

TEACHING PEACE DURING MULTI-GENERATION WAR

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ABSTRACT

For the first time in U.S. history, soldiers are deploying to a war that began before they were born. Today's youth and emerging adults have grown up in a world of endless war, fear, and resurgent nationalism. Yet they are open to new possibilities and increasingly engaged. The earliest Adventists spoke against war and bearing of arms, and in favor of peace and justice. Can this generation rediscover that vision?

AN OPENING STORY

On the morning of September 11, 2001, I was heading to my monthly staff meeting with the campus ministry leaders I supervise. At the time, I was Director of Young Adult and Campus Ministry for the Catholic Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston. Stopping at Kroger for some donuts, I was in the checkout line when I glanced up at a television, wondering why a grocery store would have it on. I saw the towers of the World Trade Center, and the smoke coming from the first plane's impact. I got in my car and turned on the radio, and heard the speculation—was it an accident or intentional? When I got to my office, the second plane hit. That answered the question. We were under attack, and were now a nation at war.

We were told it would be long. President George W. Bush told Congress on September 20, "Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen" (Bush 2001). But we could not have known how long it would be. Babies and toddlers playing in front of the television that day, and others yet unborn, are now wearing the uniform and deploying to fight the same war of which their parents deployed. The Long War, the Global War on Terror, has become our nation's first multi-generation war.

What has been the cost? We have fought in 80 countries. We've spent \$6 trillion (Shane 2018). Over three million U.S. service members have deployed. Nearly 7,000 U.S. service members have died and over 50,000 have been injured (Global War on Terrorism Memorial Foundation, 2018). And the toll on the nations we have gone to is even higher. It is estimated that "480,000 people have died from direct violence and 21 million people have become refugees" (Osburn and Fink 2019). There's no telling how many have died from disease, or starvation, or any of the other secondary effects of war.

My question for you to consider is this: Can we teach this generation a different way? Can we plant in them the seeds of peace?

ADVENTISTS AND WAR

Since its inception, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been opposed to war, cautioning members against volunteering and encouraging those who are drafted to serve as noncombatants. This position was most recently reaffirmed at the 1972 Annual Council (General Conference Committee 1972).

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

This partnership with God through Jesus Christ who came into this world not to destroy men's lives, but to save them, causes Seventh-day Adventists to advocate a noncombatant position, following their divine Master in not taking human life, but rendering all possible service to save it. As they accept the obligation of citizenship as well as its benefits, their loyalty to government requires them willingly to serve the state in any noncombatant capacity, civil or military, in war or peace, in uniform or out of it, which will contribute to saving life, asking only that they may serve in those capacities which do not violate their conscientious convictions.

This statement is not a rigid position binding church members, but gives guidance leaving the individual member free to assess the situation for one's self (Burton 2019).

On April 10-11, 2019, the General Conference hosted a conference on "Seventh-day Adventists and Military-Re-

lated Service,” to review the church’s position and to hear reports from the Divisions. Speakers such as GC Health Ministries director Peter Landless, a veteran of the South African military, “drew attention to the need to teach Adventist children our position on war so that it will be clear in their mind when they become of age” (Burton 2019). Said Mario Ceballos, GC Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries director, “We are not a people of war,” “We are a people of peace” (Burton 2019).

The Seventh-day Adventist Church was organized in the middle of the U.S. Civil War. Adventists were fervent abolitionists and they supported the Union cause, but they debated how they should respond to a draft. James White thought “it would be madness to resist,” and to do so would be “taking the responsibility of suicide.” But he invited different opinions, and in the issues of the *Review and Herald* that followed, members argued their positions (Knight 1997). Yet when the church published an official statement in 1864 there was no hint of divided opinion. It said Adventists were willing to save life and care for the wounded, but refused to bear arms. They asked the government to regard them as one of the churches consistently opposed to military service. “While we thus cheerfully render to Caesar the things which the Scriptures show to be his, we are compelled to decline all participation in acts of war and bloodshed as being inconsistent with the duties enjoined upon us by our divine Master toward our enemies and toward all mankind” (Wilcox 1936, 24). Some members followed that counsel; some didn’t. One issue of the *Review* mentioned two who were removed from membership for voluntary enlistment—one from the Battle Creek Church, with no dissenting votes (Knight 1997, 165).¹

The position of noncombatant service was reaffirmed after the war ended in 1865, again at the start of World War 1, and once again at the start of World War 2. But in 1934 this clause was added: “The church does not attempt to dictate to its members individually, but each person must stand upon his own conscientious convictions” (Wilcox 1936, 12). The 1972 Annual Council added a similar clause: “This statement is not a rigid position binding church members but gives guidance leaving the

individual member free to assess the situation for himself” (General Conference Committee 1972, 72-1171). So churches which remove members for joining the military today (and there are some that do), are out of compliance with the church’s stated position.

These statements on the role of conscience are important. They show the consistency of the church’s position since the 1930s. More importantly, they underscore the approach we need to take in teaching young people: We are to give information and facilitate discussion that will help them make conscientious decisions.

REALITY

Let’s look at the reality, however. We’ve upheld this non-combatant position better in some times and places than in others. In World War 1 some Adventists in the United Kingdom went to Dartmoor Prison, where they received brutal and degrading punishments (BUC News 2014). In Germany during WW1 and WW2, denominational leaders followed the prevailing political winds and embraced nationalism and militarism. Both the church and the state disciplined those who refused to bear arms. In the Nazi era, some Adventists went to concentration camps or were executed—Fritz Bergner, Hans Brüning, and Willi Kollmann were but three of the church’s martyrs who were faithful to the end (Heinz 2019, 144-146). In the United States, on the other hand, the Adventist Church established a program to prepare youth for noncombatant service. The Medical Cadet Corps started in the 1930s and continued through World War 2, ending when the draft stopped in 1972. It taught principles of noncombatancy, life-saving skills, and military drill and ceremonies (Bartel-Wagner 2018).

But after the draft ended, the church in North America dropped the ball. Engagements of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries (ACM) with youth have been sporadic, and there has been no curriculum. As former GC director of ACM, Gary Councill, said:

Since the cessation of the Vietnam conflict and termination of conscription in the United States (1973), the Adventist Church benignly neglected to address the issues of military service or instruct young adult mem-

1 Knight, p. 165. “As voluntary enlistment into the service of war is contrary to the principles of faith and practice of Seventh-day Adventists as contained in the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, they cannot retain those within their communion who so enlist. Enoch Hayes was therefore excluded from the membership of the Battle Creek Church, by a unanimous vote of the church, March 4, 1865.” “The church of Plum River and Green Vale, Ills., met on the 22nd day of January in business capacity, and, after due deliberation, withdrew their fellowship from Hiram N. Bates, who has voluntarily enlisted in the U. S. service, thereby showing that he was not in harmony with the views of the Seventh-day Adventists.” *Review and Herald*, 25 (March 7 1865), p. 112.

bers about noncombatancy in our church journals, educational curriculums, or Sabbath schools. Medical Cadet Corps training disappeared, mostly from lack of interest. Conference leaders and church educators wrongfully assumed Adventists would not voluntarily enlist in the military services (Councell 2011, 343-344.

When the church fails to form the conscience according to Christian principles, society will do so according to its values and passions. After 9-11, many young men and women joined the military with their veins coursing with patriotism. This included Adventists. They saw it as a just cause, and a defensive war. They joined, and not just as medics, like Desmond Doss or the volunteers of Operation Whitecoat. They've joined as combatants in every branch. And yes, many have also served as medics, doctors, and nurses--and as chaplains, who go with love wherever the service members go.

I served as an Army chaplain in the Army Reserve and Vermont National Guard from 1986 to 1996. In 2009 I "re-upped" (as we say) in the Texas Army National Guard. In 2013 I deployed to the Middle East as part of Operation Enduring Freedom. I came home, but the war continued. I only went once, but others have had multiple deployments. One of my nephews has deployed seven times; another deployed six.

I think we need to do more for youth than just talk about the church's voted positions through history. We need to do more than lift up heroes and exemplars like Desmond Doss or the Whitecoats. We need to talk about war and peace in light of the tragedies and horrors of the wars in the century and a half since the founding of the church. We need to talk about the nature of war and its impact on the countries caught up in it, and the impact on the soldiers who fight.

In the nearly 18 years of the Global War on Terror, relatively few U.S. service members have died—6996 as of May 7, 2019. But over 7500 veterans die each and every year from suicide (Wentling 2018). That is 125,000 since 9-11. Twelve of those names are engraved on my heart. And 50,000 have come home from deployment wounded in body, decorated with a Purple Heart. Tens of thousands more have come home wounded in their soul, sometimes with "bad paper," a Dishonorable Discharge that ex-

cludes them from most VA services. We have spoken of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) since the 1980s (though stress injuries have been noted in all wars). More recently, we have been hearing of Moral Injury, which can occur when the sense of right and wrong has been violated, when individuals have been forced to do or see things that went against their conscience (Wood 2016).²

War has impacted us in other ways. Our homeland has changed since 9-11. We've gone from a nation that was united in service during the days after the attack to a nation torn by fear, with politicians embracing demagoguery, scapegoating those who are different, and stirring up racist and nationalist passions long dormant. We have justified surveillance and the diminishment of civil liberties through the Patriot Act, and we have defended the torture of captured foes at Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, and countless "black sites" around the world.

Violence is increasing at home as well, with rising numbers of mass shootings in workplaces, houses of worship, and schools. The one that hit closest to home for me was at Santa Fe High School in Texas, about an hour from my house. A friend from the county mental health agency reached out to me and asked me to assist in providing support, and I did so for two days. I spoke to students, teachers, and parents still in shock. One student told me his family had just moved there to get away from gang violence in the city that had taken the lives of two of his friends. I also saw students and their community coming together, encouraging one another, and looking with hope to the future.

REASONS FOR HOPE

What I saw in Santa Fe I have seen around the country—youth, young adults, and families impacted by tragedy turning their anger and passion into action. Some student survivors like David Hogg of Parkland, Florida, have become vocal advocates for change. Rhonda Hart, whose daughter, Kimberly Vaughan, was murdered at Santa Fe High School, is running for school board in a neighboring district (she left Santa Fe soon after the shooting). Phil Robertson, a 2018 Santa Fe graduate said, "How can this happen and you still hold the same views you had before it happened?...There are things we could do about this" (Novack 2019).

2 See also Robert Emmet Meagher. 2014. *Killing from the Inside Out: Moral Injury and Just War*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, Cascade Books. Andreas Bochmann, "Psychological Effects of War and Pastoral Care," in Hasel, Magyaroni, and Hoschele. 2019. *Adventists and Military Service*, Madrid, Spain, Safeliz. pp. 183 ff.

Our teaching of peace needs to address both the horrors of war and the possibilities of peace. It needs to tap into the desire of young people to make a difference. We can start by sharing the many statements about peace that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has issued over the years; a selection can be found on the webpage of the Adventist Peace Fellowship.³ Two statements were issued in opposition to the invasion of Iraq. Others condemned war in Congo and Kosovo. The church has opposed the sale of assault weapons to civilians. It called attention to the dangers of climate change back in 1995 (Seventh-day Adventist Church 1995).

World leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church have also underscored the connection between social justice and peace. At a conference in Moscow in 1985, then GC president Neal C. Wilson said to Mikhail Gorbachev and other attendees:

Our Christian commitment compels us to reappraise the contribution we may make to peace and the social justice intrinsic to peace. In the person of the God-man who walked among us as one of us, we see divinity and humanity combined. Thus we cannot serve God without also serving our fellowman. Not only in His incarnation but in His ministry to us we see an example of how we should relate to a choice between conflict and peace (Wilson 1987).

Beyond the mere reading of statements, we need to find ways that young people can be involved in making a difference in the community and the world. And we are already doing that, through local service projects and mission trips, through student missions, and through internships with organizations like ADRA. These are opportunities for youth to meet new people and visit new places, to serve others, to see the face of Christ in those in need, and to know that they are making a difference. You may recall the statement by Mark Twain,

Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime (Twain 1869, Conclusion).

A 2013 study validated Twain's suggestion, finding "a robust relationship between the breadth of foreign travel

experiences and generalized trust" (Cao, Galinsky, and Maddux 2013).

One of the things I appreciate most about my 2013 deployment to Kuwait was the opportunity to explore the country, experience the culture, and build relationships across lines of division. I participated in several "Soldier and Leader Engagements" with Islamic Affairs officers of the Kuwait Ministry of Defense. I invited them to give presentations to my Unit Ministry Teams and the soldiers of my unit on Islamic faith and practice, and what American soldiers in Kuwait should understand about the nation and its beliefs. I took soldiers on tours of the Grand Mosque of Kuwait; we visited art and culture museums including the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah; we wandered the corridors of the Souq Al-Mubarakiya where I even introduced them to an Iranian Shia rug merchant. In Doha, Qatar, we went to the Museum of Islamic Art. Everywhere we went they were greeted warmly. Many expressed their surprise that what they experienced ran counter to everything they saw in the U.S. media about the Middle East, regardless of the source.

Young people are open to new experiences and new insights. I was a freshman at Atlantic Union College when I found a note from the dean in my mailbox. He was assigning me a new roommate—an English as a Second Language Student from Egypt named Abdel. We hit it off immediately. Over the next months, over many cups of tea, with the music of the Egyptian diva Umm Kulthum playing in the background, we explored each other's Scriptures and beliefs. We talked about world politics and about college life. We built a lasting friendship, and it became the base for a lifetime of work for me in interfaith dialogue and teaching World Religions.

As our nation becomes more diverse, more youth, including those who attend public schools and those who attend Adventist schools, are exposed to these life-changing encounters. We can build intentionality into them through organized discussions and common service. I love the model provided by the work Keith Burton did at the Center for Adventist-Muslim Relations at Oakwood University, and what some of our leaders in Adventist-Muslim Relations are doing in the Chattanooga area. My daughter, as a student at Andrews University, participated in mission trips to Honduras and to Beirut and to Jordan. She spent a year at *Campus Adventiste du Salève*, where she polished

³ adventistpeace.org/historical-documents.

her French skills. After graduation, she did a yearlong internship with ADRA in Madagascar. That quote by Mark Twain is one of her favorites because she has seen the evidence in her own life and the lives of her friends.

As I explore ways to teach about war and peace, I'm reading more by Anabaptist and Quaker authors, and the experiences of other conscientious objectors in our nation's wars. I spent an afternoon at Menno-Hof, a museum of Anabaptist history and life in Shipshewana, Indiana. I love some of the materials published by the American Friends Service Committee, especially their pamphlet, "Ten Points to Consider Before You Sign a Military Enlistment Agreement." They make suggestions like taking one's time, talking to veterans about their experiences, making sure a recruit gets every promise made by the recruiter in writing, and that one should have somebody review the contract before a recruit signs it).

I'm looking at academic programs like those at the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. A friend of mine has taught at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame. They host the annual Notre Dame Student Peace Conference for undergraduate and graduate students each Spring. I attended their Summer Institute for faculty in Peace Studies. This chapter is a sketch of a work in process for me, a snapshot of a point along journey. I expect I will continue to learn.

Adventists have a rich heritage we can mine. We have inspiring examples of courageous individuals we can highlight. At the same time, we need to be honest about our failures and the negative examples of Adventist experiences in Germany, in Rwanda, and even in the United States. We need to study the lessons of nationalistic fervor in 20th century Germany, of tribal divisions in Rwanda, of racism and segregation in the United States, and apartheid in South Africa. We need to ask how someone like Vernon Howell, known to history as David Koresh, was able to appeal to Adventist young people. We need to take our Adventist statement with its appeal to conscience and

apply it to other areas of the spiritual formation of youth and young adults.

In making this call for teaching peace, I'm echoing an invitation others have made from time to time. The 2002 GC Statement, "A Call for Peace," made the same plea:

The Seventh-day Adventist Church operates what may be the second largest worldwide parochial school system. Each of its more than 6,000 schools, colleges, and universities is being asked to set aside one week each school year to emphasize and highlight, through various programs, respect, cultural awareness, nonviolence, peacemaking, conflict resolution, and reconciliation as a way of making a specifically "Adventist" contribution to a culture of social harmony and peace. With this in mind, the Church's Education Department is preparing curricula and other materials to help in implementing this peace program.

The education of the church member in the pew, for nonviolence, peace, and reconciliation, needs to be an ongoing process. Pastors are being asked to use their pulpits to proclaim the gospel of peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation which dissolves barriers created by race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, and religion, and promotes peaceful human relations between individuals, groups, and nations (Seventh-day Adventist Church 2002).

Current and former leaders of the GC Education Department tell me this was never done, except for a couple of special issues of the *Journal of Adventist Education* in 2003 and 2008. It's up to us to make it happen. So much has happened since 2002. So much fear and division have darkened our land. Youth and young adults are ready to let their light shine. Let us help them kindle that flame.

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