

Seventh-day Adventists and Military-Related Service

An Essay and Study
by Gary R. Councell



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PREFACE

Christians hold citizenship in this world by accident of birth and in the “kingdom of heaven” by choice of “new birth.” This dual citizenship often creates spiritual dilemmas of allegiance and priorities, further intensified by cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and national differences. Seventh-day Adventist Christians belong to a religious “United Nations” of members who live in more than two hundred countries around the world.

Most Adventists readily agree in theory that matters of faith take precedence over temporal concerns, yet probably would admit their actual practice is often incongruent with beliefs. So how can spiritual priorities be more consistently applied in daily living? Is service in government agencies yielding allegiance to modern Caesars and this world? When governments require citizens to serve in ways that conflict with conscience, how should an Adventist Christian respond? In our rapidly changing world of these last days, clearly stated biblical and ethical principles on issues of public and military-related service are needed to help guide decision-making by church leaders and individual members. The author contends that the current denominational stance on military service requires review and further study to determine its applicability in the 21st Century. He advocates development of a strategy for biblical decision-making to

prepare church members for future conflicts that would involve military or public service.

Concepts and questions are posed for Adventists to consider when thinking about their relationship as a Christian to the greater community. In particular, should an Adventist serve in the military, in law enforcement agencies, or intelligence gathering? Is such service incompatible with the Christian faith? Can it be acceptable? What criteria determines the answers? This essay does not purport to give all the answers, but it does try to stimulate some thought that may assist individuals in the decision-making process as they seek to determine God’s will for their lives.

All thoughts in the essay are the opinions and views of the author, and except where credits and quotes are given, reflect his summation of experience, reading, and study on the subject. This essay is not necessarily the official position of the Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries Department of the General Conference, nor is it the official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Bible texts are quoted from the New Living Translation of the Holy Bible by Tyndale Publishers, Inc.

Nearly eight years has passed since this essay was first published. Denominational thinking on the subject has been passive. Perhaps it has not been a pressing concern. Meanwhile, the world is changing rapidly prompting wider divisions and escalating conflicts: economically, politically, militarily, morally, and religiously. Adventists are not immune from the effect of these dynamic forces. The church has two responsibilities: to take a position publicly, and to assist members pastorally as they decide how to respond and live their faith.



Psalms
Proverbs

SOCIETAL ISSUES

CURRENT WORLD SITUATION

As predicted, great changes are taking place in our world. The final movements in earth's conflict between good and evil are rapid. Modern science has improved quality of life, advanced medical care, spawned computer technology, speeded communications, and explored space; yet scientific knowledge also has been used for evil in criminal activities, immoral decadence, and weaponry. Devastating famine and disease continue assaulting humanity, aided by natural disasters, changing climate patterns, and pollution. Though the media and jet travel have shrunk the world into an accessible community, those means also have revealed greater disparity between the "haves" and "have-nots." Deep philosophical and political differences rage between the "givers" and "takers" within nations. Regardless of mankind's best efforts to avert and resolve them, three crises threaten peace in these last days: economic uncertainty, political division, and insecurity. These crises are inter-related and build on each other. They also impact on the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Hope, goodwill, and trust remain elusive.

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

Poverty plagues earth's population. According to the World Bank, forty percent of the world's population

exists on less than two U.S. dollars per day. The ultra poor spend eighty percent of their income to obtain only eighty percent of required minimum caloric intake. Much effort and resources have attempted to remedy causes of poverty and improve conditions for the poor, but as Jesus observed, "The poor will always be present" (Mark 14:7). Poverty causes a descending spiral into other miseries and negative conditions: precarious livelihoods, hunger, disease, physical limitations, and relational problems. Poverty is a contributing factor to crime, human trafficking, and mass migrations.

In his 1961 farewell address to the nation, President Dwight Eisenhower warned about the cost of an arms race and dangers of a military-industrial complex. During the Cold War years, the United States spent over thirteen trillion dollars on national defense, not counting the costs of the Korean and Vietnam conflicts. The Soviet communist bloc simply could not sustain the expense of its military-enforced ideology and provide any quality of life for its citizens. Eventually, the Cold War bankrupted the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Warsaw Pact, leading to its disintegration. While the super powers wore each other down, the Third World began asserting its economic muscle of human and natural resources.



Since the terrorist attacks on America, 11 September 2001, the cost for homeland security to the nation erased any “peace dividend” from the Cold War’s demise. The U.S. Government has spent 7.6 trillion dollars on defense and homeland security since the 9/11 attacks through November 2018. “Repercussions trickle down through every layer of the global economy. In the era of globalization, the September 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington have had worldwide economic consequences” (Harry Hayes quoted in an article from *International Review*). While difficult to measure, the economic costs of terrorism throughout the world during the first year after 9/11 rose to two trillion dollars. Radical Islamists have effectively utilized various methods for funding their offensive operations: criminal activity, international drug and human trafficking, money laundering, and siphoning off legitimate aid. Terrorism costs money. The official 9/11 commission report estimates funding the nineteen operatives of the 9/11 plot cost al-Qaeda half a million dollars. In conducting jihad against the West, Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups used fear along with killing innocent people to disrupt the economy of its enemies and as a means to achieve its goals of destroying its enemies. Counteracting the weapon of fear is a costly defense.

When rapidly emerging Asian economies and petrol-empires collide

with Western wealth, the resulting crashes upset the traditional temples of fiscal exchange, trade balance, and job security. Add inflation, indebtedness, and greed on national and personal levels, and the issues become even more complicated. Regional instability, narcotics trafficking, and population shifts disrupt recovery attempts. Economic problems contribute to political and social unrest.

POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UNREST

Since World War II major political changes have occurred: colonialism ended, new nation states emerged, and nuclear holocaust threatened all peoples. Nations responded to the Nuclear Age and Cold War by brokering alliances and treaties for mutual protection and to preserve forms of government, past traditions, and way of life. With an Iron Curtain dividing the world, how could the Adventist understanding of eschatological prophecy ever happen? In the late 1980s the Warsaw Pact quickly disintegrated as the Soviet Union collapsed. For one decade the world enjoyed relative peace, but another ominous ideological conflict had already started. Islamic fundamentalism seethed with resentment against the West and Israel. Using general Muslim embarrassment and anger over past defeats and grievances, radicals embarked on campaigns of terror to right perceived wrongs and re-establish an Islamic caliphate

(government ruled by a spiritual leader of Islam). They envisioned a global Islamic caliphate governed by Sharia law much like Taliban rule was enforced in Afghanistan. The world today is engaged in another ideological conflict that is as demanding and rigorous as the Cold War. Unless some form of religious freedom opens in Islamic countries, a significant portion of the world will remain closed to Christianity. Religious beliefs and practices will form a barrier as impenetrable as the "Iron Curtain" was between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The church will need to use innovative methods for reaching Muslims with the Gospel.

The collective best efforts of the world's smartest minds seem unable to keep the peace. Established in 1945 in hopes of preventing any more world wars, the United Nations can claim only partial success. Nations are angry. While leaders debate, conflicts continue. Treaties and ceasefires flourish, only to be ignored. Non-aligned nations act in a rogue manner, causing regional tensions. Special interest groups withdraw and separate, demanding recognition and rights. Within countries and across national boundaries narco-criminal cartels, piracy, and terrorist groups function as defacto governments that subvert legitimate political processes and upset national economies; i.e., the shadowy drug and human / sexual trafficking cartels that govern portions of Mexico. Since World War I historians have determined that

up to 170 million innocent people have been killed in genocides. The slaughter of defenseless citizens was perpetrated mostly by the victims' own government!

The net population growth in the world exceeds 150 thousand per day, or an annual rate three times the world membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Competition for diminishing resources has created complex economic dependencies and trade patterns to meet the increasing needs of expanding populations. Desire for a better life prompts population shifts, resulting in more people now living in urban areas than rural. It also leads to illegal border crossings and immigration problems that prove disruptive to traditional social mores within nations. For example, at present rates some European countries will soon have more population from immigrants than native born citizens.

CHANGES IN WARFARE

The Korean Conflict was the last war with a defined FEBA (Forward Edge of the Battle Area). General Douglas MacArthur's daring landing at Incheon, Korea, demonstrated how unreliable defined front lines can be. During the Vietnam War the Viet Cong used guerrilla warfare effectively against South Vietnamese and American military forces. After the battle of Ia Drang in 1965, the North Vietnamese generally avoided direct confrontation until they could amass forces for the Tet Offensive (1968) and final defeat of the South

(1975) after the Paris Peace Accords (1973). The Iraqis foolishly assumed a defensive line would hold against Coalition forces in the Persian Gulf conflicts only to have their military decimated by precision weaponry.

With smaller armies than potential adversaries, powers with less manpower must maintain superior technological advantage to compensate for their numerical disadvantage on conventional battlefields. Technological parity places balance-of-power at risk. Future wars may be determined by who controls satellites, because command of space enables communications, positioning and accurate delivery of munitions. Assuming reluctance to unleash the destructive force of nuclear arsenals, nations with such weapons have adopted a military strategy of pre-emptive first-strike in hopes of averting real threat. Other strategies are operational: focus on objectives and by-pass pockets of resistance to subdue later. General Norman Schwarzkopf's "Hail Mary" maneuver easily mauled the superior Iraqi military in one hundred hours with minimal Coalition losses. Yet, even modern military power has limited applications.

Knowing they cannot overcome their enemies by conventional means, special interest groups resort to unconventional means to obtain their objectives. Modern terrorism has severely impacted the world with its asymmetrical method of waging war. Terrorism violates international law of war, ignores the Geneva Convention

and intentionally disregards any respect for human decency or life, even of terrorists. How should civilized nations respond to small bands of suicidal terrorists intent on imposing their views on others by wantonly murdering innocent people regardless of their affiliations, age, or gender? How can countries prevent or stop genocide of people groups by their own government? How should nations deal with piracy against unarmed merchant mariners? The nature of warfare has changed. Nations no longer declare war on another nation-state. Defined battle lines between combatants with safer rear areas seldom exist anymore.

Though modern weaponry has become more precise and lethal, terrorists employ weapons calculated to paralyze populations psychologically by fear. After the demonic terrorists attacks of 11 September 2001 on targets in the United States, forty-four percent of Americans suffered at least one clinical symptom of post traumatic stress disorder. One year later thirty percent of adults were still troubled by those events. The national psyche was impacted. Today, conspiracists accuse the U.S. Government of staging 9/11; other people deny the attacks happened, and many choose to put it out of their memory; unlike Pearl Harbor, it is ignored. War was not declared, and citizens were told to continue living as usual. No rationing was imposed as was done in World War II. Muslims in America were not interned into camps or

deported from the nation. Terrorism works. Fanatical extremists gain notoriety for their cause and change normal life in reaction. Crude and cruel, but effective methods include beheadings, chemical attacks, indiscriminate bombings targeting civilians, intimidation, kidnappings, mass shootings, rapes, and starvation. Do morally responsible people simply ignore, cower, or submit to crazed killers? The question requires an answer.

In response to terrorism and criminal mass shootings, government and law enforcement agencies are teaching innocent and defenseless people to run, hide, or fight. Is that advice sufficient? Is that response correct? Not always! Deterrence and prevention help, but have not eliminated the threat. Countering terrorism or crime in a particular location seems to send it to another region. For example, the defeat of ISIS, the Islamic State of Iraq, and Syria in 2018, simply scattered survivors to other countries to continue their *jihad*.

CHANGES IN THE MILITARY

Military forces perform other essential functions than wage war. They are the executive arm of the state to maintain internal order and defend against aggression. They also deploy in civic assistance and humanitarian operations. The United Nations and other agreements engage the military forces of many nations in peace-making and peace-keeping duties. For example, Adventist chaplains in

African nations' militaries frequently deploy outside their national boundaries on such missions. Units act as UN "rent-a-cops."

Today's militaries use highly sophisticated equipment and weaponry. Personnel must be educated and trained. More and more countries are discovering that conscription for short terms fails to meet force requirements. Though arguments persist con and pro, when the United States transitioned to an all-volunteer military in 1974, the effectiveness of its military improved. In fact, recruitment targets have been easily met. Contrary to popular perception, today's military personnel represent conservative values. They are a highly motivated, disciplined, and patriotic sub-culture; many of whom make public service a life-long career.

To counter terrorists and unconventional forces, militaries use specially trained forces to gather intelligence and select targets. These elite "stealth" units are often inserted into hostile territories to team with native insurgency movements. Six weeks after the terrorists attacked on 11 September 2001, one hundred Special Forces soldiers assisted the Northern Alliance of local warlords opposed to the Taliban in Afghanistan. Within two months the Taliban were driven from the cities and countryside into the Bora Bora Mountains and Pakistan. The nature of warfare has changed; the day of large forces opposing one another in



protracted battles along a static front may never happen again.

LOSS OF FREEDOM

Because of our prophetic understanding, Seventh-day Adventists champion freedom and religious liberty. A high value is placed on truth. Jesus said, “The truth makes you free” (John 8:32). In a world filled with falsehood and half truths, many people echo Pontius Pilate’s question, “What is truth?” (John 18:38). Christians hold that “truth” is

- a. God (Exodus 34:6; Psalm 31:5),
- b. Defined by God’s Law (Psalms 119:142 and 151),
- c. The “Word” (John 17:17),
- d. Christ (John 1:14; 14:6), and
- e. His Holy Spirit (1 John 5:6).

Such truths are the foundation for democratic forms of government. “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” (Declaration of Independence of the thirteen United States of America adopted in Congress, 4 July 1776). They also are the basis for human rights (Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution, ratified by the original thirteen States, 15 December 1791; and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations, 10 December 1948).

Religious and political freedom enables, empowers, and frees men and women to be all that they understand the divine will to be for their lives. It motivates



good and right, faith and love, by respecting the freewill of choice. Abusive government and false religion, especially when united in an adulterous relationship, resort to using fear and force in attempts to coerce adherence by controlling, dominating, and manipulating the human spirit, mind, and body. That abuse of power tramples upon truth and leads to persecuting all who oppose it; hence, the cause of many wars by adulterous unions of church and state.

Beginning with the systematic elimination of Armenian Christians by the Ottoman Empire in 1915, over 170 million people have died at the hands of oppressive governments. That is more than eight times the world membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Cambodian

dictator Pol Pot's brutal "killing fields" so horrified Vietnam that the communist country invaded its neighbor to end the carnage. More recently, ISIS attempted ethnic cleansing of infidels (Christians and others) from the territories it controlled. Did other nations have the right to intervene and prevent or stop such wanton killing? What is the purpose of government? Is using the military to end evil by force and violence just as wrong? What has Adventism said or done to stop this slaughter of innocents? What can the church do? And what should the church do, if anything?

Along with mass casualties, genocide and persecution cause losses of many freedoms. Religious freedom is nonexistent in many regions of the world and is sustained

only by constant vigilance in countries that supposedly guarantee it. As outlined in the panorama of prophecy, final events in the great controversy between good and evil picture a time of tribulation for God's Remnant people. Evil forces will attempt to eradicate their presence from the earth.

PURPOSE AND ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

God's creation exists by His command. It operates in accordance with divine law and in an orderly manner. When Yahweh formed the Children of Israel into a nation, He gave them law codes to govern their civil, legal, religious, and social life. He included laws even about warfare and warriors (Deuteronomy 20). Though ultimately in control of the affairs of man (Psalm 2 and Daniel 2), the Lord chooses to work through human instruments, both politically and religiously, to accomplish His divine purposes. Romans 13 clearly states that governments are appointed by God for good to provide security and order among mankind. The primary purpose of government is to provide order and security for the common good of its citizens.

Governments may legally initiate the use of force to maintain order, protect individual rights and national sovereignty. Without that ability, anarchy could reign, or foreign invasion could occur. A defining characteristic of government is the legal use of force. To be legal, force must also be just. When an individual

is attacked by others using force to do harm, rob property, or impose their will on another, self-defense is justifiable. Government is organized to defend and protect at all levels against unjust aggression. So, what constitutes a "just" defense? Usually the best defensive tactic is an active offense. After the diabolical terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, D.C., 11 September 2001, the United States changed its military strategy to pre-emptive first strike. A national debate about the attack on the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Baath Regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq has divided the nation over whether the actions were just or not.

JUST WAR

St. Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, and Hugo Grotius wrote theories on just war that continue being debated by ethicists, philosophers, and theologians. The National Council of Catholic Bishops presents the weightiest arguments for a modern religious perspective in their pastoral letters, "The Challenge of Peace" (1983) and "The Harvest of Peace" (1993). Protestant views stem from Martin Luther. The complexity of the topic makes further discussion beyond the scope of this chapter.

Two presumptive concepts quickly emerge in the arguments over *jus ad bellum*, the right to go to war, and *jus in bello*, right conduct within war. A recent third category, *jus post bellum*, concerns termination of war and the right to prosecute war criminals. Just war theory

often begins with a presumption against war (pacifism) that focuses on the harm war may cause, rather than with a presumption against injustice that focuses on the need for responsible use of force in response to wrong-doing. Pope John XXIII's statement in *Pacem in Terris* is often quoted by pacifists, "In this age which boasts of atomic power, it makes no sense to maintain that war is a fit instrument with which to repair the violation of justice."

In view of Satan's cruel injustice inflicted on humanity as his weapon against God, should Adventists simply trust God to ultimately resolve issues of justice, or do we have a moral responsibility to address injustice here and now? This conflict of concepts remains a divisive "cold war" on just war.

Historically, seven moral concepts have been used to justify military force: just cause, competent authority, right intention, reasonable hope of success, last resort, the goal of peace, and overall proportionality of good over harm. Do these apply when military force is used for humanitarian relief across sovereign borders (is state sovereignty absolute?), or non-combatants are directly and intentionally targeted (what is a non-combatant?), and other blurred situations in the complex, inter-connected nature of modern society? Is *jihad*, war for the sake of religion, always just? Does *jihad* translate into license to fight total war against all *infidels*? While

governments have wisely refrained from employing nuclear weapons, countless millions of people continue dying from indiscriminate killing by conventional and unorthodox weaponry. Theories of just war attempt to govern conflict on the macro, nation level, but what values guide individuals in their response to evil?

CITIZEN RESPONSIBILITIES

Members of a social group have certain responsibilities and duties to that group. We are born into a social fabric interwoven with many threads of obligation. By accident of birth we acquire a mother tongue and fatherland. Without choice we arrive and live in "VUCAville," a world that is volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. By choice we become citizens and heirs of a spiritual kingdom. Christians have dual citizenship. Jesus taught His disciples to "render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). Disciples of Jesus make following Him their primary purpose for living (Acts 5:29). As citizens in this world, but not of it, we are to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31). This dual citizenship often creates moral dilemmas. Citizens are expected to fulfill their obligations of obedience, taxes, and service. These expectations often conflict with personal and religious beliefs, practices, and goals. How does a responsible citizen determine priorities and fulfill their

just obligations? Adventists have the moral compasses of Scripture and prophecy to guide us through these convoluted and paradoxical “last days.” So why aren’t the answers clearer about how to relate to the world around us? Some have sought answers in understanding the Christian’s relationship to culture.

CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

Yale Divinity School theologian and ethicist, Dr. H. Richard Niebuhr postulated five responses for Christians to the world in his classic book, *Christ and Culture*, written in 1951. He outlined five relational stances that somewhat traces his historical view of an ascending church and a dying pagan civilization:

- a. Christ against culture.
- b. Christ of culture.
- c. Christ above culture.
- d. Christ and culture in paradox.
- e. Christ transforming culture.

Though highly regarded as foundational on the subject, Niebuhr is hardly the final authority. If Christianity and culture unite or mix, will the resulting syncretism be acceptable to anyone? If Christianity and culture face off in opposition, what will result, and is that result desirable? Adventists also wrestle with the issues of faith and culture.

Decades of mission outreach grew Adventism into a global

denomination of 20 million members spread throughout 200 countries. During this phenomenal growth, Adventists retained a high degree of theological cohesiveness and unity in religious beliefs. However, they have experienced challenges relating to cultural issues and problems with race and gender within the church. Applying theology and religious beliefs to practice has proven difficult and divisive in their response to culture. For example, what influences power – membership or stewardship? Do regional conferences in the North American Division perpetuate images of racism? What roles are open to females in the church, and who determines? Some members see observance of Christmas and Easter as yielding to paganism, while others see it as an opportunity to tell the world about Jesus. Some see serving as a police officer or in the military as apostasy, while others see it as responsibly serving your fellow man and being patriotic.

Adventists exhibit three stances in their relationship with the world. Many Adventists act in the belief that you must identify with the world to win the world. They mingle to understand the mindset and needs of people in their communities. They seek to open lines of communication in hopes their non-judgmental attitude and loving behavior will win hearts to Christ and the “truth.” While that approach produces the desired results in many cases, it also has inherent dangers of

losing identity, adapting faith to the tyranny of the “isms”, compromising syncretism, and becoming casual, then careless in one’s own faith practices and lifestyle.

The opposite ditch on life’s highway is just as much a spiritual hazard. Other Adventists avoid the world as much as possible by isolating themselves from it in appearance, associations, civic responsibilities, diet, education, entertainment, etc. They often become judgmental of those who differ with their concepts and religious lifestyle. Their introspective detachment can result in narrow legalism and unreadiness for changes in life. Increasing numbers of Adventist young adults reject this kind of “protected” lifestyle and seek an independent lifestyle that includes a more balanced expression of spiritual values.

Both extremes of liberal left and conservative right lose relevancy and cost lost influence. Throughout Scripture the Lord expects His people to witness that He is God (Isaiah 43:12), “that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no other” (1 Kings 8:60). Christ commanded His disciples to be influential witnesses and progressive centralists, designating them as “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” Our light is to “so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:13-16). The Apostle Peter further expands that theme calling Christians “a chosen generation... His own special people, that you may proclaim the praise of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES

ORIGIN OF WARFARE

Though sketchy on the details, Scripture emphatically states war began in heaven (Revelation 12:7). The “mystery of iniquity” arose within Lucifer, whose pride caused him to rebel against the very authority and government of God (Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14:12-15). Created perfect, the anointed cherub desired to be included in the counsels of heaven and equal with God. Deceptively spreading discontent among the angels under his command, Lucifer took his cause to God. Ellen White describes how he misrepresented his subordinates by claiming their desire was for him to occupy the position Christ held. His disaffection ripened into active revolt. War followed for the mastery of heaven. “The angels were marshaled in companies, each with a higher commanding angel at their head” (*Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 3, page 37:1). “Christ and His angels fought against Satan and his angels... Christ and the loyal angels triumphed, and drove Satan and his rebel sympathizers from heaven” (*Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 3, page 38:1). Since that time Satan and his army of confederates have been the avowed enemies of God in our world. The conflict between Satan and Christ, evil and good continues (See *Great Controversy*, Chapter 29 and *Patriarchs and Prophets*, Chapter 1, for further details).

Adventism organized into a religious

denomination during the “Uncivil War between the States” (1861 - 1865). As a prophetic church, Seventh-day Adventists believe the last days will bring “wars and rumors of wars” and “nation rising against nation” (Matthew 24:6, 7). Jesus may have predicted World War I and World War II with the plural “wars” and foretold the 30+ regional conflicts since WW II with the term “rumors of wars.” There will be no lasting peace. Conflicts will culminate ultimately in the battle at Armageddon* (Revelation 16:1-16). Adventist psyche rests in part on the concept of warfare; i.e., the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan (good and evil). Aside from their understanding about the “Theater of the Universe,” Adventists keenly engage in other battles against social evils and political wrongs. Our history is replete with aggressive and defensive postures over issues such as temperance, slavery, and Sunday laws. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a highly organized, militant organization with a global mission.

** Armageddon means “the mountain of Megiddo.” Most scholars believe this battle is the final spiritual conflict, but that does not exclude an actual physical battle.*

DIALECTICAL INTERPRETATION

Dialectical thinking splits the sphere of truth into opposite hemispheres, so that instead of complementing or completing each other, the principles are set against one



another. This results in partial truths, isolated from the other. Adherents of a partial truth tend to subordinate the other side to the one he or she holds dear. Yet, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). The Pharisees of Christ's day were orthodox and had faithfully preserved Judaism and the Scriptures through difficult days of Greek Hellenism. They differed with the Sadducees who fought to retain Jewish Temple worship and some political independence during years of Roman occupation. Both parties were Jews hoping for the Messiah and wanting Israel restored to its former glory, but they were frequently at odds with one another, divided except in denying Christ.

Around issues of military service and war Adventist thinking has become dialectic; divided like the nation is politically over the Global War on Terrorism, immigration, and socialism. Few, if any church members seek war and want to kill a human being. Neither do they want to be harmed by evil. So how is evil overcome? Some say by strong force; others say by non-resistance. Is the answer determined by personality or through theology?

Clouded with presumptions against war, many Adventists ignore sound principles of exegesis and

hermeneutics when it comes to looking at biblical passages that tell about warfare and killing. Few Adventist theologians or leaders have served in the military or engaged in combat. From academy years forward, I heard Adventists should avoid military service due to the probability of violating the Fourth and Sixth Commandments. It disappointed me as a teen to learn I could not work as a forest or park ranger for the same reasons because they occasionally carried a weapon or might have to perform official duties on the Sabbath. I knew my own father, as a new Adventist drafted in World War II, had remained faithful to his baptismal vows while enduring tremendous pressures like those experienced by Desmond T. Doss.

Students were encouraged to enter "Adventist" vocations: medical work, ministry, or teaching. For girls, the choices recommended were very limited. Any guidance offered came from rather narrow and traditional interpretations. We were taught our faith had limitations and could not be practiced in certain situations, which contradicted the biblical lessons we learned from Joseph, Daniel, and Esther. Then, as now, I do not believe faith is based on career, circumstances (bad or good), comfort, or convenience. Faith trusts a Sovereign God, who as our Creator reveals what is best for His children in His Word, by His Spirit, and through Jesus Christ.

A common Adventist explanation given for war and fighting in the Bible rests on the concept of Israel being a theocracy. God was the supreme ruler over the Children of Israel. He was "the center of authority and government" (*Education*, page 38:1). The nation was governed by God, even after prophets and kings assumed human leadership roles. Therefore, if God ordered the killing, it was justified. Humans were just carrying out divine orders, and if they had had greater faith, God would have done the job for them. According to the argument, the New Testament era changed all that. Christ taught new laws of "loving your enemies" (Matthew 5:44), and when struck "offer the other cheek" (Luke 6:29). He prayed for those who drove nails through His wrists (Luke 23:34). Therefore, as Christians, we are to love as Christ did and never use force in resisting evil. This dichotomy pits Scripture against Scripture and portrays an emotional god of opposite attitudes. No wonder thinking church members are confused, especially when the Bible states "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

Israel became a theocracy at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:3-6) and withdrew from the relationship when they chose a heathen ruler (John 19:12-16 and *Desire of Ages*, page 737:6). When the theocracy proposition is followed through to conclusion, spiritual Israel (the church) replaced the Jews as citizens in God's

government (1 Peter 2:9 and 10). Ellen White extends the concept and says "we (Adventists) are sacredly denominated by God and are under His theocracy" (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 7, page 108:1). That statement raises some interesting implications about citizenships in any nation.

Some writings by Adventists about military service and war lack balance, polarize the issues, and turn judgmental like a recent book, *I Pledge Allegiance...* by Keith Phillips and Karl Tsatalbasidis. Others appear to reject the inspiration of the Old Testament and are selective even about which parts of the New Testament should be considered valid. Few Adventist writers have military experience or expertise (Pastor Phillips served seven years and rose to the enlisted grade of Sergeant). Worse, some authors fail to seriously consider Bible passages that might appear to differ with their pre-conceived notions. How many articles on conscientious objection by Adventists mention 2 Kings 11 or 2 Chronicles 23? Might there be a reason for their inclusion in the Bible? I am not advocating a centralist pluralism that is inclusive of all viewpoints simply for the sake of appeasement. But in matters of conscientious choice church members would be served better if biblical and ethical principles are wrestled from the apparent paradoxes of the Bible and then applied as relevant guides for living today?

PARADOXICAL PRINCIPLES

Scripture is full of apparent paradoxes or contradictions. We are saved by grace as a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8-10), but then are admonished to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). Adulterers were to be stoned (Deuteronomy 22:13-30), but Jesus said only the sinless could throw stones (John 8:7). Saul failed to slaughter every Amalekite and lost God’s favor and his kingdom, yet David murdered a loyal general to steal Mrs. Uriah and hide adultery, produced Prince Solomon, and was still forgiven. According to the prince turned preacher, there is a time to hate and love, kill and heal, of war and peace (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8). And when the conditional element to covenants is overlooked, God seems to break numerous promises to the Children of Israel.

However, paradox means more than opposite or contradictory elements. It can also affirm that the nature of truth often has two essential elements dependent on proper relationship to the other. Instead of seeing issues as either / or, it’s both / and. Dr. Herbert E. Douglass gives credence to Ellen G. White for her insightful perception of biblical truth in the form of an ellipse with two foci to formulate a central principle. Her writings also contain apparent contradictory statements (for example, on the nature of Christ), yet when studied in context and as a whole, one comes to a clear picture of what she understood about the

Savior. Dr. Douglass illustrates this biblical ellipse with one question. “When you want a glass of water, do you ask for a glass of hydrogen, or should you ask for a glass of oxygen? You expect the two combined in the right proportion, because you won’t get water without both.”

The same principle applies to the discussion of Old and New Testament views on how God’s people should relate to military service, violence and war. Commandments and experiences from the same God of both eras are recorded for our benefit to help guide attitude and behavior (Romans 15:4 and 1 Corinthians 10:11). Principles from all of Scripture should guide our thinking and actions. Events and teachings in the First Testament cannot be lightly dismissed, because they have been replaced by a new covenant. For Adventists to use that logic opens up other possibilities that raises questions about other church doctrines and practices.

OLD TESTAMENT

The earliest recollection of Bible stories and kindergarten songs for many Adventist preschoolers glorify the boy David slaying (killing and beheading) Goliath, Joshua conquering Jericho (putting all the inhabitants to death except Rahab and her family), and Gideon defeating (slaughtering) 120,000 Midianites. The wicked are drowned by God in a global flood; good people like Abel and Uriah are murdered, while

Cain and David seem to get off easy. After reading Uncle Arthur's Bible Stories, the question could be asked how a good angel could slay 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night. Didn't God love any of them? Or did He only love His people? Reading the entire Bible uncovers other horrific accounts of betrayal, brutality, and bloody massacres. The traditional explanation of God ruling over a theocracy does not satisfy a contradictory caricature of God the Father and Jesus the Son. With this type of spiritual formation, perhaps it can be understood why many people develop a "we good – they bad" perspective on life.

Deeper study reveals a much more realistic picture of biblical events. God placed Israel on the crossroads of civilizations to be His witnesses. That location also put them between warring powers, which frequently involved them in conflicts. During the reigns of King David and Solomon (1011 – 931 B.C.) the Israelites dominated the Middle East region. When God's people were faithful, they prospered and lived in peace. When they forsook the Lord God, they suffered natural calamities, foreign invasions and captivity. Second Kings 17 depicts the downfall of the Northern kingdom of Israel. Leaders led the people to worship false gods (Baal and Molech), rejected prophetic pleas, and made alliances with neighboring kingdoms for defense. The decadence, immorality, and violence among God's people as portrayed in the Bible is shocking.

Understanding their world as it was then reveals a world much like our day now. Mankind has not changed much. If God was displeased with Israel then, think how He must feel about the depravity of the twenty-first century. Had God not intervened as He did in history, the sinfulness of mankind would have ended in chaos and self-destruction, as it is headed for today. Although the violence and war recorded in the Old Testament is certainly not the ideal, several lessons can be gleaned from the accounts:

1. God is the Ruler of the universe. He establishes kings and kingdoms, and removes them according to His will and timetables (Daniel 2:21 and Psalm 2).
2. Mercy and justice balance each other; neither truly exists without the other (Micah 6:8 and Zechariah 7:9). Though he preached judgment and salvation, Jonah was angry with God for not destroying the people who repented. While God is depicted as gracious, long-suffering, and merciful, He hates evil (Exodus 34:6 and 7).
3. Judgment is certain. God will not tolerate sin to go unchecked among not only the wicked (Genesis 6, 18, and 19), but also His own people (Hosea 10). Divine punishment often took the form of foreign invasion, defeat or occupation.
4. God preferred to defend His people His way using heaven's

arsenal of plagues, panic, hornets, hail, flood, fire, darkness, confusion, angels, and ambushes (Exodus 23:27-31; Deuteronomy 7:16-24; Joshua 10:11; 24:6-12; 2 Chronicles 20 and 32; and Isaiah 37:36-38). He can still do so today.

5. Unfortunately, God's people usually preferred to do the fighting themselves, so they formed armies (1 Chronicles 12 and 27:1-15), added chariots and cavalry (2 Chronicles 8:5 and 6), developed defenses and offensive weapons of war (2 Chronicles 26:6-15), and fought many military battles. Fighting then was close-up and far more personal than in modern warfare where the enemy is often seen only as a grid coordinate. Note: God did not abandon or condemn His people for their lack of faith. He continued to guide them through their military leaders to victory.
6. The laws recorded in the Pentateuch governing God's people established a highly structured society, yet with greater freedoms and a justice system, including cities of refuge (Joshua 20), than otherwise was known in the ancient world. The laws respected life and individual rights, while providing order and security. The legal codes covered civil disputes, criminal justice, health regulations, religious observances and obligations, and even principles for conducting

warfare (Deuteronomy 20), and treatment of war prisoners (Deuteronomy 21:10-14). Military service was an expected part of life for an Israelite or Jewish male, though exemptions were given for combat. Women fought, but rarely (Judges 5).

7. Except as directed by God to annihilate a conquered enemy, the Israelites practiced limited war, honored treaties (Joshua 9), and lived along side their enemies for extended periods in relative peace. Captives were treated humanely sometimes (2 Kings 6:8-2 and 2 Chronicles 28). The people were not barbarians.
8. Some causes are worth defending. Israel fought to repel invasions (1 Kings 20), quell insurrections (2 Samuel 15-18) and rebellions (2 Kings 3), maintain national integrity in civil wars (2 Chronicles 13), fulfill treaties (1 Kings 22), restore honor (2 Samuel 10), etc. In fact, carrying and using weapons were common. Faced with opposition to rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, Nehemiah exhibited courage and armed the workers (Nehemiah 4:7-23).
9. In comparison to modern warfare, most of the battles described in the Bible were relatively small skirmishes between a few thousand opponents or less. Many Old Testament scholars question the validity of translations for numbers found in the historical accounts. When that problem

is combined with the cultural tendency of the era for kings to exaggerate their feats... the records seem preposterous. While hand-to-hand combat can be bloody, casualties simply did not run in the hundreds or even tens of thousands. The greatest known, ancient land battle at Qadesh (1274 B.C.) involved less than 100,000 men on both sides combined. Later conflicts between the Greeks and Persians involved less than 250,000 combatants, unless you believe Herodotus' numbers for the battle of Plataea, August 479 B.C.

10. The Israelites and Jews usually fought with fewer numbers and inferior weapons (1 Samuel 13:19-22). Though they understood and used military tactical operations, they often engaged in guerrilla tactics and subterfuge. Miraculous victories were attributed to the Lord (Exodus 14 and 15; Judges 4 and 5).

11. A correlation exists between moral and spiritual well-being and the ability to be victorious in battle. Moral ascendancy contributed to victory (1 Samuel 14). The greatest cause of defeat came from spiritual degradation, loss of purpose / will and low morale (1 Samuel 28 and 31). Wartime defeats and victories experienced by the Lord's people paralleled the lows and highs of their spiritual condition. Some historians see a similar pattern

in the history of nations such as England, Israel, and America.

12. God used foreign powers and kings as His instruments to carry out His purposes (*Prophets and Kings*, page 291). Often, they were the means of punishment when the sins of God's people were as grievous as or worse than the heathen people around them. The Assyrian hosts were referred to as "the rod of Mine (God's) anger...The staff in their hand is Mine indignation" (Isaiah 10:5). Other times, God worked through foreign kings to accomplish His timetable (Cyrus) or enable special events (Artaxerxes). The righteous among God's people suffered with the others when disaster or oppression struck. However, the righteous few also became the means for bringing knowledge of the true, living God and His law to their captors (*Prophets and Kings*, page 292).

NEW TESTAMENT

The Second Testament is not devoid of references to the military as some may suppose. Except for constant brigands and zealot rebels, Roman procurators executed Roman law enforced by Roman legions. Like the Victorian British Empire, the *Pax Romana* of Roman peace in its prime prevailed throughout the empire. However, silence should not be construed as pacifism. In New Testament Palestine silence on the subject was simply subjugation during the reigns of the Herod dynasty.

Revolt, rebellion, and insurrection were common; hence, the need for Roman military occupation.

Except when soldiers carried out King Herod's orders to kill baby boys in Bethlehem and do their duties around Christ's trial and crucifixion, the New Testament portrays soldiers in a positive light. When soldiers asked John the Baptist what they should do, the evangelist did not tell them to "get out of the military." Instead, he encouraged them to perform their duties better (Luke 3:14). None of the inspired New Testament writers say, "Don't join!" "Stop serving!" Neither do any of them condemn military service.

Jesus commended a centurion for possessing greater faith than found in all Israel (Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10; and John 4:46-54). At Golgotha, a pagan Roman Army officer is the only one to acknowledge the crucified Jesus as the Son of God (Matthew 27:54; Mark 15:39; and Luke 23:47). Later, the very first Gentile convert to the Christian faith was another Roman Army officer named Cornelius, who then formed the first Christian Church in his own home (Acts 10). At grave political risk another commander, Claudius Lysias, rescued Paul from a mob in Jerusalem and assassination plots. Then on the way to Rome, Julius trusted the prisoner Paul more than his own guards and sailors, thereby sparing 276 persons from certain death. See Acts 27 for the story.

Apparently, the Gospel writers

deeply respected soldiers and often used allusions and metaphors to the military when illustrating the Christian life (Ephesians 6:10-18 and 2 Timothy 2:3, 4). Even Jesus is portrayed as the commander of heaven's armies when He comes again (Revelation 19:11-16).

Themes of spiritual conflict and persecution surface frequently in the New Testament. Jesus repeatedly warned about betrayal (Matthew 10:34-36 and Luke 12:51-53) and coming woes (Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21). The Apostles related the persecutions endured by Early Christians and wrote prophetically about coming conflicts that will continue until the time sin is forever eradicated from the universe. Sandwiched between the First and Second Advents of Christ are 2,000 plus years of trouble, tribulation, and tragedy for God's people. The Apostles exhorted disciples of Christ to live godly lives as good citizens (Romans 12 and 13), so that any persecution would be for doing good rather than evil (1 Peter 2:11-23; 3:8-17 and 4:7-16).

RESPECT FOR LIFE

The most prevalent theme of the New Testament is hope of life everlasting through Jesus Christ. In Him is life, truth, and the way (John 14:6). Jesus declared His purpose in coming to earth was to give life more abundantly (John 10:10), "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10) and "to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew

20:28). His earthly ministry opened new vistas for living through His teaching, healed broken lives by His power, gave new life to the dead, and provided for whosoever will to have eternal life by giving up His own life in behalf of sinners.

To live forever remains humanity's deepest desire. We search for the special secret in DNA or gene; raise children, write histories, and erect stone monuments to perpetuate past spirit into future generations. People still make the same inquiry the Rich Young Ruler asked, "What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" (Matthew 19:16).

As the Greatest Psychologist, Jesus' teachings predated Abraham Maslow's chart on hierarchy of needs. The humanity of Jesus developed holistically (Luke 2:52). Human beings comprise seven elements: physical, mental, emotional, volitional, relational, spiritual, and sexual. Jesus taught life consisted of more than the physical element and the accumulation of external things (Luke 12:15). He recognized man's longing for spiritual meaning as life's top priority (Matthew 6:25-34 and Luke 12:22-32). In fact, Christ emphatically stressed the spiritual as the supreme need. You must be willing to lose your life in order to save it for eternity (Matthew 10:37-39; Luke 17:33; and John 12:25). Until you face your own death, you cannot know life fully. Speaking of Himself, Jesus said He had the power to lay down His life and take it back up

again (John 10:17, 18). As the Creator of all life and Resurrected Lord, He can be trusted to restore life after death (1 Corinthians 15:12-28 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

The way to find and obtain eternal life is by believing in Jesus as the Son of God (John 3:14-17 and 36, 5:24, 6:40-58, 17:3 and 20:31). That is the only way (Acts 4:12). In Romans 5 the Apostle Paul tells how we shall be saved by His (Christ's) life. Humans have a part in the process; they must confess the Lord Jesus (Romans 10:9-13), their sins (1 John 1:9), and repent (Romans 2:4; Acts 2:38 and 17:30). Eternal life is God's gift (Romans 3:23) that enables us to become new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) and walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). That new life is lived by faith in the Son of God (Galatians 2:20).

Receiving new life in Christ brings changes and responsibilities to care for our own bodies, treat others with respect and love, live peaceably, and obey lawful authorities. We are to walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6) and follow in His steps (1 Peter 2:21). Though Christians may claim citizenship in the kingdom of God, they still reside on earth. The Gospel advocates practical godliness (Romans 12 and 13), rather than being so heavenly oriented that we are no earthly good!

BIBLICAL MANDATES

Jesus answered the young man's question about how to obtain eternal

life by this reply, “If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matthew 19:17). Joyful obedience is evidence of a saving relationship with the Lifegiver (John 14:15 and 15:10). Too often Christians think of “commandments” as only the Decalogue (Exodus 20). Relating to stone is hard. Jesus reiterated the principle of love on which the Decalogue is founded (Matthew 22:33-40; Mark 12:28-34; and Luke 10:25-28) and then expanded the Law to include “loving one another as He loved us” (John 15:12). He gave us Himself as a living example of how to love. Love is responsible caring – selfless service to others. The Apostle Paul defines love as “bearing one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). Love may mean laying down one’s life for his friends – the greatest act of love (John 15:13). Though noble, dying for another person is not the highest purpose for living or even the hardest act. Living the Christian life is often harder than dying for Christ or another person.

When a person experiences the joys of salvation and has the assurance of eternal life (1 John 5:11-13), witnessing or sharing Jesus naturally follows. Christ’s disciples are commanded to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). They are to make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them and teaching observance of all things He commanded (Matthew 28:18-20).

Notice the sequence Jesus gave in His commission: Be a disciple,

make disciples, baptize them, and then teach them all things. Does the order Christ gave have significance? Adventist outreach has tended to teach, then baptize. Discipleship may be taught later. Some methods of evangelism appear like salesmanship to convince people to think and act like the seller in order to qualify for membership in the club (church)! Christians are to go into the entire world and preach the Gospel to everyone (Mark 16:15).

FREEDOM OF FAITH

Man was created a free moral agent, imbued with the dignity of free choice. Christians must respect that nature of man and recognize individual conscience. Truth frees and ennobles. When a person receives the truth of Jesus and is baptized, two actions occur: their past sins are forgiven, and they are empowered to live the Christian life and fulfill divine requirements by spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). The same gifts are not given to everyone and each person’s experience differs from another’s (*Ministry of Healing*, page 100). Therefore, the church is correct when pastoral care and religious support is provided to church members who differ along the full continuum of belief about their relationship to military service, violence, and war. Whether one chooses to be a total pacifist, serve in the military as a non-combatant, or be a combatant is a matter of personal choice in responding to their understanding of God’s will for their

life. Those kinds of issues, along with many other paradoxes of Scripture that are not clearly defined with a “Thou shalt not... or Thou shalt...,” cannot be decided by one pole, foci, group, or individual for another.

Having examined some of the biblical principles and current issues, what

factors might an Adventist consider in determining for her or himself how to relate to military / public service, violence, and war? How might the church help guide members in making these important decisions? Answering these questions remains a challenging and divisive issue for the church today.



CHALLENGES FOR THE CHURCH

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

Membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church is growing rapidly, but success brings its own challenges. The vast majority of members are converts, or “first generation” church members. They may have sufficient doctrinal understanding to join the faith, but many lack any appreciation for the Adventist heritage, lifestyle, and practical nuances of membership. Even in North America, new believers may not have heard of Corporal Desmond T. Doss (unless they watched the movie, “Hacksaw Ridge,” produced by Mel Gibson in 2016), or been told the official church position on military service. A small group of second and third generation military families also exists within Adventist circles. They are a subset of the greater military sub-culture in the United States. To further complicate matters, since the cessation of the Vietnam Conflict and termination of conscription in the United States (1973), the Adventist Church benignly neglected to address the issues of military service or instruct young adult members about non-combatancy in our church journals, educational curriculums, or Sabbath Schools. Medical Cadet Corps training disappeared, mostly from lack of interest. Conference leaders and church educators wrongfully assumed Adventists

would not voluntarily enlist in the military services.

The General Conference Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries Department launched a thorough review of their programs in 2006 that led to transformation of strategic direction, emphasis, and policies. The assessment revealed several startling discoveries:

1. For a variety of valid reasons, Adventists voluntarily enlist in military service. Perhaps Pathfinders with uniforms, badges, ribbons, marching, drills, flags, etc. instill an appreciation for discipline and militaristic organization. Could church youth programs actually influence joining and feeling comfortable in the military? This trend of voluntary enlistment is not limited to North America or the United States as is commonly supposed. (Best estimates of the numbers of Adventists serving in U.S. Armed Forces hover around three-tenths of one percent of the total military strength, or between 6,000 to 7,500 men and women). Adventists proudly serve in the militaries of their homelands around the world, even if some church leaders refuse to acknowledge their presence and provide pastoral care.
2. Virtually all Adventists in military service of all nations, except for



chaplains, are combatants. The U.S. Government Accountability Office reported 425 applications for conscientious objector status (21 for 1-A-O non-combatant classification) out of a total force of 2.3 million service members in the U.S. Armed Forces during the five years 2002 thru 2006. None of the 1-A-O applicants were known to be Adventists. Slightly over half of applications (224) were approved; only ten of twenty-one applications for 1-A-O classification were approved. Processing time averaged 200 days. The last year statistics on the subject were reported was 2007.

3. During initial basic entry training, accommodation for Sabbath observance is highly improbable and rarely granted. Once personnel settle into military duties, obtaining accommodation for religious practices is less

difficult – depending on the laws of the nation and regulations of the military force. The U.S. Congress passed a public law in 1984 mandating the Department of Defense (DoD) develop directives for accommodating religious practices (including diet and Sabbath observance). See DoD Instructions 1300.17, dated 10 February 2009; updated 22 January 2014.

4. The composition of military forces changed. The number of countries that rely on conscription for military service has declined since 1970. Half of all nations rely on volunteers to serve in their militaries (see list below). However, most volunteers do not make the military their professional career (only one-fifth of volunteers in the U.S. Armed Forces receive a military pension). Military

equipment has become very technical, requiring skilled operators. Military duties demand persons committed to the vocation capable of being trained. Unless motivated by a national emergency or for personal benefits, short-term conscripts often do not meet military needs. Though conscription is not currently practiced, most nations reserve the right to resume or enforce conscription in the event military needs arises. Over half of volunteers are married or marry while serving in the military. Two thirds of U.S. Armed Forces personnel are married. Females comprise sixteen percent of U.S. military forces. Forty nations permit females to serve in their militaries. Nine nations have compulsory military service for females.

released a report on the inclusion of women in combat-arms units. As the country continues moving towards permitting females to enlist and serve in the armor, artillery, and infantry, more than likely pressure for drafting females would also increase if conscription were reinstated. What kind of impact would drafting young women have on the national psyche, on any denominational response, and upon young women who would be facing potential conscription and placement in a combat unit?

ADVENTIST CHAPLAINCY MINISTRIES AND THE NATIONAL SERVICE ORGANIZATION

These trends changed how the official military liaison office of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the National Service Organization (NSO), serves church members in military service. The North American Division once sponsored NSO Centers for military members as places of “refuge” and fellowship over Sabbath. When the Cold War ended, the U.S. Armed Forces reduced personnel nearly forty percent, and Congress mandated Base Realignment and Closures in 1988 and 2002. As a result, the NSO Centers were under-utilized and increasingly costly to maintain. In 2008 the last one was closed, and the property sold. Funds were redirected to support twenty-five* overseas Adventist Military Chapel Worship Groups with Sabbath

TYPE OF MILITARY SERVICE	# OF NATIONS
Volunteer – no enforced conscription	101
Volunteer and compulsory	12
Selective conscription	12
Alternative to compulsory option	15
Conscription (one year)	21
Conscription (18 months)	12
Conscription (longer than 18 months)	30
Countries without a standing military	19

5. On 8 March 2011 the Military Leadership Diversity Commission

School supplies, worship items, and outreach materials. In accordance with the official position of the church on military service, Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries continues to provide pastoral care and religious support to all known military-related church members.

** The number varies with the military mission and numbers of Adventists assigned overseas.*

OFFICIAL POSITION

The official stand of the church in reference military service was last stated by action voted at the 1972 Annual Council of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists held 14 – 29 October in Mexico City, Mexico:

“Genuine Christianity manifests itself in good citizenship and loyalty to civil government. The breaking out of war among men in no way alters the Christian’s supreme allegiance and responsibility to God or modifies their obligation to practice their beliefs and put God first.

“This partnership with God through Jesus Christ who came into this world not to destroy men’s lives but to save them causes Seventh-day Adventists to advocate a non-combatant position, following their divine Master in not taking human life, but rendering all possible service to save it. As they accept the obligation of citizenship as well as its benefits, their loyalty to government requires them

willingly to serve the state in any non-combatant capacity, civil or military, in war or peace, in uniform or out of it, which will contribute to saving life, asking only that they may serve in those capacities which do not violate their conscientious convictions.

“This statement is not a rigid position binding church members, but gives guidance leaving the individual member free to assess the situation for her or himself.”
For a full text, see Appendix A.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is not a “pacifist or peace” church by the traditional definition of the terms. Though the Seventh-day Adventist Church advocates a non-combatant position, pacifism, military service, or non-combatancy are not tests of church membership. The denomination does not act as the conscience for any member or military commander, but it does seek to inform the conscience and behavior of both, so decisions can be made with a maximum of understanding and thought. Thus, some church members are willing to train with and use weapons; while others, for individual conscientious reasons choose not to have anything to do with weapons or military service. Historically, most Seventh-day Adventists have served as non-combatant medics for two reasons: (1) Such service minimizes Sabbath conflicts (saving and maintaining life is honorable on the Sabbath), and (2) Such service is more in harmony with

the church's stated recommendation.

Nearly fifty years have passed since that statement. We live in a changing political-military world environment. An objective review of the denominational position is necessary and should be combined with a thorough biblical study to help guide church leaders and members in making decisions relating to military and public service. The position on military service evolved during a national crisis in North America. Since then, the original stance seems to have been re-affirmed from pragmatic, reactionary responses to real-life issues. That is not to say the stances taken were not prayerfully sought and wise guidance based on the biblical and theological understanding of the times. However, concern for fledgling denominational identity and espousal of the Bible seventh-day Sabbath appear to have motivated attitudes toward the military by Adventist pioneers more than the issue of military service, or even bearing arms. Today's anti-military writers who oppose Adventists serving appear to rely more on traditional arguments and subjective pre-suppositions than on sound biblical exegesis and support.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS ON MILITARY SERVICE

Ellen G. White lived through times of many wars in the Nineteenth Century: Mexican War, Civil War, Indian Wars, Spanish-American War, wars in Europe, and the beginning of World War I. Yet, she wrote virtually

nothing specifically about those events and about military service and soldiering. Obviously, she opposed war. Typical of her views is the statement, "Satan delights in war, for it excites the worst passions of the soul and then sweeps into eternity its victims steeped in vice and blood. It is his object to incite the nations to war against one another, for he can thus divert the minds of people from the work of preparation to stand in the day of God" (*Great Controversy*, page 589). "Wars of conquest violate the Eighth Commandment" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 309). "Satanic agencies have made the earth a stage for horrors, which no language can describe. War and bloodshed are carried on by nations claiming to be Christian. A disregard for the law of God has brought its sure result" (*SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, page 974).

On the other hand, her comments about soldiers and the military are quite favorable. She compares the church of Christ to an army and Christians with soldiers (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, page 394 and *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 9, page 116). Two statements are quite surprising: "Freedom of choice is given to every soul, but after a man has enlisted, he is required to be as true as steel, come life or come death" (*Evangelism*, page 647); and speaking about angels, "Time and again have they been the leaders of armies" (*Sons and Daughters of God*, page 37).

Being Northerners, early Adventists

were Abolitionists – against slavery, even before the Civil War over slavery. When war came, some Adventists in Battle Creek proposed an armed regiment of Sabbath-keepers that would “strike this rebellion a staggering blow.” Pioneer leaders studied the issues and concluded that the position most consistent with biblical principles was non-combatancy. (See Appendix B for a brief historical timeline). Ellen White received visions about the conflict (see *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 1, chapters 53-55 and 69), and wrote this admonition: “I was shown that God’s people... cannot engage in this perplexing war, for it is opposed to every principle of their faith. In the army they cannot obey the truth and at the same time obey the requirements of their officers” (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 1, page 361). Yet, she does not condemn those Adventists who served in the military, including a member who enlisted to fight and later became a conference president. Generally, Adventists attempted exemption from conscription by paying a commutation fee of \$300, or accepted assignment to hospital duty or by caring for freedmen.

Later in her ministry, Ellen White intimates disapproval towards those who tried to escape the draft by inducing disease or maiming themselves “that they might be rendered unfit for service” (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, page 458). While working in Europe, she observed military drills, including

training with cannon and rifles. When three workers in the church press were summoned for three weeks of military drill, Mrs. White commends the men on their regimental ribbons and uniforms, but makes no remarks about their using weapons.

“Government calls do not accommodate themselves to our convenience. They demand that young men whom they have accepted as soldiers shall not neglect the exercise and drill essential for soldier service. We were glad to see that these men with their regimentals had tokens of honor for faithfulness in their work. They are trustworthy young men. They did not go from choice, but because the laws of their nation required this” (*Selected Messages*, Vol. 2, page 335).

While living at St Helena, California, Mrs. White visited the Soldier’s Home in Yountville and ministered to the residents there. She mentions Elder G. A. Irwin, General Conference President, also visiting and meeting “a soldier with whom he had many times stood side by side in battle” (White Letter, 1903). In four letters about her visits she mentions the soldiers’ service with admiration and gratitude. She does not condemn them or raise the issue about combatancy.

MORAL OBLIGATION TO PROTECT AND DEFEND

When Chedorlaomer invaded Canaan he defeated the five kings

of the Valley of Siddim and took Lot captive. Abram armed his 318 trained servants and rescued his nephew in a classic guerrilla night attack (Genesis 14), which Gideon later copied (Judges 7). This event did not happen by chance or beginner's luck. Night attacks must be meticulously planned and coordinated. Abraham's camp had weapons, and the men must have been skilled in their use. Though not explicitly stated, Abram feared reprisal by the Elamite King and questioned how the divine promise of making him a great nation would ever be fulfilled (Genesis 15:1 and *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 136). In response, the Lord renewed the covenant and reassured Abram (Genesis 15).

"Abraham was also wise in diplomacy and brave and skillful in war... The worshiper of Jehovah had not only rendered a great service to the country, but had proved himself a man of valor. It was seen that righteousness is not cowardice, and that Abraham's religion made him courageous in maintaining the right and defending the oppressed. His heroic act gave him widespread influence among the surrounding tribes... Abraham regarded the claims of justice and humanity. His conduct illustrates the inspired maxim, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself'." (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pages 134-136).

Scripture mandates protecting and

defending the innocent, helpless, and weak as a moral obligation. Virgins, pregnant women, wives, children, and even servants and strangers were provided legal rights that afforded them some degree of protection and justice. David and his band of six hundred men rescued the people of his village Ziklag that had been taken captive by the Amalekites (1 Samuel 30). Queen Esther interceded for her people and the Jews were allowed to defend themselves (Esther 8 and 9). Repeatedly, David pleads for justice. "Defend the poor and fatherless... Deliver the poor and needy; free them from the hand of the wicked" (Psalm 82:3, 4). The Parable of the Good Samaritan teaches caring for victims (Luke 10:25-37). The practical Apostle James said Christians have a duty to care for orphans and widows (James 1:27).

When Peter drew his sword to defend Jesus, the Lord said to him, "Put your sword into its sheath" (John 18:11). Christ did not condemn him for defending injustice, nor did He say, "don't carry a sword." Aware of His destiny, Jesus wanted no interference with the plan of salvation. Peter's rash act could have been used as proof that Jesus and the disciples were revolutionaries. Thus, condemning Jesus to death would be in the public interest, rather than uplift Him for the redemption of mankind (John 3:14 and 12:32). Later in His trial, Jesus answered Pilate and said, "If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight" (John 18:36). Jesus was

fully cognizant of dual citizenship. Contrary to what the Pharisees claimed, He had earlier set forth the fundamental principle to fulfill just obligations to earthly governments (Matthew 22:15-22).

MODELS FOR CONSIDERATION

Private Joseph Schultz served as an infantryman in the German Army on the Eastern front in World War II. His squad was ordered to execute fourteen local civilians who stood blindfolded against a large haystack. Rather than shoot innocent civilians, he lowered his rifle, joined the civilians, and was executed along with them by his own squad. A photograph of the incident survived the war. Was Schultz a hero? Did his death make any difference? Did it save anyone? No, but it was the right thing to do apparently in Schultz's mind and made a difference to him, enough of a difference that he was willing to die for his conviction.

Adventists are familiar with the heroism of Corporal Desmond T. Doss, awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his valorous service during the battle for Okinawa, May 1945. Under direct enemy fire Doss lowered 75 wounded to safety off the Maeda Escarpment. Later, though wounded, he voluntarily remained behind so that others wounded worse could be evacuated first.

As a young man, John Weidner witnessed Nazi atrocities and determined to save lives without



taking life. He established the Dutch-Paris underground and assisted over 1,100 Jews and downed Allied airmen to escape into neutral countries. In the process of saving others, he was captured three times by the Gestapo and tortured. His escapes mirror those of John and Peter (Acts 5 and 12). Herbert Ford's book, *Flee the Captor*, relates Weidner's many exploits and can be substantiated by files at the office of the Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, Israel.

President Richard M. Nixon posthumously presented the Congressional Medal of Honor to Corporal Thomas W. Bennett, another non-combatant medic, for sacrificing his life to save others in the highlands of Vietnam, 11 February 1969. Tom was a Southern Baptist opposed to killing. While attending college at Morgantown, West Virginia, he voluntarily enlisted in the

U.S. Army as a medic during an era when many young adults avoided military service.

If space permitted, many more accounts could be given of those who served in combat and refrained from taking life or saved life. Studies reveal few soldiers actually aim and fire their weapon with the intention of killing another human being. Vast amounts of firepower is used to blanket a suspected enemy location, often without actually seeing opposing enemy combatants. Perhaps this explains why it seems easier for artillery, bombers, and gunners on warships to engage in long-distance combat, than an infantry soldier on the front lines. Unfortunately, criminals seem to have no problem with using violence close up. Since 11 September 2001, an average of 15,000 murders (over 250,000) have been committed in the United States, thirty-five times the number of U.S. military personnel who have died in the Global War on Terrorism. Mass shootings have increased in numbers and deaths.

MORAL AND SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES

In light of this brief discussion that barely touches on the complexity of war, killing, and military service, each Adventist must prayerfully and thoroughly study what they believe is God's will for their lives regarding these matters. Every person must be fully persuaded in their own mind. After reading vast amounts of books,

literature, and Internet articles on the subject, I have concluded one's emotional predisposition toward the subjects probably determines the arguments. In an effort to argue one's thesis, objectivity is often lacking in pursuit of defining truth. The emphasis is one-sided, often without considering or addressing the obvious. That is why the church wisely leaves this human dilemma to the individual conscience.

From my study and more than thirty-six years of experience in the military, I believe two key moral and spiritual principles are foundational in making a personal choice about military service and combatancy. First, Christians should seek to save life, rather than willfully seek to kill. Sometimes, Adventist views have been expressed in the negative, as being against something and what we should not do. Negative stances are reactionary, rather than pro-active. Prior to World War II, Adventists pro-actively prepared young men for non-combatant military service in the Medical Cadet Corps. Following World War II, the denomination cooperated with the U.S. Army and encouraged Adventists in uniform to volunteer for the "Operation Whitecoat" program of medical research projects. These pro-active approaches termed "conscientious cooperation" by church leaders helped counteract public questions about conscientious objection (non-combatancy). Nothing similar is in place working today, which may explain, in part,



why so many Adventists in the military are serving as combatants.

Second, Christians have a moral duty to protect and defend life from blatant evil. In some situations, a role similar to Abraham's rescue of Lot may be required, whereas in others, the aggressor can be spared like David did with King Saul (1 Samuel 24). Regardless of the circumstances, the Christian's intent is to protect and defend the innocent, helpless, and weak from harm, including the right to defend one's life. In that role, the Christian may choose to sacrifice her or his life, or may attempt to disarm or disable the aggressor. If in that process the aggressor is harmed or even killed, the Christian is guiltless, though her or his acts are always less than God's ideal. He

or she will probably bear emotional scars as did King David for the blood on his hands (1 Chronicles 22:8 and 28:3). Perhaps the best deterrent is strength, training, and readiness to prevent aggression.

The following questions could help individuals determine their decision about military service and combatancy:

1. Are my reasons based on sincere religious convictions, or are they driven by emotion, nationalism, patriotism, or political values? Can others easily see what my external norm for values is, other than my own relative ego?
2. Are my convictions strong enough to guide actions (behavior)? In other words, are my convictions

and behavior increasingly moving towards congruency?

3. Am I consistent in the application of my convictions, or am I selective? For example, do I say I am opposed to killing, yet have an arsenal of guns at home?
4. Am I willing to make sacrifices in the practice of my convictions?
5. Am I prayerfully seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit as I engage in the process of learning and evaluating my convictions to insure they are genuine?
6. If I choose to serve in the military and swear before God and my fellow citizens to fulfill my duties, am I willing to complete my contract regardless of the circumstances, comfort, or convenience? Sometimes the emphasis by Adventists on the Fourth and Sixth Commandments overshadows obeying the other eight. The Apostle James reminds us that to break one is to offend in all (James 2:10). If you accept the benefits and bonuses for enlisting, then you must also accept the responsibilities that accompany them.
7. If I choose not to serve in the military, am I willing to perform alternate public service?

RECOMMENDATIONS

Adventists in the military face four challenges to their faith: a secular lifestyle that can lead to a casual,

then careless daily spiritual life, use of force (training, bearing, and using weapons for the purpose of harming others), observing the Sabbath, and adhering to the Levitical diet (following a lacto-ovo vegetarian diet is relatively easy in the U.S. Armed Forces). During my ministry as a military chaplain, I observed that only a third of Adventists in uniform actively participate in regular Sabbath worship with other Adventists. Military duties and expectations often conflict with religious beliefs and practices and tempt expedient responses. The military is also a conservative, values-based organization that advocates civic responsibility. Depending on the spiritual resolve of the individual, one finds what one desires and seeks, whether good or evil. Worldly people or fine Christians can be found in the military, on a public campus, or in any secular work place.

Is it possible to serve in the military and maintain one's faith as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian? Yes, indeed! Thousands of Adventists have done so in many countries' armed forces. To think living the Adventist faith in the military is impossible implies that certain circumstances are greater than faith. Adventism can be practiced lying on a hospital bed, as a prisoner, or aboard a naval ship. Albeit, some circumstances require adaption to traditional practices. The challenge is to expand the paradigm of operational faith without compromising the core essential elements that make it distinctively Adventist. Before

enlisting for pragmatic reasons, Adventists considering military service should seek counsel from Adventist veterans, service members, chaplains, and other church pastors around the questions listed above.

Given the current state of world affairs, the Seventh-day Adventist Church should immediately embark on three intentional and well thought-out programs to help prepare members for their decisions regarding military and public service.

1. In 2007 the ACM Director spent a day visiting the leaders of the federal Selective Service System to discuss the possibilities of the United States returning to some form of national service. While no imminent plans are in place, the leaders strongly urged Adventists to develop an alternate plan to military service for those members who are conscientious objectors. Being aware of Adventist historical positions, SSS leaders advised the church to obtain federal recognition and approval of that plan before any conscription or mobilization is implemented.

Other faiths already have federally approved programs in place. They also advocated that Adventist members volunteer to serve on county and state Selective Service Boards and be part of the decision-making process for Adventists who request conscientious objector classification as 1-Os (pacifists) and 1-A-Os (non-combatants).

Regrettably, to this day no known Adventists are serving on Selective Service boards. Attempts by ACM to present a proposal for federal approval of an Alternate Service Program for Adventists never got beyond the ACM Committee level. Church leaders rejected proposals because they would be open to non-members and due to possible cost.

2. Some form of realistic training should be offered to prepare young Adventists for public and possibly military service. For years, Adventists have been content to enter military and public service at the lowest starting point, which makes their service more difficult. With advance preparation, they could enter as officers and be leaders. Leaders influence and make decisions. They experience fewer problems of accommodation of religious practice. Several existing programs could be either adapted or offered on Adventist campuses: Civil Air Patrol, Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (secondary school level), and Reserve Officer Training Corps (college or university level). All of these focus on character and citizenship values, instruct skills, and offer leadership training. They could be oriented along lines of military medical service. Participation in the programs offers educational credit and advantages entering the military.

Unfortunately, traditional

(stubborn, subjective) thinking has prevented exploration of these possibilities, thereby limiting options for church youth. Delay until another crisis will cause unnecessary difficulties and require more impromptu, reactionary responses. Another bold initiative is needed like that offered prior to World War II at Union College that became the SDA Medical Cadet Corps.

3. A more palatable alternate program could build on the search and rescue skills curriculum offered at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska, USA. Starting with teenagers, the church could be training members in civil emergency preparedness for disaster response. Units should be organized with competent, trained leaders that would actually be prepared to cooperate with county and state emergency centers. Members would be instructed in advanced first aid, search and rescue, survival skills, government organization, and policies for emergency preparedness and response, etc. These units would also create a youth program to fill the void left by Medical Cadet Corps between Pathfinders and college activities. Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries, Adventist Community Services, Education, and the Youth departments could cooperatively sponsor the program. In cooperation with Adventist Development and Relief Agency

and other non-governmental organizations, the church would be providing a credible public service and alternative to military service. This would be a positive alternate kind of service that saves life rather than possibly takes life. Until the church establishes some form of recognized and approved alternate service, Adventist members will continue to join the military, partly due to failure on the part of church leadership to care enough to provide a positive and meaningful alternative consistent with denominational positions.

Regardless of Adventist views on war, military service, and weapons, Adventists should comply with the laws of their nation; e.g., currently in the United States all males ages 18 to 26 must register with the Selective Service System. Ministry for all members should take precedence over opposition to those who serve in the military, whether by choice or conscription. Some peace proponents actively minister to convicted felons who have murdered, raped, and robbed. Yet, they angrily oppose any form of pastoral care or religious support to members of their own faith who serve in the military and help defend their right to hold an opposing viewpoint. Such pride of opinion and judgmental attitude is the worse sin. The church has a mission to all people groups. We are engaged in a great controversy between good and evil that will continue to intensify before Jesus comes and puts an end

to evil. All of us are participants in that conflict and must choose whom we will serve and how. Ultimately, we are responsible to God, and must stand before His judgment, so let us not judge one another now. Let us be pro-

active and solution-oriented, rather than problem-fixated and reactionary. Discussing other controversial issues in his day, Paul concluded, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Romans 14:5b).



NON-COMBATANCY

(CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION TO BEARING ARMS)

The Seventh-day Adventist Church officially organized during a tragic civil war that divided the United States of America (1861-1865). Early in their denominational formation Adventists were confronted with the dilemma of how to fulfill civic and faith relationships responsibly, especially when temporal and religious obligations were in apparent conflict. After much prayerful and thorough study early church leaders concluded that the best position to adopt was the principle of non-combatancy. This stance was officially registered with the United States federal government in 1864 and has remained the position of Seventh-day Adventists ever since.

Non-combatant service and training is defined as follows:

1. The term "non-combatant service" shall mean (a) service in any unit of the armed forces which is unarmed at all times; (b) service in the medical department of any of the armed forces, wherever performed; or (c) any other assignment of the primary function of which does not require the use of arms in combat; provided that such other

assignment is acceptable to the individual concerned and does not require them to bear arms or to be trained in their use.

2. The term "non-combatant training" shall mean any training which is not concerned with the study, use, or handling of arms or weapons.

The official stand of the church was last reaffirmed by an action taken at the 1972 Annual Council of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists held 14 – 29 October in Mexico City, Mexico:

"Genuine Christianity manifests itself in good citizenship and loyalty to civil government. The breaking out of war among men in no way alters the Christian's supreme allegiance and responsibility to God or modifies their obligation to practice their beliefs and put God first.

"This partnership with God through Jesus Christ who came into this world not to destroy men's lives but to save them causes Seventh-day Adventists to advocate a non-combatant position, following their divine Master in not taking human life, but rendering all possible service

to save it. As they accept the obligation of citizenship as well as its benefits, their loyalty to government requires them willingly to serve the state in any non-combatant capacity, civil or military, in war or peace, in uniform or out of it, which will contribute to saving life, asking only that they may serve in those capacities which do not violate their conscientious convictions.

“This statement is not a rigid position binding church members, but gives guidance leaving the individual member free to assess the situation for her or himself.”

When national laws permit options, church members, in making a personal decision on how to fulfill obligated terms of service to their country, should first consider the historic teaching of the church on non-combatancy. If because of personal convictions they choose otherwise, pastors, chaplains, teachers, or other church workers should aid the member in satisfying any legal requirements for securing their choice and should minister to the member’s spiritual needs as follows:

- a. For those choosing civilian alternative service in lieu of military service, pastoral counsel, and guidance

should be provided when it is established that such a request is based on consistent religious experience. Pastors, chaplains, teachers, or other church workers should provide statements of their personal knowledge of the member’s position on the following: (1) church membership, (2) attendance and participation in services of the church, (3) personal standards of conduct, (4) previous expressions of belief supporting the request for exemption. Those providing such statements should request government officials to respect and honor the individual’s personal convictions.

- b. For those who conscientiously choose military service as a combatant, pastoral counsel and guidance should be provided in ministering to their needs since the church refrains from passing judgment on them.

Notice that the Seventh-day Adventist Church advocates a non-combatant position, but does not require it. Thus, some church members are willing to train with and use weapons; while others cannot, because of their own individual conscience, have anything to do with weapons or military service. Historically, many Seventh-day Adventists have served as non-combatant

medics for several reasons: (1) Such service minimizes Sabbath conflicts (saving and maintaining life is honorable on Sabbath), and (2) Such service is more in harmony with the church's stated recommendation.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church does not seek to be the conscience for any member or

commander. But we do seek to inform the conscience and behavior of both, so decisions can be made with maximum understanding and thought.

Information provided by Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904. For further information, please contact ACM by calling (301) 680-6780. Email: acm@gc.adventist.org. Websites: AdventistChaplains.org and WorldServiceOrganization.org

APPENDIX B

A TIMELINE OF CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION AND NON-COMBATANCY WITHIN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

Since the beginnings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church the denomination has been challenged with the issues of what members should do in time of war. Each member is admonished by Jesus to be a loyal citizen of their country (“Render therefore unto Caesar what is Caesar’s...”) and at the same time remain loyal to God (“and unto God what is God’s.” Matthew 22:21). Obviously, this can create tension for someone who also reads in the Ten Commandments, “Thou shalt not kill (murder)” and then faces a military requirement to train with a weapon.

The Adventist position has developed historically along these lines:

- 1860-63 The Adventist Church formally and legally organizes in North America.
- 1862 James White’s editorial in the Review “The Nation” where he says, “The fourth precept of that law says, ‘Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy’; the sixth says ‘Thou shalt not kill.’ But in the case of drafting the government assumes the responsibility of
- the violation of the law of God, and it would be madness to resist.” (*Review and Herald*, August 2, 1862, vol. 20, page 84).
- 1864 Adventist leaders appeal successfully to the Governor of Michigan and receive recognition as being conscientiously opposed to the bearing of arms. Similar letters to the governors of Wisconsin, Illinois, and Pennsylvania are sent and receive approval.
- 1886 While living in Switzerland, Ellen G. White commends several men who must do their military time in the Swiss Army. While she comments on their regimental ribbons and uniforms, she makes no remarks about use of weapons. (Letter 23, 1886).
- 1918 President Woodrow Wilson issues an executive order allowing for religious conscientious objectors to serve in the U. S. military.
- 1934 Dr. Everett Dick begins

medical military training to young men at Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska. The unit was called the Union College Medical Corps.

then goes on to change the wording to “the church advocates non-combatancy, but allows members to elect to be pacifists as well.”

1936 Dr. Cyril B. Courville organizes a similar unit known as the Medical Cadet Corps at the College of Medical Evangelists (now named Loma Linda University).

1972 Annual Council affirms the statements of 1954 and 1969, but decides the question is a personal matter of conscience for each member. The denomination continues to encourage church members to consider the historical position of non-combatancy. It also recognizes that some members may conscientiously choose to be combatants.

1939 The General Conference adopts a plan for training young men for military service.

A Medical Cadet Corps Council is formed. The various college programs are united under the name, Seventh-day Adventist Medical Cadet Corps.

The church commits to providing pastoral care and religious support to members, regardless of their personal position.

1950 Dr. Everett Dick re-activates Medical Cadet Corps training at Union College one month before the North Korean invasion of South Korea.

1974 Conscription ends and manning of U.S. Armed Forces is solely from voluntary enlistments. Medical Cadet Corps programs quickly fade and end. Appointment of National Service Organization secretaries from division down to local church level also rapidly stop. For the next three decades military-related issues are seldom mentioned in school curriculums, church literature, and by youth departments. Enlistment in the U.S. Armed Forces as a non-combatant is still permitted, but rarely sought.

1953 U. S. Army begins Operation Whitecoat (1953–1973) in which nearly 2,500 Adventist young men volunteer as human subjects in preventive medicine studies.

1954 The Annual Council states that the official position of the church is non-combatant. The National Service Organization is implemented to work with Adventist military personnel.

1969 Annual Council (October 12) reaffirms the statements of 1954,

1990 An estimated 15,000 Adventists

serve in the militaries engaged in the Persian Gulf Conflict. The “war” is over quickly and the denomination takes little note of it.

chaplains, all personnel will train with, bear, and use weapons as combatants, including medical personnel. This question was confirmed in 2014.

- 2001 On September 11 terrorists attack the United States killing nearly 3,000 persons and destroying the World Trade Center in New York City. The Global War on Terror follows again with minimum response from the church.
- 2006 Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries holds a National Service Organization meeting to review church response to military service and develop a strategy to raise awareness about military-related issues.
- 2007 Implementation of the ACM strategy for NSO begins and continues during subsequent years.
- 2010 Discussion is initiated with the leaders of the Selective Service System in Washington, D.C. regarding alternate service programs. SSS leadership was very familiar with SDA concerns and history. They included ACM in discussions with other faith groups and encouraged SDAs to formally submit an ASP for federal approval.
- 2012? Enlistment and retention in the U.S. Armed Forces as a non-combatant is quietly terminated. Except for

Thus, it is seen that the first statements were modified from a pure combatant stance, when drafted into service, to a non-combatant position to a non-combatant recommendation without a church requirement to be a non-combatant. Careful examination of the dates helps explain the changes. Initially, during the Civil War, the Adventist Church was struggling with many issues of identity and theology. There was some confusion and much discussion. The refined decision was to serve honorably in the military, but to do so as non-combatants.

That remained in place until 1969. What happened then? The U. S. was involved in Vietnam, and only those individuals who showed religious backing for their pacifism could be released to alternate duty. Since the Adventist church’s stance was non-combatancy (serving without weapons) any Adventist drafted who claimed to be a pacifist was denied that status, because the stance was at variance with the church’s stated policy. Hence, the 1969 change recognizing the choice of pacifism, while still encouraging members to serve as non-combatants. When members have the freedom to select how they would serve, they may also elect to serve as combatants, although that is not the

recommended type of service.

This remains the church's stance today. The Seventh-day Adventist Church advocates non-combatancy for members who serve in the military, but accepts those who elect to serve in other capacities or not to serve at all – according to the conscience of the individual member. The church ceased being the conscience of the individual and began a process of informing the individual enabling them to make individual decisions for which they are personally responsible. Choice of serving or not to serve is not a test of fellowship as a church member.

During the initial stages of church organization most Adventists lived in the Northern part of the United States. Today, over twenty million members live in two hundred countries around the globe. Some nations do not provide options for military service or non-combatancy; hence, it would be impossible for the church to mandate that members in those countries serve in that capacity. Thus, the current

recommendation (not requirement) for non-combatant service is the most viable.

The Geneva Convention and military regulations designate chaplains as non-combatants. Military chaplains are prohibited from carrying or using weapons. Medical personnel carry weapons to protect their patients and themselves.

Many medics have served without bearing or using weapons. Corporal Desmond Doss, a non-combatant medic in the U.S. Army, was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor (the highest USA military medal of valor) for saving over 75 lives under enemy fire in the battle for the Maeda Escarpment on the Pacific island of Okinawa, 1945. Specialist Thomas Bennett, a non-combatant medic in Vietnam was killed saving lives and awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor posthumously. Since World War II, several other non-combatant medics have been awarded high medals for valorous acts of bravery during conflicts.

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Gary R. Councill began his military ministry in 1969 as a Second Lieutenant Staff Specialist while attending the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University in Michigan. After ordination in 1974, his first active duty assignment as an U.S. Army chaplain was with the First Cavalry Division at Fort Hood, Texas. Following four-year tours in Germany and Fort Lewis, Washington, he served four years as the Facilities and Logistics Manager in the Office of the Chief of Chaplains. After two years as the Fourth Infantry Division Chaplain, he attended the U.S. Army War College, was promoted to colonel and then returned to Germany as the 26th Area Support Group Chaplain. The Chief of Chaplains next asked him to close the religious program and chapels on Fort McClellan, Alabama, before returning him to Fort Hood as the III Corps and Installation Chaplain. Two years later, he was assigned as the U.S. Army Pacific Command Chaplain for two years. Prior to retiring from the Army, in 2006, he served as the Director of Information, Resources Management, and Logistics for the Office of the

Chief of Chaplains, Headquarters, Department of the Army, in the Pentagon, Washington, D.C.

The next nine years Chaplain Councill worked in the Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries Departments of the General Conference and North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists as a director and ecclesiastical endorser. He also was the Secretary for the Executive Committee of the National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces, an organization of nearly 200 national faith groups that “loan” their spiritual leaders to serve as chaplains.

He recently completed a three-year term on the National Executive Board for the Military Chaplains Association (MCA). Formed in 1925, Congress chartered MCA in 1950 to promote chaplaincies. Since retiring from denominational employment, Gary actively engages in local pastoral ministry and volunteers as a community chaplain (airport, disaster response, and law enforcement).

For over fifty-four years Chaplain Councill has been the husband of Joyce E. White-Councill. They are the parents of three children: Brenda, a national board-certified teacher and guidance counselor; GS-14 Terry, a researcher for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration; and Larry, a Colonel in the United States Air Force. The Councills have five grandchildren.



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