

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS and CIVIL GOVERNMENT



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"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." Rom. 13:1.

"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." Matt. 22:21.

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This statement was authorized by the General Conference Committee of Seventh-day Adventists, September 25, 1940, Takoma Park, Washington, D.C.

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS throughout their history have been consistent advocates of the principles of civil and religious liberty, principles upon which the great American Republic and certain other governments were founded. This church has believed and taught that the first and highest duty of the Christian is embraced in his relationship to God; that he should also, in the words of the apostle Paul, be subject unto the "powers that be"—that is, the civil government—and that he will perform his obligations to the civil government, not because of fear, but "for conscience' sake." Rom. 13:1-5.

Subject to the Higher Powers

The Christian will live a life of loyalty to the government under which he lives. He will pay his taxes, not unwillingly or grudgingly, but gladly and gratefully, in return for the protection which the government affords in the preservation of life and property. He will seek to obey the laws of his country, even though by evasion he could add to his own profit. To illustrate, he will not bring into the country

dutiable articles without paying the proper tax. He will not violate the traffic regulations, which are made for the protection of the general public. He will not kindle camping fires when he knows it will endanger the public property, and when the laws of his State or country strictly prohibit them. He will be careful to extinguish fires which the law does not prohibit. We speak of these only as examples of the thousand and one requirements enacted for the regulation of society.

The Christian is loyal and faithful to his government in these questions pertaining to civil life. In harmony with the exhortation of the Scripture, he seeks the peace of the city in which he lives. Jer. 29:7. By his godly life of devotion to the service of God and the good of humanity he demonstrates his kindly spirit toward all men. He proves by a life of soberness and quietness that he is not an agitator or a revolutionist.

Duty to God First and Paramount

The Christian cannot conscientiously obey any human requirement which leads him to violate the law of God. The government of God is paramount. The requirements of God come first. This has been attested through the centuries by the loyal martyrs who have gone to the stake rather than compromise their conscientious convictions.

The Christian's Relation to Earthly Government

The duty of the Christian toward the government under which he lives is made clear in Holy Writ:

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commandments pertain to the relation of man to God, and belong alone to the sphere of God's government and jurisdiction. Into this sphere, civil government has no right to enter.

Limits of the Authority of Human Governments

With what authority has God invested civil government? It is inconceivable that He should have bestowed upon it unlimited power. That would be to make earthly government, to the extent of human capability, equal to the government of God. It would be to place God's work in the earth—His gospel, His church, the affairs of mankind physically, socially, civilly, and spiritually—under the control of human government without reference to its attitude toward the principles and problems involved. This we cannot believe the great Ruler of the universe would do.

We are therefore forced to the conclusion that the jurisdiction of human government is limited to the sphere of civil relations, to the decision of questions governing the relation of man to his fellow men. There is a sphere—the personal relation of man to his Maker—into which civil government has no God-given or Heaven-ordained right to intrude.

Civil, Not Spiritual, Jurisdiction

Nor is it possible, in the nature of the case, for civil government to deal with the second table of God's law in the spiritual significance of the commandments of that table. This spiritual field belongs alone to God. With the civil relation defined in the last six commandments, the civil government may take account. The government has a right to punish the murderer,

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God." Rom. 13:1, 2.

Christ clearly recognized and taught the existence of the dividing line which separates the authority of civil government from the sphere of spiritual relations. To some who came to Him inquiring whether it was right to pay tribute to Caesar, or civil government, the Master, after calling attention to the fact that they were recognizing Caesar's government by using Caesar's coinage, replied, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." Matt. 22:16-21.

There is a sphere in which Caesar may rightly operate. In the field of civil relations he may range freely. He should be a terror to evil works, "a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil;" in this "he is God's servant," ("An administrator to inflict punishment upon evildoers,"—Weymouth's translation.) the Christian being subject to these civil enactments, "not only to escape punishment, but also for conscience' sake." Rom. 13:3-6.

The Christian is to "render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law." Rom. 13:7, 8. The apostle then proceeds to quote in substance the last five commandments, which define the civil relations of men. He makes no quotation from the first table of the law, because the first four

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the adulterer, the thief, not because they have done a moral wrong, but because they have violated the law of civil ethics. The government deals with overt acts. God, however, looks beneath the overt act, and takes account of the thoughts of the heart, of the motives and purposes of the life. In His estimate, the man who hates his brother, even if he commits no overt act, is a murderer. 1 John 3:15. The lustful man likewise violates the commandment, even though outwardly he may not offend against the law of chastity. Matt. 5:28.

Loyalty to Government

When civil government, either consciously or unconsciously, oversteps the bounds God has set for it and seeks to regulate or control the personal spiritual relations which exist between man and his Maker, what should be the attitude of the Christian toward his government?

God is supreme, and His requirements are paramount. To Him the Christian owes unswerving allegiance. He cannot surrender this allegiance at the command of any human master. And when the laws of his government require that he should violate the laws of God, he has no alternative, but must obey God rather than men. Above any fear he may have of man, who is able to destroy only his body, he is to fear the great God of heaven, who is able to destroy both soul and body. Matt. 10:28.

The attitude of the Christian should always be that of loyalty to his government so long as this does not conflict with his duty to God. How shall he manifest his loyalty when the laws of his government conflict with the requirements of God?—He must obey his God, at

whatever cost; but he may at the same time put forth consistent Christian effort to set before the public and the lawmakers the principles involved. He may seek to have the law repealed. He may seek relief by personal effort, and in union with others, in such ways as are lawful. Never can the Christian resort to personal violence in the accomplishment of this end. He will not engage in brawling, nor will he incite to rebellion or riot. Rather than this, he will suffer meekly the penalty of the law, however unjust, leaving to God the vindication of his cause. By this course of conduct, and in this spirit working to redress the wrong, the Christian is giving the highest proof of his loyalty to government. He is standing for fundamental principles; and, in seeking to induce his government to confine its activities to that sphere to which God has justly limited its authority, he is rendering to it the highest possible service.

Relation of Seventh-day Adventists to War

In harmony with their profession as followers of the Prince of Peace, can Seventh-day Adventists engage in the destruction of their fellow men? This is a question which has confronted the members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church from its early history. From their study of the life and example of Christ and the teachings of the gospel, they have from the time of their organization been noncombatants. Their understanding of the gospel principle of noncombatancy may be set forth briefly as follows:

1. Christ's kingdom is not of this world. Said Christ to Pilate, "If My kingdom were of this

world, then would My servants fight." John 18:36.

2. We are commanded to love even our enemies. Declares the Saviour: "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." Matt. 5:44.

3. "The Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Luke 9:56. We are to carry forward the work of the Master, and we are told: "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." Rom. 8:9.

4. The Master taught further: "Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." Matt. 5:39.

5. When Peter was about to defend his Lord with the sword, Christ said to him, "Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Matt. 26:52.

6. The apostle Peter presents this picture of the character of Christ, our great Example: "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously." 1 Peter 2:21-23.

Our Historical Record on Noncombatancy

1864. Under date of August 2, 1864, at Battle Creek, Michigan, then the general headquarters of the church, the Executive Committee of the

General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists addressed a letter to the governor of Michigan, in which was made the following declaration:

"The denomination of Christians calling themselves Seventh-day Adventists, taking the Bible as their rule of faith and practice, are unanimous in their views that its teachings are contrary to the spirit and practice of war hence they have ever been conscientiously opposed to bearing arms."

With a declaration of loyalty to the Government, they asked that the governor of the State in which their head office was located endorse their claim to recognition as noncombatants, under the act of Congress. The next day, August 3, the Honorable Austin Blair, governor, issued a statement as follows:

"I am satisfied that the foregoing statement of principles and practice of the Seventh-day Adventists is correct, and that they are entitled to all the immunities secured by law to those who are conscientiously opposed to bearing arms, or engaging in war."

The foregoing declaration, with the endorsement of the governor of Michigan, was presented on August 30, 1864, to the Government at Washington. On September 1 the provost marshal general made reply, pointing out the method of establishing the noncombatant status.

1865. The following action was taken by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists at its full session, held in Battle Creek, Michigan, May 17, 1865:

"Resolved, that we recognize civil government as ordained of God, that order, justice and quiet may be maintained in the land, and

that the people of God may lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty.

"In accordance with this fact, we acknowledge the justice of rendering tribute, custom, honor, and reverence to the civil power, as enjoined in the New Testament. While we thus cheerfully render to Caesar the things which he 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."

1917. This declaration of Civil War days was reaffirmed as follows by the Executive Committee of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, meeting April 18, 1917, at Huntsville, Alabama:

"We hereby reaffirm the foregoing declaration. We petition that our religious convictions be recognized by those in authority, and that we be required to serve our country only in such capacity as will not violate our conscientious obedience to the law of God as contained in the decalogue, interpreted in the teachings of Christ, and exemplified in His life."

In May, 1934, the General Conference Committee of Seventh-day Adventists approved a document of instruction to the youth of its church, two paragraphs of which refer to non-combatancy as follows:

"The Noncombatants.—While recognizing that warfare is unavoidable in maintaining civil government in a world of sin, noncombatants conscientiously object to taking human life. They believe that in this way they can render a greater service to their fellow men and be a

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greater influence for the cause of righteousness than by taking combatant part in the destruction of human life. They do not, however, condemn those who take part in war. On the other hand, noncombatants are willing to aid their government in every consistent way in time of warfare, except by taking human life. They will help to feed and clothe the Army; assist in caring for the sick and wounded; help to bury the dead; aid in the transportation of men, food, clothing, etc. They will build the camps; go into the fields, mines, and factories, at the direction of the government. They will help to fortify positions and otherwise protect human life. They will carry the wounded back from the front. The noncombatant is not a coward; he simply and conscientiously and courageously objects to taking human life, so far as his participation is concerned.

"Seventh-day Adventists of the United States are registered with our Government as noncombatants. They are always ready to serve without reservation, except bearing arms in combat and doing unnecessary work on the Sabbath day. As a matter of duty and loyalty to human government which is ordained of God, they stand loyally and patriotically with their Government."

In thus declaring the teaching of the church, this action made it plain that the member's own conviction must be the ultimate factor in this matter of conscience. The action further states:

"The church does not attempt to dictate to its members individually, but each person must stand upon his own conscientious convictions."

liberty of² conscience (false)
Mo. B. pp. 51, 52

Obey God Rather Than Men

Nor are such instances confined alone to the Old Testament Scriptures. The apostle Peter and his companions were brought into similar straits. Commanded by ruling authorities not to teach nor preach in the name of Jesus, the apostle answered, "We ought to obey God rather than men." Acts 5:29. God showed His approval by the mighty power of His Spirit which attended their labors.

Of all men, the Christian should be free from giving just offense. He should be quiet, orderly, honest, neighborly, law abiding. Every relation in life should be regulated by sincere devotion to God and to his fellow men. He should love God supremely and his neighbor as himself. Love to God and love to man—upon these two great principles hang all the law and the prophets.

Instruction to Our Church

The following statements were made during the days of the Civil War between the American States:

"We should act with great caution. 'If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.' We can obey this admonition, and not sacrifice one principle of our faith. Satan and his host are at war with commandment keepers, and will work to bring them into trying positions. They should not, by lack of discretion, bring themselves there."—*Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 356.

"Some have been holding themselves ready to find fault, and complain at any suggestion made. But few have had wisdom in this most

Notable Bible Examples of Fidelity to Principle

The Christian has encouragement in the Sacred Writings to be true to his convictions. When Daniel was required, on pain of death, to obey the law of Medo-Persia contrary to an expressed command of God, he steadfastly rendered obedience to God, and when he was cast into the den of lions, God wrought for him a wonderful deliverance, thus vindicating him in the stand he had taken. Daniel 6. And even if this vindication had not been manifest in this life, and Daniel had been allowed to perish in the lions' den, his vindication would have been manifest in the life to come. The Christian's thought is not primarily upon this brief span of earthly life, but upon eternal life.

A similar experience came to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel 3. This king erected on the plain of Dura a great golden image, and assembled to its dedication the chief men of his extensive empire. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego repaired to the plain of Dura, and with the others they stood in the presence of the golden image. Thus far they could obey the law of Nebuchadnezzar. But when the command was given to bow down and worship the golden image, these three men could not obey the royal edict. They knew it was a direct violation of the law of God. In the words of the Saviour, they feared not him who was able to destroy only their bodies, but rather the One who was able to destroy both soul and body. Because of their stand, they were cast into the burning fiery furnace, but God vindicated their course by giving to them a miraculous deliverance.

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trying time to think without prejudice, and candidly tell what shall be done. I saw that those who have been forward to talk so decidedly about refusing to obey a draft, do not understand what they are talking about. Should they really be drafted, and, refusing to obey, be threatened with imprisonment, torture, or death, they would shrink, and then find that they had not prepared themselves for such an emergency. They would not endure the trial of their faith. What they thought to be faith, was only fanatical presumption.

"Those who would be best prepared to sacrifice even life, if required, rather than place themselves in a position where they could not obey God, would have the least to say. They would make no boast. They would feel deeply and meditate much, and their earnest prayers would go up to Heaven for wisdom to act and grace to endure. Those who feel that in the fear of God they cannot conscientiously engage in this war, will be very quiet, and when interrogated will simply state what they are obliged to say in order to answer the inquirer, and then let it be understood that they have no sympathy with the rebellion."—*Ibid.*, p. 357.

"I saw that it is our duty in every case to obey the laws of our land, unless they conflict with the higher law which God spoke with an audible voice from Sinai, and afterward engraved on stone with His own finger."—*Ibid.*, p. 361.

In later years, the following counsels were given the church:

"Teach the people to conform in all things to the laws of their state, when they can do so

without conflicting with the law of God."—*Ibid.*, vol. 9, p. 238.

"The banner of truth and religious liberty held aloft by the founders of the gospel church and by God's witnesses during the centuries that have passed since then, has, in this last conflict, been committed to our hands. The responsibility for this great gift rests with those whom God has blessed with a knowledge of His word. We are to receive this word as supreme authority. 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.

"We are not required to defy authorities. Our words, whether spoken or written, should be carefully considered, lest we place ourselves on record as uttering that which would make us appear antagonistic to law and order. We are not to say or do anything that would unnecessarily close up our way. We are to go forward in Christ's name, advocating the truths committed to us. If we are forbidden by men to do this work, then we may say, as did the apostles, '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.'"—*Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 68, 69.

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Seventh-day Adventists Define Christian Noncombatancy

Noncombatancy is not pacifism.

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

Christian noncombatants will participate in any service which will contribute to the saving, the maintenance, and the well-being of human life, but they hold that their supreme allegiance to God prevents them from taking life.

Christian noncombatancy is not antimilitarism, which would banish the military establishment and do away with uniforms and flags, which opposes military orders, drills, insignia, procedures, activities, and appropriations.

Christian noncombatancy concerns itself only with the individual's accountability and relationship to God. Always, everywhere, in every condition and circumstance, the individual Christian noncombatant puts God's will first. A Christian noncombatant will not refuse to participate in the military establishment, nor to wear his country's uniform; he will salute his country's flag, he will aid his country in its need.

Christian noncombatancy is not cowardice. It is a conviction held without reference to personal danger or safety. Those who hold it do

"It is not wise to find fault continually with what is done by the rulers of government. It is not our work to attack individuals or institutions. We should exercise great care lest we be understood as putting ourselves in opposition to the civil authorities. It is true that our warfare is aggressive, but our weapons are to be 'hose found in a plain 'Thus saith the Lord.' Our work is to prepare a people to stand in the great day of God. We should not be turned aside to lines that will encourage controversy, or arouse antagonism in those not of our faith."—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 394.

"The Pharisees had ever chafed under the exaction of tribute by the Romans. The payment of tribute they held to be contrary to the law of God. Now they saw opportunity to lay a snare for Jesus. The spies came to Him, and with apparent sincerity, as though desiring to know their duty, said, 'Master, we know that Thou sayest and teachest rightly, neither acceptest Thou the person of any, but teachest the way of God truly: is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no?' . . .

"Christ's reply was no evasion, but a candid answer to the question. Holding in His hand the Roman coin, upon which were stamped the name and image of Caesar, He declared that since they were living under the protection of the Roman power, they should render to that power the support it claimed, so long as this did not conflict with a higher duty. But while peaceably subject to the laws of the land, they should at all times give their first allegiance to God."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 601, 602.

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not shun danger. They do not seek to avoid going into the first line of action. They will go anywhere to do noncombatant service.

Christian noncombatancy leads those who hold it to request their government, when it calls them, to place them in those branches of service, either civil or military, in which they will be able to render the service they desire to give.

They will, when called, willingly and loyally perform any military duty which contributes to the preservation, the maintenance, the welfare, the sustaining, of human life. They will spend and be spent, and give their last full measure of devotion, to such work as is called for in the medical, nursing, stretcher-bearing, ambulance, cooking, first-aid, dental, embalming, clothing, accounting, commissary, and other genuinely noncombatant branches of the military establishment.

In war as in peace the Christian is bound to obey God and keep the precepts of Christ. It is because of this that a Christian believer in noncombatancy requests that he be permitted to carry out his obligation to his government in times of war or preparation for war by performing any service which may be compatible with his obedience to God.

Sabbathkeeping

Our believers who may be drafted into military service will, no doubt, find it more difficult to observe the Sabbath in the Army than at other times, and yet we are sure that all will recognize that the exigencies of war do not change the obligation of the Christian to keep God's holy day.

In order to minimize this difficulty, the Sabbathkeeping noncombatant should, when called into service, request that he be assigned to some post of duty in which he may not only be exempt from bearing arms, but also in which he may labor conscientiously in the lines of duty which are compatible with Sabbath observance.

There are certain types of service which can be rendered on the Sabbath without doing violence to the Sabbath commandment, and in such lines we may labor cheerfully.

Our Saviour set us the example of doing works of mercy and actual necessity on the Sabbath day. He told a sick man whom He healed on the Sabbath day to take up his bed and to repair to his own home. The scribes and Pharisees accused Christ of doing many things on the Sabbath day which they considered not lawful. But Jesus answered them thus: "I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the Sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it?" Luke 6:9. On another occasion the Saviour answered His accusers: "What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath days."

The Saviour laid down some broad principles here as to what constitutes proper Sabbath observance in times of necessity and distress. These principles are worthy of our study now.

By His example in healing the sick and ministering to the needy on the Sabbath, Christ indicated that it is proper for His followers to render the same kind of service on that day.

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men, both with respect to their duties toward their God and their obligations toward their fellow men. We should study, not how little we can do for suffering humanity in times of national emergency, but rather how much. We, above all people, who stand as the advocates of health and sanitary reforms, and for a practical religion which delights in works of mercy, should stand in the forefront in this line of service.

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Military commanders generally have been very considerate as they have faced this problem with Seventh-day Adventist personnel. Out of consideration for the convictions of those under their command, they have issued orders which released such individuals from duty from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. This is the best solution to the problem of the Seventh-day Adventist who is in the service, for it takes him away from the routine of camp and relieves both him and his officer of any embarrassment which might arise if he were to remain at camp. Even in time of war, such thoughtful consideration has been given to members of the Seventh-day Adventist church.

We should be willing to submit to anything except sin. Loyalty to moral principles is a paramount duty in the life of every individual. Each is answerable to God alone for his convictions, and must give an account of himself at the last great day. No one can decide for another the paramount issues of eternity. Each individual must decide the great question of the difference between right and wrong. We must interpret our religious ideas of Sabbath observance, not after the example and teachings of the Pharisees, but in the light and example of the life and teachings of Christ. We must be able to discern the difference between policy and principle, and be true to principle. We must be consistent. We cannot be conscientious in some matters and insincere in other things that are equally important. We must not shift a responsibility which rightfully belongs to us, upon someone else.

These words of caution are offered in the hope that they may be of help to our young

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