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Military Service—a Comparative Study Between the New Testament Teaching and the Attitude of German Adventists

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Military service: A comparative study between the New Testament teaching and the attitude of German Adventists

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MILITARY SERVICE—A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING AND THE ATTITUDE OF GERMAN ADVENTISTS

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree
Master of Arts (Religion)

by
Johannes Hartlapp
May 1993
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ABSTRACT

MILITARY SERVICE--A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING AND THE ATTITUDE OF GERMAN ADVENTISTS

by

Johannes Hartlapp

Chair: Andrew G. Mustard
Title: MILITARY SERVICE--A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING AND THE ATTITUDE OF GERMAN ADVENTISTS

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Problem

When World War I broke out German Adventists were obliged to make a basic decision regarding their military service. Their readiness to do active service in the German forces resulted in considerable damage to their relations with the General Conference and Adventists in other countries.

Method

In comparing documents and reconstructing historical events this thesis tries to discover the former position of German Adventists on military service and how it changed.
Historical documents are examined to determine whether or not they support the supposedly traditional Seventh-day Adventist stance on non-combatancy.

Results

The pragmatic decision of the Germans must be seen as a result of their fear of state sanctions. Their attempts to establish a sound theological basis to underpin their decision remain unconvincing and can be no more generalized dogmatically than the non-combatant position born in a democratic environment.

Conclusions

The position regarding military service can be determined only by the individual's sense of responsibility arising from the peace commandment of the Lord.
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XII. SUMMARY 

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Almost fifty years have passed since the end of the Second World War. But the wounds inflicted by the attitude of German Adventists toward the military have not yet fully healed.

The outbreak of the Gulf War caused a very emotional discussion in our American churches about the active participation of young Adventists in the armed conflict. In the debate Brian Strayer, professor of history at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, made the following response to a critical statement:

If Hasel's home country is Germany, then he should know that twice in this century German Seventh-day Adventists enthusiastically supported war and even dictatorship to a degree never seen among American Adventists. European division President Louis R. Conradi led a majority of German Adventists in praying for the Kaiser, bearing arms in his army in World War I, and even attending school and working on Sabbath to support the war. During the 1930s, German Adventists warmly supported Adolf Hitler and his rearmament efforts leading to World War II, as their pamphlets and official church magazines show.¹

However, such an undocumented comment does not correspond to the historical realities. In this thesis it is my aim to make the attitude of the Germans clearer and

thus to tear down walls of prejudice. We must reconstruct the historical sequence of events and try to unearth the theological root causes. But first of all let us have a look at the biblical statements on the issue. In a final step we will juxtapose the attitudes of the German and the American Adventists in those times. In so doing, I will base my brief sketch of the views of American Adventists on the work of certain representative authors.¹

The issue of military service is closely intertwined with the concept of authority. An examination of the Adventists' ethical understanding of the state would go far beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless it would reveal a wide field of unanswered questions regarding the political attitude of Seventh-day Adventists. Some of these attitudes, however, will be touched upon briefly at the end of this treatise.

The description of the attitudes of German Adventists is based exclusively on written documents and uses, as far as possible, only primary sources. This will make for a presentation of the Germans' views that is rich in contrasts. Writing this paper I had a chance to refer to the extensive collection in the Archives for European

Advent History in Darmstadt, the rich holdings of the Ellen G. White Research Centre at Newbold College in Bracknell, England, and the records of German archives, especially the Federal Archive, Potsdam department. The archives of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists remain untapped. In their place, I found rich material in the work of Edward Thomas Decker who, in his account of Seventh-day Adventist history, used the comprehensive collections of the General Conference Archives and gives a thorough survey of the material still held in store there.\(^1\) Little or nothing has hitherto been written and published about the history of German Adventists.\(^3\)

The only work that deals with the whole period of Seventh-day Adventist history in Germany is the one by Jacob M. Patt, "The History of the Advent Movement in Germany" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1958). For the last fifteen years, some publications have dealt with the times of National Socialism but make little reference to Adventist attitudes toward military service.\(^3\) In order to make


\(^2\)Gerhard Padderatz, Conradi und Hamburg (Hamburg: by the author, 1978); Daniel Heinz, Ludwig Richard Conradi, Archives of International Adventist History, vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main, Bern, and New York: Verlag Peter Lang, 1986).

lesser-known resources at least partly available to the reader, excerpts from primary sources will frequently appear in the footnotes.

Some statements about the positions of the Germans and the General Conference on military questions are repeated in church publications without any scrutiny at all. This paper will challenge such "dogmatic" standpoints and contrast them with the following theses:

1. The non-combatant position is one possible practical implementation of the words and acts of Jesus regarding military service.

2. In the American Civil War the first Adventists, including Ellen G. White, did not take a unilateral and absolute noncombatant stand.

3. The first Adventists in Europe and Germany participated in armed military service but often refused to do so on the Sabbath.

4. Since the two World Wars there has not yet been any discussion of the theological foundations behind the different modes of behavior of the Adventists.

5. The Reform Movement came into being not only because of the position of German Adventists during the World War I. While every effort has been made to ensure objectivity, it is recognized that in selecting from the available materials, bias is unavoidable. The paper has also been influenced by the author's own experience in undertaking eighteen months' unarmed military service in the construction battalions of the deceased German Democratic Republic. During that time, he felt mounting doubt over the morality of unarmed military service in whatever form, including Red Cross service, as in the final analysis it does nothing but help cement the existing structures of power.

An analysis of the historical circumstances will probably not be able to heal the wounds in the relations between German and American Adventists. It may, however, contribute to more open discussion and more careful reflection about present positions taken.
CHAPTER II

THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS, JOHN THE BAPTIST AND THE
APOTLES REGARDING STATE POWER AND
MILITARY SERVICE

Christians seek to live according to the will of God. Wherever possible, they pattern their actions on the
lifestyle of Jesus Christ.

Jesus and his apostles said little about the authorities under which they had to live. They did not
develop instructions regarding military service or a doctrine of the state. It was their objective to bring the
kingdom of heaven close to the people. All the statements they made about Jewish or Roman authorities and military
persons must be understood in their immediate historical and cultural context.

Moreover, fundamental issues such as service in the military cannot be answered by the New Testament as there
was no general conscription then. Neither can we find a general answer to the question of how to behave in case of
war.

Nevertheless, Jesus and the apostles came into contact with military officers, civil servants and kings. We will have to ask if Jesus recognized the legitimacy of state power and military service. What was his attitude toward the rulers? Can we find some principles for today?
John the Baptist’s Call to the Soldiers and the King

John the Baptist’s preaching caused anger among his listeners even though he was only proclaiming the long-awaited news that the Kingdom of God was at hand. They expected that John would soon call for a rebellion against the Romans in order to establish the Kingdom of God. Instead, he called for repentance. The biblical story in Luke 3:14 reports the question posed by soldiers and John’s answer. Probably the soldiers were Roman mercenaries serving Herod Antipas. The Baptist now asked these pagan warriors to obey the orders of their superiors and not to rob or blackmail.

The tax collectors and soldiers are therefore not to give up their profession but the sins of their profession. As converted soldiers and tax collectors they are to bring forth the good fruits of repentance.

John’s highly explosive remarks about the unlawful marriage of his king to the wife of his stepbrother eventually brought him imprisonment and death. Mark reports that John was becoming politically dangerous for Herod Antipas (Mark 5:20). This was not only because of his criticism about Herod’s marriage but because he confronted him with all the evil which he had done during his time of

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1 At that time there were no Jewish soldiers. Herod the Great had dissolved their last battalions because he distrusted them.

2 Fritz Rienecker, Das Evangelium des Lukas (Berlin: Evangelische Haupt-Bibelgesellschaft, 1965), 92.

The Political Behaviour of Jesus Christ and His Attitude toward the Roman State, Soldiers and Weapons

It cannot be denied that Jesus behaved politically. He addressed the entire spectrum of social and political life in the Palestine of his day. We do not encounter any general questioning of the society around him, nor do we find in his utterings any unconditional agreement with it.

In Mark 10:42 Jesus spoke openly of the violence of worldly authorities and contrasted it with the behaviour of God's children. With a certain irony he described the rulers of his time as persons who called themselves well-doers even though they governed in a most despotic way (Luke 22:25). He also attacked the prevalent religious morals when pointing to the practice of divorce, the perversion of the Sabbath commandment (Mark 10:2-12; 2:23-3:6), the narrow interpretation of tithing and their hypocrisy. His contacts with sinners, prostitutes, drinkers and publicans caused a great stir and was even misunderstood by his disciples.

Finally, the Sanhedrin became afraid of the political danger emanating from this Jesus (John 11:48). But the conversations of the captured Jesus with Pilate showed clearly that Christ's political criticism was always

\[^1\text{Matt 23:23; Luke 18:9-14; Mark 12:40.}\]
\[^2\text{Luke 7:36-50; 9:12; 15:2; Matt 11:19.}\]
secondary to his mission. He recognised the authorities of this world and while retaining his inner "freedom of a Christian man" who, as a "perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all", was at the same time a "perfectly free lord of all, subject to no one."¹

By asking him sly questions the Jewish teachers of the law tried in vain to unmask Jesus as an enemy of the Romans and an opponent of the state. The best known is where they asked him whether it was right to pay tax to the emperor.² What they had in mind was the Roman poll tax. Paying it implied recognition of the rule of the Caesars.³ Jesus' response: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's", means that the one who issued the money is the lord, and it is God who installs and dethrones these lords (Dan 2:21; John 19:11). Jesus' second demand, "Render to God the things that are God's", not only applies to specific issues such as the right to mint coins but to God's claim to total loyalty. Jesus clearly stated

That we know that all decisions we make in this world are provisional and perishable and we should never hang our hearts on them. On the other hand, our decisions


²Mark 12:14. Literally: "May we pay tax to the emperor?"

³For devout Jews the Roman poll tax created a conflict of conscience which they tried to appease by not looking at the emperor's image on the coin when paying this tax. Zealots refused to pay altogether. They only recognised one Lord over Israel, Jahweh.
must at the same time show clearly that we make them in the face of the Lord.¹

Visiting Jericho, Jesus invited himself to the house of the generally-hated tax collector Zacchaeus. There is not the slightest indication in the New Testament text that Jesus asked Zacchaeus or the Centurion of Capernaum to give up their jobs. Like John the Baptist, Jesus did not condemn publicans and soldiers. He accepted their professions but also made it clear that conversion was not only possible for them but even mandatory. When calling the tax collector Levi to follow him, he demonstrated that it was his objective neither to change the structures of society and establish theocratic order, nor to engage in a one-sided upgrading of worldly occupations. The command, "Follow me" (Luke 5:27), which puts Jesus’ proclamation into a nutshell, was aimed at a personal conversion, at a lifestyle in accordance with the principles of God’s kingdom (as reported in the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5-7) and thus at an active preparation for the coming Kingdom. Only if we pay attention to the constantly dominating eschatological dimension in Jesus’ conversations and sermons will we see that in all the decisions concerning our lives here and now Jesus always proceeded from the maxim that "no man can serve two masters" (Matt 6:24).

In the garden of Gethsemane, Peter took up his sword

¹Fritz Rienecker, Das Evangelium des Matthäus (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus Verlag, 1974), 298.
to defend the Lord. But Jesus rejected Peter's help saying, "all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matt 26:52). Christ was certainly thinking of the God-given order of creation as described in Genesis 9:6 which he had come to re-establish. That is why he rejected any implementation of faith by military force. But Jesus went further. By the reconciliation of God he invalidated the terrible logic of sin which, by the use of violence, creates counter-violence. This actually is the key to the Sermon on the Mount which is the "constitutional law" of the divine Kingdom. Jesus even specified the sixth commandment by condemning not only the deed but even the thought of taking revenge (Matt 5:22). Above all is the command to "love your enemies, . . . pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you" (Matt 5:44). Thus, war becomes unthinkable and the necessity to wage it is never given. It is only logical that the Messiah calls the peacemakers and pacifists "blessed" (Matt 5:9). They were not to resist evil, "but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matt 5:39). In other words, it is better to suffer injustice than to do wrong. On Calvary the Messiah showed what he had meant by his words.

**Concept of the State in the New Testament**

The concept of the state is foreign to the New Testament. It has its origin in pagan antiquity. Its place is taken in the New Testament by the concept of government ("power"). The term 'state' means an ordered community; government is the power which creates and maintains order. The term 'state' embraces both the rulers and the ruled; the term 'government' refers only
to the rulers. The concept of the *polis*, which is a constituent of the concept of the state, is not necessarily connected with the concept of *exousia*. For the New Testament the *polis* is an eschatological concept; it is the future city of God, the new Jerusalem, the heavenly society under the rule of God. The term government does not essentially refer to the earthly *polis*; it may go beyond it; it is, for example, applicable even in the smallest form of community, in the relation of father and child or of the master and servant. The term government does not, therefore, imply any particular form of society or any particular form of state. Government is divinely ordained authority to exercise worldly dominion by divine right.²

Proceeding from this definition it seems unnecessary to ask for which forms of government the New Testament guidelines were given. The world of Jesus and his contemporaries was full of despots who in their application of power in most cases acted irresponsibly.

The theological explanation of worldly authority is not found in the words of Jesus but in Paul's writings. "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist" (Col 1:16-17). From this perspective, Christ is the Lord of all authority (Matt 28:18) by whom he has brought reconciliation on the cross (Col 1:20). This also defines the scope of action for all authorities. They are not God in themselves but they have received a commission (1 Pet 2:14) for which they will

one day be made accountable before their creator. In their duty to obey, the believers are bound to their creator and his order. In the view of the authorities, they are obliged to obey . . . until government openly denies its divine commission and thereby forfeits its claim. In cases of doubt obedience is required; for the Christian does not bear the responsibility of government. But if government violates or exceeds its commission at any point, for example by making itself master over the belief of the congregation, then at this point, indeed, obedience is to be refused, for conscience’ sake, for the Lord’s sake. It is not however, permissible to generalize from this offence and to conclude that this government now possesses no claim to obedience in some of its other demands, or even in all its demands. Disobedience can never be anything but a concrete decision in a single particular case.

State Power in Revelation 13

Anyone who tries to interpret the Book of Revelation from an historical perspective will be confronted with the antichrist who is explicitly described in chapter 13. Revelation, in contrast to the other New Testament books, was written in times of more intensive persecution of Christians, especially the first unrelenting persecutions under Emperor Domitian (AD 81-96). The reason for this was the godly veneration dominus ac deus which the emperor already claimed for himself during his lifetime. Anyone who refused to acknowledge this claim was persecuted relentlessly. The entire book, and especially chapter 13, becomes transparent before this historical background. The

\(^1\) Bonhoeffer, 342-343.
rising beast in this chapter unites the beastly features of the four beasts in Daniel 7. It is so terrifying that it devours virtually everything. "From the apocalyptic perspective of the seer and thus of God the Roman Empire is the culmination of all nastiness and has become an antigodly power. It embodies a degenerate political power."¹ As the beast receives its authority to exercise power from Satan, the Christians in Rome considered it to be the embodiment of satanic power. As the beast appears at the same time as a devilish caricature of Christ (Rev 13:2-4), the state becomes the antichrist, the opponent of God. The antichrist requires for himself what is due to Christ and God alone. It is the totalitarian state. In spite of all this, John calls for neither holy war nor combat but instead advocates non-violent and passive resistance. "Here is the patience and the faith of the saints" (Rev 13:10).

Christians and Military Service in the New Testament and the Early Church

The proclamation of the first Christians continued the Old Testament practice of proving scripture by scripture. Old Testament language was used. The writings of the apostles contain many military images.² The "armour of God" in Ephesians 6:11-17 was a term well understood by


²2 Cor 10:3-4; 1 Tim 1:18; Rom 6:13.
the people.\(^1\) Thus, antecedent military metaphors were very popular in the proclamation of the gospel. This did not mean a glorification of the military, but of God. These people still thought in a genuinely Old Testament way that God was acting as a warrior and ordering the world according to his will and with the assistance of his people.\(^2\)

Some of the apostles had some experience in the use of weapons. Peter knew something about this and, as a devout Pharisee, Saul/Paul had been persecuting the Christians with the use of weapons. Among the first Christians there were also soldiers (Act 16:33; 13:12). The first heathen Christian who manifested the miracle of the baptism of the spirit was the Roman officer Cornelius (Act 10:44). Paul had no inhibitions about converting soldiers. During his captivity in Rome he even preached the gospel to the pretorians, the emperor's personal bodyguard.\(^3\)

Apparently there were more than soldiers among the first Christians. As the Roman army was mostly composed of mercenaries from alien and occupied nations, the acceptance of the gospel also meant a new social standing for them.

\(^1\)Old Testament parallels are Ps 18:33; 33:20; 91:4; Isa 59:17; Jer 25:29.

\(^2\)This manner of speaking has been retained to this day even by the Adventist Church when we speak of an evangelistic "crusade" or sing songs calling for "the trumpets to sound". We do not know, however, how much of the Old Testament concepts have really been retained, as the New Testament calls the Word of God our only legitimate weapon in this world.

\(^3\)Act 22:27; 27:31-43; Phil 1:13.
In the Roman army the number of Christians rose very quickly. We not only hear of common soldiers but also of officers who confessed the Lord. In order to get Christians into the army the heathen officers in many cases seem to have relieved them from swearing an oath on the flag and of sacrificing to the emperor. In many other situations they must have been magnanimous to them, just to keep these wonderful people. The legions on the Rhine were so strongly populated with Christians that very early they exercised some missionary power on their environment. On the other hand, the influence of Christian soldiers within the church must have been great as there were so many in it that certain military expressions were picked up by the Christian language. The Christians called fasting "statio" which means "keeping guard" and heathens were called "paganus" which in soldiers' diction meant "civilian"--as the heathen is no fighter for God.¹

This time of soldiers' conversion must have been relatively short. As is evident in the New Testament, the early church demanded that all catechumens with occupations irreconcilable with belief in Christ give them up before admission to baptism.² Before the time of Constantine, the reasons for refusal on the part of Christians to join the military service have been summarized by Adolf von Harnack as follows:

1. It was an occupation of war, and Christianity rejected war and the shedding of blood.
2. The officers had, under certain conditions, to order executions.
3. The common soldiers had to obey unconditionally.
4. Unconditional obedience to the oath on the flag and unconditional obedience to God were irreconcilable.
5. The emperor cult was nowhere as pronounced as in the

¹Ernst Ferdinand Klein, Zeitbilder aus der Kirchengeschichte (Berlin: Deutsche Evangelische Buch- und Traktat-Gesellschaft, 1926), 56.

²Among the forbidden occupations were those having to do with fornication or idolatry, especially hunters, comedians, actors, stock merchants, gladiators and soldiers. Cf. Acts 15:20; 21:25.
army and was almost unavoidable for the soldiers.
6. The officers had to offer sacrifice to the emperor's genius and the soldiers had to take part.
7. The military insignia were sacred pagan symbols and their veneration was therefore idolatry; at the same time military decorations were idolatrous.
8. The behaviour of soldiers even in peacetime was at odds with Christian ethics (e.g. blackmail, lasciviousness).
9. The traditional rough games and jokes in the army were objectionable and in many cases had something to do with idolatry and feasts of the gods.¹

The refusal of military service was measured by the same axiom that had been so important in the life of Jesus—no one can serve two lords. The soldiers' oath demanded unconditional obedience to the emperor. Thus the first, not the sixth commandment, became a touchstone for them. "Not the killing makes a person godless, but it is the godless one who kills. Such refusals to serve in the military must be understood not by the doing but by the being."² Although the church eventually aligned with the state and the military authorities tried to erase the records of the martyrdom of Christian soldiers, many of their names, such as Pachomius and Martin of Tours, remain known to this day.

Although wide circles of the early church led by Origen, Tertullian, Cyprian and Lactanctius rejected

¹Adolf von Harnack, Militia Christi (Berlin: Verlag A. Deichert, 1901), 70.
²Walter Dignath-Düren, Kirche, Krieg, Kriegsdienst (Hamburg-Volksdorf: Herbert Reich, Evangelischer Verlag, 1955), 18.
military service, there continued to be many Christian soldiers and officers who were able to reconcile their job with their Christian conscience. It was only toward the end of the third century that Diocletian dismissed large numbers of Christians from the army during a military reform. At the same time, the first signs of a shift from an eschatological-ethical emphasis to an ascetic-monastic one became visible in the church. It was no longer a decision of conscience that made people refuse to serve in the army, but the idea of heavenly recompense that generated withdrawal from the world. Thus, the conscientious objector Pachomius became the founder of common monastic life. Under Constantine, these attitudes developed further. Even when the official church later came into existence, the idea of the irreconcilability of military service and the discipleship of Christ remained unaltered. In contrast to the laity, the clergy, i.e. the monks and priests, were exempt from military duties.

\(^1\) Karl Barth, Die kirchliche Dogmatik (Zöllikon and Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1951), 3, bk. 4:521.

\(^2\) Ibid. 522.
CHAPTER III
"KINGDOM" AND "WAR" IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

The Sovereignty of the Creator

For the people of Israel there was none greater than Jahweh. The mere mention of his name was something so holy that they even avoided doing so. For them, God reigned as sovereign over everything. When after the temptation in paradise and the fall the sovereignty of God was at stake, Jahweh stood by the people who faithfully obeyed him. The Bible reports Noah’s faithfulness when building the ark in these words: "By his faith he condemned the world" (Heb 11:7 NIV). Thus God’s acting in this world, his loving admonition to obey and the conviction of evil became doubly evident since the fall. Blessing or curse (Deut 30) was the choice presented to the people of Israel by Moses on behalf of God. These are the two ways in which God acts in a world fallen in sin. Both seek the same goal: "... that all people of the earth may know thy name, to fear thee, as do thy people Israel" (1 Kgs 8:43).

By a covenant God had made Abraham and his descendants the instruments of his action. But the path of the people of Israel was leading farther and farther away from him. They no longer acted according to the Lord’s will in their lives and for that reason could no more pass on his
will to the peoples that surrounded them. Finally the
heathen fulfilled the Creator's will with regard to Israel
(Isa 45:1-7). In spite of Israel's failure God remained the
sovereign. He gave Israel another chance which again the
people did not use. They did not even acknowledge Jesus
Christ who lived out what God had in mind for his people.
Full of sorrow he had to say: "The kingdom of God shall be
taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the
fruits thereof" (Matt 21:43). It is often overlooked that
the context of this statement is freedom of choice. The
choice of Israel and her fall were both part of God's
sovereign action as "this is the Lord's doing" (Matt 21:42).
The following verse then shows that God will also in future
remain the boundless and governing Lord: "And whosoever
shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever
it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Matt 21:44).

The apostles considered themselves messengers of God
for the eternal gospel of blessing and curse, salvation and
judgment. Their dominant eschatology underlined the
provisionality of everything worldly, inclusive of all human
authority. The destination of human history "in the
dispensation of the fulness of times" is to "gather
together in one all things in Christ, both which are in
heaven, and which are on earth" (Eph 1:10). Eventually

\[^{1}\text{It is noteworthy here that the composite of kairos
and pleroma, or the verb pleroo in the New Testament, is
used for stages in God's great plan of salvation and for his
unobstructed acting. Cf. Acts 2:1; Gal 4:4, Mark 1:15.}\]
God's sovereignty will be reestablished on earth in a way that is visible to all. Until then, however, the events of past and present are nothing but a prelude leading to the great finale.

**Kingdom of God and the Kingdoms of This World**

In the Old Testament, Jahweh appeared as the King of the people of Israel. He gave laws and orders and revealed his will to the prophet; and by the casting of lots. The installed leaders of Israel were his deputies who directed the fate of the people not out of their own authority but God's (Exod 3:10; Num 27:18-21). Israel was to be a people of God in which the principles of his government on earth were to be made transparent, as a lasting memory of paradise (Exod 19:5-6). In this time of theocracy, the spiritual and political leadership were two sides of the same coin. During the time of the judges this double function was still retained yet the people resisted this kind of leadership. Finally, the corruption of the priestly sons of the prophet Samuel resulted in the first election of a king in Israel. In so doing, the Israelites had cast God aside as their king (1 Sam 8:7-8). Saul still accepted some measure of guidance from the prophet Samuel and in David we see that the offices of prophet and king are united in one person. Under King David's successors, however, spiritual and political power were separated still further. The kings that followed were no longer willing to obey God and even began to persecute his prophets.
Devout Jews had hopes for a renewed theocratic leadership of their nation after the Babylonian exile. It was mostly the messianic promises that pointed to a future theocracy in Israel and the surrounding nations.\footnote{Isa 11:1; 19:22-25; Jer 33:15-16.} Yet this was all so fraught with ideas of worldly kingdoms that they did not recognize that the kingdom of God which John the Baptist and Jesus had come to proclaim had already begun. They simply could not understand that it was not the descent from Abraham but the "birth from above" that would provide access to this Kingdom. Jesus identified himself as a king upon entry into Jerusalem and in his appearances before both the Sanhedrin and Pilate.\footnote{Matt 21:1-11; 26:63-64; John 18:36-38.} But he also said unmistakably that his kingdom was "not of this world" and that the weapons of flesh and blood could not be used to establish it. Thus, he removed all legitimacy from any religious power that has since claimed to build the Kingdom of God by the application of armed force.

In the beginning the apostles still had problems in understanding what constituted the kingdom of God (Acts 1:6), but then they began to realise that the believer is part and parcel of God's Kingdom in the present (Col 1:13; Phil 3:20). It is from that Kingdom that the Christian receives his orders although he still lives in this world and is subject to human forces (John 17:15). In the
tensions that result from this dual citizenship, a part of the future, unfinished, comprehensive basileia theou becomes visible, even today. The national, social and religious barriers which formed the foundations for the kingdoms of this world no longer exist in the church (Gal 3:28). Instead, reconciliation and love are decisive for citizenship in the kingdom of God (Matt 25:31-46). When Jesus returns and the judgment is held, the Lord's Kingdom will once again be set up on the earth. Then it will be said, "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev 11:15).

From Holy War to the Faithful Struggle of the Believers

The people of Israel saw God's call as taking place in a concrete historical situation, especially during the wars that threatened its existence.¹ At the same time, these wars were a judgment on the heathen (1 Sam 28:18). It was God himself who waged the wars for his people. He was in supreme command and was present through the ark.² A comparison of the wars of Israel up to the times of the kings reveals a nearly identical procedure each time. First there was the blowing of the trumpet and the sending out of

¹See, e.g., Exod 15.

²Josh 10:14; Deut 20; Num 14:42; Josh 3:11; 1 Sam 4:6-7.
messengers calling for them to follow (Judg 6:34, 3:27; 1 Sam 13:3). The men who were gathered in the camp along with their weapons (2 Sam 1:21) had been dedicated to the Lord (Josh 3:5; 1 Sam 21:6). The camp community had to be ritually cleansed (Deut 23:10-15). The fearful (Judg 7:3) and others freed from the duty to serve for war were taken aside (Deut 20:1-9). In the camp, ceremonies of repentance and sacrifices were held (Judg 20:23,26; 1 Sam 11:4; 30:4; 7:9; 13:9f). It was essential that God's approval be sought to ensure the success of the enterprise (Judg 20:23,27). Subsequently, it was proclaimed that God had given the whole land (Josh 2:24, Judg 18:10), the city (Josh 6:16; 8:18), the enemies (Judg 3:28) or the camp of the adversaries (7:9,15) into the hands of the Israelites or their representatives. Certainty of victory, even before the battle was fought, was a typical feature of these godly wars.¹

As God himself ordered and waged these wars the booty was placed under a ban, i.e. it was dedicated to the Lord. Often the warriors of Israel did not have to take up arms at all to fight for victory, as the Lord simply terrified their adversaries (Josh 10:10). They only had to follow after and utterly destroy them. In spite of the brutalities, holy wars are "never imperialistic wars of

¹See, Werner H. Schmidt and Gerhard Delling, Wörterbuch zur Bibel (Berlin: Evangelische Haupt-Bibelgesellschaft, 1972), 339.
conquest, but in every case a securing of the right to live granted to the people of Israel by Jahweh.1 As it was God's own war, he was considered to be the great warrior, shield, sword and banner of Israel.2

As much as Israel, from its very beginning, time and again experienced the "Yes" of its God when he granted them victory over their enemies, so the Old Testament has a lively knowledge of the fact that Jahweh is always free to grant or refuse victory to his people according to his will.3

The time of holy wars gradually came to an end when, during David's reign, a professional army was built up (1 Sam 13:2; 14:52). The wars were no longer directed by the spiritual leaders, but by military men in accordance with their own ideas and without asking for the advice of God. Hand in hand came a religious decay of the people, so that in the end God had to make alien nations judges over his people. God's judgment over his people was brought, among others, by Hasael of Damascus, the Assyrians and finally by Nebuchadnezzar.4 During these times of need the prophets began to proclaim the future realm of peace of the Messiah where all weapons would be destroyed and swords would be turned into ploughshares, and in which the Messiah


2Ps 24:8; Exod 15:3; Isa 63:1-6; Deut 33:29; Exod 17:15.

3Zimmerli, Grundriß, 52.

would rule as the prince of peace in righteousness.¹ The good message now was: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth" (Isa 52:7).

Jesus and his apostles continued this idea of peace. First and foremost they stressed the need to be reconciled with God and one another. In his sermon on the Mount, Jesus rejected any killing at all. He even expanded the sixth commandment of the decalogue and demanded that it be understood in its full sense: blessed are the peacemakers.

The new element in his messianic message was:

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.²

War in the New Testament is spoken of almost exclusively in parables and comparisons (1 Cor 9:7; 14:8) or in reference to the life of faith. The spiritual armour, the weapons of God, the missionary attack of the fighters of Christ and other images illustrate a life of discipleship.³

Only at the end of this world does war again become paramount. Jesus foresaw terrible wars (Matt 24:21) and in

¹Isa 11; Zech 9:10; Hag 2:22; Mic 5:9, Ezek 39:9; Isa 2:4; Mic 4:3.

²John 13:34-35.

³1 Thess 5:8; Eph 6:10-17; 2 Cor 10:4.
his Revelation, John pictured the wars that will finally lead up to the last conflict. In this nutshell description of world history one thing becomes very clear: the author of war is Satan (Rev 12:9). In the form of antichrist and beast, he fights God and the church. At the end of this age, God will once again appear in his son, Jesus Christ, as a warrior in the form of a white rider (Rev 19:11). That is to say, in the final battle the righteousness of God, put in doubt by the fall, will be re-established. Thus, the cause for all war—sin—will be no more.
CHAPTER IV
INTERPRETATIONS IN CHURCH HISTORY

The preaching in the New Testament church was permeated by the outstanding call of "maranatha!", the Lord is coming. Yet as early as the second century there occurred "a decisive break in the history of Christendom which in its relevance can be compared to all other great intersections of this kind, including the Reformation."¹ The parousia was postponed and reinterpreted until finally it took on a new meaning in the lives of many Christians. The transformations that took place under Emperor Constantine speeded up this process and undermined the ethical principles of the early Christians. Thus, a change also occurred in their attitude toward military service and the state. The synod held in the presence of Contantine at Arles in A.D. 314 on the one hand required, in the old style, that drivers and actors give up their jobs before being baptized as they could not be members of the church as long as they were practising these occupations. On the other hand, the same synod threatened conscientious objectors with the highest church punishment possible—excommunication. It became apparent that these

leaders

... took the conditions and laws of this passing world more seriously than the prospect of the coming of the Lord. Thus they had evidently given up the ethical criterion without the application of which in this age the Christian will and action must get out of control.\(^1\)

With the loss of the immediate expectation of the Lord’s return, the Christian state gained an unheard of importance. The state was held responsible for the preservation and defence of the Christian faith and for putting into practice the missionary task given by Jesus. Thus, the institution of the state had received a virtual carte blanche to wage war under the pretext of preserving the faith. The necessary theological foundations provided by Athanasius, Ambrosius and most of all Augustine (who worked primarily under the invasion of Gothic intrusions into the Roman Empire) led to the ideas of a holy and just war.

New eras in church history brought new interpretations of the return of Jesus and, for that matter, of the onset of God’s government. The church has always been influenced by contemporary conditions and it found different answers to the challenges of the Kingdom of God.

Augustine and the Traditional Catholic Interpretation

In his most famous book De civitate Dei Augustine divides the world into God’s church (civitas Dei) which he

\(^1\)Barth, Dogmatik, vol. II, 521.
likens to progress, and the kingdom of the fallen prince of
the angels (civitas diaboli) which he describes with images
of decay. Applying this pattern to secular and church
history he judged the Roman state rather negatively but also
considered it a part of the godly order. Although the
entire world was longing for peace, the pax Augustea did not
bring it about. It was only the pax Christi that definitely
changed the world. For that matter, the church was
dependent on the power of the Christian Roman Empire to
build up the God-state, something that Augustine utilized
with his suppression of the Donatists. It was his belief
that the Kingdom of God would triumph in the shape of the
church and a golden age would commence.

As Augustine did not underestimate sinful human
nature he only asked of the "simple" builders of the Kingdom
of God (i.e. the laity) that they should live according to
the Ten Commandments whereas the clergy and monks were
required to act according to the principles of the Sermon on
the Mount. In mutual solidarity both groups formed the
corpus christianum. From such a perspective the ethical
demands of Jesus were of relevance only to the spiritual
profession. In a Christian state the laity has no right
whatsoever to criticise. Decisions of conscience are
necessary only in an non-Christian state. Beyond that,

. . . the juxtaposition of the Christian and the
antichristian as contained in the principal doctrines of
Augustine resulted in the idea of a God-willed struggle
between the Christian realm and the nonchristian powers
of this world. This was the intellectual foundation for
the justification of the crusades.¹

The Enthusiasts and Their Literal Application of the Sermon on the Mount

Since the Franciscan movement, the entire history of the church has been influenced by the idea of a literal application of the Sermon on the Mount. The small groups which propounded this idea were usually called enthusiasts or fanatics. As followers of Christ they tried to apply his words to the letter. They held that the basis for all life together must be the Sermon on the Mount which supplants all other valid laws. Neither violence, oaths nor military service were permissible. As this radical view underestimated the reality of sin and the power of Satan it remained limited to a small, often bloodily persecuted, minority.

The Radical Reformers of the Anabaptists and Thomas Müntzer

The starting point of this attitude was similar to that of the "enthusiasts", as Luther called them. Beyond that, some of the radical reformers were not satisfied with the prospects of a coming Kingdom of God. They wanted to have it here and now. Thus, they placed beside (and above) the demands of the Sermon on the Mount the idea of the Old Testament theocracy. This concept culminated in a bloodbath in the Munster Kingdom of Zion in 1534/35 brought about by a

confrontation with the state. The principles of the Sermon on the Mount cannot be applied by law and force. Thomas Müntzer\(^1\) had already stressed, several years before, the social component of the Sermon on the Mount. But his concept of the state was more dominant. "It was not the duty of the serfs to obey and the godly legitimation of the authorities by Romans 13:1ff that was at the centre of attention, but the duty of the authorities toward their subjects according to Romans 13:3ff."\(^2\) As soon as the state violated this duty to protect the right faith, Müntzer considered it a tyranny which he, "the Gideon with the sword", must resist.

**Luther’s Doctrine of the Two Regiments**

Martin Luther’s point of departure is built on Augustine’s understanding of the state. Yet he underlined more clearly the difference between the two kingdoms.\(^3\) In contrast to Augustine, Luther stressed the general

\(^1\) Although Thomas Müntzer was not an Anabaptist, his understanding of the State came near to the Anabaptist position.


\(^3\) Luther himself never used the word of the "doctrine of the two kingdoms" expressis verbis himself. When he spoke of the worldly kingdom as being in contrast to the spiritual or heavenly one, he thought not only of the state and the authorities as such but also the realms of nature, family, the sciences and arts. The generally-used expression, "the doctrine of the two kingdoms", to describe the relation of church and state is therefore too narrow an interpretation of Luther’s intentions.
priesthood of saints. The Christian is at all times required to obey the new commands of Jesus (the spiritual regiment) and the worldly regiment of God (the state which he likens to the New Testament "law"). For that matter, he must live in both areas. As a Christian he belongs to the kingdom of Christ; as a citizen of this world he belongs to this worldly kingdom. The new commandment of non-violence and the suffering of injustice must be applied when it comes to one's own rights. The rejection of injustice by armed force is also necessary when it comes to protecting one's neighbour.

In this way the two propositions are brought into harmony with one another: at one and the same time you satisfy God's kingdom inwardly and the kingdom of the world outwardly. You suffer evil and injustice, and yet at the same time you punish evil and injustice; you do not resist evil, and yet at the same time, you do resist it. In the one case, you consider yourself and what is yours; in the other, you consider your neighbor and what is his.1

This principle of Luther did not stand up to practical application. When is only my concern at stake? As the ruler in a Protestant land was also the primus episkopus in his area, it was he who made the decisions for war and peace on behalf of the church. Thus, the single Christian was relieved of a decision of conscience. State protestantism finally resulted in a perversion of the power of princes and kings, something that Luther himself wanted

to avoid by all means. It is not widely known that "Luther asserted it is not only a right but a duty to resist" [from an ecclesial perspective and only in the area of church].

The God-state of Calvin

In contrast to the West European state church and the governmental church regiment in Germany, Calvin developed a model of an omnipotent God-state. He considered the institution of the authorities (without any limitations to political power) to be so much the order of God that there was no more separation of church and state for him. He thought the linkage of both necessary, as only in this way could God's commandments and the proclamation of the Kingdom of God have a public effect. The relations between the authorities and the subjects were essentially determined by mutual duties.

This 'lawful state' has in the centre of its being a mutual obligation, the contractual nature given by creation's order of lower and higher. This limits and spells out the mutual duties and rights of the authorities and its subjects.

This absolute view of the idea of subordination created a state in which intolerance held sway. "Thus in Geneva there arose a kind of theocracy, a mixture of church and state with very strict church and moral laws. A sin

1Bernhard Lohse, Martin Luther (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1987), 193.

against God was a sin against the state."¹

Newer approaches, whether born out of theory or practice, more or less followed similar lines of tradition and radicalized or liberalized them.² As the attitude toward state power must always be tested by practice, the search for applicable and practical answers will always be susceptible to error. Anyone who analyses the position of the German Adventists toward the demands of the authorities in the First and Second World Wars will become painfully aware of this.


²It was especially neo-protestantism (Ritschl’s character ethics [Gesinnungsethik] and Schweitzer’s interim ethics [Interimsethik]), the experiences of the two World Wars (Bultmann, Barth, Bonhoeffer, Gollwitzer), the liberation movements (theology of liberation, Gutierrez, Moltmann) and communist dictatorships (Schönherr) that required new answers.
CHAPTER V

THE CONCEPT OF THE STATE IN 19TH CENTURY GERMANY

In the beginning of the last century three factors had a decisive influence on the German concept of the state. In Germany, in contrast to other European states, the French Revolution gave a new lease of life to the idea of "holy" and "just" war, an idea seriously questioned during the Enlightenment.

Both expressions stem from the world of Augustine. In his view, war must always be waged to achieve peace. "Warring itself is no sin, but warring to loot, this is sin."¹ Thomas Aquinas developed this idea further and spelt out three basic conditions for a just war: 1. legitimized authority, 2. just cause, and 3. good intention. To a large extent, Martin Luther took over this concept which has stayed alive into this century. The idea of a holy war is founded on Christian triumphalism which is based on the words of Jesus: "Compel them to come in" (Luke 14:23). The choice of the means to implement this commission, which was to be made very restrictively, was still an issue many years later. Thus, a direct line can be drawn from Augustine to

the crusades, the wars of the Albigenses, the Inquisition, the executions of Huss and Servetus and to the martyrs of the Reformation and the religious wars.

In addition, pietism (which was a protest movement against Lutheran orthodoxy) promoted traditional Protestant authoritarian thinking. The passivity of pietism with regard to political and civic duties thus evidently relieved the authorities from any necessity of correction by the Word of God. The limitations of personal piety left no place for an ethic of state. Individuals were responsible for their private sphere and their own bliss; the state, for war.

The Wars of Liberation in 1813/14 also had a decisive bearing on the German concept of the state. The alien domination by the French promoted a national awakening previously unseen in German history. The idea of the crusades was revived in a secularized, idealistic and nationalistic form. Among other ways, this found its expression in many songs. One by Ernst Moritz Arndt may serve as an example:

Let roar what may roar,
in fire bright and hot.
German men, unite to wage a holy war!
And lift your hearts to heaven,
and heavenwise your hands,
and shout, you men of war:
The yoke is dead and gone.¹

Philosophers such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and most of all Johann Gottlieb Fichte, provided the

¹Ernst Moritz Arndt, Lieder für Teutsche von E. M. Arndt (Berlin: Morave & Scheffelt, 1913), 19.
theoretical foundation for excessive German nationalism. War was given a "higher" and more "noble" objective, until by the time of the First World War it was said: "Our soldiers are not only warriors for our homes and our country, for our king and our motherland, but they form the armies of God and in His service and they sacrifice themselves as His officers and servants." ¹

With some exceptions, German Protestantism continued to make a link between throne and altar. Until the breakdown of the German monarchy the Kaiser was also the summus episkopus and, understandably, in Prussia he used this role to quench any democratic and pacifist tendencies from the outset. As he held his office "by the grace of God", he believed himself divinely authorised to do as he pleased. Carried away by the idea that they were to be true missionaries of Christendom and a bulwark against all enemies (Catholicism and, after World War I, the Jews, western libertinism and most of all eastern Bolshevism), most Germans were ready to accept enthusiastically their "outstanding historic mission." Few Germans questioned the implementation of monarchic orders. At least since Bismarck, there was a clear-cut difference between national ethics and private morals. This, among other things, explains why so many Germans readily took up Hitler's call for a crusade against Bolshevism and the Jews, the more so ²

¹Westfälisches Sonntagsblatt für Stadt und Land, June 16, 1916.
as he did it in the name of the "Almighty" and the "divine destiny" he had in mind for the German people. Such familiar "Christian" vocabulary did not miss its point either.
CHAPTER VI
THE ATTITUDE OF ADVENTISTS DURING THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

Before World War I, Adventists had little experience of how to behave in the case of war. In most countries church membership was very low, so that questions of military service remained marginal. The only indication may be the attitude of American Adventists during the Civil War of 1861-65. An assessment is hampered by the fact that most Adventists lived at that time in the Northern states and that the young Adventist church considered the war a just one, as the abolition of slavery in the Southern states was on the agenda.

At the beginning of the Civil War the government recruited soldiers on a voluntary basis. As numbers were few, they were offered advance payment. When this proved unsuccessful and the general draft appeared unavoidable, James White published an editorial on the matter entitled "The Nation" in The Review and Herald on August 12, 1862.1 His words expressed the following basic ideas:

1. The demands of war are contrary to the fourth and

1James White, "The Nation," The Review and Herald, August 12, 1862, 84.
sixth commandments. "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."

2. Adventists owe a lot of good to their Christian
American government. That is why the state has a right,
according to Matthew 22:21, to demand the things "which are
Caesar’s." "Those who despise the civil law, should at once
pack up and be off for some spot on God’s foot-stool where
there is no civil law."

3. Anyone who agrees to be subject to the lordship
of God lives as an exemplary citizen and strictly adheres to
the constitution. That is why Adventists are "the last men
to ‘sneak’ off to Canada, or to Europe, or to stand
trembling in their shoes for fear of a military draft."

4. "When it shall come to this, that civil
enactments shall be passed and enforced to drive us from
obedience to the law of God, to join those who are living in
rebellion against the government of heaven, see Rev. xiii,
15-17, then it will be time to stand our chances of
martyrdom."

One month later, John H. Waggoner expanded this
point of view by adding that the drafting of soldiers is not
a response to pressure but a necessity, because the
existence of any human government depends on its military
might. In this case, the purpose of the draft was not to
cause oppression but was for defence. In this regard, no parallels can be drawn with the persecutions of the Acts of the Apostles and the book of Daniel. "Anyone who draws parallels here does not keep an eye on the motives without which moral actions can never be judged correctly." This generated varied reactions in the congregations. Whilst some agreed with the authors' points of view, others called them murderers and Sabbath violators. In the State of Iowa a group of full conscientious objectors was formed.  

Half a year later, Ellen G. White sought to mediate between the two opposing positions. She pleaded for circumspect actions, not for rash objections. "What they thought to be faith, was only fanatical presumption." One should face the authorities and explain one's point of view; though genuine Christians could not voluntarily take part in the Civil War. "I saw that it is our duty in every case to obey the laws of our land, unless they conflict with the higher law which God spoke with an audible voice from Sinai, and afterward engraved on stone with His own finger."  

In March 1863 the Northern states proclaimed the general draft. But it was possible to avoid it by a

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2 Davis, Conscientious Cooperators, 59-69.  
4 Ibid., 361.
substitute payment of 300 dollars. From the spring of 1864 non-combatant services were accepted. But Adventists did not avail themselves of this option; they tried to raise the money just as in 1861 they had already collected advance money for voluntary soldiers, so that Adventists could remain exempt from a general draft. In the middle of 1864 the draft laws were amended to allow exemption for members of religious communities only. Thereupon, the General Conference applied to the governor of Michigan for recognition as a non-combatant community. Pointing to war as being irreconcilable with the precepts of the Bible, especially the fourth and sixth commandments, they requested the government to exempt them from having to bear arms, but not from military service altogether. The answer granted the young church recognition as a non-combatant community, but in practice local authorities denied this status to Adventists in the local community and forced them into the army against their will. In the spring of 1865 the draft hit nearly every third Adventist. For the Adventist Church this almost meant financial ruin and served to emphasize the problems the state had in accepting the Adventist position. In this critical phase the sudden end of the war saved Adventists from making a final decision for or against the draft (and, for that matter, for or against the state).

It is noteworthy that the congregations were then looking for a pragmatic solution of common consensus. On the one hand, Adventists wanted to be respected as good
citizens; on the other, they did not want to break the laws of God. Neither James nor Ellen G. White wanted to make universally dogmatic statements in offering their advice. Rather, in this field too, they wished the believers to be properly prepared for the Second Coming of the Lord that they were expecting to take place soon. Like the early church and the New Testament, their thinking was eschatological rather than dogmatic. As the much feared escalation of the conflict did not occur because the war ended quickly, the question remained unanswered as to how they would have behaved toward a dictatorial decree.¹ This was to happen later to German Adventists.

¹“That the leadership of the Adventist Church in the late 1860s viewed the understanding of the topic of military service as unfinished business is evidenced by a letter from future General Conference president G. I. Butler to J. N. Andrews on November 24, 1868. Andrews, the foremost Adventist scholar, had been asked by the General Conference to develop a major biblical study on the topic. While urging him on with the task, Butler—in his vigorous style—argued at length for combatant participation in a war, even though he claimed not to be fully satisfied with his own position. Unfortunately, Andrews never completed the task. As a result, Adventism entered the twentieth century without a thorough and well-thought-out documented argument undergirding its official position on the topic. That lack would cause major problems in some sectors of the church during World War I” (George R. Knight, "Adventists at War," Adventist Review, April 4, 1991, 14).
CHAPTER VII

EXPERIENCE WITH MILITARY SERVICE AND THE TOTALITARIAN STATE IN GERMANY BEFORE WORLD WAR I

Ellen G. White’s Counsel during Her Visit to Europe in 1885

At a European Missionary Conference in Basle in mid-September 1885 a discussion about the military issue took place. The following questions were raised: Should Adventists bear arms and serve in the army? If so, is it permissible to serve on the Sabbath? It was noted that Germany, France and Italy had obligatory military service and that only Switzerland offered the possibility of unarmed service in the medical units of the armed forces. None of the countries, however, granted their soldiers freedom from Sabbath duties. In order to support the brothers concerned, a Commission of the Missionary Conference was asked to prepare a circular. "Nothing is known about the publication of a statement on the topic of military service as was proposed at this conference. Neither did Sister White speak


In a letter of Sept. 2, 1886, Ellen G. White reports her experience of saying farewell to three young brothers of the Basle publishing house who had been drafted for three weeks of reserve exercises.

It was a very important stage of our work in the publishing house, but the 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 were trustworthy young men. These did not go from choice, but because the laws of their nation required this. We gave them a word of encouragement to be found true soldiers of the cross of Christ.2

Confronted with the question of military service in Europe, Ellen G. White confirmed in the same year that the leading church brethren had acted correctly during the Civil War.3

Besides the issue of military service, obligatory schooling in many European states caused great conflict. Not

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2Gustav Tobler Sr., Gott gibt sein Volk nicht auf (Krattigen: Advent-Verlag Zürich, 1979), 15.


3"You inquire in regard to the course which should be pursued to secure the rights of our people to worship according to the dictates of our own conscience. This has been a burden of my soul for some time, whether it would be a denial of our faith and an evidence that our trust was not fully in God. But I call to mind many things God has shown me in the past in regard to things of a similar character, as the draft and other things. I can speak in the fear of God, it is right we should use every power we can to avert the pressure that is being brought to bear upon our people" (Ibid., 334-335).
all the parents acted in unison and the leaders did not propose general precepts. Conradi’s statement was considered generally valid, however:

To make a harvest of souls possible at all, which even demanded much more faith and self-denial of our members because of the difficult conditions of nourishment and persecution, our preachers had to suffer here. That equally required greater sacrifices than in the New World. The leadership including Sister White, who was then staying with us, agreed that anybody who had done the utmost in the military and the schooling issue, had thus done his duty and for that matter could not be condemned at all.¹

When Ludwig Richard Conradi later found himself in the crossfire of criticism because of his attitude to the First World War, he pointed to a piece of advice that had been given by Ellen G. White in earlier years. According to her knowledge of the conditions in Europe she, in Conradi’s words, was supposed to have said: “Circumstances alter cases.”² If such a statement had not complied with the facts this surely would not have been left unchallenged. No one, not even Conradi’s successor Lewis Harrison Christian, accused him of having used this argument unjustifiably. It harmonizes with the pragmatic attitude of the early Adventist Church.


German Adventists and Military Service before 1914

Their Attitude toward Conscription

With the increase in membership the questions of military service became relevant for the whole Adventist Church. It is interesting to note that the conflict with the authorities did not centre around a general objection to the bearing of arms but around the observance of the Sabbath. Serving on the Sabbath was considered a deliberate transgression of the divine will, and for that reason was considered an incomparably severe sin for Adventists. The often sensational trials that were widely reported in the press usually followed the following pattern: after an Adventist had been drafted, and in most cases from the very outset had done his duty in an exemplary way, the conflict began on the first Friday night when Sabbath began. The recruit refused to obey orders. No concessions were achieved, either by kind words or threats of punishment. As

1Whereas at the turn of the century there were only about 2,000 Adventists in all of Germany, in 1910 their number had increased to almost 10,500.

2In this regard Christian errs when he tries to prove that the first sabbathkeepers in Germany refused to bear arms. The example he quotes from the General Conference Bulletin of April 9, 1903 says that in the late 1880s there was one Adventist who was relieved or partially relieved of his military duty on the Sabbath. The source quoted says nothing about his attitude to bearing arms (Lewis Harrison Christian, The Aftermath of Fanaticism [Takoma Park, Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, n.d.], 15-16). Christian’s arguments were later adopted by Patt, James M. Barbour and others.
the reputation of the military was at stake, the soldiers concerned were soon brought before a military court. After imprisonment the drama started anew on the following Sabbath. Not infrequently this power struggle ended in a medical bulletin that proved the accused to be incapable of serving in the military and thus made it possible for him to be discharged from the armed forces without spectacular loss of face for the command.\textsuperscript{1}

One significant point, however, can be detected in the court minutes. Each individual was free to make his own decision when it came to the question of conscience. The evidence for this cannot be denied and still this fact marks a strange contrast to the nearly casuistic legalism of those old-time Adventists. Anyone whose conscience was formed by church prescriptions with regard to fashion, adornment, leisure activities and theology certainly would not then be likely to be able to make a free decision on such a vital issue. This became very evident on the basis that military service was considered a special opportunity for missionary witnessing. That is why young Adventists generally obeyed the call to serve. Only a very few tried to circumvent the draft by emigrating to America. The others tried to be allocated to the medical or support services. When this was not possible, they performed normal armed service. Thus,

\textsuperscript{1}For detailed reports see Padderatz, 242-245, and Holger Teubert, "Die Geschichte der sogenannten 'Reformationsbewegung' der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten," TMs [photocopy], 4-5.
Adventists could be found in all branches of the armed forces and in all ranks including higher officers.\(^1\) The reports of Zionswächter show that German Adventists did not act differently from their counterparts in the missionary areas under the administration of the German Union: Switzerland, Hungary, Serbia, Rumania and Russia. They were even ready to fight in wars such as the first and second Balkan War in 1912/13 and in the war between Russia and Japan in 1904/05. The only known exception is a Russian Adventist who was drafted during the Russian-Japanese war and who refused to carry a rifle or do his duty on the Sabbath. After various punishments he was allowed to do his service without arms and was later discharged for medical reasons.\(^2\) Not all Adventists had Sabbath conflicts; many were relieved of their duty on Sabbath.

The German Adventist Church had no homogeneous attitude toward the military service such as existed amongst Adventists in other parts of the world. On the contrary, it took an astonishingly tolerant stance toward the bearing of arms. No one was excluded from the church for reasons of military service.

\(^1\)For a listing of these, see Teubert, 7.

\(^2\)Zionswächter, October 15, 1906.
Statements about the Behavior of Adventists in the Army and toward the Authorities

From 1871 to the outbreak of World War I, Germany experienced a time of peace combined with a tremendous growth of nationalism. Although most people expected further progress rather than war, the church, by way of prophetic insights, was prepared for what it considered to be the "final war". No agreement, however, existed on how to act at the actual outbreak of war. One assessment of the press (reprinted in the church-owned Herold der Wahrheit, no. 15, 1905) stated: "They [the Adventists] detest human bloodshed as a mortal sin and for this reason would refuse to shoot at others should they be ordered to do so." In the same strain, Otto Lüpke quoted Alford in his annotations on the Sabbath School lesson of August 8, 1914:

If the civil authorities order us to break the law of God, we must obey God more than men. . . . Even if a law is relentless and unreasonable, it is not the duty of Christians to disobey but to voice their rightful protest.¹

On the first Sabbath after the outbreak of war, August 8, 1914, Adventists studied together their Sabbath school lesson on Romans 13 and probably agreed with the statement quoted above. Afterwards, a circular letter from Guy Dail of August 2 was read out in which the faithful were called upon to readily obey conscription and to serve in

The tragic situation of the early Adventists in Germany is clearly reflected in this contrast between claim and reality.

Conradi held another position than Lüpke. It is possible that he feared state pressure because of numerous refusals to serve on the Sabbath. The activities of the Church were police-controlled anyway and had no legal status whatever. In many cases the "national" churches, such as the Protestant Church in Prussia, caused Adventists to be harrassed and even banned. In their eyes the sanctification of the Sabbath made Adventists natural foes of the State. Thus, for the rapidly growing numbers of Adventists, there was only one way of escaping societal isolation—a consensus solution had to be found. Only in places where consensus had been achieved, such as in the Kingdom of Bavaria, was the State ready to grant the Adventist Church legal recognition, albeit with the proviso that "this recognition of the Adventists of the Seventh Day as a private church organisation naturally does not relieve them of their general civic duties, especially with regard to

1Circular Letter by Guy Dail, Hamburg, August 2, 1914, Private archive of the author.

2"A lot of problems are at times caused for the school and military authorities by the Adventists by not sending their children to school on Saturday and by refusing to do their duty in the military. . . . Unfortunately the leaders of the Adventist church cannot be expected to relieve those serving in the army from the observation of the Sabbath commandment. In their publications, e.g. in their Zionswächter, they are even outrightly encouraged in this kind of disobedience" (Karl Handtmann, Die Adventisten
compulsory schooling and military service."¹ When in 1911, "two drafted members of the private church society [of Seventh-day Adventists] refused to serve on the Saturday", the Union president was told by a ministerial decree that

A reversal of the recognition in Bavaria would have to be considered should the responsible leaders of the church not be able to amend the continued complaints about the behaviour of their members, especially about their excessive financial exploitation of the dependent members and about the refusal to obey of their members drafted to serve in the army.²

In response, Conradi took steps to correct the situation, which he defended to Arthur Grosvenor Daniels as follows:

. . . we as S.D.A. people are not against military service, but against serving on the Sabbath in time of peace. If we do this, I am sure that in a little while, our young men will have no trouble, and we shall be able to develop the hundreds of young men here, both for the home work and for foreign fields, which otherwise would necessitate their leaving the country or having great difficulty. I know what Sr. White said to us, as early as 1886, that both the military and the school question were matters we would have to work out over here as best we could.³

Conradi later added that the forces most needed to spread the message would have been lost if the church had not taken this position from the very beginning. "It would have been intolerable just as it happened to many others. Our work to

¹Landesarchiv Saarbrücken, Bestand St. Ingbert Nr. 683.

²Staatsarchiv Neuburg/Danube, Bestand: Bezirksamt Kempten, Akte Nr. 4700.

³Letter, Conradi to Arthur Grosvenor Daniels, March 14, 1913, quoted in Padderatz, 252.
save souls would have shrunk instead of moving ahead forcefully." Not unimportant role in this decision may have been the recognition of the German East African Mission that Conradi had started in 1903. In Africa this Mission had the same legal status as all other missions. In 1913 the Adventist Mission was even honored with a 50,000 Mark grant by the Kaiser. Such a trump card with the highest colonial office of the Reich was something that Conradi did not want to give up at home.

As self-evident as the motivations of Conradi may seem to have been, there was still resistance from the churches. In his letter of January 13, 1913 R. Voigt (a minister in the Rhineland) asked Ellen G. White whether or not it would be right to fight for one's homeland in case of war. William C. White replied by pointing to the series of articles, "A Study of Principles," in the 1911 *Review and Herald* and continued:

By making inquiry of Elder Conradi or other ministers in our field, you will learn that it has always been the teaching of our brethren that we should be non-combatant, and not engage in killing our fellow-men. During the time of the civil war here in America, our brethren had quite an experience in an effort to establish their loyalty and still avoid entering the Army.

It is evident from a decree of the three German unions on the military issue on July 26, 1913 that Conradi

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did not have the full support of all the leaders in the church. This resolution expressly advised Adventists to apply for medical services in the military. On January 28, 1914 this request was sent to the responsible imperial commission as a petition in connection with the upcoming bill on the Sunday law. Owing to closure of the session before the document could be discussed and voted upon, no clarification could be obtained. This was soon to bring forth bitter fruits.

"We speak up about our position on the military question. We advise our younger brethren to do their military duty. At a proper time and opportunity our position is to be explained to the authorities saying that we are ready to serve but prefer to do a Samaritan service and request for our members to be granted the Sabbath free" (quoted in Teubert, 7).

Kirche und Staat, vol. 3., 1920, 32; Zionswächter, January 22, 1919, 9. Patt’s claim that the Kaiser had personally written the words "No pardon for Adventists" in the margin of the petition paper apparently does not comply with the historical facts (Patt, 256).
CHAPTER VIII

THE FIRST WORLD WAR AS SEEN BY GERMAN ADVENTISTS

Public Declarations at the Outbreak of the War

The outbreak of the First World War and general mobilization came as a surprise for the leaders of the European Division located in Hamburg, Germany. As all the congregations expected some guidance on how to react to the call-up orders, the leadership had to act quickly. A special church meeting was called by the highest officer of the Division present at the time—Division Secretary, Guy Dail, an American. In agreement with the two elders of the Hamburg church the congregation passed a resolution that was subsequently sent to all German Adventist congregations. The focus of attention in this declaration was the statement:

. . . we should as far as we are in the armed forces or are still to be drafted into them do our military duties readily and with application. . . . From Joshua 6 we can see that the children of God used arms of war and also did their military service on the Sabbath.¹

Four days later Heinrich Franz Schuberth, Conradi's deputy (Conradi at that time being in England), sent a letter to the War Ministry in Berlin in which he said: "In these present, serious times of war we nonetheless feel

¹Circular Letter by Dail, August 2, 1914.
obliged to do our utmost for the defence of our country and under these circumstances to fight with arms even on Saturday." This position necessarily led to estrangement between Adventists of opposing states in wartime.

In judging these documents, one must not forget the historical background and Conradi's personality. Although he was not the author of these documents himself, it is clear that he remained in agreement with this decision even after the end of the war. Dail later regretted having put his signature to the circular of August 2, 1914. Schuberth conceded, "Everyone will agree that its wording would probably be different today from that of August 1914. Conradi accepted this and called the resolution "unfortunate in some statements." To be sure he would have put it more diplomatically, but the basic principle that "the work must go on" would never have been given up by him. This would have corresponded neither to his style of leadership nor to his missionary urge.

Through the diverse and outstanding gifts of

1Quoted in Die Wahrheit über die Reformationsbewegung in der Adventistenkirche (Hannover-Buchholz: Missionsverlag für Glaubens- und Gewissensfreiheit, n.d.), 5.


3Ibid., 9.
4Ibid., 8.
Conradi, the European Division had quickly developed into a veritable rival of the General Conference. The formation of a European Division under his guidance in May 1913 was, among other things, a personal recognition of his endeavours in Europe and in the missionary fields overseas. He was not a man of narrow nationalism. His field of work was the whole world. He was geared to success which could always be measured by the number of souls won. In early 1914 he demonstrated his iron will to succeed in a letter to William Ambrose Spicer in the following words: "... the North American and the European divisions will have to run a close race."¹ At a time when the church was growing successfully, Conradi felt that they could not allow everything to be destroyed again. For that reason the compromise solution, which he certainly did not accept lightheartedly, was to him nothing but a necessary consequence of his missionary strategy.²

In contrast to many members, he did not proceed from the assumption that the war was the direct prelude to the Second Coming of Christ. To him it was at most an intermezzo. In August 1915 he said: "The war has nearly paralyzed our educational efforts in Germany, but a lot of

¹Letter, Conradi to William Ambrose Spicer, February 11, 1914, quoted in Padderatz, 205.

²In a letter to William C. White he later confessed: "I got under terrible pressure and the Lord alone knows how great this pressure was" (Letter, Conradi to W. C. White, May 11, 1920, quoted in Heinz, 100).
young people will be needed after the end of the war to work among the heathen. Everyone should go back to school as soon as conditions have returned to normal."¹

At the same time, these words conceal great fears that the church would be banned. Conradi confessed that the experience with the German military authorities up to then might be indicative of more trouble to come. That is why he thought the authorities would be moved to make Sabbath concessions only when they saw the highest possible degree of loyalty among Adventists. This loyalty was shown also by the offer of the Adventist Church for use of its institutions as military hospitals.²

It is significant that the position taken by Conradi, Schuberth and Dail had already been announced before the war broke out. Thus, in 1907 the Adventist soldier, Gottlieb Zeglatis, stated before a military court, after being asked whether he would refuse to do his military duties on the Sabbath, that "In case of war he would also fight on Saturdays if the enemy was attacking, but he would refuse to fight should he be on the side of the attacking party".³ According to Conradi's words a similar statement was made by the French Adventist missionary, Paul Badaut:

¹East German Union Conference (Berlin), Minutes of Meetings of the East German Union Conference Committee, Archives for European Adventist History, Darmstadt, Germany, U 1-2, 1.

²See Conradi, Kein Falsch, 8.

³Padderatz, 249.
"But when it comes to war, our young people will also do their duty on the Sabbath as Christ said that the Sabbath was made for the sake of man, not man for the sake of the Sabbath." One might say that many Adventists made a distinction between armed military service during peacetime, on the one hand, and in times of war on the other. They considered that only a just war justified the use of arms. In the nationalistic enthusiasm of 1914 most Germans considered it just to defend their homeland. This was the position taken many times in the German Adventist church magazine Zionswächter which even went so far as to claim that this war was a "holy" one:

Why does the devil induce nearly the whole world to fight against our dear fatherland? Because he knows that we have one of the mightiest armies of God at our disposal. Why does he try to cut off Germany from the rest of the world? Because he wants to keep this land from sending out even more chosen soldiers of God to do battle for him.^

Even if these words do not reflect the opinion of all German Adventists it is understandable why, in the first months of the war, there was no significant resistance to the publicly-announced position of the church leadership.

^Conradi, "Um dieser Zeit willen," 438.

Theological Attempts to Justify Participation in War

Although the circular of Dail pointed to Joshua 6 to justify participation in acts of war on the Sabbath, further attempts in this regard were made later. In contrast to other leaders of the church, and to answer often surmised opinion that he was undergirding the participation in war by biblical statements, Conradi wrote in Zionswächter:

... that this was an open question in the Bible. God's children are children of peace and they do not want war. Neither do they believe that they may use weapons of the flesh to spread the gospel on this earth. On the other hand they expect their worldly rulers to protect them and feel they may defend themselves in case of attack. For this they have a shining example, Abraham, the father of all believers.¹

He continued to cite the liberation of Lot, according to Genesis 1:14, as a military action blessed by the Lord. Pointing to John 9:6-14 he showed that Jesus wanted to teach the Jews not to judge too quickly. Anyone who judges rightly, carefully distinguishes between emergencies and general rules, Conradi added. As war is a time of emergency, "everyone must understand that according to the Bible in such times of emergency, the Lord allows actions that would be punishable in times of peace."² As a third biblical example, Conradi pointed to Queen Esther who, against the precepts of the people of Israel, became the wife of a heathen king in order to save His people as the

¹Conradi, "Um dieser Zeit willen," 436.
²Ibid., 437.
tool of God in the hour of emergency. In short, Conradi justified his position "for the sake of the times."¹

In a two-part article, G. Freund tried to justify the draft from the divine right of kings of the Old Testament as described in 1 Samuel 8:11-12 (cf. Neh 4:9-11). It is the king and not the soldier, he said, who will later "have to answer how he did his hard and responsible duties according to the will of the Highest. . . . as the annihilation of our nation was written on the banners of our enemies", war was justified.² Quoting from Luther's

¹It is noteworthy that in this regard Conradi deliberately set out to distinguish his position from that of his American brethren and tried to justify his attitude towards obligatory schooling and the draft. Looking back, he came to the conclusion that "the attitude of our brethren in the United States could not be decisive for us in Europe because they did not have a problem with both [the military and schooling issues] and for that matter had no experience in this regard. . . . In Europe we have regulated this question in the light of the circumstances and did not listen to advice that only pertained to the American situation. . . . Really, our Church has never had to pass through a test like the present one. It is true that the Civil War ravaged America between 1861 and 1865 but we had then hardly more than 3,000 members [in comparison, on July 1, 1914, the European Division had 33,500 members of whom 15,000 lived in Germany] and were at the beginning of organising ourselves. . . . Besides I thought it necessary, in view of the earnestness of the day, to draw the attention of our brethren at the last General Conference at various times to the fact that they must be very careful in their assessment of these issues, otherwise thousands of our members could be brought into immense problems. According to the counsel given to us by one of the most important authorities, we had the full right to work out an answer to these questions in Europe ourselves and others who do not know the European conditions at all and who are not concerned with the issues at all should modestly refrain themselves from passing any judgement on the matter" (Ibid).

²Freund, 365.
exposition of 1 Peter 2:13-14, it was shown that waging war as such is no injustice, but that it is part of the God-given office of the worldly authorities. Finally, war generated peace and obedience. Pointing to the sixth and eighth commandments of the Decalogue the author went so far as to contend that "our good and brave armies" even "secured" the lives and possessions of "our enemies."¹

Two articles by Kurt Sinz seconded Conradi's argument. The first entitled "The Spirit and the Letter"² centered around the idea that circumstances and motivations must be taken into account when interpreting the Word of God to avoid falling into Pharisaism. As another witness, the author quoted 1 Maccabees 2:29-41 which describes how the Jews defended themselves by arms on the Sabbath. The second article, entitled "Quiet but Forward", cited Obadiah, the devout courtier of Ahab, who stood on God's side without saying much. Sinz drew from this story the lesson that "one had to submit to the prevailing circumstances" and that one could only serve one's neighbours in a manner "appropriate to the circumstances"³ instead of stubbornly remaining in the usual rut.

From 1916 on, one point seems to emerge again and

¹Ibid., 366.


³Idem, "Ruhig, aber doch vorwärts," Zionswächter, September 6, 1915, 281.
again in the resolutions of the gatherings of German Adventists and of the various missionary fields: namely, that they all accepted the biblical teaching regarding a citizen's duty to serve in the military and go to war as being a purely civic requirement that the God-given authorities may make according to 1 Peter 2:13-14 and Romans 13:4-5.¹ They justified the decision taken by pointing out that the Commission of the General Conference had taken into account the German position when, at their meeting of November 1915, they responded to a question of Conradi.² The General Conference had given "... to the various fields on this earth the full freedom to adhere to and adapt the respective legislation in this civil issue as hitherto done or even further."³

A brochure written by Josef Wintzen and entitled The Christian and the War greatly influenced the attitude of German Adventist churches toward bearing arms and fighting on the Sabbath. Legitimatized with a preface by the three German Union Conference presidents, it came into circulation in late 1915. First, this essay explained that war is a consequence of sin, but that God uses war as a means of punishment in the same way that he also uses natural


²Conradi had asked, whether the various countries should decide by themselves how to react in case of military drafting or not. (Ibid.).

³Ibid.
disasters and pestilence. That is why God is the Supreme Commander of all battles, and and it would be a mistake to consider every war a sin and every warrior a special sinner. Second, Wintzen established the thesis that killing in war does not break the sixth commandment, as it is the king or initiator of the war who is morally responsible. Using the example of Abraham, the author even expanded the definition of a just war to wars of aggression, saying "that exactly because he [Abraham] asked for God's assistance, he now followed his enemies filled with the courage of faith and attacked them in war."\(^1\) As Melchizedek was a symbol of Christ, his words of blessing after Abraham's battle show "what position Christ took toward the warring of the father of faith".\(^2\) On the issue of waging war on the Sabbath, the author used Old Testament examples such as Nehemiah 4:8-14; 13:15-23 and 2 Kings 11. Such concerted evidence set out to expand the teaching of Jesus that works of divine service, of love and assistance were not a transgression of the Sabbath commandment.\(^3\) Transposing the words of Jesus and the Old Testament examples into his own time without thought for the historical or cultural context, the author arrived at the conclusion: "Thus we have now shown by everything

\(^1\)Josef Wintzen, Der Christ und der Krieg (Dresden: Verlag Albin Hering, 1915), 13.

\(^2\)Ibid., 14.

\(^3\)From the context one might conclude that in a just war fighting on the Sabbath must be among the works of divine service, love and emergency!
that has been said that first, the Bible teaches us in all seriousness that active participation in war does not transgress the sixth commandment; and secondly, in the same strain that warring on the Sabbath is not a transgression of the fourth commandment."

The second part of the brochure was filled with responses to the generally-voiced arguments against participation in war. The basic tenor of these responses was that war is a unique situation and that biblical texts such as Matthew 26:52, 1 John 3:15 and Matthew 5:44 relate only to private and civil areas. The consequence of this, then, is that the call to love one’s enemies is only partially valid as it is "not related to wars that the Lord uses as a means of punishment." As one-sided as these arguments were, Wintzen took an even more extreme position when he criticized those who disagreed with him for not

... being able or willing to accept the point of view of the Bible and of the Testimonies. ... Truly, anyone who does not see God’s hand and the Almighty as the supreme commander of the battles in the current great wars of the nations must be spiritually blind."

1Ibid., 18.

2Ibid., 22. The author finds it difficult in his own logic to explain whether the prohibition on David from building the temple means that a minister should not join in the battle with arms. His conclusion was: "Certainly the true Christian and especially the minister as a messenger of peace is much better disposed for the medical services, to heal wounds rather than cause them and we wish for all our brethren in the battlefield to be able to do this, but we also see that a necessary service in arms does not exclude the brethren from a later work in the ministry" (Ibid., 21).

3Ibid., 6.
While Conradi still held an open mind, Wintzen had already developed his own clear-cut "biblical" theology.

In this way, the German Adventist churches had a theological justification for participation in the war and no further voices were raised against it. From then on the reports of brethren fighting in the front lines and their experiences made up a large part of the Zionswächter. Even though in the course of time the longing for peace became greater and greater,¹ some felt that the Adventist experience in war confirmed that it was right to actively share in it.²

When in the summer of 1915 the Adventist reformers³ appeared, the question of biblical justification for participation in war was no longer an issue. From then on the discussion centered around the following questions:

³"Where have they gone, the glorious days of mobilization? They have gone and will they ever come back? Nobody knows. . . . Who can count them, the great amount of disappointed hopes of our nation in these times? . . . When will there be peace again? Who would not want to lift the veil of this secret and to have a glimpse of what is sealed for us?" (Bernhard Böttner, "Sehnsucht nach der Heimat," Zionswächter, October 1, 1917, 147). Cf. Letter, N.N. to the editor, "Vater, gib Frieden!" Zionswächter, March 18, 1918.

²"For all things in the world I would not want to miss the glorious experience I made in the garrison and on the front lines. If it were not right to serve in the war the Lord would not so obviously side with His children, especially with those in the military" (J. Fischer, "Eine unparteiische Stimme in der jetzt die Gemüter beschäftigenden Frage: 'Der Christ und der Krieg.'", Zionswächter, June 8, 1918, 80).

³A break-away group who protested against Seventh-day Adventist war policies. See below, 78-84.
What position did the testimonies of Ellen G. White take on the war issue? What is, indeed, the traditional Adventist point of view?

**Contacts between Germany and America in the Initial Phase of the War**

**Correspondence with Church Leaders in the United States**

In a letter of August 2, 1914 from London, Conradi reported on the situation following the outbreak of the war in Europe. In it, he referred to facts he had learned by a telephone call with Schuberth. Even at this early stage of the war he saw its far-reaching impact when he wrote: "We shall have an experience that we have never really had since our denominational existence, directly involving about 25,000 of our people; and within a few days probably 2,000 of our brethren will be under arms."¹ He also spoke about drafted conference presidents, workers and other church employees; about the banning of book evangelism in areas then in enemy territory (e.g. Russia and missionary areas of Africa, parts of the Danube mission and others) with which contact could no longer be maintained.

In a letter of late August 1914, Dail described to W. C. White the situation within the European Division, mainly in Russia, Hungaro-Austria and Germany. He also mentioned the speech of the German Kaiser to the nation. In

¹Quoted in James M. Barbour, "World War I Military Crisis in SDA Church--Did God Reject or Unite His People?" TMs [photocopy], 2.
his opinion, it was "very heart-stirring and full of pathos, and reveals a courageous spirit and trust in God." Because of its geopolitical position, Germany was threatened by East and West and for that reason had to defend itself. It was mostly the predominance of England that was preventing progress in Germany, Dail added. That is why he found it difficult to understand why it was that in a land where the Three Angels' Message had been spread so far and wide (i.e. Germany) all endeavors should have been in vain "before her mission as a nation has been fulfilled." Finally, he asked whether the present war was a fulfilment of that which had been predicted in Testimonies, vol. 1. p. 259 or whether this was indeed the last war in world history. In early October, Dail tried to explain the German position in a letter to Asa Oscar Tait, editor of Signs of the Times. His arguments resembled those of Conradi: 1. There was an active draft in Germany; 2. Obedience now

1Letter, Dail to W. C. White, August 24, 1914, White Center Newbold. D.F. 320.

2Ibid.

3"Other nations are making quiet yet active preparations for war, and are hoping that England will make war with our nation, for then they would improve the opportunity to be revenged on her for the advantage she has taken of them in the past and the injustice done them. A portion of the queen's subjects are waiting a favorable opportunity to break their yoke; but if England thinks it will pay, she will not hesitate a moment to improve her opportunities to exercise her power and humble our nation. When England does declare war, all nations will have an interest of their own to serve, and there will be general war, general confusion." (Ellen G. White, Testimonies, vol. 1, 259).
would assure freedom of faith later; 3. No general regulations existed about the Sabbath question in times of peace. As no comparable situation had arisen in the past, not much attention had formerly been paid to the military issue. "But the present war brings the matter to our notice in a very practical way and we have really had to assume a position."¹ In his further remarks he confirmed the first reaction of brethren who were against military service, especially on the Sabbath, even if they risked being shot dead on the spot.² Finally, he requested confirmation from the American brethren that the decisions made by the Adventist leaders in Germany were not contrary to the general attitude of the whole church.

Or if you do not want to state anything publicly, if you would make a statement to us in writing, that we over here could use, I think it would help many persons, who

¹Letter, Dail to Asa Oscar Tait, October 6, 1914, White Center Newbold, D.F. 320.

²That inner church opposition had nothing to do with the Reform Movement (or Reformers, the name of the organized offshoot group of Seventh-day Adventists, which began in November 1915 and refused to support the war effort in any way, including the Medical Corps [see Teubert, 12]), was confirmed by Dail in a further letter of October 15, 1915: "In our own work, there is also a crisis on. Satan is seeking to do all he can to divide the opinion and union of the church. I can see it very plainly in various parts of the field. The military question of itself, and the attitude that we as a people should assume to it, is not entirely disposed of yet to the satisfaction of all. There are those who would fain get us to believe that it would be much better to assume the role of non-combatants even tho [sic] that might cost us hundreds of lives that would be taken as sure as can be, on account of their being looked upon as traitors, than to go into the armies, and act the fair citizen’s share in the defense of the country" (Letter, Dail to "Dear Brother," ibid.).
are now strongly urging that there is in our denominational attitude, a great break between us and the American brethren.\(^1\)

In October 1914, the Adventist leaders in Hamburg received a rejection of the German position by the president of the Scandinavian Union (Julius C. Raft) who called the declaration of August 2 a mistake that ought to be "thrown into the bin." He was hoping that the church members in Germany would not agree with the opinion of a minority, just as he himself did not accept it. He said that Dail had initiated a discussion that could split the church "and it would have been much wiser for us never to have touched the question at all."\(^2\) The accused defended himself by pointing to the fact that there was no declaration available for Adventists on how to behave in case of war.\(^3\) In order to reduce the tensions, he pointed out that Conradi was planning to visit them soon to talk matters over and find a solution to the military issue. Only then could all opponents in Germany be silenced. All this activity was moving toward a brief declaration: "A simple recognition of

\(^1\)Dail to Tait, October 6, 1914.


\(^3\)"However, in the time of peace our brethren, to some extent, served in the army on the Sabbath. There were many noble exceptions. But we as a people never disciplined any one for having gone about his regular military duties on the seventh day of the week. There never was any statement made as to what we ought to do in case of a war, tho [sic] our brethren did go to the front in the Russian conflict with Japan, and in the late Balkan war" (Dail to "Dear Brother," October 15).
the principle on which we have been acting in Europe since
Sr. White said, 'Circumstances alter cases', leaving each
man subject to the merely civil requirements of his own
land, is all that we really need."

But a statement of sympathy and exoneration from
the American brethren for the stance taken by German
Adventists never came. Instead W. C. White responded by
pointing to the various participants in the European war.
Any American declaration would only support one side over
the other. Some of his brethren had been very surprised by
Dail's letter of August 24, 1914 "which seems so ardent to
defend and praise the action of the rulers in one country,
while pointing out weaknesses and atrocities of another." It
seems clear that these lines were directed against the
participation of the German brethren in the war. W. C.
White continues to say that it was the mission of the church
to proclaim the message of the imminent return of Jesus to
all nations, tongues and races. It is noteworthy, however,
that no direct reference is made to the situation in Europe.
It was many years later, in negotiations with the Reform
Movement, that Daniells explained the wise reservations of
the General Conference during the war.

1Dail to "Dear Brother," November 13.

2Letter, W. C. White to Dail, December 10, 1914,
White Center Newbold, D.F. 320.
Ellen G. White's Remark on the Behavior of Adventists in the Army

The circular of August 2, 1914 and the apparently inevitable split amongst European Adventists allowed Dail no rest. As the leading brethren at the General Conference did not grant his wish that they pass a declaration of sympathy for the German Adventists, he asked W. C. White early in 1915 whether the testimonies of E. G. White contained any hints or counsels on how to act during time of war. In his reply of April 11, 1915, W. C. White only repeated what was known anyway: that his mother had not been given any special testimonies about the Adventists' attitude to the draft. But to help the Germans arrive at a decision, he added some statements from the time of the American Civil War concerning fanaticism and desertion, warning of a split within the churches and setting the limits of tolerance vis-à-vis the government if its demands were contrary to the Ten Commandments. Of some interest in this regard is the following remark:

About three years ago some of our brethren in Australia had a problem because they thought that all of our young men would be called into the military and they turned to us just like you have done asking us whether in Mother's manuscripts there was something that could help them see what was their duty. Thereupon Brother Robinson not only examined all her letters but also the previous issues of the Review and Herald but he found nothing on the subject. I am really sorry that we cannot comply with the earnest wish of our brethren who have gotten into problems because of the present war and that we did not find anything certain for them in the Testimonies with regard to the position they should take toward the
conscription in the European countries."\footnote{German copy of the letter spread as a leaflet (Stellung zur Wehrpflicht [Chemnitz: Druck G. Leonhardt, n.d.]), Private archive. Cf. Letter, W. C. White to Voigt, April 11, 1913, White Center Newbold, D.F. 319a.}

W. C. White then drew on his own experience and pointed out some generally valid New Testament principles. Adventists must love the people of all nations and do them good, he said. Then the spirit of war would depart from their hearts and they would refrain from voluntary participation in war. At the same time they would see, when they studied the New Testament, that they must, according to Romans 13, submit to higher powers. "For that matter there must be certain things in which we must submit our judgement to the authorities."\footnote{W. C. White to Dail, April 11, 1915.} He then closed his personal advice with these words:

I have heard that certain brethren have voiced serious concern against the actions of other brethren in . . . \[omission\]. I can only say: Do not judge lest thou be judged. I do not know what we would do in their shoes. It is our privilege to pray for them so that God might give every single one of them his right understanding of his duties. As I see it is the duty of all to strive for a cultivation of the spirit of peace in the Church even when we are forced to go to war.\footnote{Ibid.}

In a further letter of May 24, 1915, W. C. White speaks about the growing problems in Europe and remarks about the condition of his mother.\footnote{"On a separate sheet I will send you a statement about Mother's condition . . . Yesterday, although she was very weak, her mind seemed clear, . . . " Mother seemed to} Two days later he
amended the letter with a two-and-a-half-page report about the condition of his mother. In the form of a short diary he reported on May 25, 1915:

I then asked, "Shall I write Edson, and tell him what you have said to me today?" "Yes," she replied. "Where is Edson?" I answered, "He has just given a stereopticon lecture at Mt. Vernon Academy, regarding the European War, and its meaning as an evidence that the coming of the Lord is near." "Do the people so regard it?" she asked. I replied, "Yes, thinking men in all parts of the world regard this war as an indication that we are nearing the end." Then she asked, "Are our people affected by the war?" "Yes," I said, "hundreds have been pressed into the army. Some have been killed and others are in perilous places. There is a great suffering in many places, and much perplexity. Some of our people in America and in Europe feel that those of our brethren who have been forced into the army have done wrong to submit to military service. They think it would have been better for them to have refused to bear arms, even if they knew that as a result of this refusal they would be made to stand up in line to be shot." "I do not think they ought to do that," she replied. "I think they ought to stand to their duty as long as time lasts."1

This brief statement was full enough to justify in their own eyes the decision taken by the Adventist leaders.²

understand the letter, and rejoiced greatly in what God is doing in Portland. This is the first time for several weeks that she has been able to comprehend such a letter" (Letter, W. C. White to Dail, May 24, 1915, White Center Newbold, D.F. 320).


"Everyone who pays exact attention to question and answer will see that Sister White in 1915 had exactly the same conviction as she had expressed to us in 1886. The brethren should submit themselves to the draft and do their duty and if they did this they would not be doing any wrong in their own eyes. In all this of course it is expected of everybody that they should again and again try their utmost to get the Sabbath free after faithfully doing their duty on the other days (Conradi, Kein Falsch, 28).
On the other hand, it did not take long before the Reform Movement attempted to use this quotation for their own purposes and to define "duty" as the keeping of the Commandments. In their opinion, E. G. White said that Adventists should obey the Commandments under all circumstances as long as time lasts until the Lord's return.

The dispute over the interpretation of this statement was decided by the Ellen G. White Board of Trustees on January 4, 1962 by simply placing these words among her uninspired statements. A precedent for this already existed as, 12 years earlier, Arthur L. White had replied similarly to a question put to him by Jean Nussbaum:

"It is my opinion that we could hardly consider this a testimony. I believe it should not carry too much weight in dealing with this important question. Sister White was in feebleness. At times she did not even

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¹"VOTED, that in the matter of the letter of W. C. White to Elder Guy Dail dated May 25, 1915, reporting an interview with Mrs. White on the preceding day in which mention is made of the war question, we take the position that this report, presenting a recollection of a conversation with Ellen White on May 24 and presenting fragments of her statement in response to certain information relative to the situation of our brethren in the war, should not be put into the category of testimony material or that which has come to us from the inspired pen of Ellen G. White presented under the compelling influence of the Spirit of God. The statement is obscure and it is difficult to know just what the true meaning of Ellen White was. We must recognize that the conversation took place within just a few weeks of her death, and the statement appears in a framework indicative of the fact that her mind passed readily from periods of clearness to periods of confusion. Therefore the Secretary is instructed to not make use of this statement or give out copies for the use of others, referring all inquirers to those statements from Mrs. White's pen which can be accepted at their full face value" ("W. C. White Statement to Dail, May 25, 1915," White Center Newbold, D.F. 320).
recognize those who came to see her and you will observe that she merely replied, "I do not think they ought to do that." The words are not positive and under the circumstances. I believe they should not of themselves carry too much weight in dealing with this important matter.¹

Doubtless the reference to the health of E. G. White at the time was justified. These words may difficult to grasp by those who consider a non-combatant stance to be the only traditional position of the Adventist Church and refuse to accept that the pragmatic attitude of early Adventists was in no wise one of dogmatic rigidity. In reality, the letter easily harmonizes with other non-dogmatic counsels relating to the schooling and military issue in Europe. Recently, the writer found this assumption confirmed when he encountered a postcard written by Dail to his wife: "I will send you a statement by Sister White that I have just received and that relates to the military question. It is not directed against us, something I consider right at this time."²

As we have shown, E. G. White's writings contain only limited reference to the military issue. After her initial siding with the Northern States during the American Civil War, she soon recognised that both sides were acting contrary to the will of God. "I was shown that God's people, who are His peculiar treasure, 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."¹

On the other hand she condemned a sought-for martyrdom with equal vigour: "What they thought to be faith, was only fanatical presumption."² Both statements stand side by side. "As in so many cases, Ellen White was more moderate than her fellow church members. She left more room for individual responsibility than many of us would be comfortable with."³

Divisions of the Church: The Reform Movement Begins

Causes and Background for Its Rise

Conradi’s leadership style, personality and missionary strategy, exclusively aimed at numerical growth through the years, began to generate growing opposition within his own ranks.⁴ As long as he had a growing church to speak for him, there was little or no opposition to his

¹White, Testimonies, vol. 1, 361. In a compilation of E. G. White quotations on military service (W. C. White, D. E. Robinson and A. L. White, "The Spirit of Prophecy and Military Service, 1956," TMs [photocopy], Ellen G. White Publications, Washington 12, D.C.) the compilers stressed several times that the statement was exclusively related to "this war" and not to war in general.

²White, Testimonies, vol. 1, 357.

³Knight, 15.

⁴Before the war probably very few of Conradi’s fellow workers would have noticed his constant efforts to set the German Church against the Americans organizationally and theologically.
style of leadership. But from the beginning of the war, other factors brought about a protest movement which was inevitable.

In proclaiming the imminent return of Jesus, Adventist interpretation has always placed important emphasis on the "signs of the times." It was believed that when these signs appeared, two distinct groups would emerge--those who accepted the sign of the beast and others who aligned themselves with the church of the remnant. According to Revelation 16:14-16 a coming war, the wrath of the nations, would clarify these two sides immediately prior to the coming of the Lord. These words demonstrate the conviction in the Seventh-day Adventist Church at the time that the outbreak of World War I pointed to the end of the world and emphasised the importance of keeping God's commandments and following the testimonies of E. G. White. Thus, Josef Wieck was stating the obvious with his pamphlet The Witness of the Last Church in which he reported a vision he had received in a military dungeon.

1Cf. Conradi's comment on Rev 16:15: "Thus, this work of preparation also belongs to the times of grace and the above admonition is of much greater importance as the armaments of the Kings in the East are the decisive sign that the end of the time of grace is at hand. It is now for us to watch out as never before and to keep our garments clean so that when the time of grace ends soon and the plagues begin, the shame of our nakedness does not become evident for ever and ever" (Conradi, Der Seher von Patmos [Hamburg: Internationale Traktatgesellschaft, 1907], 470).

2As a soldier, Wieck was sentenced to seven days' imprisonment because he refused to be vaccinated.
Moved by the spirit of the Lord I take up my pen to make known the testimony of the Lord to the last church and to thus publish a revelation. . . . On the evening of January 21, 1915 I saw three images in a row. I preached full of power in every place. I saw without fear or shyness that the end of all things was at hand. . . . Furthermore I was asked: How long do you want to preach this message of warning? I hesitated with my answer but the voice called out loud: When the stonefruit blossoms! The final spirit of the Lord, the latter rain that will be poured out soon will give special power and light to our faithful brethren in colored apparel and guide them out. . . . It must be clear to every thinking man that in the spring the great pestilence will come in the large battlefields and in such times the separation will occur and thus the end of the time of grace will have come.1

As it became obvious that the church leadership was not ready to accept this vision of the end of the world in the spring of 1915, the author published a second pamphlet in which he not only restated his first vision but also accused the church leaders in Germany of forsaking the precepts of God by their endorsement of active military service. That is why, he said, the latter rain would not be poured out on the official Adventist Church but only on groups with similar views to his own. His words received a mixed reception. His call for separation among the believers created great tension amongst the churches. This could be controlled only by the exclusion of Wieck's adherents who included new "prophets" such as Eduard Herms, A. Stenzel and later, Mrs. Gertrud Kersting. They were joined by church leaders, such as ministers Wilhelm Richter and Alfred Stobbe whose popularity attracted more than a few

1Quoted in Wilhelm John, Wer sind die wahren Träger der Adventbotschaft? (Bielefeld: by the author, 1928), 10.
Adventists.

Taking stock of this opposition reveals the weakest point in Conradi’s theology. The Adventist churches he had helped to shape in Europe considered faith and the law to be the foundation of their salvation. This emphasis on the law resulted in such uniformity that it left no room for their own decisions of conscience. Many felt uncertain when they were called upon to make their own decisions and were grateful to hear apparently clear advice, testimonies of E. G. White and concrete prophetic messages in the ranks of those in opposition to Conradi. In addition persecuted Adventists, even when it came to deserters such as Wiek and others or to expelled Reformers, made very credible witnesses. Martyrdom was always closer to the early Adventists’ mentality than the readiness to compromise. Thus, the decision of the German church leadership to support the defence of Germany by the use of arms was the first step, albeit a decisive one, toward schism within the church. For that reason, it cannot be totally without

^Heinz, 88-89.

^It only became known later that Conradi conceded himself much more freedom then he allowed others—and this was of course exploited by the Reformers. Take his position on health reform and theological questions, for example. In this regard the remarks of Karl Hoßfeld in Zeichen der Zeit, (n.p., [1916]), 23-24 are very revealing. The hints of Hoßfeld merit attention as he was one of the few Reformers who stood up for their convictions before the authorities and were put into prison for this. Until he broke with the Church in 1916 he continued to be a Bible worker. In the early 1920s he returned to the Adventist Church because his
cause that the Reform Movement declared in 1927, from their own point of view, of course:

The real cause for the departure was not the issue of participation in war but pride, greed and selfishness . . . and deceit of every kind. The faithful few in the Church began to sigh and weep over this state of affairs and they cried to the Lord. Inside, the breach had been made long before the war.¹

Looking at the Reform Movement in some detail, one can see that the true dividing lines were the interpretation of Scripture and the understanding of law and gospel.

Growing Differences with the Reformers

In July 1915, 100,000 copies of a leaflet published by the Reformers were distributed. It gave no indication of its author but made mention of the Internationale Traktatgesellschaft Hamburg, which is the publishing house of the Adventist Church. Its contents referred to the end of Turkey (an ally of Germany), war as a work of the devil and the imminent outpouring of the seven plagues. The circulation of this leaflet produced a reaction from the authorities in Hamburg. Prior to this, there had been local bans on church services in Saxony and other parts of the Reich because the state authorities found it difficult to differentiate between the original Adventists and the Reformers. In Saxony, the Supreme Command linked a lifting of hopes and expectations were not fulfilled by the Reform Movement.

of this ban to the condition "that the leadership itself must make a certain statement [of loyalty to the German state]." In a document dated March 5, 1915 (which was later often seen as the third significant document of the split) Conradi, Schuberth and the President of the Saxon Conference, Paul Drinhaus, reconfirmed the validity of the declaration given to the ministry of war on Sept. 6, 1914. However, they simultaneously stressed more clearly than before that Germany was in a state of emergency. In this way the church was able to avoid more than once a confiscation of the Hamburg publishing house. But this made relations between the official church and its internal opposition much worse, even to the point of open enmity. The manner in which they attacked each other for the sake of "truth" does no credit to either side. While the Reformers allegedly stooped to lies, libel, deliberate changes of the Testimonies, illegal reprints and other methods, the "church at large" (as the Reformers called it) reacted with excommunications and public denunciations. In some places church leaders had their opponents placed on trial as "anti-militarists" or asked for official written confirmations of the excommunication of former members.

1 Conradi, Kein Falsch, 10.

2 "Is it appropriate to hand over these people to the military police as antimilitarists? If such elements really become a danger to the state by their hostile agitation and there is the danger that we might be mixed with them we must for the sake of our mission try and protect ourselves in this way" (East German Union Conference
The use of these methods precluded further discussion on theological issues, although on the military issue some Reformers such as W. Wagner and Hoßfeld argued their case on theological grounds very effectively.¹ The debate centered around the right to claim to be the prophetic remnant, since the Reformers had started to consider themselves to be the true and persecuted church according to Revelation 12:17. They called the official church a fallen one, a persecutor according to Revelation 17:6 and, for that reason, Babylon. The division could not have been deeper.

In the course of 1916, the Tabernacle Movement split off from the opposition that was now beginning to establish the first organizational structures. A never-ending chain of splits characterized the appearance of the Reform Movement through the following years. During this process, certain groups and leaders appeared briefly, tried to dominate by spreading extreme views, before disappearing again.²

¹Leaflet, W. Wagner, Der Christ und der Krieg im Lichte der Bibel (Stöhna, Saxony: by the author, n.d.); Hoßfeld, 10-16.

²It is interesting to study the development of a group headed by the Hamburg Reformer, Philipp Waldschmidt. The minutes of the annual meeting of this group (August 5 and 6, 1933) says: "The membership meeting of this year has been convened for the purpose of dissolving the 'Mission of the Newly Reformed Church of Christians, 1844' and to recommend its members to join the movement of faith of the German Christians" [!] (Staatsarchiv Hamburg, Bestand Amtsgericht, Vereinsregister B 1964 – 19).
In spite of this, the Reform Movement continued to increase in numbers. Some members learned about this movement through the counter-statements in the Zionswächter and joined it. From 1917 on, unlike 1915 and 1916, there were practically no indications of a dispute in the Zionswächter. The editors adopted a policy of silence on the subject. No statistics are available about the Reform Movement, so their numbers can only be reconstructed by counting excommunications from the official church. Depending on the region, between ten and twenty per cent of the members went over to the opposition. Of these, many returned disillusioned to the official church in the mid-1920s.

Although the military issue was the initial cause for the Reform Movement at the outset of the dispute and later was part of its raison d'etre, there were only a few among them who actually refused to serve and delivered themselves to the authorities. Some solved their problem of conscience by desertion. Others refused military service, but stayed within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.1

1Among the last-mentioned group was also the later head of the Adventist Mission Society, Wilhelm Mueller (Letter, Christian to Milton Earl Kern, April 24, 1934, White Center Newbold, D.F. 319). Indications of conscientious objection among the Reformers and Adventists are available in Guido Grünwald, Zur Geschichte der Kriegsdienstverweigerung (Essen: Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft, Vereinigte Kriegsgegner, n.d.), 32; Martha Steinitz, Olga Misar, and Helene Stöcker, Kriegsdienstverweigerer in Deutschland und Österreich (Berlin-Weißensee: Verlag der Neuen Gesellschaft, 1923), 37-38; Franz Kobler, ed., Gewalt und Gewaltlosigkeit (Zurich
Decisive Events up to the End of the War

The Autumn Meeting of the General Conference Committee in 1915

Between November 5 and 21, 1915, Conradi took part in the autumn meeting of the General Conference in Loma Linda. As usual, the participants expected a report from him about the European Division and this matter was already on the agenda. He reported the outcome in an article of the Zionswächter.

From all brothers and sisters I heard the witness that they prayed a lot for our field work during the hard times, that they understand our difficult position in this time and that it was clear to them that given the circumstances the best had been made of it.¹

The readers understood this to mean justification of the German church leadership, in consequence of which several union conferences even recorded the presumed agreement of the General Conference in their conference reports.

This presentation of what happened at Loma Linda was countered, however, by the report of Christian who in 1922 was called to be the successor to Conradi as head of the European Division. In an extensive presentation on the origins of the Reform Movement he also spoke about his impressions during the General Conference meeting:

We expected him to tell much about Europe and the work there during the war period. But he said almost nothing. . . . He did not refer at all to the documents sent by a few men to the government in Germany. It was clear that wise caution was not the main reason for his unusual silence. . . . I knew what had happened in the committee when Elder Conradi met with some of the General Conference brethren. On that occasion, the brethren absolutely refused to sanction the document sent to the German rulers, and told Elder Conradi that they neither could nor would do so. . . . They told him that they could never approve of the attitude of the German brethren, and that he would have to go back and find his way as best he could in the multitude of difficulties that come in days of war. To this he took great exception; though when he returned he told the people in Germany that the General Conference told them to do the best they could. However, we do not have to go by what Conradi said in Loma Linda, or what he reported on his return to Germany. We have definite evidence that the General Conference never approved of that which had been done in Germany.  

As evidence, Christian pointed out that there was no resolution of agreement in any of the General Conference Autumn Council reports; that the brethren of Northern Europe and Great Britain had been informed about the refusal of the General Conference; and that Charles Henry Watson, then president of the Australian Union, had asked the brethren in America for advice regarding military service and received the reply: "The counsel . . . made is clear . . . that the attitude of the General Conference was opposed to bearing arms." As further proof, Christian cites the official declaration of the General Conference when the United States entered the war in 1917, which stated that Seventh-day Adventists have been noncombatants throughout their

2Ibid., 28-29.
Whose report is true? It certainly would be unfair to simply accuse Conradi of lying in order that we might retain the myth of a traditional Adventist non-combatant stance. In his report of the autumn meeting, he had not spoken of the written but reported only his personal impressions. More credible, however, is the report by Daniells of talks with the opposition movement at Friedensau in 1920. There he stressed several times that the brethren of the General Conference had been very cautious in their judgement as they knew the documents in question but had no clear picture of the entire situation. Thus, they were neither ready to condemn nor sanction the German declarations but wished rather to wait until the end of the war before discussing these questions face to face with the leaders in Europe. To them it was apparently not enough to

1Ibid., 29-30; Wilcox, 112-113.

2Tobler, 38; Lowell Tarling, The Edges of Seventh-day Adventism (Barragga Bay, Bermagui South, Australia: n.p., 1981), 102; Bruce Telfer, "Administration Procedures of the Church to Deal with the So Called Reformed Movement in Europe after World War I," TMs [photocopy], p. 10, D.F. 319, White Center Newbold.

3The official minutes of the General Conference of November 15 read: "L. R. Conradi spoke of the British colonial missions in East and West Africa and Egypt, calling for workers from Britain." The November 21 minutes state: "L. R. Conradi outlined the situation in Europe and the outlying fields, and the need for having someone to join in the general work of the Division, preferably to locate in Great Britain" (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists [Washington, D.C.], Minutes of Meetings of the General Conference Session, November 15 und 21, 1915).
have Conradi as the only ambassador of the German Unions.\textsuperscript{1} While there is no evidence that a resolution of support for the German position was ever adopted, is also no mention in the minutes of a motion that condemned the German attitude.

Christian’s report, just like Conradi’s, must be viewed with caution. Great differences of opinion had already arisen between them before 1922, the year in which Christian supplanted Conradi as president of the European Division.\textsuperscript{2} This is the only way to understand why Christian wrote a 160-page book about the European history of the Adventist Church without even mentioning the name of Conradi once!\textsuperscript{3} In spite of these differing reports one thing seems certain: Conradi had gone to Loma Linda in the hope that the General Conference Committee would submit to the request of the German Union president and pass a short resolution in reply to the attacks of the Reform Movement. But he was disappointed. It is difficult today to judge whether it was consideration for the delegates from Northern Europe, Great Britain, France and other countries who would

\textsuperscript{1}Cf. Barbour, 19.

\textsuperscript{2}"Between both vice presidents [of the General Conference] something seems to be going wrong. You will hear something about this from grandfather. It is strange that when he was in Berlin Brother Christian did not speak in Hamburg although Brother Conradi had so many things to discuss with him. Such an economy has no way of prospering" (Letter, Georg W. Schubert to Heinrich F. Schuberth, May 11, 1921, Archives for European Adventist History, U 1-2, 26).

have voted against the German position, or whether theological arguments had the upper hand. It was a bitter disappointment for Conradi that he could not return home with such a declaration of support as it unmistakably showed that his star was in decline.

Further Declarations of the German Church Leadership

The increasing length of the war brought more and more restrictions upon the German populace. In late 1916, Bavaria passed a national emergency law according to which every citizen could be ordered to forced labour. In this way the Sabbath issue suddenly affected civilians too. On behalf of church members who might be affected by this new law, Conradi wrote a letter to the Royal Bavarian Ministry of War on December 8, 1916. After restating the Adventist position on the military issue in 1914, he continued: "As representatives of our Missionary Society we feel very obliged to the High Military Authorities for their understanding and respect for our unselfish men in arms who were given the opportunity to rest on their Day of Rest whenever circumstances permitted." He added:

The new law of national emergency has again faced many of our members with a decision of conscience and they have requested that we express to the Royal Bavarian Ministry of War their full readiness to serve. In faithful adherence to the biblical commandment "Six days shalt thou labour" they are fully ready to do their comprehensive national duty within the scope of this emergency law and to apply all their might in places...
where this is most profitable for the general benefit of all. But full of obedience and with respect to their conviction of faith which hitherto has been fully guaranteed by the principle of the freedom of faith and conscience in the German Reich, and for which they never shunned any sacrifice in times of war, they request your lordships to use their services in places where they can honor their Master and Lord on the day sanctified by God, the Saturday, just as their contemporaries can do on their day, the Sunday. In spite of this they will always be ready to do the works of Good Samaritans on the Saturday if the need arises. After the understanding shown to our men in arms by the High Military Authorities we are fully confident that the Royal Bavarian Ministry of War will circumspectly take into account the conviction of faith of our church members to serve in the work of national emergency.¹

Thus, Conradi pointed to a widely forgotten fact. In spite of the official declarations of the church, Adventists in the German armed forces did indeed endeavour to obtain Sabbath privileges. Their experiences filled many pages of the Zionswächter during the war. These reports also document the application and readiness of Adventist soldiers to do their full duty in time of war.

The 1916 report of the Southern German Conference contains a list of the ranks and promotions of Adventist soldiers. It is possible that the proportions of this list are typical for the whole Reich.

Last year 103 brethren belonging to our Conference were doing their service for the earthly fatherland, i.e. 50% of all brethren. Of these 1 is a captain, 2 are sergeants, 3 corporals, 20 lance-corporals, 76 privates including 7 stretcher-bearers; 67 are married, 36 single. 9 have been honored with the Iron Cross, 1 with the Baden Order of Merit, 1 with the Red Cross Medal, 1 with the China Medal and 10 were promoted to higher ranks. Among them are 10 workers, 10 book evangelists and 44 church officers. 5 have hitherto been killed in

¹Ibid.
Conradi's argument that the General Conference had recognized the point of view of the German brethren became a new target for the Reform Movement. Thus, they said, not only the European Division but the whole Church had left the grounds of original truth. With even greater zeal they agitated among the congregations and the public. This resulted in further prohibitions and limitations of the publishing work in Hamburg.\(^2\) That is why the brethren felt compelled to make a fundamental statement which was signed on November 15, 1917 by those segments of the European Division that were not at war with Germany—the East German, West German (including the Dutch), the Central European (including the Austrian) and the Danube Conferences.\(^3\) This declaration is the first public document on the issue of war that was not produced under pressure.\(^4\) The greater part of

\(^1\) Zollmann, 73.

\(^2\) A confiscation of church money was barely avoided, and the publishing house was required to cease production for a period. In this situation, Conradi's negotiating skills as a leader were once again invaluable.

\(^3\) In view of this the argument that it was only the Germans who supported active participation in war is not quite correct, even if on the European Division committee the words of Conradi must have dominated: "No Division, Union or local Conference Committee ever approved the action of these individuals" (Telfer, 11).

\(^4\) Still in 1915, the East German Conference Committee under the guidance of Conradi said the following: "In our discussions the frequently requested motion to establish a written statement about our position toward the military profession during times of war and peace was
this was devoted to theological explications. Scriptural references included Romans 13:1-5, 1 Peter 2:13-14 and the royal right of 1 Samuel 8:10-12. War, it pointed out, was a godly punishment according to Jeremiah 25:15-31 and the legitimacy of the soldier's profession was endorsed by Luke 3:14. In the light of 1 Kings 2:5, only killing for motives of hate was condemned by the sixth commandment.

Now that we cannot take the Word of God in any other way we acknowledge that the God-given authority to maintain order, justice and calm in the country may justly take up the sword, as otherwise the faithful cannot lead quiet and peaceful lives. But if we leave these things exclusively to those who do not believe in the Word of God in the fullest sense, we place ourselves outside the compass of these divine ordinances by just enjoying the blessings of an orderly government but not being ready to make our contribution and help bear the burdens. An acknowledgement of the first can and may not include a refusal of the last as we then would be contradicting ourselves because even for the sake of our conscience we must be faithfully subject to the authorities. From the Lord's words, "Give to Ceasar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" we can also see that both must be reconcilable with each other.1

Comparing this with other statements it is of interest to note that the focus of attention was no longer justification for armed participation in war and on the Sabbath, but attention now centered on the Christian's relationship to the State in general. No mention is made about a situation of need or emergency. All the rights rejected" (East German Union Conference, Minutes, August 19 and 20, 1915).

conceded to the State (including matters of life and death) cede to the authorities influence and power that is not according to the New Testament. This strongly resembles the historical overestimation of the rights of the state in Protestant circles.¹ Regretfully, it must be noted that there is not the slightest indication in the text about the duty of Christians to protect life and above all to be bound by the will of God expressed in the Ten Commandments. It is true that the last sentence emphasizes that it was self-evident that "in spite of this declaration we concede everyone his full freedom of conscience and that we respect every other peaceful position." But this is immediately followed by the reservation: "We decidedly condemn the actions of some agitators who try to force their special point of view on others and thus not only bring harm to the interests of their fatherland but even to the cause of the Lord."² In reality, the Adventist Church in Germany did not concede to her believers freedom of conscience in their position toward the state and the military. Several times it had been pointed out that in cases of doubt the written declaration of the church leadership should be used in military courts. Anyone who opted against this could not count on the solidarity of the church leaders.

¹For example, see above the comment on Luther's position, 32-34.

²Die Ausschüsse der Missionsgesellschaft.
On the other hand, it would be wrong to conclude from all this that Adventists in Germany were fully-fledged nationalists. There may have been some exceptions, but the typical position was expressed as follows: "Even if every Adventist should do his duty toward the state and pray for the authorities, sermons and lectures and youth meetings should not contain elements of national hatred and the mentality of war. Our sole objective must always be the salvation of souls."1 This was said in response to the question "How far can we go and must we show patriotism in connection with our work to save souls?"2 Besides, nationalism did not fit into Conradi's missionary strategies. In spite of the war, he never put the task of proclaiming the gospel to the heathen countries in second place. Even in his letter to the Royal Bavarian Ministry of War he expressed his hope that peace could be reestablished with the help of the Adventists and that "the free course of the gospel in the dark countries of paganism could anew be of use to the whole of mankind."3 In the first article written by Conradi after the outbreak of war he formulated six objectives, the first of which was the mission to the heathen:

No one less than the Savior himself shows us in Matthew

1East German Union Conference, Minutes of Meetings, August 19 and 20, 1915.
2Ibid.
3Letter, Conradi to Bavarian Ministry of War.
24:6–14 what is the duty of the people of God in the midst of the tribulations of war. Instead of thinking only of ourselves and our progress in such times of need it is especially in such days that the gospel of the kingdom of glory must be preached to the whole world as a witness for all nations. . . . As great as our own need may be, we must in no wise forget our missionaries in the far-away world of the heathen but must maintain our readiness to make sacrifices for them in every way.1

His experience had taught him that the power of the Adventist faith lay in the connection between the local congregation and the world-wide mission field. In this way, the individual believers feel themselves members of a worldwide family. Even if this concept was partially hindered by the decision to agree to armed military service in the war, Conradi could still reap some of the harvest which he had sown before. Membership figures in the Central European Division rose from 16,900 in 1915 to 25,200 in 1920. There was no other region in the world that could claim figures of growth like these. If growth was an expression of the blessing of the Lord, did this then not justify Conradi’s tactics in the war?

1Conradi, "Die rechte Hilfe in der Not," Zionswächter, August 17, 1914, 401.
CHAPTER IX

THE PERIOD OF REFLECTION BETWEEN THE TWO
WORLD WARS

The Reaction of the General Conference to
the Position of the Church in Germany

To the extent that Conradi was the figurehead of
German and even European Adventism before and during World
War I, the General Conference held him responsible for what
had happened—and rightly so. When the United States
entered the War in 1917, the American Adventists clearly
stated their position as being noncombatant. Out of a
feeling of joint responsibility toward God and their
democratic state, they rejected bloodshed and actions of
war, but within the limits imposed by their principles of
faith they declared their readiness to serve their country
in situations where they could faithfully obey the Ten
Commandments.¹ A discussion with the leaders in Germany
about this stance became an impossibility with the onset of
war as all channels of communication between the General
Conference and the German Reich had been cut.² Thus,

¹Wilcox, 256.

²Conradi relinquished his US citizenship in the
interim. Owing to the war the countries of the European
Division which were opposed to Germany in the war
established a provisional Division Office in The Hague.
differing positions and tensions remained. As a first reaction to the deviations of the German Adventists, the General Conference decided on October 15, 1918 to dissolve the European Division. Decentralizing measures were designed to reduce the influence of Germany and of Conradi. This decision was implemented in two steps: The European Division was reorganised in 1920 and eight years later it was finally split up into a Northern European, Central European, Southern European and into a Division of the Adventist Churches in the USSR. In this connection, Conradi was relieved of his office as President of the European Division in 1922 and was replaced by Christian. Although he had reached retirement age, Conradi perceived this decision as an open criticism of his ministry, in spite of the continuous growth in Central Europe during his administration. Only his closest collaborators were aware of the reasons that led to the decision to relieve him of his duties.

1Christian later reported about the first encounter with the European church leaders in 1919 in Boulder, Colorado, after the war: "These men were the first to give us a definite report on what had really happened, and they minced no words in telling what they thought of the mistake of sending such misleading statements to the government" (Christian, Aftermath, 25). These leaders, however, came only from the British, Scandinavian and Latin Unions. The only "accused" present was Dail, but he had moved to The Hague in 1915 and had been unable to maintain contact with the Germans after the United States entered the war.

2In retrospect, the formation of a German Inter-Union Association was the right step. Only an independent German Adventist Church organisation was allowed to work in Germany during Nazi times.
Negotiations with the Reformers at Friedensau in 1920

The Position of the General Conference as Seen by Daniells

Only after the end of the war could constructive talks be held with the Reformers. They still harbored the hope that the General Conference would publicly denounce Conradi's position. When it came to the talks they were not so much an encounter between two groups of one church but of two totally independent churches.\(^1\) Headed by General Conference President Daniells, the two parties met after a large ministers' meeting at Friedensau between July 21 and 23, 1920. In addition to other somewhat secondary questions, Daniells had to explain the position of the German leadership and of the General Conference. According to the minutes of the meeting, he said:

We have really found it unusually difficult to discover and give a common ground that will apply in every case of war. . . . The question of war is a very complicated problem, possibly more so than any other question we have. . . . As soon as the war began in Europe we in America began to study this question with much care. We had certain important advantages. . . . We, on the other hand, had two years to study this question before we entered the war. With reference to these questions concerning the war, then, we had the advantage in that it was possible for us to take time to decide on our standpoint after careful consideration. We found, however, that as we began to study this question with great care, some among us became greatly confused. We called together our most experienced men, such as Brother Spicer. . . . Brethren, I can tell you truly that even these men found these questions so difficult

\(^1\)In early 1919, the Reform Movement had founded the International Missionary Society of the Seventh-day Adventists, German Union.
and confusing that is was difficult for them to come to a definite decision. We wanted to find and to take a position on which we could all agree, and after careful study we came to the conclusion that as a church we believed and accepted the principles of non-combatancy. Non-combatant seemed to us our proper motto. That had been before the position which we as a church had taken. In our study we discovered that during the Civil War in America our people took their stand as non-combatants. And now again in this war, as our brethren, after thorough study and discussion, came together, they decided that they would hold to the same position. But that decision alone did not remove all our difficulties.¹

Thus, he sought to build a bridge to the German leaders. He passed an astonishingly mild judgement on the disputed declarations. In his opinion, some terminology used had been simply ill-chosen. If the brethren in Germany had had enough time, the declarations might have been worded differently. At the same time, he made it clear that the General Conference would never have passed such public statements.² However, in the meantime, Dail had seen his mistakes and tearfully declared his sincere wish to have been able to retract the declaration of August 2, 1914.³ In contrast, Daniells criticised the Reform Movement for


³"We regret and we do not accept certain statements that were written and sent out here. When, however, we consider the circumstances and the motive behind these writings, we have come to the conclusion that our brethren here were just as faithful in their relation to the work as we were" (Ibid., 58-59).

³Probably he was speaking about Dail’s speech at Boulder, Colorado in 1919 (Christian, Aftermath, 25).
fundamental mistakes as they were "totally in the wrong." To show that the position of the Reformers was too simplistic, he quoted an Old Testament example and asked:

What would you have done if Moses, right after he had received the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai, had ordered you to attack king Bashan and to destroy the king with all his people, both men and women and children? Would you have accused Moses of being a murderer? God however had given him the task to do something that seemed to be a transgression of the sixth commandment. You see from this that we do not find it a wise thing to accept the exposition of the commandment given by a small group like yourselves until we have time to study the question thoroughly, because so many conditions and things enter a true obedience of the commandment.

The Missing Reaction of Conradi and of the German Church Leadership

If one looks for an unequivocal reaction among the German church leaders regarding the documents that were to announce the position of the Adventists to the German Government, one can hardly find any. The only statement of Conradi makes a confession of guilt secondary and is rather general: "It is not hard for me to say, first of all, that

1"We believe that your understanding of this question, together with the people whom you represent, are in great error" (Report, 86). Using these sharp words to do his utmost to bring the Reform Movement back into the main church, Daniells nonetheless exaggerated in this statement. Certainly it is easier to agree with the words of Wilhelm Richter, one of the first Reformers who came back to the main church: "Concerning the question of military service the brethren of the Movement [i.e. the Reform Movement] took the right position in 1914/15. I myself had to spend the years of 1917/18 in the Spandau prison for my conscientious objection" (Wilhelm Richter, "Eine kurze Chronik über die Entstehung und den Verlauf der Reformbewegung mit einigen Anmerkungen", TMs, 12, Private archive).

2Report, 67.
we are very sorry that a question of this kind should come up."¹ Almost simultaneously he added that he had been in London when the war broke out and not in Hamburg when Dail published the declaration, and that the only action possible for him to take at the time was to establish contact with Schuberth by telephone. This seems to be no more than an excuse or a denial of responsibility. The greater part of Conradi's speech in his defense was taken up by reports concerning the prophecies of the end of the world by Wieck and other self-proclaimed prophets, about police actions against the churches and the Hamburg central office and the discussions with the protest movement. But it is also true that Conradi did not conceal his position on the military and Sabbath attendance in schools, and how he and the other European leaders had handled these matters in the past. He went on to ask: "Did our Adventist leadership in Europe make a mistake when, during the time of peace, they permitted our young men to do military service and our children to attend school on the Sabbath?"² Daniells evidently did not respond to this.

In summary, three results of the talks can be named:

1. There was no clear confession of error from the German leaders before the assembly. Their excessively pragmatic attitude to the military issue had made many

¹Ibid., 21.
²Ibid., 31.
church members insecure about what position to take and driven them into the arms of the Reformers.¹

2. Daniells apologized several times on behalf of the German brethren and tried to spare them embarrassment in the theological discussions on the matter. At the same time, he made it clear that even the General Conference had not been sure about its position at the outbreak of the war and that the biblical evidence sometimes allowed different conclusions.²

3. Even though their attitude did not always seem to be sound, the representatives of the Reform Movement were the only ones who showed the courage to state clearly: "We grant that it is greatly to be regretted that certain people in our movement have given themselves to error and to fanaticism. We also wish to ask our brethren to forgive us where we, as frail human beings, have made mistakes."³

¹Christian reports that the German leaders confessed their guilt during the ministers' assembly that took place before and after the talks with the Reformers: "They freely confessed their fault, and earnestly, even with tears, asked to be forgiven" (Christian, Aftermath, 44). No documentary evidence of this is available. Conradi only regretted some written statements but never his standpoint as such. On the other hand, Dail changed his views and confessed his failure.

²This was acknowledged even by a representative of the Reform Movement, H. Spanknöbel: "That there was no unity and no clear understanding among the Adventist people before the war in these questions is very evident from the various meetings you have had in America, and what you have said here is a testimony to the same confusion" (Report, 82).

³Ibid., 84.
In spite of these conciliatory words, the Reform Movement stuck to its rigid position with the result that common ground could not be found and the talks at Friedensau in the final analysis came to nothing. At the same time, the others present failed to use the chance to really assess opposing views on the events of the past. Thus, the speaker of the Reform Movement was right when, in premonition of the events of the Second World War, he expressed the apprehension: "If we in the future follow the same method that we had in the past, then again in another coming storm we will find our people unprepared."

An Attempt at Reconciliation: Gland 1923

At the Friedensau talks with the Reform Movement in 1920, the differences concerning the military question were quite evident. Conradi stuck to his position that Adventists should serve in the army in peacetime when drafted, whereas Daniells clearly took the non-combatant stance. As there was no draft in the United States during peacetime Daniells was referring mainly to times of war. Thus, both positions stood in contrast. Just as he had done in 1915, at the General Conference session in 1922 Conradi once again made an attempt to justify the German position taken during the war by pointing to the emergency situation that had prevailed.\(^1\) In order to finally reduce the

\(^{1}\)Ibid., 83.

\(^{2}\)Conradi reported "... at the outbreak of the
resulting tensions between the Unions of Europe, the European Division headed by Christian, its new president, passed a resolution to this end in early 1923 at Gland, Switzerland.

The introductory sentence of this declaration pointed to the agreement of all Adventists believers in the world on the issue of war. This may be summarized in three points: 1. Adventists acknowledge and support their government because it is instituted by God and is designed to work for order, justice and calm. 2. That is why they honor the State and pay customs and tax. 3. Adventists honor God's Law as it was practised in the teachings and life of Jesus.

For that reason we observe the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday) as sacred time; we refrain from secular labor upon that day, but engage gladly in works of necessity and mercy for the relief of suffering and the uplift of humanity, in peace and in war we decline to participate in acts of violence and bloodshed. We grant to each of our church members absolute liberty to serve their country, at all times and in all places, in accord with the dictates of their personal conscientious conviction.¹

The three German Union presidents and Conradi signed an additional note in which they pointed out their agreement with the declaration and at the same time expressed their regret over the documents published during the war:

war, the military officers and some of the clergy said, "Now is the favorable opportunity to suppress this American sect" (quoted in Barbour, 18).

¹Spicer, "Our European Brethren and Noncombatancy," Review and Herald, March 6, 1924.
... our position during the war as it had been expressed in different documents was reviewed, and we herewith by our own signatures confirm anew what had already been declared at Friedensau in 1920, our regret that such documents had been issued. We are in full harmony with the statement adopted by the Council today.¹

The purpose of this further declaration was to eliminate all disharmony. Taking a closer look at the text, however, some questions arise: Where is there an unequivocal answer to the question of whether or not military service is permissible? Why is there no hint of the preferred medical service during times of war? What position is taken toward the bearing of arms? These issues which were so pertinent during the First World War in Europe thus remained unanswered. What did such nebulous expressions as "works of necessity" and "uplift of humanity" really mean? Could such arguments not be used to justify every defence of any country and even a preventive war? And what use are the already weak arguments if the last sentence leaves everything to the individual conscience anyway? The expression "non-combatant" is not even to be found in the text, although this meant so much to Adventists. Of course it is true that this document is the first declaration of all European Unions on the military issue.² Non-combatancy was the intention, but there is no direct reference to the military question and the use of arms as announced in the

¹Ibid.

²"It is the first declaration of these principles ever made in our general work in Europe" (Ibid).
preamble to the document. Did this really provide acceptable answers to the questions raised by so many Seventh-day Adventist churches? Or does this text show nothing more than an attempt of the General Conference to save face? If it is true that Conradi only put his signature to the additional note with great reluctance, it shows how far they were from true consensus. In this vein, a pamphlet by the Reformers quotes a circular by Schuberth saying: "While it became evident in the discussion of this resolution [of Gland] that two diverging opinions can both be based on the Bible, we were more and more convinced that it is better for ethical reasons and that it is also the sense of Christianity not to participate in violent acts of bloodshed. . . . On the other hand this must not bind any conscience as the last paragraph clearly states."¹

In the first months of 1923, the churches in Germany were informed by their conferences about the results of the meeting in Gland. In the circular of the North East Saxonian Conference, which does not incorporate the additional declaration of the German brethren, the president advised the elders of the churches: "Please do no more than to read out the declaration and avoid any discussion of it. This can never be successful."² If this is not just a

¹Muß es eine Reformation der Adventgemeinde geben?, 10.

isolated remark, it would indicate an unresolved problem. This was also the opinion of the Reform Movement concerning the declaration of Gland which in their eyes was far too liberal regarding the freedom of individual decision.

Hints at the Attitude of German Adventists on the Military Issue during the Weimar Republic

The years of the Weimar Republic brought demilitarisation and democratic reforms to Germany. When conscription was abolished, the burning issues regarding non-combatancy of the First World War lost their importance. An article in *Der Adventbote* by Emil Frauchinger is of interest in relation to the Gland declaration. He points to the fact that at all conferences, "year in and year out" the same questions on the military issue were being raised. "Either our church members have forgotten the answers or one must assume they believe that the standpoint of the Bible might change with the course of time. . . ." A third alternative might be added to the two suggested by the author, namely, that the members were apparently not satisfied with the answers given to that

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1Conferences and missionary regions of Southeast Europe still belonging to Germany that retained or reintroduced military conscription were assisted in making up their minds concerning the issue: "Brethren who are called to do their military service should be especially advised by our workers about the position they ought to take" ("Die Jahreskonferenz der Mährisch-Schlesischen Vereinigung," *Der Adventbote*, December 1, 1922, 364).

point! As an explanation, the author made it unmistakably clear that Jesus and the apostles had also taken a position on the military issue as "this issue is at the same time a question of protection and security of the country and for that matter a question of authority."¹ In Matthew 22:15 an answer might be found: First, we owe unconditional obedience to God and are governed by the Ten Commandments that are binding as long as heaven and earth exist. The State might force a certain degree of external morality but is unable to implement the true law of morality, the Ten Commandments, because true morality cannot be enforced. That is why the apostles, on the one hand, advised the believers to obey the authorities but, on the other, rejected every law that meddled with religion.

For that matter the military question is a purely personal issue of conscience which everybody has to answer before God himself. There is nothing that is more subject to the personal decision of man than his relationship to the Highest Being. It is exactly for this matter that the demand for the freedom of conscience is justified as it corresponds to the very inner nature of man. This right to the freedom of conscience is recognized in all civilized countries, with the exception of a few, as an unalienable human right.²

It is doubtful whether this complicated answer prevented the delegates from again asking questions about military service at subsequent conferences. What does become evident, however, is the demand for State recognition

¹Ibid., 52.
²Ibid., 52.
of conscientious objection to service in the military.

In a similar strain, Conradi wrote in *Zionswächter* in 1919 that stricter Sunday laws were to be expected. In anticipation, the leadership intended to prepare a petition to the authorities asking for permission to work on Sundays and to keep the children out of school on Saturdays. In this article, Conradi used the same kind of argument as with the military issue. He reasoned that if the children were to carefully learn the subject matter they missed on the Sabbath and were otherwise "diligent and well-behaved", the parents would "be successful in circumspectly proceeding to get their children out of school on the Sabbath. These petitions also take into account our brethren, to ease their lot during military service". In the same year, the Prussian Ministry of Culture granted Adventist children Saturdays free. Soon all the other German Länder followed suit. Also, the German railways and post office allowed their employees Saturdays free on a legal basis. Thus, the hope grew that in another such case of emergency the conscience of Adventist soldiers would be fully respected.

The discussion with the Reform Movement over the military issue remained contentious until the late-1920s. For instance, under the political pressure of Stalin's

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government, the Adventist churches in the Soviet Union passed a resolution at their sixth all-union congress in which they declared military service in all its forms obligatory for Adventists. The Reformers argued that this was a matter of personal freedom—something which the document of Gland had addressed. At about the same time one of their leaders, Karl Kotzel, later a missionary to South America, asked the Ministry of Defence to be allowed to see the declaration of August 4, 1914.

I would now be very interested to know whether this document is in the hands of the present honorable government. If so, will the Adventists accordingly take part in another war in the future? This conclusion would certainly have to be drawn from the nonwithdrawal of the documents of the past.

In writing this, he was probably voicing questions that were raised in connection with the Friedensau talks of 1920, when it was considered whether or not it would be good to point out the compromising position of German Adventists at the beginning of the war. As this obviously had failed, the diplomatic answer of the ministry was that such a document was known to them. "What conclusions can be drawn from the fact that this declaration was never

1 Alf Lohne, Adventisten in Russland (Hamburg: Saatkorn-Verlag, 1987), 118.


3 Bundesarchiv, Abteilungen Potsdam, Bestand Reichskirchenministerium, No. 23388.

4 Christian, Aftermath, 43.
requested to be returned to the sender is something we cannot judge."¹

Further fuel was added to the controversy by a pacifist member, Martha Steinitz, who wrote that about fifty Adventists had refused military service in the First World War. At the outbreak of war, she said, about one hundred conscientious objectors had been shot or hanged in Hungary, mostly Nazarenes and Adventists, and similar incidents had occurred in Southeast Europe.² The Reform Movement claimed credit for this bravery in standing up for principle even though not all those who did so were members of their movement.³ Thus the intermezzo of the Weimar Republic ended the tension for German Adventists when it came to the military issue. Their different point of view to that of the General Conference persisted even after the Gland Conference. Besides, there was now an even stronger propaganda campaign being carried out by the Reform Movement using new arguments and evidence.

¹Bundesarchiv, No. 23388.

²Kobler, 258-259.

³For instance, Christian mentioned in a letter to Kern in 1934 that Mueller, later head of the Adventist Missionary Society, had been incarcerated because of conscientious objection. Unfortunately, no documents about these objectors are available today.
CHAPTER X

SURVEY OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST POSITION ON THE MILITARY ISSUE DURING THE TIME OF NAZISM

Different Statements on the Military Issue before the Reintroduction of the General Draft in 1935 and the Ban of the Reform Movement

From the moment they came to power, the Nazis considered the Adventist Church "alien if measured by the religious attitude of the German nation."\(^1\) As early as May 1933, some criticisms and reproaches led the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior to question whether steps should be taken "for an immediate prohibition of this sect."\(^2\) This came soon. On November 26, 1933, the Gestapo (Secret Police) banned the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This ban, however, was suddenly rescinded on December 6, 1933. To this day no one knows why. From that point on, at least, the Church leaders in Germany knew how much tolerance and freedom of conscience could be expected of the new state authorities.

Along with the fear of new prohibitions, the new type of nationalism again found an eager audience within the Adventist Church. The apparent failure of the

\(^1\)Bayrisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Munich, Bestand MA 107292, No. II 23887, May 26, 1933.

\(^2\)Ibid.

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democratic forces in the Weimar Republic, the fear of Bolshevism, hatred of the victors of 1918 and their new Western culture drove many Adventists, along with the majority of the German people, into the arms of the "national socialists." The Germans admired Hitler who apparently had the stamina and energy to master the big problems and to defend "Christian" values. After the short period of prohibition in 1933, Adventists felt compelled to show their allegiance to the State. Many were influenced by Hulda Jost, head of Adventist Welfare Work. Since 1928, she had built up Adventist welfare groups all over Germany within a very short period. These soon became well-known in many social fields. She was enthused by Nazism herself, and, being unaware was not aware of its true nature, exerted great influence over the church members. In her brochure published after her death entitled, "I Call You, Mothers of the World!", she spoke vehemently in defence of Christian values in the face of Bolshevism.

Thus I raise my voice again in the name of God and of humanity, that we women and mothers, whose blood should freeze in the face of the extent and horror of crime and rape, the dissolution of all order and all sense, wake up and act in unity. . . . We must take a clear and unequivocal anti-bolshevist position.

Such words, of course, reduced the threshold of

As early as in the mid-1920s the Adventist public journal Gegenwartsfragen (Issues of the Present) frequently criticized the League of Nations and the efforts of the Western powers to re-arm.

resistance in many Adventists when Hitler proceeded to put such ideas into reality some years later.

On the other hand, the involvement of Jost also resulted in positive developments. Everywhere in the churches first aid courses were taught to enable all, both young and old, to render practical assistance in case of need. "Wherever possible we want to encourage our young people to acquire some training for medical services in Red Cross courses or others of the kind."¹ This council resolution, taken in 1934, later enabled Adventist young men to enter the medical battalions of the German armed forces.

In the opinion of the leaders in Germany, the brief prohibition of the Adventist Church in 1933 was due to being mistakenly confused with the Reform Movement. That is why several Adventist apologists, perhaps in an attempt to show themselves as loyal citizens, set out to discredit the Reformers, and prove that they were adversaries of the German State. This kind of argument again picked up the war issue of 1914. In a circular warning against the Reform Movement, the president of the West Saxonian Conference, Ludwig E. Bahr, declared in November 1933:

In the light of the story of Abraham the demand of the men of the so-called Reform Movement (Apostasy Movement) that military and armed service must be condemned is wrong. They accuse us of having fallen away from the fundamental truths just because we do not refuse to do our military service as they do. They will continue to

¹West German Union Conference, Hanover, "Evangeliumsarbeit aus Glauben, 1935" TMs, 23, Private archive.
do harm to our Church until the authorities become aware of their actions and forbid their propaganda. At no price do we as the Seventh-day Adventist Church want to be confused with them, and we are sure that the day will come when the authorities, who cannot tolerate such things, will be fully aware of the difference between them and us.¹

Fortunately, the authorities finally did see the difference in attitude toward the military question between the Reformers and the main Seventh-day Adventist Church. In June 26, 1935, the Gestapo ordered that all police offices establish exact reports about the scope and activities of the Reformers. This order explained that "The Reform Movement . . . is a sect that split off from the main church of the Seventh-day Adventists because this Church permitted its followers, against their basic tenets, to enter into military service."² On April 29, 1935, the Reform Movement was banned.³ Some Reformers later refused to serve in the

¹Ludwig E. Bahr, "Abraham in Kanaan, November 1933," TMs, 2, Private archive. In his further argument the author quoted several times from the article "The Nation" by J. White, which appeared in Review and Herald, August 12, 1862.

²Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv, Bückeburg, Signatur L 102b, 4907.

³"The Reform Movement of the Seventh-day Adventists uses a religious cloak to pursue goals opposed to the national socialist philosophy. The adherents of this sect refuse to serve in the armed forces and use the German salute. They declare openly that they have no fatherland but that they are internationalists and consider all men their brothers. As the position of this sect may serve to create confusion among the population, their dissolution was necessary to protect the state and the nation" (Nordrhein-Westfälisches Staatsarchiv, Münster, Signatur Kr. Unna, Politische Polizei No. 32).
military and several paid for this with their lives.¹ Others fled from Germany and a few subjected themselves to conscription. The leaders of the Reform Movement fled to Holland.²

Later, the press and judicial authorities stressed repeatedly that the Reform Movement must not be confused with the Seventh-day Adventist Church which was contributing valuable service through its charity and welfare organisations. To justify this image, Adventists were faced with the necessity of repeatedly proving their loyalty to the State.

The Reaction of the German Church Leadership to the Reintroduction of the Draft

On March 16, 1935, a law was passed reintroducing the draft in Germany. As early as one month before, the leaders had responded to inquiries about the Adventist position by stating that Adventists would submit to conscription to "prove that they are genuine Christians and faithful citizens."³ This situation did not come about all

¹Reports about the seven martyrs known by name are contained in Hans Fleschutz, Und folget ihrem Glauben nach (Jagsthausen/Heilbronn, Württemberg: Internationale Missionsgesellschaft der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten-Reformationsbewegung, n.d.).

²For greater detail see, Teubert, 35-37.

³East German Union Conference (Berlin), Minutes of Meetings of the Union Conference Committee, meeting of March 14, 1935. After taking official notice of the above-mentioned statement of the Central European Division, the minutes of the East German Union Conference add: "The delegates present reiterated their well-known allegiance to
of a sudden, because young men had been required to serve in the national labor service from 1933, which to a certain extent resembled paramilitary training. To be of some assistance to the Adventists concerned and to strengthen their faith and their steadfastness, the preachers and congregations were asked to take special pastoral care of them. The young people themselves were advised to "stand out by faithfully doing their duty to be granted the freedom to live according to their religious convictions." ¹

After the introduction of the new conscription law, the Church leadership in Germany first tried to reassess the military question theologically and second, to obtain the guarantee of a free Sabbath for Seventh-day Adventists. Unexpectedly, the Minister of War responded to a number of petitions from Adventist soldiers by granting them the right to attend divine services on the Sabbath.² In practice, state and authorities. Regarding military service and the labor service we believe we owe obedience to the authorities according to Romans 13 for the protection of home, nation and fatherland" (Ibid).

¹"Evangeliumsarbeit", 22. It is interesting to note that this brochure points to the resolution on the military issue voted by the three German unions on July 26, 1913.

²"The religious community of the Seventh-day Adventists has expressed the desire to allow its members presently doing their military service to attend their divine services on Saturdays between 9 and 12 o’clock. I have no reservations to grant members of this community this wish upon application; taking into account, however, their in-service and out-service conduct and the requirements of their duty" (quoted in the circular of the Central German Conference, October 2, 1935, Private archive).
however, this order was applied only during the initial phase of the draft.

In preparation for a declaration regarding military service, the president of the German Inter-Union Association, Adolf Minck, sent out a draft proposal to all conference presidents and department leaders pointing out that: "In order not to be surprised by the course of events we must more clearly define the position expressed by this [following] resolution. Our preachers and workers must have something substantial in their hands."\(^1\) At the same time he requested their reaction to the draft of this declaration. Of the eleven responses by the conference presidents of the East German Union, five returned the the draft without commenting, three made insignificant changes and only two commented extensively on it.\(^2\) Beyond this, it is noteworthy that the two authors of the more extensive comments were clearly very careful not to cause offence in their remarks. The finally-adopted document entitled, "Our Position toward the State and General Conscription", was sent to all presidents and department heads as a confidential declaration. It read:

\[\ldots\] do not publish in writing the points listed in this declaration, neither for the servants of the gospel

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\(^1\)Letter, Adolf Minck to the Conference presidents and secretaries in the East German Union Conference, April 2, 1935, Archive for European Adventist History, U 1-2, 464.

\(^2\)This seems to indicate how isolated the responsible leaders of the time must have felt.
nor for the members of the churches. They may however be used as a basis for personal talks with gospel workers and young brethren who may possibly be asking for advice. They may also be of some assistance in our talks with representatives of the state authorities.¹

Attached to the document were seven pages with a collection of quotations from the history of the Adventist Church, most supportive of the "traditional" position of the German Church.² This collection of quotations was not to be passed on in writing either, "as such statements, according to experience, are easily misinterpreted."³ The document can only be judged against the background of concern for the survival of the churches. At the same time, it was the only official declaration of the Adventist Church in Germany on the military question during the times of National Socialism.

¹For "Our Position towards the State and General Conscription," see German Inter-Union Association of Seventh-day Adventists (Berlin), Minutes of Meetings of the Inter-Union Executive Committee, August 7, 1935.


³Letter, Minck to the Presidents and Department Secretaries of the East German Union Conference of April 29, 1935, Private archive.
"Our Position toward the State and General Conscription"

The document comprises seven points, the first six substantially agreeing with the draft of Minck, and the last being replaced by another. The first point refers to the authorities as being instituted by God (Romans 13:1-7) whom the Christian must serve because he loves what is good. It is then pointed out that according to the precepts of Jesus in Matthew 12:14-17 we are required to pay tax to the State. The third point uses Genesis 14:14-20; Numbers 1:1-3; 1 Samuel 8:9-17; Luke 3:14 and Acts 10:1-2,7,44,48 to underline the right of the State to introduce military service to protect the nation in peace and war. "According to our spiritual position as promoters of peace in every respect and our striving to help everywhere in love and to heal wounds, we would prefer to serve in the medical services of the armed forces." The following point stresses the personal nature of such decisions of conscience, just as a person does his civic duty in special situations. According to Romans 2:16 and 14:10 each individual must stand before God's judgement on his own.

1 Draft: "We believe it is right to distinguish between armed service in times of peace and in times of war. A time of war is a time of need, but a time of peace provides the chance to try in all earnestness to be treated in matters of faith and of conscience at least as are members of other denominations." (Letter, Minck, April 2, 1935).

Further, it says:

According to the example of our Savior it will always be our goal to do God’s will as it is to be found in the Ten Commandments and also to stress the sanctification of the Day of Rest, of the Seventh Day. How far this can be achieved and done in special circumstances must be left to the decision of the individual.¹

A quotation from E. G. White underscored the relativity of individual opinion and views and warned of unconsidered judgements.² The sixth point contains the plea to act wisely in this regard and not to desert, refuse to obey orders or otherwise act unwisely. Finally, the Golden Rule is cited: Everyone should act as Jesus did, for He is the yardstick of all our action.

In comparison with the declarations issued during World War I, certain shifts of emphasis can be noted. It is true that this well-worded statement of conviction was written in times of peace and did not need to take into account the situation of Adventists already fighting in the front lines. On the other hand, two years of Nazi rule had already left its mark and the fear of renewed prohibition of the church hovered over the decision makers like the sword of Damocles. It can be assumed that the choice of words was essentially influenced by this fear. It is noteworthy that the thesis of Conradi about the circumstances of armed service during times of peace as compared with times of war

¹Ibid.

was not propounded *expressis verbis*, although the first
draft of the document had intended to do so. Pointing to
preferred service in the medical field, the leaders referred
to the resolution of the three German Unions in 1913 but
stressed repeatedly how important was individual
responsibility before God. The 1935 document thus went
beyond what had been said in 1913.

To protect themselves from the Reformers and to
simultaneously help the young men, every conscripted
Adventist received a card signed by his minister and the
conference secretary which contained only the first three
points of the declaration.¹ His signature under the
statement: "I have been informed about the above basic
tenets and herewith declare my acceptance of them"² meant
some security for the Church but de facto robbed the
individual of the right to opt against armed service as
points four to six of the document allowed. In an
accompanying letter Emil Gugel, the Ministerial Secretary of
the German Inter-Union Association, provided hints about how
to act on the Sabbath when in military service. It was most
important to confess the Sabbath as a gospel Christian and
not

. . . in the legalistic way of the Jews. Concerning

¹Excerpts from the Minutes of the Central European
Division, September 30 - October 6, 1935, Archives for
European Adventist History, U 1-2, 96.

²Supplement to "Our Position towards the State and
General Conscription," Private archive.
swearing the oath on the flag we on our side have no reservations because it is formulated in such a way that it does not bind our conscience in our duties to God, but only relates to the duties of the Wehrmacht.¹

Statements on Military Service and Nationalism up to the Outbreak of World War II

The practical consequence of the declaration of the Church leaders in connection with the conscription law was that in principle there were no problems for those in service, as the law made attendance at church services possible. But it was different in the civilian area. Especially after the abolition of the exemptions from school attendance on Sabbath for Adventist children and from Sabbath work for Civil Servants, a state of tension developed which made the authorities doubt the allegiance of Adventists, and in direct reaction posed greater problems for the church leadership than had been the case in 1914.² To investigate the matter in detail, the Gestapo took over the case.

I would like to ask you to provide confidential statements made whether and where in your area the adherents of the sect of the "Seventh-day Adventists" have shown themselves to be opponents by their attitude toward the state and especially toward military service, elections, the German salute, the German Labor Front and the National Socialist People's Welfare

¹Letter, Emil Gugel to the SDA Draftees in the Wehrmacht, October 25, 1935, Archives for European Adventist History, U 1-2, 114.

²It would go beyond the scope of this investigation to research the problems arising from the Sabbath issue in the civilian area. However, the failure of the Church leaders in this area, resulting from fear of another ban on the Church, was even greater than on the issue of war.
Organisation. Are cases known in which they have absolutely refused to work on Saturdays?¹

It is obvious from this statement that the military question had not been fully resolved in Adventist churches. This may, in part, have been caused by some Adventists who agreed with the Reform Movement in many points but who did not want to separate from the church. When matters became really serious, however, most of them changed sides and went over to the Reformers.

In late 1936 the Advent Beobachter, a magazine of a Polish Adventist apostasy movement [the so-called Kube movement], published an article about the position of Adventists in the military and armed service which, in its pacifist bias, attacked the attitude of German Adventists. The Adventist leaders, in contrast, considered it a "veritable manoeuvre of cheating which was possibly calculated to damage the public image of our Church."²

Fearing that State authorities might misunderstand the content of the article and use it against the church, Minck wrote a letter to Georg Wilhelm Schubert, President of the Central European Division in Basle. This letter was written to inform the German authorities about the true attitude of German Adventists to military service. After evaluating the

¹Gestapo Saarbrücken to all mayors of the district, January 21, 1937 (Landesarchiv Saarbrücken, Bestand: Abteilung Merzig-Land, No. 5).

documents from the American Civil War used in the article of Advent Beobachter, Minck based his argument on the well-known documents of 1913, the reply of W. C. and E. G. White in 1915, the declaration of Gland and the seven-point programme entitled "Our Position toward the State and General Conscription". He came to this conclusion:

The above-mentioned statements of our Church find their best affirmation in the armed service which thousands of our men did in times of war and peace and by the faithful obedience of those of our young men who are presently doing their duty in the German armed forces. Our basic attitude toward military conscription is in no wise impeded by the fact that a number of Adventist conscripts prefer to be used for medical services in accordance with their spiritual manner of thinking. It is self-evident that the young men are trying to stick to the fundamental Christian tenets of our Church even when they serve in the armed forces and that to their best conscience and knowledge they try to live accordingly. This will certainly be acknowledged and estimated by the respective authorities.¹

The Situation and Attitude of Conscripted Adventists during the War

In contrast to the outbreak of World War I, no policy statements regarding the duty to serve in the military were made by Adventists in the summer and autumn of 1939. Their position was clear and since 1935 had proved both practical and feasible. Anybody who thought and acted differently either went over to the Reformers or, being painfully aware of what National Socialism entailed, emigrated. Many Adventists adapted to the circumstances and practised their faith only when it caused no offence.

¹Ibid.
To a certain extent the leaders of the German Adventists felt confirmed in their cautious attitude by Christian, who was at the last meeting of conference presidents before the war and had given the following advice in view of the threat of prohibition:

In all predicaments in the different countries where I stayed throughout the last twenty years two basic principles of our Church proved to be decisive: 1. We must try in every way to avoid persecution. 2. We must cling to the Word of God and to His Commandments. In no wise must we veer from God’s commands or from the gospel; both belong together. After many years we shall perhaps understand the matter better than today.¹

This was indeed the way the leading brethren viewed matters. In the first instance, they tried to keep the State from meddling in the work of the church. To achieve this, they were willing to accept compromises in exercising their faith.²

Through the propaganda of the Third Reich, Nazi ideology crept unnoticed into the hearts of German Adventists. It is true that the war broke out unexpectedly,


²Some of Christian’s words, however, did not sit well with the church leaders: "I agree to have love in every possible way, to encourage our members and to strengthen them, but I also believe that one should act fundamentally (1 Cor. 5:7 and 13). No one who does not get his Sabbath off can have an office in the church. The Sabbath Commandment has the seal of God and we get our seal for obedience. The Lord’s True Day of Rest and all his commandments are holy. The only safe and right thing for us is to abide by the Bible. Christians must not wonder too much about the consequences of their actions. The Lord will show us the way and give us the grace to remain faithful to Him" (Ibid., 72).
but in the meantime many had "understood" that the Christian roots of European culture could only be defended in a war against the East. As was written in the materials provided for German workers:

If we take a look at the present situation of our world today it is becoming more and more evident that this German nation will be drawn into a great controversy with the godless people of the East. When this conflict will fully break out, only God knows. What is at stake are the Christian roots of our European culture. In this battle you will prove that you are strong mentally and militarily. You will not succeed if you are not firm in your religion and in your Christian faith. A true German soldier must be a Christian man.¹

But some statements in German Adventist literature went even further. The war against the Western powers was seen as "God's judgement" over these "fattened" nations: "The great battle of the nations today is a power struggle between Hope and Luxury, between a young national trust in the future and in life and a satisfaction that has come to be uncreative."² The idea of a holy and just war present in many Adventist publications during World War I was now, in the late 1930s, expressed openly and explicitly. Only a few understood at that time the brutal and inhumane nature of the Nazi regime. Anyone who refused to be "gleichgeschaltet" was punished without mercy. At the outbreak of the Second World War, Germany was a mix of

¹Quoted in Ministerial Department of the Central European Division, Für Diener des Evangeliums, No. 2 (Hamburg: Advent-Verlag, n.d.), 9.

²Kurt Sinz, "Im Strom der Zeit," Der Adventbote, June 15, 1940, 85.
crusading ideas and unthinking obedience to the State.

It is all the more praiseworthy that in such an environment there were men and women who were not ready to compromise their consciences.¹ A well-known case was that of Rudolf Nesselroth who was thrown into the interrogation prison of the German armed forces at Berlin Tegel in 1940. The pastor of his home church at Wesermünde requested that the East German Union take pastoral care of the imprisoned brother. The Union passed this task on to a pastor of Berlin. From a letter that has been preserved it is evident that this must have been "a case of disobedience in connection with the Sabbath. Brother Nesselroth is still a member of our Church and even an elder..."² The following passage indicates that the church leaders did not feel comfortable about the whole matter: "It may very well be that you will get into difficulties [when trying to visit him], that they will not give you permission easily to speak

¹Cf. Arthur Whitefield Spalding, Origin and History of the Seventh-day Adventists, vol. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1962), 256-260. As the German leaders were in many cases themselves close to being arrested or else shied away from their responsibilities, not much help could be expected from those parts. That is why these steadfast members often fought lonely battles. Many of them are forgotten. However, a few instances concerning the refusal to work or serve on the Sabbath during the war are known. About ten Adventists died in the concentration camps for keeping the Sabbath and three or more members of Jewish origin shared the same fate. To this day, no precise investigation about these has been made.

²Letter, Otto Schildhauer to Richard Dangschat, October 24, 1940, Archives for European Adventist History, U 1-2, 452.
to him, but in such cases we have tried our best."¹ A letter from the president of the Baden Conference to his union shows the treatment meted out to those who propounded non-combatant views in the churches:

On the morning of the Day of Rest I was at Lahr. After the divine service I had a gathering with the Friesenheim women and I noticed that they continue to adhere to non-combatant views and that they are not ready to accept advice in any way. For that reason I had to explain to them that under such circumstance we could no longer keep them on our membership rolls.²

In contrast to this, it would be wrong to assume that the German Adventists who fought in the Second World War did so with enthusiasm. Many tried to get into medical battalions, but others were assigned to branches of the armed forces against their will. Some statistics of drafted Seventh-day Adventist pastors in September 1942 which have been preserved show that out of the 123 pastors and church employees, twenty-six were in the medical services. As far as can be ascertained, at least twelve more were employed in military administration.³ An overall list of Adventists of the three German Unions dated February 14, 1943, names 259 pastors, 3,890 ordinary church members and 1,844 friends of the church, the latter being mostly unbaptized children of Adventists who had been drafted since the beginning of the

¹Ibid.

²Letter, Erwin Berner to Gustav Seng, November 24, 1941, Archives for European Adventist History, V 1-1.

war. Included on the list were: seventeen captains, twenty-one first lieutenants, fifty-four lieutenants, ten special guides, one airplane inspector, four staff physicians, seven first staff physicians, six assistant physicians, ten lower physicians, seven first paymasters and paymasters, twenty inspectors, 322 sergeants and 904 corporals. The total figure of 6,000 drafted Adventists already contained 550 killed in action or missing.¹

Internal Church Publications Relating to the Military Issue during the War

There was no attempt by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to justify from a theological perspective the behavior of its members in the German armed forces during World War II. Nevertheless, there are some sparse written documents about the military issue. These mainly deal with practical questions or record the permanent distrust of the dictatorial regime in Germany. One of the most significant evidences of this is the circular by Minck of April 30, 1940 to the presidents of the conferences and to the pastors. He said that his reason for writing was the refusal of Adventists to work in arms factories on the Sabbath.² He

¹Letter, Minck to the German Ministry of Church Affairs, February 14, 1943, Bundesarchiv, Abteilungen Potsdam, Bestand: Reichskirchenministerium, No. 23388.

²"Recently the responsible authorities have repeatedly drawn my attention to the fact that some members of our Church who have to work in industries vital for the war and for our survival have refused to do their duty on the Saturdays. . . . That is why I feel compelled to ask you to see to it that our church members are once again

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then continued in general terms: "An agreement to military and war service includes the fulfillment of the resulting duties [of military service]."¹ As biblical proof, the author quoted 1 Peter 2:13-17 and ordered the presidents to hold ministers’ meetings on this topic within the next three weeks. There they were to point out

... that we continue to consider the basic principle of Romans 7:12 binding for us. ... Besides we must use all our theological skills to expressly stress that we apply the keeping of the precepts and commandments of God sensibly during this time of war and are equally ready to obey the authorities in the light of the Word of God (Romans 13:1-5).²

During the war, a lively correspondence developed between Adventists doing military service and their congregations and conferences. Many felt God’s guiding hand, especially on the front lines. Others lost their lives.³ After the church magazine Der Adventbote was forced to cease publication in the summer of 1941, the circulars put out by the conferences remained more or less the only source of information for the churches. Conference

informed about the duties we have towards our nation, our fatherland and towards the authorities in the light of the Holy Scriptures" (Letter, Minck to Conference Presidents and Workers in Germany, April 30, 1940, Private archive).

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³During the whole war, 1,269 Adventists were killed in action or behind the lines, among them nineteen pastors. Another twenty-six were still missing in 1947 or were prisoners of war (Wilhelm Mueller, ed., Gesegnetes Wachstum in kümmerlicher Zeit (Hamburg: Advent-Verlag, 1948), 10; idem, Freude und Leid der Adventgläubigen in Deutschland (Hamburg: Advent-Verlag, 1948), 4).
officers asked their local churches for statistical material about soldiers, promotions or decorations. News such as the following was shared about people serving in the military: "... two are bearers of the Oak Leaves attached to the Knight’s Cross of the Iron Cross. When the Duce was liberated, among the band of paratroopers was one of our brethren."¹ On several occasions, the main office of the church in Berlin sent out to the German Ministry of Church Affairs a list of all conscripted men and their honors and promotions, in order to "reaffirm that the members of the Adventist Church are not only doing their best to be diligent promoters of the public welfare of our nation, but that they are also ready to defend out wonderful fatherland by their possessions and their blood."² The recipients, however, considered that such evidences of patriotism had been exaggerated.³

The extent to which the military influenced the church leaders can be seen in the following excerpts from a letter written by the president of the Berlin Conference, who wrote to his colleagues as "Captain Mai" in early 1943:

We have not heard from each other for quite a while. This is understandable with the daily increasing load of responsibility as every free hour and ounce of strength, first and foremost is dedicated to total war! ... I feel satisfied that even in the 58th year of my life I

¹Letter, Friedrich Hambrock to the Elders of the West Saxonian Conference, March 22, 1944, Private archive.
²Letter, Minck, February 14, 1941, 217.
³Ibid., 218.
can do my duty for my beloved fatherland. Most of the others in my group have been active from the very beginning and thus have done considerably more than I. But I try hard to keep pace with them anyway in order to assure the victory already gained.\(^1\)

The author continues by comparing Jesus Christ with the Fuehrer, both demanding allegiance.

We are thus fighting in two places and the more faithful we are in the one pertaining to eternity, the more strength and victory we shall have in the one pertaining to this age. . . . So then let us be free from all worries and faithfully do what we must where our beloved and earthly Fuehrer has sent us until our victory ensures a lasting peace. But full of equal faith we must follow our beloved heavenly leader until we have gained victory by His side and can share in the peace of His Kingdom and glory!\(^2\)

As the war dragged on, the initial optimism in a German victory began to subside and was replaced by the hope for the coming Lord.\(^3\)

\(^1\)Letter, Gustav Mai to H. Vollrath, April 23, 1943, Private archive.

\(^2\)Ibid.

\(^3\)"Since my last letter some months have passed. The year of 1945 darkly lies before us with all its sorrows and joys. Yet we believe that it will bring us the decision in this Great Battle of the Nations. We place all our hopes in the Almighty One who guides the wars in all the world. This gives us courage to faithfully do our duty even in the hour of greatest stress in the place where God has put us. . . . Some Conferences of the East German Union have now become a battlefield; several of our Union have now become a battlefield; several of our workers have been evacuated and we have lost contact with many. All this makes us adhere so much the more to the One who has said, 'see, I am with you alway'" (Letter, Budnick to All Employees in the Wehrmacht, February 15, 1945, Private archive).
CHAPTER XI

IN THE FOCUS OF CRITICISM: THE POSITION OF GERMAN ADVENTISTS IN THE WEHRMACHT DURING WORLD WAR II

Immediate Personal and Organisational Consequences

It is clear that there was great tension during World War II between the General Conference and German Adventists. Evidence of this may be found in reports after the end of the war about the situation of the church in Germany and its position during the war. These reports were brought back to the General Conference by Adventist officers in the US army, mostly by Major D. M. Parker.\(^1\) The first official report was written at the request of the General Conference by Otto Schuberth, former principal of Marienhoehe Seminary, after he had visited his old home in late 1945.\(^2\) Then in the summer of 1947 Walter B. Ochs, vice president of the General Conference, spent several weeks in Germany to familiarise himself with the situation there.

By that time, the German church leadership had already received a letter from General Conference President,

\(^1\)Quoted in Decker, 115-124.

\(^2\)Cf. Otto Schuberth, "First Contact with the Church in Germany," The Ministry, May 1946, 12.
James Lamar McElhany, containing accusations against the position held by German church leaders and certain church members during the war. Among the issues mentioned was the observance of the Sabbath in the army and in civilian life, documents by prominent German leaders against fundamental teachings of the Sabbath, and compromises that had been made. These and other points were an unmistakable signal to the General Conference that the German Adventists had again failed on the military issue. Minck did not respond to this until the autumn of 1947. With regard to the circular of April 1940\(^1\) he declared:

> I then had orders from the Gestapo (secret police) to tell all pastors and churches that from now on all had to work on the Sabbath. I could not say "Yes" for the sake of our principles and the Commandments of God; neither could I say "No" for the sake of our work, the lives and freedom of our brothers and sisters. What then could we have said? Exactly what we said in our circular. And God stood on our side. Contrary to all expectations they were satisfied with our declaration.\(^2\)

Prior to being relieved of his presidential office in 1950, Minck once again reported to a small commission of the General Conference about the circumstances that had led to the writing of this circular. In early 1940, he had been faced with the decision of whether to allow the whole church to be banned or to "look for an acceptable and permissible

\(^1\) See above, 131-132.

\(^2\) Letter, Minck to James Lamar McElhany, September 17, 1947, Archives for European Adventist History, U 1-2, 389.
compromise in the eyes of the Lord." From today's perspective the circular has to be judged differently. Close scrutiny of this short letter reveals an attempt to allocate God and the Fascist dictatorship equal authority. The language of the April 1940 circular, which quoted Romans 7:12 in full ("Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just and good"), would have been understood by Nazi leaders who read it to be confirming divine support for their policies. But Paul was speaking of the will of God. In this context it could only mean that it is God's will and His commandments that are holy. That is how the churches understood it, too. But was not the subsequent demand to obey the authorities and to subject oneself to them clearly in contradiction to this? One can evaluate these words as well-worded ambiguities which, in the final analysis, were successful in preventing the church from being banned. A sober look, however, will show a desperate attempt to maintain, at least on paper, an Adventist identity.

In an attempt to defend the position of the German church leaders, Minck argued that the Second World War, in

1Minck, "My Responsibility Before the Presidents of the General Conference and its Vice Presidents on July 18, 1950, 8:00 P.M. in the Civic Auditorium of San Francisco," TMs [photocopy], Private archive. On the grounds of a Gestapo ultimatum (April 1940) he had the Church leaders invited to Berlin. After a whole day of earnest discussion the circular was formulated and unanimously accepted with the objective "that nobody might see in it a violation or debasement of our principles or of the Commandments of God" (ibid).
common with the First World War, had been a time of extraordinary need in which it was difficult "to draw the line between the end of need and the beginning of disobedience."¹ He also defended the German soldiers from the charge that they had been less faithful to the Sabbath truth than had the soldiers of other nations. He said that he could name instances of Adventist soldiers of other countries who were in Germany during the war and had failed to bring honor to God and His church. "Hitherto we have not written anything about this to you, but if needs be we are ready to break our silence."² With regard to the German soldiers, Minck expressed the conviction that about 95% of all Adventist pastors were in the medical and administrative services of the Wehrmacht.³

Minck's answer brought some clarity to the situation. In the eyes of the General Conference the German Adventists had failed for the second time. In consequence, the German Unions were placed under direct supervision of the General Conference and some pastors and one conference president were temporarily suspended from their duties.⁴ More seriously, the General Conference refused to restore to

¹Letter, Minck, September 17, 1947.

²Ibid.

³These figures, however, seem to be too high. If one takes into account the statistics of the East German Union Conference (see above, 130) the percentages were essentially lower.

⁴Ibid.
German Adventists their traditional missions of German East Africa, the Middle and Far East and other countries. In the view of this writer, depriving the German church of its mission fields, weakened the vitality of the "home" church which foreign missions often provide. In 1950, at the General Conference session of the church in San Francisco, only the German delegation voted against removing Minck from office.

The Meeting at Neandertal, 1951

In the summer of 1951, representatives of the General Conference held a ten-day workers' meeting for all the pastors of the Central European Division where, among others, W. H. Bergherm presented three papers on the themes: "Church and State", "Why Are We Noncombatants," and "The Medical Cadet Corps." All three attempted to justify the non-combatant attitude of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In his argument, Bergherm tried to show

that this non-combatant view which was once held by the Church should be given back to Christianity. And I want to show you that Seventh-day Adventists are faithful citizens nonetheless and that they support their

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After the missionary areas could no longer be fully supported by the Hamburg Advent Missionary Society soon after Hitler's takeover, and later not at all, the former Central European Division was divided into two sections in 1937. The first comprised Germany, Holland and Czechoslovakia; and the second, in Basle, tried to take care of mission areas of the former Central European Division. When German Adventist missionaries were detained at the outbreak of the war, the General Conference took over direct administration of the second section.
With regard to the Old Testament, he said that it had been God’s original intention to liberate the people of Israel according to Exodus 23:23 without wars, only by God’s own force. But lack of belief that God could indeed rescue them by his own strength, and their sin, had separated them from the strength of God. As a result, they had to wage wars. The position of Jesus in the New Testament is also clear: "A total absence of resistance is what God expects of us." Paul and the early Christians had followed this advice for they knew that they were citizens not only of their earthly fatherland but also of the Kingdom of Heaven. From this, the speaker drew the following conclusion for the present: "I am obliged to serve my earthly homeland as faithfully as I serve God . . . and to offer no resistance", but only, he added, in matters that do not conflict with one’s duties toward God. "That is the reason why I put on the uniform when in 1943 the USA entered the war. But I did not bear arms. I bore the sign of the chaplain, the cross." Generally, he said, Adventists

1W. H. Bergherm, "Church and State, 1951," TMs [photocopy], 3, Archives for European Adventist History, U 1-2, 153.

2Ibid., 8, 158.

3Idem, "Why are We Noncombatants, 1951," TMs [photocopy], 7, Archives for European Advent History, U 1-2, 167.

4Ibid.
should serve in the medical battalions of the armed forces.

Bergherm's presentations, richly adorned with illustrative stories, did not meet with complete approval from the listeners. "Since my lecture that I gave amongst you on Sunday, several brothers have approached me with questions concerning participation in war. Some became somewhat nervous about the theological rationale."¹ One reason for this may have been, among others, the assumption of the speaker that nationalist feelings were associated with the lust to wage war and kill.

You cannot take the sword in the one hand and the Bible in the other. You cannot save and kill at the same time. You can only do one thing or the other. Jesus does not say: Blessed are the Conference Presidents or those who sacrifice their lives for the fatherland. You cannot be soldiers and at the same time live according to verse 44 (Love your enemies), because a soldier has to kill.²

A. L. White responded to the questions of the workers in his presentations. On E. G. White's position toward the military issue, he said that there was no testimony available on the subject. Asked about her statement of 1915, that church members should do their duty as long as time lasted, he avoided a clear response, pointing to the Sabbath schooling issue in Europe.³

¹Ibid., 1, 161.
²Ibid., 6, 166; idem, "Church and State," 7-8, 157-158.
³"Our brethren cannot expect God to side with them if they take their children to places where it is impossible for them to obey the fourth commandment. They must try hard to come to an agreement with the authorities that the
One important question for the Germans was: What must I do when, having taken a medical course, one is not recruited for the medical corps? In an optimistic tone, A. L. White referred to a letter from an American general offering advice to Adventists in the medical corps of the US army and promised:

We have not yet approached the German authorities because Germany has not yet got an army. But I am absolutely sure that as soon as this comes we can reach virtually everything that is necessary by the help of that letter. Until now we have been successful in every country.¹

These words, however, did not answer the question. Probably A. L. White had not quite understood that behind it stood one of the most burning issues for German Adventists in the Second World War. As advised by the General Conference, they had trained as medical orderlies long before the war began; but were then, against their conscience, drafted into other military units.

An analysis of the Neandertal workers’ meeting leads one to the depressing assessment that the attempted conversion of German Adventists to a non-combatant position had failed. Whether this was due to a misunderstanding of the questions posed by the Germans² or simply because the children need not attend school on Sabbath days. If this cannot be done then they know what is their duty, namely, to obey God’s commandment whatever it may cost” (A. L. White, "The Spirit of Prophecy, 1951" TMs [photocopy], 2, Archives for European Adventist History, U 1-2, 170.

¹Ibid.

²Such as: Does the Bible allow for emergency laws
psychological barrier between the American victors and German losers was too high, is something that can not be safely assessed today. Mueller, the newly-elected Division President, tried to play down these tensions in his final address to the meeting: "Our Church has from its very beginnings taken the non-combatant position. It is good that we do not have to bridge the gap like others, among them churches." But a gap did exist and remains today.

The Germans after World War II

The rapid growth of membership in Germany after the end of the war obscured the need for a careful assessment of the past. The Adventist tenet, that growing numbers are the clearest proof of God's blessings, made discussion of the mistakes of the past redundant. A fervent hope in the Second Coming, which was especially strong in the years of deprivation after World War II, orientated the German Seventh-day Adventist Church to the future and allowed

in questions of faith? What are the practical limits of obedience to the State? Is the non-combatant view really the original position of the Adventist Church? What was E. G. White's attitude to the military issue?

1Ibid, 3, 171.

2"We acknowledge that you and the men of the General Conference as responsible brethren have the right to look for the things mentioned, to teach and admonish us. Still I permit myself to remark in advance that probably the existing facts must be considered decisive and that the good position of our work and the commendable attitude of faith of our members and pastors are the best response to your questions" (Letter, Minck, September 17, 1947).
little scope for pondering the past. It is not surprising, therefore, that the leadership of the Adventist Church in Germany saw no need to critically examine its position toward the State, especially not on the military issue. The only statements made offered sweeping generalizations, such as the following: "It is no wonder that we made mistakes under the prevailing difficult circumstances and conditions. I feel sorry for having made them."^2

In 1950, the Commission of the Central European Division issued a declaration on the question of war and military service. In part, it follows the declaration of Gland but makes no mention of the authorities and their duties and demands. On the other hand, new mention is made of the medical service.

On the grounds of our New Testament insights and in agreement with our brothers and sisters all over the world we do not want to participate in the use of force to damage or annihilate human life. But we are ready to do good works of mercy and of necessity, especially to serve in the medical corps. In this way we hope to comply best with the claims of God "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" and "Thou shalt not kill". We encourage every church member to join this resolution of the Church out of their personal conviction but concede to everyone freedom of conscience to make their own

^1"I think there may have been no time when the longing for the Coming of the Lord and the establishment of the eternal Kingdom of God has been so great as in these times of storm and need. . . . If we take a look back to the past one and a half decades then this was not only a miserable time but also one filled with sorrows. But let the past be the past!" (Mueller, Gesegnetes Wachstum, 39).

^2Minck, "My Responsibility."
decisions.¹

After initial difficulties, young Adventists in the Federal Republic of Germany were permitted to do their duty in the Civilian Service. In the German Democratic Republic, however, they had the option of serving in unarmed Construction Battalions.

¹Central European Division (Darmstadt), Minutes of Meetings of the Division Committee, December 1950, "Resolution of the German Inter-Union Association of December 1, 1950."
CHAPTER XII
SUMMARY

The eyes of the early Adventists were very much on the future and current events were interpreted as signs of the times. Everything pointed to the Coming of Christ. Their attitude as neighbors was determined by their intention to comply with the higher standard of the Law of God in order to be prepared for the Lord. According to the biblical witness, they expected great difficulties in keeping the Sabbath, especially during the last events of world's history. This presupposed their readiness to accept persecution for the sake of their faith. They tried to answer ethical questions by the Bible and acted according to the highest moral standards. This behavior revealed them as children of their times. They underpinned their ethical conduct dogmatically with concrete biblical foundations. But with the changing mores of society they had always to look for new biblical foundations to cope with new situations. This from the very outset proved to be a losing battle and had a bearing on their position in war.\(^1\)

\(^1\)In Germany these were, for instance, the discussions over modesty in dress, jewellery, abortion, divorce, the cinema and television, etc. A comprehensive analysis can be read in Michael Pearson, "Seventh-Day Adventist Responses to some Contemporary Ethical Problems"
In their thinking, war had its proper place. It was to be the last intermezzo before the grand finale. According to their understanding of prophecy, this war would witness the joining of hands between fallen Protestantism (embodied in the USA) and Catholicism, which would jointly put the Advent believers under pressure to observe Sunday. Thus, early Adventists considered every war a potential battle against the church. At the same time, they accepted the demand of Romans 13:1-5 and were ready to obey the State as long as it did not require them to break the Law of God, especially the Sabbath commandment. This idea, however, collided with the following realities:

1. From the very beginning, American Seventh-day Adventist publications have contained the idea of a just war. The Civil War was a just cause to liberate the slaves. In the First and Second World War, America had to defend democracy.¹ Even the idea that war had to be waged to

¹I am convinced that no one will ever forget the terrible catastrophe which befell the world on that September day in 1939, when the enemies of civilization marched into Poland and began, like a gigantic steam roller to flatten the major portion of Europe under the ruthless war machine of Axis domination. Also the staggering blow delivered to a peace-loving nation at Pearl Harbor will be everlastingly in the memory of the world. It was in those days that many men were called into the service of the United States Government, because a crisis was upon us. It was in those days that I felt that my experience, education, and native European background should be placed at the disposal of my adopted country, whose leaders had determined that she should not fail the cause of democracy in that fateful hour, that she should uphold freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of religion against all
defend traditional Christian values can be found.¹

2. During the American Civil War, the leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church did not accept the offer of substitute service. With enormous financial endeavors they tried to buy the young brethren out of the army instead. Later, however, such pacifist tendencies almost totally disappeared. The church opted for a non-combatant position. In World War II this was expressed unmistakably and irreversibly:

Noncombatancy is not pacifism. Pacifism maintains substantial and powerful organization which agitates against war. Noncombatancy maintains no organizations, carries on no agitation, supports no propaganda, appeals for no members. It merely maintains its Christian faith. Noncombatancy is not conscientious objection to war service but maintains the attitude and conviction that war does not change the individual Christian's obligation of obedience to God.²

This standpoint is best understood in the light of odds. And so it came about that as an engineer I left my dear wife and children and home and the United States, to help prepare some of the bases in other lands from which this bulwark of democracy could be defended" (John van Ginhoven, "We Shall Not Fail," The Youth's Instructor, July 1945, 3).

¹"President Roosevelt called for a day of prayer at the outbreak of war. We heartily supported the President's call to prayer. It was in keeping with the traditions of this nation that was raised up of God as a refuge to the oppressed. The Pilgrim Fathers and the Puritans were devout believers in God, and put their trust in Him. That is why they came to America. But in this time of gravest peril to the nation and to all the ideals that we hold dear in the world, why be satisfied with only one day of prayer? (George Baehr and W. W. Bauer, If Bombs Fall [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1942], 94-95).

²General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Seventh-day Adventists and Civil Government (Takoma Park, Washington, D.C.: By the author, September 25, 1940), 18.
the principle of strict separation of church and state which the Seventh-day Adventist Church held to be vital for religious freedom of conscience. They had to distinguish between themselves and the state, yet did not want to be taken as public enemies. To show their support of the government, Adventists mostly served in the medical corps.

The behavior of the German Adventists in both World Wars has many similarities. As shown above, they too believed in just wars, in the defence of Christian values and tried to serve in medical units. They, too, adhered to the principle of separation of state and church and during times of peace demanded the right to freely exercise their faith. Americans and Germans considered Romans 13:1-2 the decisive statement that called for obedience vis-a-vis the state. That excluded fundamental criticism of the state (with the exception of the Sunday-Sabbath issue). It is remarkable that the early American reactions (as far back as James White), like the German position at the beginning of World War I, can be shown to have contained the typical "Christian" attitude that the State, in case of war, bears the whole responsibility for the consequences of the draft and of acts of war. This, however, was in tension with Adventist ethics, according to which each individual is fully responsible for his own actions or refusal to act at all times and must answer for them to God.

A second tension can be found in connection with the observance of the Sabbath commandment. Whereas general
Sabbath rules were almost casuistic in nature and allowed little room for interpretation, the case of war required an additional concept of "works of necessity".¹ When it came to decisions of conscience, such as the keeping of the Sabbath in peacetime, the conscience of the individual believers was shaped by commonly valid norms. For the military issue in the case of war, however, such a control mechanism did not exist.

The third tension results from a sense of nationalism among Adventists which conflicts with membership in a worldwide church family, especially a community such as the Adventist Church which is founded on the principle that true citizenship is in heaven.²

Three factors divide the position of German and American Adventists:

1. In contrast to the USA, Germany had general conscription even in times of peace (with the exception of the years 1919 to 1934).

2. In 1914 and in 1939 (1935) Germany was governed by dictatorial regimes which did not allow freedom of conscience in times of peace or war.

3. A refusal to bear arms would have been construed as

¹Cf. paragraph "Sabbath Observance" in Studies in Denominational Principles, 16.

a total rejection of the Reich, the Kaiser and of Hitler himself. Had the German Seventh-day Adventist Church taken a position of full conscientious objection to bearing arms and performing routine tasks on Sabbath, the very existence of the church in Germany might have been threatened. The few cases of Reform Adventists who thus objected are clearly indicative of this.

The principle that declared the leader of an organisation or business to be personally responsible for actions carried out by the organisation as a whole, accepted in Germany during the time of National Socialism, meant that the leader of the church was held personally responsible for the entire church. From this perspective it is understandable that Minck wrote in 1947:

To really understand and judge our position during the times of Nazi government and especially during the times of war, one would have had to live with us through this hard time so loaded with temptations. He would also have had to feel responsible for the souls of a whole Church. Believe me, dear Brother McElhany, it would have taken very little to make the 500 pastors and 43,000 church members of our former Central European Division martyrs, not only in Germany but also in the territories occupied by the German forces. At any rate such an event would have had certain consequences for these countries. It is possible that more than once a shrug of the shoulders would have sufficed to have the whole Church forbidden and all our work destroyed.

In another place he said:

1For this reason the Church had to rename the Adventist Publishing House of Hamburg, "Vollmer & Bentlin" in 1938.

2Letter, Minck, September 17, 1947.
Furthermore I noticed that I must be thankful to the Lord to have a good conscience as my hands were unstained with blood. No widows and orphans accuse me that their sons or fathers had to die because of the measures I ordered to be taken.¹

The above-mentioned conditions in Germany also resulted in a new concern—the constant fear that the church would be banned. It was not a different theological position on the part of German Adventists, compared to Seventh-day Adventist’s in other parts of the world on the military issue, that determined their behavior during the two world wars, but an existential fear that set them looking for answers to justify their position.² Because of this fear and the need to distance themselves from the Reform Movement, the German Adventists did not have the courage to assume a position on the military question which would have brought them closer to the intrinsic message of the New Testament. This becomes clearer when we consider that even before 1914 there had been numerous cases of refusal to work on the Sabbath, which as a rule entailed harsh punishment in the form of incarceration. In this regard, German Adventists had publicly shown moral courage in questions of faith and conscience.

How can the guilt of the German Adventists regarding the military issue be defined? "There is nothing like guilt

¹Minck, "My Responsibility".

²The only truly theological question was asked by Conradi when he pointed to the emergency right of Christians. See above, 61-62.
or guiltlessness of a whole nation. Guilt, like innocence, is nothing collective, it is personal."¹ In describing the position taken by German Seventh-day Adventist leaders, any guilt attached to their decisions extends only to them and not to the members as the whole. Can their fear be described as a sin or as a lacking confidence in God? Anyone who accuses them of sin or cowardice in these matters would have to show that he could himself remain true in the hour of temptation. And one who has never lived in a totalitarian regime cannot claim that of himself. Nonetheless, things done out of fear, while understandable, are not excusable. The following decisions and actions by German Adventists may well fall into such a category:

1. The clear advice to fight on the Sabbath;
2. The ill-chosen theological foundations for participation in war, especially the brochure The Christian and War;
3. The declarations of allegiance to the State which stressed members' total readiness to serve the regime;
4. The one-sided presentation of the behaviour of American Adventists in the case of war which were passed as a justification of the German attitude;
5. Although according to the official declarations every German Adventist was free to decide for himself, he was often under considerable pressure and could even be

¹Richard von Weizsäcker, Von Deutschland aus (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1987), 17.
excluded from the church if his decision was not in accordance with official church policy;

6. Neither after 1918, nor after 1945 when the free democratic conditions allowed it, did the leading bodies find the courage to critically examine their position during the war.

It can hardly be a relief for German Adventists to learn that their position in both world wars was not much different from that of other smaller denominations in Germany.1 But this shows how difficult it is to act correctly in such a situation; or, to put it differently, it reveals how the continued existence of the church is founded only on God's grace and mercy. This again calls into question the Adventist principle, "The work must go on!" The foregoing slogan may be understood to mean that our acting for God and the church is of supreme importance because of our need to proclaim the last message for this world. In this light, Christian can be understood when he said in 1939: "We must try in every way to avoid persecutions."2 But if we believe that God himself has

1When it comes to sects that are distributed across several countries it must be noted . . . that the [theological] principles of the single groups and [religious] dogmatism . . . is regionally different, especially with regard to conscientious objection. With the exception of Jehovah’s Witnesses, it must be said that the sectarians in the Anglo-Saxon countries have stricter principles and are generally more consistent than the sects in the continental European area." (Schreiber, 44).

2See above, 127.
founded the church and its prophetic message for today, then He himself is also responsible for spreading the message all over the world, even in wartime. Is it really the best testimony for the credibility of the church that after the war the work can be handed over still functioning well? If the development of membership figures is the yardstick of the right practice of faith, then the fact that German churches were totally rehabilitated after the two world wars would seem to vindicate the methods used to achieve this.

Comparing the behavior of American and German Adventists, we can discern the limitations of the "non-combatant" tradition. Conceived in a democratic environment, this position cannot easily be adopted in a dictatorship. In this regard, there does not normally exist a consensus solution but only complete acceptance or rejection of military service. However, both positions have, in effect, been rejected by the Adventist Church. The General Conference position regarding non-combatancy stated: "A Seventh-day Adventist noncombatant does not agitate against war." This resulted in inconsistency, with indirect approval of war for whatever reasons and a passive

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1A letter of H. W. Lowe, President of the British Union, to the General Conference shows that the non-combatant position not only raised numerous problems in Germany but in other countries as well. The reply to this letter shows evidence of being the work of a large committee! (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists [Washington, D.C.], Minutes of Meetings of the General Conference Committee, May 15, 1939).

2Studies in Denominational Principles, 25.
stance toward the use of violence.\(^1\) The non-combatant position, seen theologically, is an attempt to serve two masters at the same time, which runs counter to the words of Jesus. He instructed us to be active for peace (beati pacifici), to love our enemies\(^2\) and not to live in a comfortable, other-worldly pietistic niche.

One possible reason for this dichotomy may lie in the Adventist understanding of separation of church and state. As good as this principle showed itself to be for the preservation of freedom of faith and conscience, it also contains the danger that the church takes care of itself first and foremost and loses sight of the world and its social needs. Thus, today it seems to be poor practice for the church to base its attempts to be officially recognized as a non-combatant organisation in the case of war on the argument that young Adventists cannot burden their conscience by being disobedient to the fourth and sixth commandments. The biblical understanding, however, is not: Blessed are they which have saved their conscience. Jesus said: "Blessed are the peacemakers!"

In the written documents concerning the dispute over the military issue between the German church and the General Conference, it is noteworthy that they never joined forces


\(^2\)Cf. 2 Cor 5:20; Heb 12:14.
in a theological discussion of their respective positions. Can this be an indication that the American Seventh-day Adventist Church had very pragmatic considerations for its non-combatant views? When Minck was asked to explain his position, especially on the Sabbath issue, to a small committee at the General Conference Session in San Francisco, the only one of the twenty-five church leaders present who reacted to the presentation was the General Conference Secretary, E. D. Dick: "Brother Minck, this is not a question of your faithfulness but of your wisdom."1

The discussions over the Gulf War in 1991, however, have shown how little the non-combatant standpoint is rooted in the hearts of American Adventists in spite of all the wisdom applied:

By contrast with their parents and grandparents, many Adventists have been enlisting in the American armed forces, thereby agreeing to kill off their nation's enemies if ordered to do so. And not only have they been to the Persian Gulf and back; they have come home to welcoming applause in Sabbath worship services and patriotic accolades in the church's publications.²

That is why it is time to learn from the painful experiences of past and present and to recommence the search for a position that corresponds best to biblical concepts and the circumstances of our time.³

¹ Minck, "My Responsibility".


³ See also, James Coffin, "Second Thoughts on Adventists in the Military," Spectrum (May 1984): 29-33; Tom Dybdahl, "In God We Trust," Spectrum (October 1983): 38-43;
Before this can be done, however, we must openly acknowledge our guilt as did the first pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Europe, Jakob Erzberger, in 1916:

Unfortunately we have made mistakes and sinned. This was then imposed by certain people on the whole Church and her doctrine was declared to be wrong. Without calling injustice good nor without justifying the breaking of the law, as sin is sin no matter by whom or under what circumstances it may have been committed, it must never be forgotten that neither the grossest crime nor anything else can annihilate God’s Truth. We must not look at mortals nor on their mistakes but at Jesus and we must mind His words. . . . All these sad occurrences should make us thoroughly examine our hearts. They should lead us to a greater vigilance and to more diligent prayer, as "he who thinks he is standing fast let him watch out lest he fall."  


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