Why *No* to Women But *Yes* to Killing?

Divisions going their own way on ordination of women would *not* set a precedent.

by Ronald Lawson

THE WORLD CHURCH HAS LEARNED TO ACCEPT diversity in its ranks on military service: While Adventists in some countries refuse, on principle, to carry weapons, in others they are willing to drop bombs or pull triggers to kill people. It should therefore not be so difficult to accept diversity concerning whether hands can be placed on women to ordain them to the gospel ministry.

Approving diversity of practice among world divisions will be a central issue at the upcoming 1995 General Conference Session in Utrecht. The issue will arise most starkly when it is time to vote on whether to allow world divisions to decide for themselves whether to permit ordination of women as ministers. Many who oppose the ordination of women argue that the church cannot permit diversity of its practice on such an important issue. In fact, the world Seventh-day Adventist Church has for many years maintained its unity while accepting diversity of practice.

For example, Adventists have agreed that in certain parts of the world the church will accept government money to operate Adventist schools. In Africa particularly, and more recently in other areas, such as Australia, we have accepted government funding of Adventist schools. Clear differences in lifestyle have also not rent Adventists asunder. Vegetarianism is much more frequent among members in North America than in the rest of the world. For years, members in Europe wore wedding rings while conscientious American Adventists shunned the practice. Even something so central to Adventism as the Sabbath has been observed differently in different parts of the world. The church has accepted the fact that for years denominational officials in some areas approved members' playing games and even sending their children to public schools on the seventh-day Sabbath.

As delegates from around the world reflect

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over the next few months on how they will vote in Utrecht on allowing divisions to decide for themselves whether to permit ordination of women, they can benefit from a case study in diversity within the world church. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has not disintegrated while different parts of the world church have approved different positions on something so basic as whether members can serve their governments by killing other human beings. It is relevant to consider carefully the variety of practice within different parts of the international Adventist Church toward conscription and military service, and to ask how, historically, the church came to endorse such diversity.

The case study is part of a large research project that included more than 3,000 in-depth interviews with church administrators, teachers, hospital administrators and medical personnel, pastors, students, and leading laypersons in 54 countries in all 11 divisions of the world church. The project's policy is to refrain from citing the names of interviews when they are quoted, except when they are major figures in the church. For its historical sections, the essay also draws on official pronouncements and the work of other scholars.

There is considerable diversity today in how the international Adventist Church relates to conscription and military service around the globe: Adventists in most of Western Europe continue to hold the traditional "modified pacifist" noncombatant position. (The evolution of this position is described below.) When conscripted, most of them opt for the civil alternative available to them, even though this often means a longer commitment. They frequently expressed shock in interviews at the number of Adventists volunteering for service with arms in America. Those in the former West Germany have reacted against their history, in common with many of their countrymen, and are especially strongly noncombatant, anti-war, and for disarmament, and wonder about the flow from the United States of Adventist military volunteers and chaplains doing tours of duty in their land. The church in Italy felt so strongly about the issue that it voted to urge denominational leaders to strengthen the present position which, by recommending that conscripted Adventists not bear arms but treating the decision as one of individual conscience, removes any possibility of disciplining a member who acts otherwise. They asked that conscripts choosing to bear arms in countries with a legal alternative to service face church discipline. However, their request prompted no response.[1]

In contrast, in most of the countries of Eastern Europe (while under Communism), Latin America, and several countries in Asia, Adventists have abandoned the weapons issue and have limited their focus on military conscription to attempts to gain Sabbath privileges and, in some instances, alternatives to a pork-based diet. Church leaders have feared that any attempt by Adventists to avoid armed service would sharply escalate tensions with governments.

Consequently, there was little concern in Communist Eastern Europe about the weapons issue, which Adventists associated with the Adventist Reform Movement and Jehovah's Witnesses, who regularly faced prison for their beliefs. Adventists there typically trained with weapons but attempted the often daunting task of observing the Sabbath and securing an Adventist diet while in the military. These problems were so great in Romania, for example, that many Adventists chose to delay their baptisms until after completing military service so that they would feel less obligation toward Sabbath observance.

Civil alternatives to military service became available during the last years of Communist control in most of these countries, and these were typically chosen by Adventists—but for

reasons related to Sabbath observance problems rather than to their convictions about training with weapons. The one exception to this among the satellite states in Eastern Europe was East Germany, where a strong aversion to arms rooted in 20th-century German history led Adventists to choose alternate service as soon as it became available in 1967. In the Soviet Union, taking the alternative of being assigned to construction did nothing to ease the difficulties associated with Sabbath observance until Gorbachev's perestroika improved the situation considerably.[2]

Adventists in Latin America have also refrained from making an issue of military service. Church leaders in Brazil explained that this enables them to avoid conflict with the state and also the stigma and individual penalties that accrue to Jehovah's Witnesses. The Adventist Church cultivated ties to military regimes throughout the region during the 1970s and 1980s, often forming exchange relationships with them.[3] Students in Argentina participate in military parades and compete in marksmanship.

When a missionary teacher wanted to teach noncombatance as part of an ethics course in the Adventist college there, he was discouraged from doing so. Church leaders explained that training with arms did not worry them unduly, for they felt that Argentina would never fight a war. Argentine Adventists were therefore greatly surprised to find themselves fighting and dying in the Malvinas (Falkland Islands) War.[4]

In Asia, Singapore, Thailand, Taiwan, and South Korea have conscription.[5] Adventists made a formal accommodation with the government of Singapore some years ago that granted them Sabbath privileges and the right not to carry weapons. In Thailand, most Adventist conscripts are also able to arrange to protect their Sabbath observance, but they train with weapons. On the other hand, Adventists in South Korea and Taiwan have no option but to bear arms, and they also face considerable difficulties over Sabbath observance.[6]

Although there is no general conscription in the Philippines, there is considerable government pressure on colleges to include military training within their programs. Mountain View College in the south has been under great pressure to train with weapons. The senior Adventist college, Philippine Union College (PUC), in the north, has avoided these pressures because its program to train medics is recognized. Both colleges are located close to insurgencies. There is controversy because PUC chose to hire armed guards who, at last count, had killed four intruders.[7]

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The most remarkable involvement of Adventists with weapons and military conflict, however, is found among the Karen rebels against the Burmese government, who have declared the independent state of Cawthoolie along the Thai border. Adventists are the third-largest religious group among these Karens, behind Buddhists and Baptists, but they provide much of the military and political leadership. The general who heads the state, Bo (General) Mya, three of his top deputies, and several other leading military figures are Adventists. Since the Adventist churches and

schools there cannot be linked to the denominational structure through Burma, they have been linked instead to the Thai structure.

A missionary was stationed there for several years until recently, and church leaders in Thailand visit there frequently to nurture, evangelize, collect tithes, and pay the salaries of clergy. Several of them reported having been asked to pray with soldiers before battles. Neither they nor leaders from the church's Southeast Asia Union have taken a stance on the military issue—"We have not made bearing arms an issue at all, have not said they should not be shooting"—but have kept their role spiritual: "Our hearts are with them, but officially we cannot take sides—it would jeopardize missionaries elsewhere." They have not had advice from the General Conference or the Far Eastern Division on how to handle this very unexpected situation, and leaders from these higher levels of the church structure have not visited Cawthoolie. Indeed, the church leaders at these levels seem nervous about the situation. They want to dissociate the church from Cawthoolie, and to keep missionaries and tourists away from there in order to prevent stories of Adventist-led armed struggle from surfacing.[8]

Adopting a Position in the 19th Century

Just as Adventism was creating its organizational structure between 1860 and 1863, the American Civil War forced the church to grapple with the issue of military service. Since Adventists expected to be persecuted by the state before the imminent return of Christ, and felt that they had the responsibility of spreading God's last warning message to the world, there was widespread reluctance among Adventists to volunteer for service. When he discovered that they were being accused of disloyalty, James White, editor of the *Review and Herald*, wrote in favor of participating: "in case of drafting, the government assumes the responsibility of the violation of the law of God."[9]

This editorial initiated a debate, which revealed deep divisions over the issue. Adventist ranks included many who had been touched by pacifism through the abolitionist movement. These regarded military combat as a violation of the sixth commandment and of the nonviolent teachings of Jesus. They embraced the examples in the book of Daniel, where the three Hebrews and the prophet defied orders from the state.

On the other hand, since Adventists were at that time concentrated in the North, and key church leaders had taken positions against slavery, there was also considerable sympathy among them for the Union side. Some became protagonists for active participation in the military straggle. They found biblical support for their position in passages in the Epistles granting considerable authority to the state[10] and in the Old Testament stories in which God sent Israel to war. They also restricted the meaning of the sixth commandment to murder, thus removing war from its purview.[11]

The issue became urgent when conscription was instituted in March 1863. The infant church eventually took a position against military service. However, consensus was reached primarily on practical, rather than ideological, grounds. It was agreed that participation in war was impossible for Adventists because it would make it unfeasible for them to observe the Sabbath or their diet restrictions, and would expose them to a multitude of evil influences, such as drinking, smoking, gambling, and cursing.[12]

Adventists usually chose to avoid the draft by paying the standard commutation fee of $300, and churches helped poor members raise this sum. When provision for noncombatant service was passed in February 1864, Adventists initially made no attempt to gain

recognition as noncombatants under the act because they were generally using the commutation fee to avoid service. "Only in July of 1864, when the privilege of buying commutation was restricted to those recognized as conscientious objectors, did the church act to secure such recognition for itself."[13] Having accepted a position, Adventists then enforced it, disfellowshipping members who volunteered for military service.[14] The third annual session of the General Conference, held in May 1865, shortly after the end of the war, affirmed the new pacifist position: It declared that while Adventists "recognize civil government as ordained by God," they were "compelled to decline all participation in acts of war and bloodshed because this was inconsistent with the teaching of Jesus, the 'Prince of Peace.'"[15]

New Issues Abroad

Meanwhile, Adventism had begun to spread internationally. Some of the countries where it took root lacked the tradition of concern for individual conscience that had spawned the legislation creating noncombatant status in the United States.

Military training in peacetime came to the fore early in the new century in several countries. In a very distant America, Adventist leaders gave little direction to these situations. In Argentina, where there had been conscription for many years, Adventists had refrained from requesting special privileges for fear of incurring severe punishments—that is, they typically trained with weapons and on the Sabbath, in effect abandoning their scruples rather than risk heightening tensions with the state. However, in 1907, one church member there chose instead to endure torture and imprisonment. When this drew publicity and critical comment, Adventists were exempted from military work on the Sabbath. Their focus on the Sabbath rather than on bearing arms pointed to future trends. However, when the governments of Australia and New Zealand introduced compulsory military training in 1909, the local Adventist Religious Liberty Committee petitioned them successfully for noncombatant status.[16]

Meanwhile, German Adventists conscripted in the years prior to 1914 faced considerable pressure concerning both the use of weapons and Sabbath observance. Some who were imprisoned became the focus of scornful press coverage. When they were taken to court, they refused to train with arms; however, they expressed a willingness to serve in time of war. Consequently, when war broke out suddenly in 1914, their leaders, focusing on the New Testament passages asserting the primacy of government authority, agreed that German Adventists would bear weapons in the service of the Fatherland. Moreover, their announcement stated explicitly that "under these circumstances we will also bear arms on Saturday."[17] This decision resulted in a bitter schism, which concluded with the members making up the pacifist opposition—the "two percent"—being disfellowshipped from the official church and forming the Seventh Day Adventist Reform Movement. The patriotism of the official Adventists, together with their realization that Imperial Germany would not countenance a noncombatant option, led them to reduce their tension with the state and to discard those who insisted on maintaining high tension.

The American Church and World War I (1917-1918)

Because of the late entry of the United States into the war, the American church had more time to prepare its position. This was just as well, because once again there was considerable debate over the intent of the Scriptures.[18] In April 1917 the North American

Division, declaring that "we have been noncombatants throughout our history," adopted the 1865 General Conference declaration of noncombatancy as principle, and filed this with the War Department.[19] However, it now defined noncombatancy quite differently: instead of being pacifists who refused to be involved in war, Adventists would now respond to the draft but refuse to bear arms—as unarmed soldiers, they would do good and not kill. Adventists were eager to express their patriotism and to modify positions that could heighten tensions with the state.

Unlike the Quakers, Adventists sought to avoid only actual combatancy. They did not see it as a contradiction to help the wounded to recover and so fight again: They were helping people, and what those they helped did afterwards was up to their own consciences. Their patriotism made them proud to offer service to their nation that was compatible with what their consciences allowed. Adventist leaders even urged members to purchase war bonds.

However, being part of the military initially increased tensions when Adventist conscripts were punished because of problems with Sabbath observance during basic training. Church leaders were eventually successful in arranging for Adventists to be excused from all unnecessary military activities on that day. Nevertheless, at the end of the war there were still 35 Adventists in prison, with sentences ranging from five to 20 years, for disobeying officers on this account. They were then released by proclamation.[20]

Further Trouble in Europe

Once the war ended, the General Conference was faced with the problem of how to deal with the rift in Europe, which had already spread through several countries there. Finally, in 1923, it made an incongruous decision to side with the official church in Germany, which had the effect of leaving the schism in place, while, at the same time, establishing that the official position of international Adventism toward war was noncombatancy.[21]

However, the official position was soon breached once more by the Stalinist crackdown on religious freedom. The beginning of this was signaled at the church's 1924 All-Russian Congress, when its leaders were forced to sign a statement that military service was a matter of private conscience. This statement was strengthened considerably at the next congress, in 1928, with the proclamation that military service was a Christian duty, and that anyone teaching otherwise was a heretic and should be disfellowshipped. Meanwhile, new laws proscribed proselytizing activity and charitable work by religious groups. By accepting these conditions the Adventist Church was able to function openly but in very compromised circumstances.

This situation resulted in another schism, for some of the Russian Adventists refused to compromise with the authorities. Instead they broke away from the officially recognized church and went under-

ground, thus placing themselves in a position where they attracted persecution. The schismatics called themselves the True and Free Adventists: "true" because they were faithful to the commandments to observe the Sabbath and refrain from killing, which they accused the official church of breaking, and "free" because they refused to be registered or connected to the government.[22]

Two approaches to military service had emerged within international Adventism. One, which was declared the official position, was noncombatancy—now redefined as participation in war without arms. However, it was confined largely to the English-speaking world, where it had been secured fairly easily as a legally available option. The second approach was utilized where governments firmly refused to allow any such alternative, when Adventists usually chose to avoid conflict by serving with arms. That is, in both cases tension with the state tended to be relatively low, at least as measured by military service. Indeed, in two cases the official Adventist Church had chosen to cut off minorities that resisted government military policies rather than risk raising tensions.

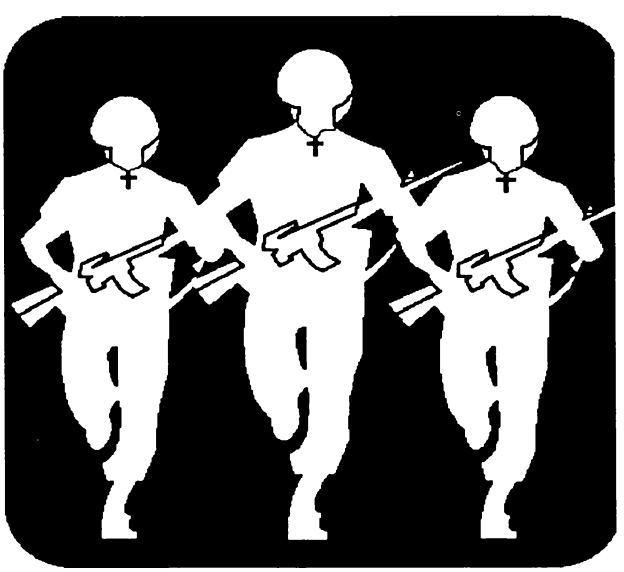
World War II (1939-1945)

As the international situation began to heat up again in Europe, the General Conference reaffirmed the church's noncombatant position once more. It issued a pamphlet in 1934, "Our Youth in Time of War," which urged Adventist youth to prepare for noncombatant service by graduating in medicine, nursing, dietetics or some other medically related field, or to at least get experience as cooks, nurses aides, etc.

In 1939, as war broke out in Europe, the church in the United States again established a program to provide medical training to Adventists who were potential draftees. This time, however, the program was much more sophisticated than during World War I, for it secured the cooperation of the armed forces: Called the Medical Cadet Training Program, it was directed and supervised by regular army officers.[23] The official church paper commented: "Refusing to be called conscientious objectors, Seventh-day Adventists desire to be known as conscientious cooperators."[24]

However, the historic noncombatant stand was already being compromised again in Germany, where Adventists praised Hitler and his National Socialists with enthusiasm, and many conscripts bore arms willingly even though they had been granted the right to opt for orderly or medical duties. In so doing they sharply reduced the tension between their church and the state, surviving untouched in spite of the similarity of several of their beliefs and practices to Judaism. Their experience was in marked contrast to that of the Reformed Adventists and the Jehovah's Witnesses, who suffered greatly, often to death, because of their unswerving commitment to their pacifist positions.[25]

Nevertheless, during World War II the General Conference affirmed yet again that "throughout their history Seventh-day Adventists have been noncombatants. . . . the noncombatant position taken . . . is thus based on



deep religious conviction."[26] Some 12,000 American Adventists served during World War II as noncombatants in medical branches of the services. Church leaders were especially proud of their military heroes such as Desmond Doss, whose bravery earned him a Congressional Medal of Honor.[27]

Korean and Vietnam Wars (1950s and 1960s) and Transformation of the Adventist Position

The Medical Cadet Corps, which had been allowed to lapse after World War II, was revived at the time of the Korean War. Once again conscripted American Adventists served in large numbers in medical units. The major innovation during this time was the appointment by the church of military chaplains, who were paid by the armed forces and had military careers. During World War II the General Conference had refused to endorse Adventist clergy for such posts, which had had the effect of keeping them from being appointed.[28]

However, it now not only agreed to endorse them, but also to give financial aid to some would-be chaplains in order to help with their ministerial training and to ordain them immediately after graduation, since this was necessary for their appointment as chaplains, rather than having them wait several years, as was the normal procedure with Adventist clergy. Thus American Adventism took another step in normalizing its relationship with the military.

South Korean Adventists were also taught during the Korean War that it was the church's position not to undergo military training with arms—a position that was reinforced by visiting General Conference officials. Consequently, following the American model, the Adventist college in Korea gave basic medical training to those expecting to be drafted, who then asked the authorities to assign them to medical units or other noncombatant positions where they did not have to bear arms. But not all were able to obtain such positions, and the unlucky ones sometimes found themselves with an unsympathetic commander who would not respect their religious restrictions. Two of these were executed at the front line during the war when they refused to bear arms.

About 100 Korean Adventists were sent to prison for as long as seven years during the 1950s and 1960s for failure to obey orders concerning arms or Sabbath activities; many more were beaten or otherwise mistreated. Appeals to President Park were successful in securing the release of some of these men, but this approach never solved the basic problem. Indeed, the prison terms to which Adventists were sentenced became notably longer during the 1960s than they had been during the previous decade.[29]

In many other countries without provision for alternatives to military service, ranging from Franco's Spain to Communist Eastern Europe to Latin America, Adventists would also have faced severe difficulties and even imprisonment if they had tried to avoid training with arms. In some countries, such as Argentina, the church provided youth with some medical training during this period, once again hoping that the possession of these skills would shape their paths when they were conscripted. However, the major concern of local church leaders was often the preservation of Sabbath observance for conscripts rather than the avoidance of training with weapons. They frequently concluded that the General Conference did not understand their situation, so that its statements reflected an American situation that could not be applied to them.[30] In this way they avoided the tension with the state over military service that the Korean Adventists were experiencing.

Nevertheless, in 1954, following the Korean War, the Quadrennial Session of the General

Conference voted a major statement that not only confirmed the traditional noncombatant position but also provided for it to be included in the church manual as a fundamental belief throughout the world field:

> . . . The breaking out of war among men 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 take a noncombatant position, following their divine master in not taking human life, but rendering all possible service to save it. In their accepting the obligations of citizenship, as well as its benefits, their loyalty to government requires them to serve the state in any noncombatant capacity . . . asking only that they may serve in those capacities which do not violate their conscientious convictions.[31]

However, when the next edition of the church manual was being readied for printing in 1959, the General Conference Committee voted to omit the above statement from it. Church leaders were becoming more aware of the problems of observing noncombatancy within many portions of the world church, and some felt it would be inhumane to discipline members caught in such a bind—a likely result of including the position among the fundamental beliefs of the church.

In the years following the Korean War, relationships between the church in America and government and military leaders became notably closer.

In 1954 the U.S. Army established a special camp at Fort Sam Houston in Texas where all noncombatants could receive their basic training. This removed them from regular units, where their refusal to bear arms had been a regular source of confusion. More than half the men who trained there were Adventists.[32] "It was a program engineered for the needs of conscientious cooperators."[33]

That same year the U.S. Army Surgeon General contacted the General Conference seeking approval for the Army to ask Adventist draftees to volunteer for a research program designed especially for them, which would "contribute significantly to the nation's health and security."

When Korean leaders contacted the General Conference seeking advice, the latter reversed its position, arguing that it was not worth risking serious trouble with the government: Training with arms should be a matter of individual choice. Almost every Adventist student and conscript in Korea thereafter trained with arms.

The upshot was the creation of "Project Whitecoat," under which volunteers from among drafted Adventist noncombatant servicemen participated as guinea pigs in biological warfare research for the U.S. Army at Fort Detrick, Maryland. Thanks to the enthusiastic encouragement of the General Conference, 2,200 Adventists participated in the program between 1955 and 1973.[34] In taking this position, church leaders subordinated a church doctrine, healthful living, to cementing relations with the U.S. military.

During these years the church continued to urge young men at Adventist schools to take medical training through participating in the Medical Cadet Corps before draft age. The most enthusiastic of these did intensive field training at a roving Camp Desmond T. Doss, which was usually located at Adventist campgrounds. The military staffed the camp and

spent large sums setting up a field hospital.[35]

However, the ideology surrounding the antiwar movement of the late 1960s led to a spurt in the number of American Adventists choosing the 1-O classification (conscientious objector choosing alternate service). Although their choice offended the Adventists who had become militant patriots, the church was obliged to deal with them. The Annual Council of the General Conference voted in 1969 that such Adventists should be told that the historic teaching of the church was noncombatancy (1-A-O), and urged to consider this first; however, if they persisted in pursuing the 1-O classification, pastors should provide the needed help if the draftee's wish was consistent with his religious experience.[36]

When disagreement and debate on the military issue persisted among American Adventists, the General Conference formed a Study Committee on Military Service in 1971. This large committee received and debated many papers, and remained deeply divided.[37] When Annual Council took up the matter in 1972, it declared that military service was a matter of individual conscience, and thus adopted a position that could include both the militant patriots and the pacifists. Its vehicle in this was the statement on military obligations voted by the General Conference Session in 1954 (quoted above), which it transformed by adding a new ending:

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

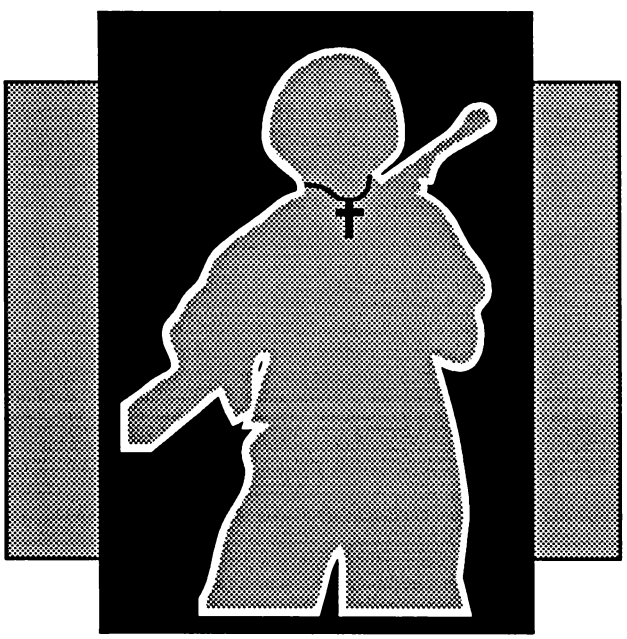
The document interpreted this by confirming that, for members in the United States, the statement was best reflected in the traditional 1-A-O (noncombatant) classification, but that the church would also facilitate members applying for a 1-O (conscientious objector) classification. However, it then added:

> For those who conscientiously choose the 1-A classification (military service as a combatant), pastoral guidance and counsel should be provided in ministering to their needs since the Church refrains from passing judgment on them.[38]

Clearly, this decision represented a sharp break with the position that had, in 1954, been declared a fundamental belief.

The new flexibility was tested and confirmed in Korea the very next year. It was noted above that young men there had endured beatings, imprisonment, and even death, rather than renege on their commitment to noncombatancy. However, as time passed, younger Koreans began to question whether the costs were worth the stand, and increasing numbers of them opted to violate the recommended church policy in the late 1960s. Then the military situation in South Vietnam deteriorated, and Korean troops were withdrawn from there along with American troops. The Park regime panicked and insisted that all conscripts train with arms (which thus removed the noncombatant alternatives previously available to some Adventists), and that such training be included within college curricula.

The latter demand placed the Adventist college in a dilemma: Should it conform to the



new policy or reject it and face closure? When Korean leaders contacted the General Conference seeking advice, the latter reversed the position it had advocated in the 1960s, arguing that it was not worth risking serious trouble with the government: Training with arms should be a matter of individual conscience. The college consequently conformed to the government's demand that it train students with weapons, and left the choice of whether to comply to the individual consciences of the students, not urging them one way or the other:

> If the College had refused to do the training, the Ministry of Education would have closed it, unless the Lord performed a miracle. . . . We decided that the college was more important than noncombatancy.[39]

The result of this decision was that almost every Adventist student and conscript in Korea thereafter trained with arms. Moreover, the church, which had formerly had a reputation with the authorities for taking a stand on training with weapons and Sabbath observance in the military, lost this reputation. The church's abandonment of its noncombatant position was a wrenching experience for those who had earlier endured prison to stand up for it, and more than half of them have since cut their ties with it.[40]

Meanwhile, Adventism in America had backed away from the serious teaching of noncombatancy through Sabbath schools, youth programming, and the church school system.

The Volunteer American Army

When the United States switched to a volunteer army in 1973, recruiters began emphasizing educational and vocational benefits that appealed to those of lower socioeconomic status and racial minorities, including many Adventists. These began to volunteer for military service (an act that removed the noncombatant option available to draftees) in unprecedented numbers. The church now directed its main effort into chaplaincy, and by 1992 the Adventist chaplaincy corps had grown to a total of 44. The National Service Organization, which was originally staffed by pastors and evangelists and whose object was to handle the problems of draftees with noncombatant status and Sabbath observance, was taken over by chaplains socialized into military values, who now tried primarily to serve the spiritual needs of the Adventist volunteer soldiers. Its new focus was confirmed when it was renamed the office of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries.[41]

The World Church and Military Service Today

To understand the international diversity on this issue, one needs to study the evolving position of the church on conscription, particularly how the church in America has modified its position over the years as church leaders became increasingly patriotic and determined to foster a supportive relationship with the federal government and the U.S. military. Within the United States in the 1990s, "military recruiters come to Adventist school campuses, and school and university bulletin boards display posters advertising the benefits of service in the armed forces."[42] It is not surprising, then, that "most young Adventist adults are unaware of the strong pacifist thread in the fabric of Adventist history."[43] In contrast with earlier generations, many young Adventists have enlisted, thereby agreeing to kill America's enemies if ordered to do so. The office of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries estimated the total number of military personnel listing Seventh-day Adventist as their "religious preference"—that is, of Adventist back-

ground—as 6,000 to 8,000 in 1991, and that 2,000 of these participated in the Gulf War. One Adventist Marine, the son of a conference youth leader, was the only survivor when his tank was hit by friendly fire.[44]

Adventist attitudes became much more openly jingoistic during the Gulf War:

> Not only have [Adventist volunteer soldiers] been to the Persian Gulf and back; they have come home to welcoming applause is Sabbath worship services and patriotic accolades in the church's publications.[45]

A non-Adventist church attendee wrote of being told by church members, "We should nuke them," that "according to the Bible 'there is a time for war,'" and that "God instructed the slaughter of women, men, and children."[46] This mood was matched by the majority within the General Conference headquarters. An official there who was troubled by President Bush's decision to launch the war told of a sense of isolation from his colleagues because of widespread enthusiasm there for American participation, for "sending in the missiles and the bombs."[47]

The Adventist message concerning military service has become blurred and confusing. Pamphlets available from Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries at the General Conference warn that "the Adventist Church strongly counsels its members NOT to enter military service voluntarily if they have conscientious beliefs that they either cannot bear arms or be available for routine military training or duty during Sabbath hours," but then they add that views on these questions are a matter of individual conscience. Similarly, an article in a church periodical reviewed the biblical evidence:

> "The attitude of the Christian should always be of loyalty to his government," says Charles Martin, director of the National Service Organization of the Adventist Church. "But when the government conflicts with the requirements of God, he must obey God, at whatever cost." . . .
>
> "Whether defensive or offensive, just or unjust, war means killing," says Martin.
>
> "It's hard for some to believe that a soldier who shoots, stabs, shells, napalms, of bombs another human being is in harmony with One who said 'Resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.' . . . Many Adventists and other Christians agree with Tertullian: Christ, in disarming Peter, ungirt every soldier."

But the article then concluded:

> The Adventist church recommends that its youth, if drafted, enter the armed forces as noncombatants. But the church also recognizes the right of individual conscience. An Adventist bearing arms is in no way a second-class church member.[48]

Since the Adventist Church operates internationally, military service has often had to be addressed, and here two distinct patterns have emerged. The noncombatant option was sought successfully in the English-speaking world and, more recently, in Western Europe. Consequently, Adventists stand out as more different on this issue in these countries than they are today in the United States. However, because they are merely making use of options that are legally available to conscripts, this indicates that tension with these societies is not especially high—although it is higher than in the United States. This is because Adventists there have often remained more separate because of a lower level of upward mobility, a small membership, which renders them politically insignificant, especially within democracies, and minor institutions, which leave Adventists with less of a communal stake in society.

On the other hand, in those countries where any hesitancy to heed the call to arms would have generated tension with the state (these include the formerly Communist region and much of the developing world), Adventists rarely raised the issue. In general, they left the high tension on this question to the Jehovah's

Witnesses and the schismatic Adventists. This does not mean that tension between Adventists and these societies was minimal, for conflict was also possible over such issues as Sabbath observance or interference by the state in church affairs. But even here Adventists typically cooperated with the authorities and took opportunities to reduce tension: They sent their children to school on the Sabbath in several countries, established exchange relationships with military and Communist regimes, allowed Communist governments to control appointments to church leadership, and, when disgust with toadying to the state resulted in schisms,[49] then-General Conference President Neal Wilson twice announced that the General Conference would recognize only the organization "recognized by the authorities."[50]

The patterns found reveal the importance of political context Adventists have not been likely to seek noncombatant status where the cost could be high. They have been wary about heightening tension with governments. When the situation has been threatening, they have proved willing to compromise.

While building comfortable relationships with government rulers throughout the international church has been embraced as a prime goal by General Conference leaders, the origins of this policy were local, in individual countries: it was the church leaders in such countries as Argentina, Germany, and the USSR who first chose to ignore what was then the official church policy on military service in order to avoid heightening tension with their governments.

Church leaders have seen diversity among Adventists concerning military service as necessary to sustain worldwide church unity. What has been true of killing for one's country is true of ordaining women for one's church. Lasting unity can only be achieved by accepting diversity of worldwide practice.

How did these varying patterns impact on the official denominational position on military service? The Adventist Church was spawned in America, its headquarters has always been here, the bulk of its income originates here, and its leadership has been dominated by Americans throughout its history. The noncombatant stance was formulated in America in response to an American problem, and the church here continued to reaffirm it strongly and to shape its programs accordingly until the Vietnam War. It is not surprising that the General Conference, which was then a creature of the North American church, followed suit. Indeed, the proclamations of the General Conference over the decades showed little awareness that the official church position was not being adhered to in many countries.

The decision by the General Conference in 1972 to become much less dogmatic on the issue was triggered by divisions within the American church in the wake of the antiwar movement of the 1960s. But the other reason was the growing importance of the world church. There was increased awareness of the persecution in South Korea and the failure of much of the world field to implement the official policy. Even more important, was the realization that the balance of power within the world church was shifting beyond the United States. Maintaining the unity of the world church depended on accepting the prevailing diversity in practice concerning serving in the military and killing others in combat.

We have seen that church leaders have not

only allowed considerable diversity among Adventists concerning military service. They have seen it as necesssary to sustain world-wide church unity. What has been true of killing for one's country is true of ordaining women for one's church. Lasting unity can only be achieved by accepting diversity of worldwide practice.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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3. Ronald Lawson, from "Church and State at Home and Abroad: The Governmental Relations of International Seventh-day Adventism," a paper presented at the meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1991.

4. From interviews.

5. From interviews. The issue of training with weapons has not been raised in many countries where conscription is not a present practice or a recent memory. These countries include India, Bangladesh, Japan, and Hong Kong, and also much of Africa.

6. From interviews.

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8. Ibid.

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