

American Union Newsletter

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THE PRO-LIFE PACIFIST POSITION

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As the foundation of the Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement, International Missionary Society, the eternal law of God and the faith of Jesus uphold the preservation of life in its entire spectrum and is opposed to taking life by any means. We believe that life is sacred from conception to old age and that no one but the Creator of life has the right to take it. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, declared: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." John 10:10. The apostles also argued for peace and against war. "Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not." Romans 12:17, 18; James 4:1, 2.

God's law

God's law, which was written with His own finger, forbade murder. The sixth commandment declares: "Thou shalt not kill." In times of war, people kill each

other. Not only that. On the battlefield, it is not possible to keep the Sabbath holy. The fourth commandment says: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." Exodus 20:8.

It is not only the fourth and sixth commandments that forbid participation in war; the eighth commandment does as well: "Thou shalt not steal." Exodus 20:15. "The eighth commandment condemns manstealing and slave dealing, and forbids wars of conquest." – *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 309.

Jesus Christ was a pacifist. He advocated peace. He stated: "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." Matthew 5:7. He taught nonresistance and nonviolence. "But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." Matthew 5:39. Jesus taught that everyone is to love his enemies. Killing the enemy in war is not loving him. "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." Matthew 5:44.

Jesus told Peter that those who take the

sword will die by the sword. "And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Matthew 26:51, 52. Later, Jesus told Pilate that Christians would not fight or participate in conflict. "Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence." John 18:36. Christians cannot and do not participate in battles on earth in these last days.

Jesus' disciples and apostles

John the Baptist's mission was to bring the Jews back to God. He came to restore all things, according to Jesus Christ. John declared the principle and practice of nonviolence. "And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages." Luke 3:14.





The apostle Paul taught against carrying weapons and carnal warfare. "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds)," 2 Corinthians 10:3, 4.

Even the apostle Peter, who pulled his sword to defend Jesus, wrote that we should not return evil for evil. "Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing." 1 Peter 3:9.

Pioneer Adventist position

From the beginning of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the General Conference resolved in its assembly that, as a denomination, the church upheld pacifism. They repeatedly voted against the bearing of arms, bloodshed, and participation in war.

The resolution of 1867 stated: "It is the opinion of this conference that the bearing of arms or participation in war is a direct violation of the teachings of our Saviour and the spirit and letter of the law of God."¹

The resolution of 1868 stated: "We do not believe that it is the right of the servants of Christ to bear arms or destroy the lives of their fellow men."

The Seventh-day Adventist General Conference conscientiously opposed participation in war. They cited the example of the 19th-century Quakers, who were pacifists.²

Pamphlets and letters were published, written, sent to state governors, and distributed among the laity to this effect.³ Pioneer Adventists declared in official documents sent to the U.S. government that "Seventh-day Adventists ... are unanimous in their views" that His teachings were contrary to the spirit and practice of war; therefore, they

have always been decisively opposed to carrying weapons."⁴

During the Civil War, God warned the Seventh-day Adventist Church through His messenger not to participate in the war, because it would violate all the principles of their faith. War is a violation of conscience. "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. There would be a continual violation of conscience." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 361.

Pacifism and conscientious objection to enlistment in the armed forces were a pillar of early Seventh-day Adventist teachings and beliefs; those who voluntarily joined the military were disfellowshipped, and their dismissal from membership was boldly published in the official organ of the church, *The Review and Herald*.

Following is an example of this: "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."⁵

War is the realm of evil spirits

The book of Revelation presents war as the work of the devil. He originated war in heaven. "And there was war in heaven: Michael and His angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels." Revelation 12:7. Satan and his demons gather the rulers of the world to wage war against each other. "For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty." Revelation 16:14. To participate in war is to cooperate with evil spirits.

The writings of the Spirit of prophecy consistently uphold pacifism, non-violence,

and non-resistance, since war is the realm of evil spirits. Often, generals and officers communicate with the spirits of demons who profess to be ghosts of great generals of the past, encouraging them into battle. "Very many men in authority, generals and officers, act in conformity with instructions communicated by spirits. The spirits of devils, professing to be dead warriors and skillful generals, communicate with men in authority and control many of their movements." — *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 363.

It is Satan who delights in war. "He was a murderer from the beginning." John 8:44. "Satan delights in war, for it excites the worst passions of the soul and then sweeps into eternity its victims steeped in vice and blood. It is his object to incite the nations to war against one another, for he can thus divert the minds of the people from the work of preparation to stand in the day of God." — *The Great Controversy*, p. 589.



Bearing arms is grounds for discipline or disfellowshipment

As Satan, who was cast out of heaven after stirring up the spirit of war, those on earth during the Christian dispensation lose their right to membership in God's visible church if they join the armed forces, bear weapons, or participate in battle. The congregation should take steps to discipline those who have erred by bearing arms, enlisting in the army, or engaging in battle.

"It was there determined that Satan should be expelled from heaven, with all the angels who had joined him in the rebellion. Then there was war in

heaven. Angels were engaged in the battle; Satan wished to conquer the Son of God and those who were submissive to His will. But the good and true angels prevailed, and Satan, with his followers, was driven from heaven." —*Early Writings*, p. 145.

The Testimonies told that, at the end of time, many would take up weapons of war and, in doing so, would separate themselves from God's peace-loving remnant.

"As trials thicken around us, both separation and unity will be seen in our ranks. Some who are now ready to take up weapons of warfare will in times of real peril make it manifest that they have not built upon the solid rock; they will yield to temptation. Those who have had great light and precious privileges, but have not improved them, will, under one pretext or another, go out from us." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 400.

Civil disobedience

We are commanded by God to be at peace with all men. In time of peace or war, we cannot join the armed forces. "We have enlisted in the army of the Lord, and we are not to fight on the enemy's side, but on the side of Christ, where we can be a united whole, in sentiment, in action, in spirit, in fellowship." —*Gospel Workers*, p. 392.

In cases of military draft, members can appear before the draft board, as did the midwives in the days before the exodus and Daniel's friends in Babylon. The midwives who were ordered to kill the male babies when they were born disobeyed the civil law but honored God's moral law.

"And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of the one was Shiprah, and the name of the other Puah: And he said, When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live. But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive." "And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that He made them houses." Exodus 1:15-17, 21.

In the same spirit, Daniel's friends appeared before the king of Babylon and his great image when they were ordered to do so. However, they refused the command to bow down and wor-

ship the image. "But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." Daniel 3:18.

By extension, believers in Christ cannot bear weapons, shed blood, engage in war, or defile the Sabbath. In such cases, they need to maintain the position that was set forth by the first apostles: "And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." "Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood upon us. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men." Acts 4:10-20; 5:28, 29.

A "thus saith the Lord" is always above a "thus saith the government" when the latter's laws conflict with the law of God. Believers must obey God rather than men when human laws require obedience contrary to His commandments.

"We are to recognize human government as an ordinance of divine appointment, and teach obedience to it as a sacred duty, within its legitimate sphere. But when its claims conflict with the claims of God, we must obey God rather than men. God's word must be recognized as above all human legislation. A 'Thus saith the Lord' is not to be set aside for a 'Thus saith the church' or a 'Thus saith the state.' The crown of Christ is to be lifted above the diadems of earthly potentates." —*God's Amazing Grace*, p. 59.

Jesus also gave His people the option to flee when persecuted. Believers have the right to escape if their lives are in danger for following their religious and pacifist convictions. "But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come." Matthew 10:23.

The first Christians fled from Jerusalem when the government persecuted them for their faith and conviction. They scattered abroad, fleeing the governmental and nongovernmental pursuers. "And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a

great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles." Acts 8:1.

Those who are living in the last days will defend the truth and flee, just as the virgin church of the Middle Ages escaped into the wilderness when it was persecuted. "And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child. And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent." Revelation 12:13, 14.

Conclusion

As a denomination, members of the International Missionary Society of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Reform Movement, are pacifists and practice non-resistance and non-violence. They conscientiously oppose bearing arms, shedding blood, or participating in war. Its members cannot voluntarily enlist, serve in the armed forces, or participate in war. During times of military conscription, they will continue to be conscientious objectors to the pollution of the Sabbath, swearing allegiance to the flag, carrying weapons, shedding blood, or participating in war. They should seek pastoral assistance if threatened with a court of law or prison. When drafted, members may apply for civil service instead of military service as long as Sabbath observance is guaranteed.

¹ Resolution of the General Conference Board, May 14, 1867.

² J. Turner, Letter to the Governor of Illinois, Freeport, IL, August 29, 1864.

³ J.N. Andrews, pamphlet.

⁴ J. Byington, J.N. Loughborough, G.W. Amadon, letter to the Governor of Michigan, Battle Creek, Michigan, August 2, 1863.

⁵ *Review and Herald*, vol. 112.





Although the Saviour had no wealth, displayed no outward grandeur, came with no worldly pomp, yet His words of promise, of command, of reproof, were uttered with the dignity of goodness, greatness, and power. The people listened with wonder and admiration, and the impression made upon their minds was expressed by the officers who came to take Him, in obedience to the command of the rulers and priests. They listened entranced to His words of heavenly wisdom, and, forgetting their errand, they returned without their prisoner. The priests and rulers asked, "Why have ye not brought Him?" and they answered, "Never man spake like this Man."

No one could listen to His gracious words and escape the conviction that He was a being of superior goodness and wisdom. The emotions of His listeners changed from admiration of His eloquence to desire to attain to the lofty character which He presented, both by precept and example. As He discoursed on themes of eternal interest, they hung upon His words as if spell-bound under their power. Those who were thus attracted to the vital truths which Christ presented, were standing on holy ground, near to the rivers of the water of life. With what deep, impressive power He called to the multitudes on the last day of the feast, saying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink." At another time He declared, "I am the light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."...

The gift of life has been freely, graciously, joyously offered to fallen man. Through Christ we may become partakers of the divine nature, and obtain the gift of eternal life; for it has been abundantly provided for all who will come and receive it through God's appoint-

ed means. When Paul beheld the wonders of redemption and the foolishness of those who did not comprehend its nature, he exclaimed, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?"

Jesus said, "Ye also have seen Me, and believe not." How had they seen Him? By the eye of faith, by the witness of the Holy Spirit, by the revelation of Christ to their souls. But they had resisted the work of the Holy Spirit, until the impression of the precious truth of Christ wore away their hearts. They did not give heed to their convictions. They did not cultivate their faith, but indulged in questioning and caviling until they were hardened in unbelief and rebellion.

Those who go on to know the Lord know that His goings forth are prepared as the morning, and everyone who receives the precious jewels of truth will hasten to impart the knowledge of His riches in Christ to those who are around Him. When men respond to the drawing of Christ and view Jesus as the royal Sufferer on the cross of Calvary, they enter into oneness with Christ, they become the elect of God, not by works of their own, but through the grace of Christ; for all their good works are wrought through the power of the Spirit of God. All is of God, and not of themselves. The Lord chose us by His Spirit. Jesus says, "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you."...

The grace of Jesus Christ alone can change the heart of stone to a heart of flesh, and make it alive unto God. Men

may perform great deeds in the eyes of the world; their achievements may be many and of a high order in the sight of men, but all the talent, all the skill, all the ability of the world will fail to transform the character and make a degraded child of sin a child of God, an heir of heaven. Men have no power to justify the soul, to sanctify the heart. Moral disease cannot be healed save through the power of the great Physician. The highest gift of heaven, even the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, is alone able to redeem the lost. What gratitude, what love, should fill our hearts as we contemplate the love of God! The heart should be softened and subdued as we meditate upon the risk that Jesus took in order that man might be elevated and restored. The world's Redeemer endured sufferings commensurate to all the guilt of a lost world. The sacrifice of Christ on Calvary's cross is a consideration that surpasses all the overwhelming power of sin; and when a sense of sin presses upon the heart of the sinner, and the burden seems intolerable, Jesus invites him to look to Him and live. There is power in Christ to cleanse the soul. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

How the wondrous provision of the plan of God for the salvation of men widens and exalts our ideas of the love of God! How it binds our hearts to the great heart of Infinite Love! How it makes us delight in His service, as our hearts respond to the drawing of His loving-kindness and tender mercy! John calls upon men to behold the marvelous love of God. He exclaims: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God; therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." —*Signs of the Times*, May 2, 1892.

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