

OUR RELATION TO WAR

Issued by the Executive Committee
of the British
Union Conference
of Seventh-Day
Adventists.

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FOREWORD

THE attitude of Seventh-Day Adventists to war service is now well known, but in answer to requests for a restatement of our position this pamphlet is issued. It contains our statements to H.M. Government, together with a brief exposition of the Scriptural background of our position.

Our Relation to War

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FROM time to time, Seventh-Day Adventists have expressed themselves officially on their relationship to war. Perhaps the most comprehensive statement was that forwarded to the Prime Minister on March 13, 1935. It reads as follows:

Sir,

We beg respectfully to draw your attention to the following resolution passed today by the Executive Committee of the British Union Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists.

As a Christian church, believing in the undiminished authority and perpetuity of the moral law, given by God Himself in the Ten Commandments, we hold that we are thereby forbidden to take part in combatant service in time of war.

We recognize that all earthly governments are ordained of God, and that such governments, in the exercise of their legitimate functions, bringing the blessings of order, justice, and safety to their people, should receive the loyal support of their citizens at all times.

Obedience to law and government, where there is no conflict with the law of God, we hold an essential Christian duty and the various organizations of our work in all countries whole-heartedly offer consistent

loyalty to the governments under whose jurisdiction they operate.

While we have always held, as a denomination, the non-combatant position in relation to war, which was recognized in all parts of the British Empire during the Great War, we hereby, in this time of peace, reaffirm our position on this matter so that, in the event of any future outbreak of hostilities, there may be no question as to the sincerity of our convictions.

It is clear from the foregoing that Seventh-Day Adventists take the definite position that, as Christians, disciples of the Prince of Peace, they cannot conscientiously participate in any activity contributing to the taking of human life. They believe further that they must honour God by the observance of the other precepts of His law, including the keeping holy of the seventh-day Sabbath, from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday, as enjoined in the Scriptures.* At the same time, as loyal citizens, believing that "governments are ordained of God" (Rom. 13:1), they consider it their duty in national emergencies, as in times of peace, to render willing obedience to all laws, save only where such may conflict with the higher law of God.

As to the nature and extent of national service rendered by individual members, they hold that these are matters for personal decision.

*The Sabbath-keeping principles of Seventh-Day Adventists have been recognized by H.M. Government in such Acts of Parliament as the Factory Act, 1937, and the Shops (Sunday Trading Restrictions) Act, 1936.

Non-Combatant Position Recognized

During the World War of 1914-18, His Majesty's Government, in the Military Service Act of 1916, conceded exemption from combatant service on the ground of conscientious objection, leaving to local tribunals the duty of deciding whether or not applications were made in good faith.

As a result of this provision, Seventh-Day Adventists were able to serve their country in various capacities, some in civilian service, others in the specially provided Non-Combatant Corps.

On May 4, 1939, immediately on the introduction into Parliament of the Compulsory Military Training Bill a letter was addressed to the Prime Minister, quoting the statement on March 13, 1935.

To this was added, in view of difficulties which arose in connection with Sabbath observance by Adventists in the Forces during World War I, the following request:

We therefore trust that, as His Majesty's Government has already respected the Sabatarian beliefs of Seventh-Day Adventists in the Factory Act 1937 and the Shops (Sunday Trading Restrictions) Acts 1936, they will in the present national emergency again respect their sincere convictions, both as to military service and Sabbath observance.

Sabbath Observance in the Forces

This letter was acknowledged on May 8, 1939, and entirely satisfactory arrangements respecting

non-combatant service were incorporated into the Act. As, however, no explicit assurance respecting Sabbath observance in the Forces was given, either in the Military Training Act or in any communication to the President of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, a further letter was addressed to the War Office on September 21, 1939. A reply to this was communicated through the Ministry of Labour in a letter dated October 31, 1939, to the effect that :

It is not possible to give an assurance that Seventh-Day Adventists would always be able to observe their Sabbath, but whenever the exigencies of the Service permit, any privileges that could be afforded to such men would be granted by the Commanding Officer concerned.

When the results of these negotiations came to the notice of the tribunals, it was recognized that serious embarrassment might arise where the convictions of Seventh-Day Adventists in the Forces respecting Sabbath observance could not be given consideration, and as a result Adventists appearing before the tribunals were usually directed to take up civilian work of national importance such as hospital work, civil defence, land work, or food production, where Sabbath observance was more easily negotiable.

The Present Position

As a result of the new and even more devastating weapons of war, it is possible that the outbreak of

another conflict might be attended by immediate and appalling results to the civilian population. This would offer vast scope for humanitarian service and the choice of Seventh-Day Adventists would in consequence be to serve the community again in a civilian capacity, since experience in the two wars has shown it to be very difficult to observe their Sabbatarian principles in the non-combatant military forces.

If serving in units of the Air Raid Precautions services, etc., they would in times of emergency serve the community any day of the week, but they would not render any other service than works of mercy and necessity on the Sabbath day.

Preparation for Non-Combatant Service

It is but right that those who claim exemption from military service on these conscientious grounds should be prepared to render the most efficient service within their powers in some other capacity. We suggest, therefore, that those normally engaged in lines of work which, in war, would not be regarded as of national importance, would do well, in their spare time, to make themselves proficient in one or more of the following forms of service :

Medical, Nursing, First Aid, Air Raid Wardens, Auxiliary Fire Brigade, Farming, Carpentry, Cooking, Shoe Repairing, etc.

Because of the large place given by Seventh-Day Adventists to health and welfare work, it is but

natural that they should prefer, wherever possible, to render assistance in hospital and other medical service.

Training for such duties may be obtained through the St. John Ambulance Association, which offers special courses in First Aid, Home Nursing, Hygiene, and Sanitation. The British Red Cross Society also gives instruction in these subjects. Inquiries concerning classes conducted by these organizations may be made either locally or from their head offices in London.*

Those receiving certificates for such studies should preserve them carefully so that they may be produced in time of need.

Attitude to Authorities

Needless to say, Seventh-Day Adventists, if called upon to serve their country in any capacity, will maintain a respectful attitude to all in authority. Though always standing firmly for their religious convictions, they will present their requests for special privileges with the utmost courtesy.

Both on and off duty, they will, of course, be circumspect in their deportment. All their tasks will be performed promptly, cheerfully, and to the best of their ability.

As in the case of the prophet Daniel, it should be impossible for the authorities to find any fault

*The St. John Ambulance Association, St. John's Gate, E.C.1.
The British Red Cross Society, 12 Grosvenor Crescent, S.W.1.

with them save only "concerning the law" of their God. (Dan. 6:4, 5.)

Where difficulties arise by reason of religious convictions being ignored, those involved should present their appeals respectfully before their superior.

Sabbath-Keeping

Faithful observance of the Sabbath during periods of national emergency will inevitably be attended by many difficulties. Seventh-Day Adventists will, even at such times, maintain their loyalty to the divine law, and, by the grace of God, "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."

Questions will arise as to what is permissible on the Sabbath. Works of mercy and necessity may rightly be performed. Other tasks must respectfully be refused.

It would be impossible to attempt to enumerate all the duties which should or should not be undertaken on the Sabbath. Circumstances will vary. Every one will have to decide these matters conscientiously for himself, praying for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that God may be honoured.

Sometimes an offer to work on Saturday night and Sunday, instead of on Friday night and Saturday, is appreciated.

It is always best to explain to the authorities at the outset that God's law requires the observance of the Sabbath from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday, for unless the time is definitely understood, conflict and embarrassment are certain to arise.

All who ask for Sabbath privileges will, of course, be most careful how they observe the day. Carelessness in keeping the Sabbath under such circumstances would be quickly perceived, and result, in all probability, in a withdrawal of privileges, and discredit upon the cause of truth.

Spiritual Preparation

The outbreak of war will bring all men face to face with stern realities. Inevitably it will be a time of great trial and perplexity. Everyone, both young and old, will need a living connection with God, "a faith that will not shrink."

In any crisis God is the one sure refuge; and nothing is of greater importance to-day than a deepening knowledge of Him. If any are conscious of having drifted from God, let them return to Him now. Only the genuinely converted will be able to stand for God when the winds of strife are raging.

In World Wars I and II many remarkable evidences of God's power and loving watch-care were seen, and thousands proved the certainty of His promises. As He is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever," we may rest assured that, whatever may befall in the future, God will still be for all His people "a very present help in trouble."

If we trust Him fully, He will assuredly give us wisdom for every emergency, grace to keep us faithful through trial, courage to endure to the end.