

MEMORANDUM CONCERNING THE E. G. WHITE STATEMENT
RELATING TO THE ATTITUDE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS
ENLISTING IN THE CIVIL WAR

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In Testimonies for the Church, Volume 1, pp. 361, 362, the following statement appears:

"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. Worldly men are governed by worldly principles. They can appreciate no other. Worldly policy and public opinion comprise the principle of action that governs them and leads them to practice the form of right-doing. But God's people cannot be governed by these motives. The words and commands of God, written in the soul, are spirit and life, and there is power in them to bring into subjection and enforce obedience. The Ten Precepts of Jehovah are the foundation of all righteous and good laws. Those who love God's commandments will conform to every good law of the land. But if the requirements of the rulers are such as conflict with the laws of God, the only question to be settled is, Shall we obey God, or man?"

One phrase in this paragraph in particular has led to some misunderstandings on the part of a few who have been without certain information. The sentence in question reads:

"In the army they cannot obey the truth and at the same time obey the requirements of their officers."

Taken alone this sentence would seem to preclude all Seventh-day Adventists from all military service. Concerning certain of the Testimonies, time and place must be taken into consideration in arriving at a clear understanding or the intent of the author. Ellen White herself enunciated this principle in 1911:

"Regarding the testimonies, nothing is ignored; nothing is cast aside; but time and place must be considered."--The Writing and Sending Out of the Testimonies to the Church, p. 25.

The statement in question was written late in 1862 and was published in January, 1863, as a part of the pamphlet, Testimony to the Church, No. 9. In

the Review and Herald of January 6, 1863, reference is made to this particular testimony in a note announcing its availability. It is stated that:

"Testimony for the Church, No. 9 will be ready in a few days....Subjects--The war and our duty in relation to it, etc."

The date of this statement is significant. During the early days of the Civil War there were many calls for men. A quota was allotted to each state and in turn to each city and subdivisions of the city. If a sufficient number of men enlisted to make up the quota there was no draft. To encourage the enlistment of men and thus avoid the draft, bounties were paid beginning with \$25.00 and running up to \$100.00 per man. Thus a given community by shouldering the financial load of paying the bounty to encourage the enlistment of men furnished their quota and there was no draft.

At the time the testimony was written in the winter of 1862-1863, for all practical purposes there was no draft and men entered the service only upon enlistment. The enlisted man being totally subject to his officers had no grounds for any claims based upon conscientious reasons. Consequently, under these circumstances Ellen White's statement published early in January, 1863, was in every way correct for the men in the army were all enlisted men, and she said:

"In the army they cannot obey the truth and at the same time obey the requirements of their officers."

During this period Seventh-day Adventists with others were bearing the financial load of the bounty. As the Civil War progressed and the need for men became more acute and those available for enlistment grew scarce, Congress passed another law known as the Enrollment Law of 1863, bearing the date of March 3. It seemed to all that the draft provisions of this law would become effective. It is significant that in this particular Act provision was made for the honorable purchase of release from the draft, and those conscientiously opposed to the bearing of arms who might be inducted into the army were to be assigned to noncombatant work. Here is that portion of the law dealing with

"Section 17. And be it further enacted, That members of religious denominations, who shall by oath or affirmation declare that they are conscientiously opposed to the bearing of arms, and who are prohibited from doing so by the rules and articles of faith and practice of such religious denomination, shall, when drafted into the military service, be considered noncombatants, and shall be assigned by the Secretary of War to duty in the hospitals, or to the care of freedmen, or shall pay the sum of three hundred dollars, to such person as the Secretary of War shall designate to receive it, to be applied to the benefit of the sick and wounded soldiers: Provided, That no person shall be entitled to the benefit of the provisions of this section, unless his declaration of conscientious scruples against bearing arms shall be supported by satisfactory evidence that his deportment has been uniformly consistent with such declaration."--The Views of Seventh-day Adventists Relative to Bearing Arms, 1865, pp. 3,4.

Thus it can be seen that when the draft seemed inevitable, provision was made for those who were conscientiously opposed to bearing arms.

On July 4, 1864, there was an ammendment to the Enrollment Law revoking the \$300.00 exemption clause but again safeguarded the rights of those who were conscientiously opposed to the bearing of arms in these terms:

"Nothing contained in this Act is to be construed to alter, or in any way affect the Law relative to those conscientiously opposed to bearing arms."--Ibid., p. 4.

The study of the events and statements in their chronological setting makes it clear that the E. G. White testimony published early in January, 1863, at the time when soldiers were gained only by enlistment, did not apply to the circumstances as they were changed by the draft laws which made provision for those who were conscientiously opposed to the bearing of arms. Here is a case where the circumstances must be taken into consideration in the application of the counsel given.

That Ellen White recognized the obligations of young men who were drafted or who were subject to military service is made clear by a statement penned by her September 2, 1886, when she was in Europe. It reads:

"We have just said farewell to three of our responsible men in the office who were summoned by the government to serve for three weeks of drill. It was a very important stage of our work in the publishing house, but the government calls do not accomodate themselves to our convenience.

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They demand that young men whom they have accepted as soldiers shall not neglect the exercise and drill essential for soldier service. We were glad to see that these men with their regimentals had tokens of honor for faithfulness in their work. They were trustworthy young men.

"These did not go from choice, but because the laws of their nation required this. We gave them a word of encouragement to be found true soldiers of the cross of Christ. Our prayers will follow these young men, that the angels of God may go with them and guard them from every temptation."--Ellen G. White Unc.Letter 23, 1886.

A very informative note on this topic appears in the Appendix to Volume 1 of the Testimonies for the Church, 4th edition (1948), pp. 716-717.

Consistently through the years Mrs. White recognized the duty of young men to serve their country when they were drafted into military service.

--Arthur L. White
ELLEN G. WHITE PUBLICATIONS

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