Should they use weapons against other people if the answer

⁵ Louis Masur. *The Civil War: A Concise History*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.), 17.

⁶ Michael Stough, "Development Of A Non-Combatant Understanding As Found In The Review And Herald From 1861-1865" (MA Research Paper, Andrews University, Michigan, USA, 2010), 7.

⁷ Ibid. 34.

⁸ Ibid. 33.

⁹ Daniel G. Reid., Robert D. Linder., Bruce L. Shelley., & Harry S. Stout. *In Dictionary of Christianity in America*. Downers Grove, (IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990)

¹⁰ James M. McPherson. *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in The Civil War*. (NY: Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997), 71.

¹¹ Ibid. 71

to that question is yes?¹² The Adventist Church, which was officially established that year, immediately ran into a situation that offended the church's theology. The two previous questions became the main axis of the differences of opinion among the pioneers. James White stood up and said that the requirements of war were out of harmony with the ten commandments, which are the fourth and the sixth law.¹³ Another pioneer, Joseph Clarke Imagine "a regiment of Sabbath-keepers [who] would strike this revolt a stunning blow, in the might of Him who always backed His heroic people when they obeyed His commandments" to put the conflict in the context of the covenant.¹⁴ In contrast, Henry Carver that points out under no circumstances was it acceptable for a disciple of the Lamb to kill his fellow human beings with carnal weapons.¹⁵ As a result of differences of opinion that made young people who want to participate in the country hesitate, the government finally provides a way out, the namely non-combatant war for Seventh-day Adventists. The church has supported noncombatant conscientious collaboration with the military service for its drafted members since the 1860s, although advising its young people not to volunteer when Adventism first took its historic attitude on military duty in 1864.¹⁶

Ellen White mentioned also that SDA members are forbidden to participate in violence because it is "opposed to every principle of their faith."¹⁷ These word comes after her vision on January 12, 1861, the American Civil War was initially shown in a vision.¹⁸ However, the Adventist church is not a church that just sits idly by and chooses to be indifferent to the situation. James White proposed that the church need to take action by praying and fasting to make the war soon stop. He and other General Conference committees appealed to all members to fast and pray for peace for four days (March 1-4).¹⁹ This is one way that can be done by each member to call for peace amid war. Likewise, the accomplishment of the North in the war in eliminating slavery was believed to be the answer from God to their prayer.²⁰ Whereas predictably, almost all historians of the American Civil War fail to detect a supernatural factor in the battle's origin, many of them acknowledge a strange element in this conflict. The giving of non-combatants of war by the government is also part of the answer to their prayers.

¹² George R. Knight. *Anticipating the Advent: A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists*. (Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1992.), 73.

¹³ Ibid. 73.

¹⁴ Ibid. 74.

¹⁵ Ibid. 75.

¹⁶ Ibid. 75.

¹⁷ Ellen Gould White, *Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1*, (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1855), 361.

¹⁸ Roger W. Coon, *The Great Visions of Ellen G. White*. (Silver Spring: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1992), 86.

¹⁹ Douglas Morgan. *Adventism and the American Republic*. (Tennessee: the University of Tennessee Press Knoxville, 2001), 34.

²⁰ Ibid. 34.

In the ecclesiological area, members who took part in the conflict were excommunicated when the position was established.²¹ The church took firm action despite some differences of opinion. This step is very appropriate considering God's law must take precedence. The culmination of ineffective politics is war. Believers have faced moral dilemmas on how to balance their faith with their earthly allegiances since war is opposed to God's character and will and because it is the result of failed diplomacy and civility. Declarations opposing involvement in any war were made during the GC sessions of 1865, immediately after the close of the war, 1867, and 1868.²²

The statement mentioned clearly that Adventists “are compelled to decline all participation in acts of war and bloodshed as being inconsistent with the duties enjoined upon us by our divine Master toward our enemies and all mankind.”²³ Many Adventists choose to work as medical professionals or in other non-combat positions since the Adventist Church publicly encouraged non-combatants. The church sought and received from the government acknowledgment of its noncombatant beliefs while standing obediently with the government in its attempts to put down the dreadful insurrection.²⁴

WORLD WAR I (1914-1918)

Another big event that can be seen regarding war is from the great war of world war I. By June 28, 1914, in the roadways of Sarajevo, a young Bosnian terrorist called Gavrilo Princip attacked Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the future monarch of the Austro-Hungarian Kingdom.²⁵ This certain crime created a ripple effect that immediately brought every significant European nation and many other nations across the world into the worst conflict yet recorded in history, a war commonly known as World War I.

In this scene, Germany supported Austria-Hungary while Russia and France defended Serbia.²⁶ This incident did not only involve Europe and several parts of Asia but also America's intervention in this conflict. After the fight was end, there are over four million American males had taken up arms.²⁷ Not only America but also Australia which is allied with the British are involved in this war. Yet, the Australian government set voluntary participation. Australia was the only participating nation that did not require males to enlist in the war, hence every Australian who fought overseas in the First World

²¹ Ron Graybill, *This Perplexing War: Why Adventists Avoided Military Service in the Civil War*. Insight, Oct. 10, 1978, 4-8.

²² Barry W. Bussey (ed.), *Should I Fight?* (Belleville: Guardian Books, 2011), 33-48.

²³ Douglas Morgan, *The Beginnings of a Peace Church: Eschatology, Ethics, and Expedience in Seventh-day Adventist Responses to the Civil War*. (Spring: Andrews University Seminary Studies 45, no.1, 2007): 36.

²⁴ Francis M. Wilcox. *Seventh-Day Adventists in Time of War*. Washington: Review and Herald, 1936), 57.

²⁵ Tom Pendergast. *World War I Almanac*. (Detroit: Gale Group, 2001), 1.

²⁶ Ibid. 15

²⁷ Francis March and Richard J. Beamish. *History of the World War: An Authentic Narrative of the World's Greatest War*. (Florida: Don Kostuch, 2006.), 20.

War did so voluntarily.²⁸ By looking at the scale of the participation of the countries involved in World War I, it can be concluded that this war is on a global scale. This vast scale is sure to affect the world of Christianity, especially the Adventist Church which made a stance during the American Civil War to refuse participation in the war and have a conscientious objection.

World War I had an impact on the Adventist church, one of which was the postponement of the GC session. Ironically, the war continued in 1918 even though the 1917 Session had been delayed due to it, making it safer to travel across the Atlantic because the Allies had prevailed in that conflict.²⁹

Adventists Responses

The majority of Adventists have held the belief that life is precious and that there is an alternative to using force to resolve conflicts ever since the Church was founded around the period of the American Civil War.³⁰ However, in some places, every male is forced to take military service and got permission for noncombatant war, one of which is the British people. During World War One, British Adventists started to Objectors. Although some wound up in prison, some served in non-combatant units.³¹ Yet, not all places have the freedom of having a noncombatant like Germany and Austria. If a soldier is refused to work on Sabbath, they will sentence to court and received punishment.³²

Furthermore, to embrace a noncombatant stance, the SDA Church urges its followers not to join the armed forces. Even so, it is not a requirement for church membership.³³ During the war, the church also took steps to reach every member spread across the world through publications. The Liberty Magazine and Adventist Review both often discuss pacifism, which strengthens the voice of conscientious objectors in the

²⁸ Jeff Crocombe, "SDA Reactions to Compulsory Military Service in Australia 1903-1918" (Ph.D. Paper, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, 2013), 4.

²⁹ Maryellen Hacko. "Postponing And Changing GC Session Reflects Historical Trends, According To Expert Dr. David Trim" *General Conference* (June 2022), accessed February 20, 2022. <https://adventist.news/news/postponing-and-changing-gc-session-reflects-historical-trends-according-to-expert-dr-david-trim?searchsite=www.adventist.org>.

³⁰ British Union Conference. *WWI and the Adventist Church*. Watford: British Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2022, accessed February 20, 2023. <https://adventist.uk/wwi-and-the-adventist-church>.

³¹ Victor Hulbert. "Adventists and War" *Trans European Division News*. (November 2018), accessed February 21, 2023. <https://adventistreview.org/adventists-and-war-100-years-on-since-armistice-day>.

³² Johannes Hartlapp, "Military Service: A Comparative Study Between the New Testament Teaching and the Attitude of German Adventists" (Master Thesis, Andrews University, Michigan, 1993). 48.

³³ Southern Asia-Pacific Division, *The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Conscientious Objection*. Manila: Adventist Asia, 2018. accessed February 24, 2023. <http://adventist.asia/news/the-seventh-day-adventist-church-and-conscientious-objection>

United States and across other places.³⁴ Besides these difficulties, Adventists remained steadfast in their principles and held fast to their faith. They put in a lot of work for their nations in non-combat capacities, and several persisted in sharing their words of encouragement and peace even while the war raged.

WORLD WAR II (1839-1845)

Another major event that set the stage for history's greatest war globally was World War II. Mass murder is becoming more and more of a moral issue in this war's memory, almost like moral theater.³⁵ This gripping situation involved almost all-powerful countries participating at that time. More troops died in the war (1939–1945) than in any other conflict in history, and more civilians perished as a result of the conflict.³⁶

This massive war is separated into two events. The first event was Japan and several nations, primarily China, Great Britain, and the United States, waged a war throughout Asia and the Pacific. The second event got its start in Europe. Even though soon practically all of Europe's countries were participating, others took a more major position. Things that trigger in both situations are domination of territory and proof of power.³⁷ The lineup of countries waging the war was intricate, as were their connections with one another.³⁸ Looking at the composition of the countries that fought at that time, almost all of them were large countries and had Christian populations, especially Adventists such as America, Britain, and Germany. Thus, the probability of citizens participating in war is very strong because, in a period of six years or more, the number of soldiers from a country can be the key to victory.

While it is obvious that some soldiers were concerned by the idea of murdering for religious reasons, others made an effort to publicly allay these concerns using theological justification.³⁹ Recognizing that the religious conflict posed a danger to military efficacy and to the feeling of common purpose required to activate the home front.⁴⁰ It can be said that religious issues are also a reason not to go to war or go to war. But how is the establishment of the Adventist church in this regard? Even though the church had gone through a major war before, this issue was always faced.

³⁴ Melissa K. Bedford. "Conscientious Objection And The Seventh-Day Adventist Church: Dialogue Since 1973 In The Adventist Review And Liberty Magazine. (MA thesis, American University, Washington D.C., 2011), 87.

³⁵ John Ferris & Evan Mawdsley. *The Cambridge History of The Second World War: Fighting The War*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 17.

³⁶ George Feldman & Christine Slovey. *World War II Almanac: Volume 1*. (Detroit: Gale Group, 2000), 1.

³⁷ Ibid. 2-4.

³⁸ Barbara Bigelow & Christine Slovey. *World War II Almanac: Volume II*. ((Detroit: Gale Group, 2000), 205.

³⁹ Kevin L. Walters, "Beyond the Battle: Religion and American Troops in World War II" (Theses and Dissertations- History, University of Kentucky, 2013), 148.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 216.

Adventists Responses

We must keep in mind that although we have passports, follow local laws, and respect leaders, our original citizenship as a follower of Christ is in Heaven.⁴¹ It is emphasized once again that the principle of the SDA Church is to follow state regulations if they do not conflict with God's law because it is God's law that must be upheld. All individual who enlists in the military must understand that the promise of allegiance to the military is in opposition to the vow of obedience to the Scriptures and His infallible commandments, which forbids the killing of another person.⁴² Even though it is to defend the country, if the order is against God's law then avoid it. Essentially, if there is a force, its members would serve in non-combat capacities.⁴³ One of the conscientious objectors from the SDA church in world war II is Desmon Doss. In his work as a medic in the army, it is pictured that he still actively searches for opportunities to express his religion and serve the needs of others, just like he did while serving in the military.⁴⁴

CONCLUSIONS

By looking at history to history, we can see how the situation of war hit the Adventist church. The Adventist church's stance on military service is centered on the Word of God. Since the American Civil War, World War I, and World War II, the idea of avoiding taking part in battle has been prevalent. The Adventist Church does not recommend its members get involved in the war, if that has to happen it's a good idea to enter the non-combatant route.

The main concept is Jesus came to this planet to save human beings, to save, and to provide life. Besides the problem of taking the lives of others, the principle of keeping the Sabbath day holy can also be undermined because war knows no days. Therefore, the most appropriate way is needing conscientious objection which declines to serve in the military or take part in hostilities because of firmly held moral or ethical convictions. Furthermore, to resist war and violence, Adventists value preserving people's physical, mental, and spiritual well-being as well as the well-being of all peoples. Above all, leave all the problems that exist in every country into God's hands so that every Adventist member can have the freedom to worship and can live a decent life as well as other people. "If we connect with God, the source of peace, light, and truth, His Spirit will flow through us, to refresh and bless all around us."⁴⁵

⁴¹ Frank M. Hasel. *Seventh-day Adventists and Military Service Some Reflections on Ethical Challenges in Military Service*. (Reflections, 2019), 2.

<https://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org>

⁴² Ibid. 3.

⁴³ Gutierrez, Alicia (2010) "Project Operation Whitecoat: Military Experimentation, Seventh Day Adventism and Conscientious Cooperation," *History in the Making*: Vol. 3, Article 6.

⁴⁴ Document GC, *Peace in the Midst of War: The Desmond Doss Story*. Accessed March 5, 2023. <https://www.adventist.org/religious-liberty/desmond-doss>

⁴⁵ Ellen G. White, "A Happy New Year", *The Signs of the Times*, January 1903, 10.

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