

ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS? SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND THE ISSUE OF MILITARY SERVICE*

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Sociologists have typically defined “sect” and “church” or “denomination”, the polar opposites of church-sect theory, in terms of multiple characteristics. Stark and Bainbridge, noting that competing lists of characteristics have caused confusion and that the use of several characteristics has limited the ability to measure transition from sect to denomination, proposed focusing instead on a single dimension, the religious group’s tension with society. This paper tests the usefulness of this reformulation by exploring one such source of tension: holding a deviant position on military service when a state imposes conscription. Since part of the process of reducing tension between sect and state is accommodation by one or both parties, the paper also examines relations between a religious group and governments in a conflict situation, and the process of accommodation — or failure to come to terms — between them. It considers when accommodation occurs, which side accommodates, and the conditions under which failure to come to terms occurs. The vehicle used in this study is the evolution of the Seventh-day Adventist position on military service over the past 130 years. The Adventist position has been transformed during this period. The paper considers how successfully this measures Adventism’s shift from sect towards denomination. Since church-sect theory has typically focused on a single country, but Adventism is a highly centralized international denomination, the paper introduces a new dimension.

Church-sect theory, which was originally put forward by Ernst Troeltsch in 1911 and amplified by H. Richard Niebuhr in 1929, has been used extensively by sociologists to explore the evolution of religious groups, especially in the U.S., with its multitude of sects and denominations (Troeltsch, 1931 (1911); Niebuhr, 1929). However, there has been confusion because while the theory’s polar opposites, “sect” and “church” or “denomination,”¹ have typically been defined in terms of multiple characteristics, there has been no agreement on the characteristics used. The employment of several characteristics has also made it difficult to measure transformation from sect to denomination. As competing typologies have multiplied the theory’s usefulness has been limited.

In an attempt to end the confusion and thus strengthen the theory, Stark and Bainbridge proposed that the polar opposites be defined in terms of a single characteristic: “the degree to which a religious group is in a *state of tension* with its surrounding sociocultural environment” (1985:23). A highly sectarian group has high tension with society, a mainline denomination low tension, with a continuum between the two representing varying degrees of tension. As a group moves from sect towards denomination, this is indicated by relaxation in tension. Tension has three elements: difference, antagonism, and separation, which together describe “a

single concept” (Stark and Bainbridge, 1985:49, 50). Stark and Bainbridge’s proposal built on two earlier isolated suggestions. In 1946, J. Milton Yinger noted that a “church” (or, to be more accurate, a “denomination”),² unlike a “sect,” “accepts the main elements in the existing balance of power” and “the legitimacy of the prevailing societal structure,” and supports the “existing powers...in peace and war” (1946:18-19,21,19). In 1963, Benton Johnson suggested that

A church is a religious group that accepts the social environment in which it exists. A sect is a religious group that rejects the social environment in which it exists (1963: 542).

This paper explores one source of tension between a religious group and society: its position on military service, especially when the state imposes conscription. Yinger noted that “the relationship of religious groups to the society in which they are found is sharply revealed against the background of war” (1946:176). When a religious group concludes that military service contravenes its principles and rejects the call to arms, that decision marks it as different. Depending on the political context, it may elicit antagonistic responses — scorn and harassment from the public and punishment by the state. This indicates that the group’s tension with society is high — that it is towards the sect end of the church-sect scale. Since many sects, over time, reduce their tension with society and move towards the church end of the scale, a sect holding a deviant position on conscription is likely to modify its stand in order to reduce tension.

Since part of the process of reducing tension between sect and state is accommodation by one or both parties, the paper also examines relations between a religious group and governments in a conflict situation, and the process of accommodation — or failure to come to terms — between them. It considers when accommodation occurs, which side accommodates, and the conditions under which failure to come to terms occurs.

The vehicle used in this study is the evolution of the responses of the international Seventh-day Adventist Church to military conscription from the time of its formal organization in the early 1860s until now. The Adventist position has been transformed during this period. The paper considers how successfully this variable measures Adventism’s shift from sect towards denomination. It thus sets out to test the utility of Stark and Bainbridge’s definition of sect and church in terms of a single characteristic, tension with society, and of a religious group’s stance on military service as a measure of this. At the same time it explores the dynamics of accommodation between a religious group and governments in conflict situations.

Since Adventism has become an international denomination, it has been obliged to cope with the issue of military service in many different countries and contexts. Inasmuch as church-sect theory has typically focused on a single country, this study introduces a new dimension.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research reported here is part of a large study of Adventism, which has included over 3,000 in-depth interviews with church administrators, teachers,

hospital administrators and medical personnel, pastors, students, and leading laypersons in 54 countries in all eleven divisions of the world church. The countries were chosen to represent the diversity of the international church with greater attention paid to those where it is more established and/or experiencing rapid growth. Local itineraries were designed with the help of people who knew the various regions well.

The U.S. was researched first since this was where Adventism originated and is the location of the General Conference, its world headquarters. I drove 28,000 miles in a year, conducting interviews at all eight union headquarters and many local conferences, the 12 universities and colleges, several academies (high schools), the major hospitals, both publishing houses, the media center, and at a great variety of urban, suburban, and rural churches representing all major racial groupings. Canada was also covered, although less intensively. The research itinerary that year also included several weeks at the General Conference. Before venturing overseas, I returned to Andrews University and the Adventist Seminary in Michigan, where the student body includes church members from many parts of the world church. My purpose was to ask these students about issues in their countries, in order that I might be better prepared for my research there.

The other 52 countries were covered in two research trips, each of nine months. Travel itineraries were laid out in detail, and I wrote to regional presidents and institutional administrators in advance. I received extraordinary cooperation because of the Adventist respect for academics and my status as an Adventist. Even when interviewees were initially reserved or suspicious, these problems were almost always overcome quickly because of my knowledge of the issues and of Adventist jargon. Interviewees told me repeatedly that they were telling me things that General Conference leaders never hear because I asked the "right" questions, promised confidentiality, and was not a threat to their careers.

In general, interviewees were chosen to fit key categories. At regional headquarters I interviewed the president, the other officers, and some of the departmental leaders (depending on who was there and my interest in the department). At colleges I typically interviewed the president, academic dean, many of the teachers (covering a broad range of departments but with a bias towards teachers of religion), deans of students and counselors, and student leaders. I also met with diverse groups of students. At hospitals I interviewed administrators and medical staff. I set out to interview a variety of pastors representing different kinds of congregations, and also a selection of leading laypersons, but the choice was necessarily limited by my route and means of travel and was supplemented by who happened to come to headquarters and institutions while I was there. I also chose interviewees because they had particular knowledge about topics that were of special interest to the research. I used the Quinquennial General Conference Sessions in 1985 and 1990, when delegates assembled from all regions of the church, as opportunities to interview significant people who had been absent during my visits or not on my routes and to ask previous interviewees additional questions.

I chose not to tape interviews for two reasons: early interviews showed that this made interviewees more reticent, and I was without funds for transcribing, since the research was funded by fellowships rather than grants. Instead, I took very detailed notes (through using my own system of shorthand, interviews

were recorded almost verbatim), initially with pen and pad and later, as laptop computers became available, on disk. The typical interview was between two and three hours in length, with some notably longer.

I prepared an interview schedule of core questions for each category of interviewee (church administrator, college teacher, etc.). These covered such areas as personal background; information concerning the unit they represented; changes and issues there as well as their perceptions of changes and issues more broadly within the church; specific questions focusing on issues of particular interest to the study such as tensions between rapidly growing regions in the Developing World and the General Conference, and Adventist-state relations; social relations and related issues; etc. When an interviewee proved to be especially knowledgeable concerning something that was particularly relevant, I pursued that further. The interviewees chosen especially as informants rather than to fill the grid were usually asked in detail about a single topic.

Data concerning earlier decades were culled largely from secondary sources. Considerable relevant historical research has been completed, in part because Adventist universities and colleges have strong history departments (dating from the early Adventist concern with prophetic fulfillment) and material is available in books, dissertations, college papers, and articles in such journals as *Adventist Heritage*, and in part because of interest beyond Adventism in the Millerites and religion under the Nazis and in the Soviet Union.³ I also used original documents available in the General Conference Archives and the "Heritage Rooms" at Adventist universities. Much of the data concerning more recent decades comes from my interviews; the paper also draws extensively on periodical articles to explore more recent pronouncements, practices and attitudes.

In order to keep the confidentiality of interviewees, as promised, the convention adopted by the study is to refrain from citing their names when they are quoted except when they are major figures in the church.

DATA

Adopting a Position

The American Civil War forced the Adventist Church to grapple with the issue of military service just as it created its organizational structure between 1860 and 1863. Since the return of Christ was imminent, and they, meanwhile, had the responsibility of spreading God's last warning message to the world, there was widespread reluctance among Adventists to volunteer for service. When James White, editor of the *Review and Herald*, discovered that Adventists were being accused of disloyalty he wrote in favor of their participation: "[I]n case of drafting, the government assumes the responsibility of the violation of the law of God" (1862: 84). This editorial initiated a debate which revealed deep divisions over the issue. Many Adventists had espoused pacifism through the Abolitionist Movement. These regarded military combat as a violation of the Sixth Commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," and of the nonviolent teachings of Jesus. They embraced the examples in the biblical 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 struggle. These found biblical support for their position in passages in the epistles granting considerable authority to the state⁴ 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 (Graybill, 1978; Knight, 1992).

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 (Saturday) or their diet restrictions, and would expose them to a multitude of evil influences, such as drinking, smoking, gambling, and cursing (Graybill, 1978). Ellen White, the Adventist prophet, as was her wont, helped consolidate the consensus:

I was shown that God's people...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 (1885 (1863):361).

Although their position placed them in a small statistically deviant minority and subjected them to some scorn and questioning of their loyalty, it did not result in legal punishments. This was because the position of Quakers in society and the commitment of the democracy to protecting religious freedoms made the administration ready to accommodate to the pacifism of the peace churches. Adventists were able to take advantage of the loopholes in the military draft designed for Quakers. Consequently, while their position potentially risked conflict with the state, it actually generated relatively little antagonism or tension.

Adventists initially avoided the draft by utilizing a provision which allowed draftees to pay a commutation fee of \$300. Churches helped poor members raise this sum. When provision for noncombatant service — the legislation designed to cater to the consciences of Quakers — was passed in February 1864, Adventists initially made no attempt to gain recognition under the act because they were already protected by the general availability of the commutation fee. “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” (Graybill 1978:6). In order to accomplish this, Adventists fudged the record by declaring that their membership had always been united in believing that war was wrong, and gained such recognition, first from state governors and then from federal authorities.

Given the internal debate, the pragmatic reasons given for the position taken, and a comment by the editor of the church paper that it would be better ultimately to accommodate by bearing arms than to face a firing squad if those were the options (White, 1862: 84), it is not clear whether Adventists would have adopted this position if it had meant facing major conflict with the state. Nevertheless, once adopted it was framed in terms of principle and enforced: members who participated in the war were disfellowshipped (Graybill, 1978:7;

Brock, 1974:26). The third annual session of the General Conference, held in May 1865, shortly after the end of the war, affirmed the new Adventist 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” (cited by Wilcox, 1936:234).

The American Church and World War I

The questions associated with military service faded from view during the peaceful decades that followed the end of the Civil War. Although the Spanish-American War of 1898 did not involve conscription, the widespread jingoism of the time drew strong expressions of pacifist sentiment from Adventist leaders and criticism of most other churches for their support for the war (Morgan, 1993:25, 26).

However, when World War I brought a reintroduction of the draft, a major change was made in the Adventist position on military service. This took place even though a pacifist stance was again officially available, and Adventists could easily have reaffirmed this as their position. In April, 1917 the North American Division of the church, 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 (Wilcox, 1936:113; Syme, 1973:70-71). 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 refrain from bearing arms. As unarmed soldiers, they would not kill but do good.

Unlike the Quakers, Adventists now sought to avoid only the use of weapons. 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 country that was compatible with what their consciences allowed. Adventist leaders even urged members to purchase war bonds.

In 1916, expecting a possible draft, the North American Division established Red Cross training schools at its colleges and several hospitals and academies. The Adventist medical school established the Loma Linda Institute of Wartime Nursing. Young men liable to a draft were thus able to undertake training that helped prepare them for, and make them attractive to, noncombatant medical units within the armed forces. Such postings were considered particularly desirable because helping people medically was defined as suitable activity for the Sabbath. They would thus provide Adventist draftees with a noncombatant role within the military while, concurrently, removing the difficult problem of service on the Sabbath. Once the draft was instituted, the General Conference established an office to deal with individual problems of noncombatancy and Sabbath observance when they emerged within the armed forces. This was later named the National Service Organization.

The Adventist embrace of patriotism should have represented a considerable reduction in their tension with society, even though their noncombatant stance

was distinctive. However, being part of the military initially led to overt conflict when Adventist conscripts were punished because of problems with Sabbath observance during basic training. Although an accommodation was reached later in the war, which excused Adventists from all unnecessary military activities on that day, at the end of the war there were still 35 Adventists in prison, with sentences ranging from 5 to 20 years. They were then released by proclamation (Wilcox, 1936:151).

Adventists were also successful in gaining noncombatant privileges (as newly defined) in the other English-speaking democracies during World War I.

Issues Abroad

Meanwhile, Adventism had spread internationally. Some of the countries where it took root were without the tradition of concern for individual conscience that had spawned the legislation creating noncombatant status in the U.S. Here any deviant position was likely to result in open conflict with the state. In these situations Adventists gradually adopted a position where they avoided such conflict through accommodation with the demands of the state. The compromise was usually so great that it totally reversed the official stance of the church.

A new issue — compulsory participation in military training in peace time — came to the fore early in the new century in several countries. Because threat of war seemed very distant in America, Adventist leaders gave little direction to these situations. In Argentina, Adventists 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 (Wilcox, 1936:367).

German Adventists conscripted in the years prior to 1914 braved prison rather than be trained with weapons or desecrate the Sabbath. However, when war broke out suddenly in 1914, their leaders made an abrupt accommodation with the state, agreeing that German Adventists would now bear weapons in the service of the Fatherland. Moreover, their announcement stated explicitly that “under these circumstances we will also bear arms on Saturday” (Sas, n.d.:14; Sicher, 1977:12). This decision resulted in a bitter schism, which concluded with the members making up the pacifist opposition — the “two percent” — being disfellowshipped 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.

Once the war ended, the General Conference was faced with the problem of the rift in Europe, which had already spread through several countries. In 1923 it made an incongruous decision to side with the official church in Germany, which left the schism in place while, at the same time, endorsing noncombatancy as international Adventism’s official position (Wilcox, 1936:346; “Noncombatancy,” 1976:979).

However, this position was soon breached once more by the Stalinist crack-down on religious freedom. This began 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 demands the Adventist church was able to function openly but under very compromised circumstances.

However, this capitulation caused another schism when some of the Russian Adventists broke away from the officially recognized church and went underground, thus attracting 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 in its endorsement of military service, and “free” because they refused to be registered or connected to the government (Sapiets, 1990:52-57; Alexeyeva, 1988:25).

In Nazi Germany the accommodation went further still, for most Adventist conscripts bore arms willingly even though they had been accorded the right to opt for orderly or medical duties. They also went out of their way to express support for the regime, praising Hitler and his National Socialists with enthusiasm and reporting the schismatic Adventists to the authorities in order to separate themselves from them.⁵ In so doing, they sharply reduced the tension with the state, surviving almost unscathed 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, who suffered greatly, often to death, because of their unswerving commitment to their pacifist positions (Sicher, 1977:4-22; King, 1982:89-119,147-179).

Two approaches to military service had emerged within international Adventism. One, the “official position,” was noncombatancy — now redefined as participation in war without arms. However, its practice 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 would allow no such alternative or, as in Nazi Germany, where it was felt necessary to demonstrate a cooperative attitude: then Adventists usually made the avoidance of conflict their first priority and served with arms. That is, in both cases tension, as measured by military service, was kept relatively low. Indeed, the official Adventist church had twice chosen to cut off minorities which resisted government military policies rather than risk raising tensions.

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 at least to get experience as cooks, nurses aides, etc. It again endorsed the concept of the church providing medical training for members liable to be drafted. It also included advice to draftees on how to approach officers when seeking Sabbath privileges, and reminded them, if all else failed, to be ready to stand alone like Daniel the prophet (Wilcox, 1936:383-395).

This was followed, in 1936, by the publication of *Seventh-day Adventists in*

Time of War, by F.M. Wilcox, the editor of the church paper. Here he assembled documents around which he wrote a history of the Adventist noncombatant stance. By omitting accounts of heated debate over the position and references to its failure and neglect in some countries, he gave the impression that it was universally accepted. In fact his discussion was almost totally confined to the English-speaking world.

Closer Ties to American Authorities

Beginning with World War II, the Adventist noncombatant position became a vehicle for creating close relations with both federal and military authorities in the U. S. Both sides were party to this shift.

In 1939, as war broke out in Europe, the American church again established a program to provide medical training to 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 (Dick, 1974:20). The official church paper commented: "Refusing to be called conscientious objectors, Seventh-day Adventists desire to be known as conscientious cooperators" (Editorial, 1941). Some 12,000 American Adventists served as noncombatants in medical branches of the services during World War II. Church leaders were especially proud of their military heroes such as Desmond Doss, whose bravery earned him a Congressional Medal of Honor (Sibley and Jacob, 1952:86; Schwarz, 1979:443; Goldstein, 1985:2).

The Medical Cadet Corps was revived during the Korean War, and conscripted American Adventists again served in large numbers in medical units. The Adventist Church appointed military chaplains, who were paid by the armed forces and had military careers, for the first time. It also assisted some of the would-be chaplains with financial aid during their ministerial training and ordained them immediately on graduation, since this was necessary for their appointment — a break with the normal Adventist procedure of having clergy wait several years (Dick, 1976:42-45).

By this time the Adventist noncombatant position no longer separated them, but encouraged closer relations with government and military leaders. On numerous occasions church leaders equated the 1-A-O noncombatant position with "conscientious cooperation," and, indeed, signs of cooperation with American authorities multiplied. 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 source of confusion. Over half of the men who trained there were Adventists (Davis, 1970:222). "It was a program engineered for the needs of conscientious cooperators" (Knight, 1992:17).

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." Theodore Flaiz, Secretary of the Medical Department of the General Conference, responded positively:

If any one should recognize a debt of loyalty and service for the many courtesies and considerations received from the Department of Defense, we, as Adventists, are in a position to feel a debt of gratitude for these kind considerations (Flaiz, 1954).

The upshot was the creation of “Project Whitecoat,” under which volunteers from among drafted Adventist noncombatant servicemen spent their periods of military service 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 (Thompson, 1991; interviews). In taking this position, church leaders subordinated a church doctrine, healthful living, to cementing relations with the U.S. military.

Since the draft was continued during the years between the Korean and Vietnam Wars, 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 this camp and spent large sums setting up a field hospital (interviews).

The Transformation of Adventism’s Stand on Military Service

South Korean Adventists were 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 there 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. However, since the South Korean regime failed to issue an order accommodating to the Adventist stance, obtaining noncombatant positions was a matter of chance, and the unlucky ones sometimes found themselves with an unsympathetic commander who refused to respect their religious restrictions. Two of these were executed at the front line during the war when they refused to bear arms, and about 100 other 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 lengthened during the 1960s (interviews).

South Korean Adventists had adopted such a firm position because Americans and Koreans had been allies in a war on their turf. Such a degree of tension with the state over military service was unprecedented among Adventists. 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 have faced similar difficulties if they had refused to train with arms. In some countries, such as Argentina, the church provided youth with some medical training, again hoping that the possession of

these skills would shape their paths when they were conscripted. However, the main concern of local church leaders was usually the preservation of Sabbath observance rather than the avoidance of training with weapons — and they often accommodated on this issue also. They frequently concluded that the General Conference did not understand their situation, so that its statements reflected an American situation which could not be applied to them (interviews). In this way they avoided the tension with the state over military service which the Korean Adventists were experiencing.

Given this diversity of practice, it is perhaps surprising that the Quadrennial Session of the General Conference held in 1954, shortly after the Korean War — which included delegates from around the world — voted a major statement which not only confirmed the traditional noncombatant position but provided for it to be included in the *Church Manual* as a fundamental belief throughout the world:

...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 (General Conference Session, 1954).

Delegates thus voted to affirm the position adhered to by the U.S. and South Korea, and to ignore the practice in much of the rest of the world.

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.

Nevertheless, when the Executive Committee of the General Conference voted a statement intended to inform military officers of the Adventist position as American involvement in Vietnam was increasing, it affirmed once more that “Seventh-day Adventists ... are noncombatants” (General Conference Executive Committee, 1963). The Adventist Church’s new official position on military service was shaped by conflict among American members over involvement in this war rather than the problems with observing noncombatancy overseas.

As the Medical Cadet Corps had created increasingly stronger ties between American Adventists and the military, many of the former had become militant patriots. They scorned conscientious objectors, who refused to be involved with the military in any manner and opted for alternative service when drafted. The director of the General Conference National Service Organization was quoted by *Time* in 1950:

We despise the term 'conscientious objector' and we despise the philosophy back of it... We are not pacifists, and we believe in force for justice's sake, but a Seventh-day Adventist cannot take a human life ("Conscientious Cooperators," 1950:68).

Consequently, when the ideology surrounding the antiwar movement of the late 1960s led to a spurt in the number of Adventists choosing the 1-0 classification (conscientious objector choosing alternate service), this caused dismay in many quarters. However, since evidence for religious belief was essential if individuals were to receive this classification, the Adventist 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 non-combatancy (1-A-0), and urged to consider this first; however, if they persisted in pursuing the 1-0 classification, pastors should provide the needed help if the draftee's wish was consistent with his religious experience (National Service Organization, n.d.:29).

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, but remained deeply divided (interviews). When Annual Council took up the matter in 1972, it chose to embrace both the militant patriots and the Adventist pacifists, declaring that military service was a matter of individual conscience. 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 to it 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 then interpreted this by confirming that, for members in the U.S., the statement was best reflected in the traditional 1-A-0 (noncombatant) classification, but that the church would also facilitate members applying for a 1-0 (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 (Annual Council, 1972).

This decision, then, represented a 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, as the military situation in South Vietnam deteriorated, and Korean troops were withdrawn 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.

This 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 1950s, 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 they would 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 (interview).

The result of this decision was that almost every Adventist student and conscript in Korea thereafter trained with weapons. The church's abandonment of its non-combatant position was a wrenching experience for the Koreans who had earlier endured prison, and more than half of them have since exited the church (interviews).

Meanwhile, Adventism in America had backed away from the serious teaching of noncombatancy through Sabbath Schools, youth programming, and the church school system. When the U.S. switched to a volunteer army in 1973, and recruiters began emphasizing educational and vocational benefits that appealed to lower-SES racial minorities, Adventists began to volunteer for military service in unprecedented numbers — an act which removed the noncombatant option available to draftees. 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 non-combatant 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 (interviews).

The World Church and Military Service Today

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" non-combatant position. 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 what was West Germany have reacted against their history, in common with many of their countrymen, and are often especially strongly noncombatant, antiwar, and for disarmament; they wonder about the flow from the U.S. of Adventist military volunteers and chap-

lains doing tours of duty through their land. The church in Italy felt so strongly about the issue that it voted to urge denominational leaders to rule that conscripts choosing to bear arms in countries with a legal alternative to service face church discipline (interviews).⁶

In contrast, in most of the countries of Eastern Europe (while under Communism) and of Latin America, and in several countries in Asia, Adventists have abandoned the weapons issue and have limited their focus when it comes to military conscription to attempts to gain Sabbath privileges and, in some instances, alternatives to a pork-based diet. Church leaders fear that any attempt by Adventists to avoid armed service would sharply escalate tensions with governments. Consequently, there was little concern in Communist Eastern Europe for 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 towards 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 any conviction concerning 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 twentieth 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 (interviews).

Adventists in Latin America also refrain 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. Students participate in military parades and compete in marksmanship. When a missionary teacher wanted to teach noncombatancy as part of an ethics course in the church college in Argentina, which ceased trying to train students for medical positions in the military three decades ago, he was discouraged from doing so. Church leaders there 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 (interviews).

In Asia, Singapore, Thailand, Taiwan and South Korea have conscription.⁷ Adventists made a formal accommodation with the government of Singapore some years ago which granted them Sabbath privileges and the right not to use weapons. In Thailand, most Adventist conscripts are also able to arrange to protect their Sabbath observance, but they train with weapons. Adventists in South Korea and Taiwan also feel they have no option but to bear arms; they also face considerable difficulties over Sabbath observance (interviews).

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, Philippines 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 (interviews).

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 an 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 (interviews).

Within the U.S. 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" (Thomas, 1991). It is not surprising, then, that "most young Adventist adults are unaware of the strong pacifist thread in the fabric of Adventist history" (Zork, 1991). 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 background — as 6-8,000 in 1991, and that 2,000 of these participated in the Gulf War (interviews).

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 in Sabbath worship services and patriotic accolades in the church's publications (Scriven, 1991).

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” (Banks-Bergmann, 1991). 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” (interview).

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 (n.d.). Similarly, an article in a church periodical reviewed the biblical evidence:

“The attitude of the Christian should always be one 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, or 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 it 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 (Goldstein, 1985:3).

In contrast, any Adventist found to be smoking or drinking alcohol would be at least censured and possibly disfellowshipped. But Adventists do not claim that any of the Ten Commandments bear directly on either of these!

Advance publicity for a special Servicemen’s Fund Offering in 1990, which quoted Calvin Rock, a Vice-president of the General Conference, put forward an unusually favorable view of the new generation of Adventist volunteer soldiers:

...serving God and Caesar at the same time....we can give our dollars to support and supply Adventist military personnel stationed around the world. As representatives of Caesar, they guard our borders, scan our skies, search our oceans, protect our investments, staff our embassies, transport our leaders and aid our allies; in short, help secure the precious freedoms we so easily take for granted. As Adventists they preach, teach and live the gospel of Christ... Adventists at bases, forts and camps around the world...pledge to continue their noble and necessary service... (“Servicemen’s Fund Offering,” 1990:16).

The evidence supports the conclusion that “on the question of military service, the anything-goes school, under the banner of ‘individual conscience’, has pretty much taken over in North America” (Scriven, 1991). Indeed, this is the case in most of the Adventist world.

INTERPRETATION

This section brings the case study data to bear on the two issues raised at the outset. The first of these concerns the relations between a religious group and governments in a conflict situation and the process of accommodation between them. Three questions were posed:

(i) Which side accommodates? In this case, while both sides have accommodated on occasion, and sometimes reciprocally as when engaged in an exchange relationship, overall the Adventist Church compromised its position far more frequently and deeply. On many occasions it compromised not only its official stance on military service but also its commitment to Sabbath observance, which was considered so important a belief that it was included in the denominational name. Ultimately its accommodation on military service was so complete that it officially abandoned not only its original pacifist position but also its long-held noncombatant position, and instead endorsed individual conscience, wherever that might lead.

(ii) When does accommodation occur? A state is more likely to tolerate deviant views and practices by citizens when it is a liberal democracy committed to religious freedom, and when a religious group holding such views, such as the Quakers in the U.S. or the Jehovah’s Witnesses in post-World War II Germany, wins respect. Adventists, being latecomers and relatively small in number, and not having won respect as a result of surviving persecution as did the German Witnesses, have had to rely on more established groups preparing the way for them in such contexts. (One would expect that the state would be more willing to accommodate to the beliefs of Adventists where they make up a notably large group in the population or have representatives in high places. They have many representatives in parliament, and often in the cabinet, in Jamaica, Papua-New Guinea, and some other Pacific Islands, and the President of Palau and the Vice-president of Uganda are both church members; their members also comprise increasingly large blocs among the population of such nations as Ghana, Kenya, and southern Mexico (interviews; General Conference, 1994). However, none of these states has enforced military conscription). States have also proved willing, even eager, to compromise, when both sides stand to gain via an exchange relationship. This was at the root of post-1939 cooperation in the U.S., when the armed forces needed well-trained medical personnel and later medical guinea pigs. Although Adventists have established exchange relationships with many authoritarian regimes in recent decades, none of these has resulted in major concessions on military service: in all cases, Adventists had accommodated completely in that respect before the relationship was consummated.

For its part, the Adventist church proved willing to accommodate when it was eager to avoid conflict or to win approval, both of which became increasingly important as time passed, and when it accorded these goals priority over

its commitment to its beliefs. These goals were related, in turn, to upward mobility among hereditary members, increasing participation in society, and to leaders placing high value on acceptance and reputation (Lawson, 1995b).

(iii) Under what conditions does failure to come to terms occur? When beliefs are valued too highly to compromise, regardless of the resulting danger — as in the case of the schismatic Reformed Adventists in Germany during both world wars and the True and Free Adventists in the Soviet Union from 1928 onwards; and when a stance based on a model developed and tested in a tolerant liberal democracy is transferred to a military dictatorship which refuses to budge — as Adventists in South Korea found in the 1950s and 1960s. When, as in these situations, both sides fail to come to a meeting of minds, the outcome is persecution.

Unlike the highly sectarian schismatic Adventists, the Adventist Church has proved eager to lower tension with state and society and has frequently given higher priority to these goals than to its commitment to its belief system.

The second issue is the utility of the Stark and Bainbridge definition of sect and denomination in terms of a single variable, the degree of tension with its sociocultural environment and, in particular, of the group's stance on military service as a measure of this.

The pacifist position originally adopted by Adventists has been transformed over time. In most countries where holding a deviant position would have resulted in overt church-state conflict, Adventists chose early to accommodate to the demands of the state. This involved not only bearing arms, but often also accommodation over Sabbath observance. In America, the noncombatant position, which replaced the pacifist stance in 1916 and held sway until 1972, became a vehicle for establishing close ties with both the military and the state. The decision in 1972 to regard the issue as one of individual conscience removed the embarrassment of having two conflicting approaches to military service within the world church and further reduced the likelihood of church-state conflict over the issue.

How successfully does this variable — Adventism's changing stance on military service — measure the movement of the group from sect towards denomination? While the dramatic shifts over time suggest considerable changes in Adventist-state tensions, the level of tension with governments over this issue has in fact rarely been very high, since even the original pacifist position made use of the accommodation between Quakers and the state, and Adventists were typically eager to avoid conflict with authorities thereafter. That is, as measured by this variable, Adventism was never strongly sectarian. However, when a more comprehensive measure is used, it shows that tension between Adventism and society was initially high. That is, military service proves to be an inferior measure of tension in this case.⁸

However, the broadly-based tension between Adventism and society and its stance on military service are linked in important ways: 1. Changes in Adventism's tension with society account for its initial shifts on military conscription. 2. Its position on military service in the U.S. became the linchpin in the development of church-state relations within international Adventism. The analysis now explores each of these in turn.

1. It was noted above that Stark and Bainbridge include three elements in

their definition of tension: difference, separation, and antagonism (1985:49-50). During its early decades, Adventism was markedly different from mainstream America. Its insistence on the strict observance of the Saturday Sabbath in a society where a six-day week was almost universal, its focus on the imminent return of Christ and the end of the world as we know it, diet restrictions (vegetarianism, no coffee, tea, or alcohol), social life-style prohibitions (no theater, dancing, gambling, card playing, smoking, or reading of fiction), a commitment to “dress reform” and abstinence from jewelry and makeup, as well as its refusal to bear arms if conscripted, set Adventists apart. Adventists were separated by their view of themselves as the biblical Remnant, the true church bearing God’s final message in the last days; and also by the close ties that developed among them, for their lives usually centered around their church, the subculture it created and fostered, and its mission. They increasingly clustered together in communities such as Battle Creek, Michigan, which became known colloquially as “New Jerusalems” and later as “Adventist Ghettos”, where their children could attend church schools and they could find Sabbath-free employment while furthering the mission of the church in its institutions. These barriers were reinforced by rules, such as endogamy, and practices, such as the dietary and social prohibitions, which made it difficult to associate with others.

Meanwhile, Adventist declarations in their publications that other religious groups were “apostate” and “the whore of Babylon”, and their brazen challenges to clergy of other denominations as a means of publicizing their evangelistic meetings, helped to create bitter antagonisms. These were strengthened by their rejection of the American Dream: not only did they hold that “the kingdoms of this world” were about to be swept away by the apocalypse, but their preaching, which focused closely on the apocalyptic visions of the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation, portrayed governments as wild beasts which hurt God’s people. In the 1850s Adventists singled out the United States in particular, identifying it with the second beast of Revelation 13, which “had two horns like a lamb” and “spoke like a dragon.” During its early decades it had been lamb-like, upholding the two principles of political and religious freedom, which they saw as symbolized by the two horns of the beast. But, pointing to slavery and to the religious intolerance shown by the churches’ expulsion of their Millerite forebears and the states’ jailing of Sabbath keepers who had violated blue laws by working on Sunday, they held that America was betraying both principles: it was already, and would increasingly become, a dragon in a lamb’s clothing. That is, Adventist eschatology enshrined tension with the state, reflecting the problems its members faced adhering to the tenets of their faith in a hostile society (Butler, 1974:173-77). These views formed part of the context in which Adventism adopted its pacifist position during the American Civil War.

However, Adventism began to change dramatically during the decades following the Civil War. Between 1870 and 1901, its evangelism became international, its membership increased steeply, and it built 16 colleges and high schools, a medical school, 75 “sanitariums” or hospitals, 13 publishing houses, and 31 miscellaneous institutions. It was putting down a stake in the societies where it operated (General Conference 1901; 1901-1902:596, 597). These changes were accompanied by a reshaping of Adventist eschatology. While America continued to be identified with the two-horned beast, it was no longer

portrayed as already in the dragon phase, but as still lamb-like, and its demise was thus seen as less imminent. That is, the time believed to be remaining before the apocalypse was lengthening. Although the interpretation remained fundamentally pessimistic, since Adventists themselves had replaced slaves as the minority whose abuse would undo the Republic, Ellen White now counseled rapprochement with civil authorities in order to facilitate missionary work. Indeed, she urged Adventists to help prolong the future of America “so the Adventist message could go forth and flourish” (Butler, 1974:193-94). That is, Adventists found themselves in the curious situation of wishing to delay the apocalypse in order to have greater opportunity to preach that it was at hand.

Although they continued to see politics as unsavory and a distraction from their primary purpose, Adventists now became involved in some issues which they regarded as vital, such as the campaign by the National Reform Association to extend the Sunday sacredness “blue laws” already in effect in some states to the national level. In spite of the fact that their rehoned eschatology saw the passage of a national Sunday law as the culmination of the prophecy concerning the two-horned beast, and thus a sure signal that the Second Coming of Christ was at hand, they felt obliged by Ellen White’s counsel to “extend the time” to respond boldly to this threat. They established a magazine devoted to religious liberty, founded the National Religious Liberty Association, lobbied before congressional committees, presented legal briefs in court, and helped defeat Senator H.W. Blair’s Sunday-Rest bill (Butler 1974:196-98). Adventists continued these activities into the twentieth century, when they became widely known as defenders of the First Amendment, which they saw as the basic guarantee of religious liberty in the U.S. (Syms, 1973; Morgan, 1992; Hertzke, 1988).

These changes — the growing Adventist stake in society, especially in the U.S., through their institutions and their successful intervention in the political process there, and their ambivalence towards their own eschatological beliefs — represented a considerable reduction in tension with society. This set the scene for their shift in position on military service during World War I: the eagerness of American Adventists to express their patriotism through unarmed participation in the military rather than continuing their separating position of pacifism, and the willingness of German Adventists to take up arms to defend the Fatherland, even on the Sabbath, were not so surprising given the general tension-reducing trend already under way.

2. The situation of Adventism in America has continued to change, and at a markedly increasing pace, in recent decades, lessening its separation, antagonism and distance — that is, its “state of tension” — with society as a whole. The growth and accreditation of its educational and medical institutions has encouraged integration into the national economy and provided opportunities for upward mobility among members and their participation, as professionals, in society: Adventist medicine has become orthodox and many of its hospitals have prospered and won friends — and they are now busily forming partnerships with other hospitals in order to be able to survive the changes challenging the American medical system; the coming of the five-day week has removed most of the major problems surrounding Sabbath observance; and Adventist dietary and smoking prohibitions have won increasing credibility as a result of

medical research. At the same time, Adventism has lowered its antagonism toward others: it has allowed its expectations of persecution to diminish and has begun to build better relationships with other churches.

As Adventists, through their institutions, gained a stake in society, their leaders identified increasingly with corporate executives and professionals: for example, they moved the church headquarters to a corporate park in Silver Spring, Maryland, during the 1980s, and at the 1994 Annual Council proposed that the President of the General Conference be recognized as the “chief executive officer” of the church (Medley 1994:6). This was accompanied by a growing desire for broad acceptance and recognition by the powerful. Consequently, in recent decades leaders have shown considerable concern for the image of their church, and have been at pains to separate it from “fanatics” who could make it seem cult-like, such as those with too radical an apocalyptic ideology.⁹ At the same time they have proved increasingly eager to gain government approval. In the U.S. the transformation of the church’s position on military service has been at the center of this phenomenon, as a position which could have been a major source of stigma and of tension with the state was converted into one of close cooperation.

The exchange relationship which Adventists built with the U.S. military and state after 1939 through their noncombatant Military Cadet Corps, which was epitomized by the launching of “Operation Whitecoat” in 1955, was extended to other areas beginning in the 1950s. From the 1950s to the 1970s the General Conference made incremental decisions to permit the acceptance of government financial aid for Adventist hospitals and educational institutions—which heretofore would have been regarded as a dangerous entanglement with the state (Morgan, 1992, chapter 5; Syme, 1973:120-143). The same process was repeated in Australia and the British colonies of Africa. A new opportunity for cooperation emerged in the early 1980s, when the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) became a channel for distributing vast sums from government sources such as USAID. For church leaders, ADRA was an “entering wedge” in regions where there was little Adventist presence and conventional missionaries were often unwelcome — a role their hospitals had played in earlier years. However, the source and restrictions placed on the use of most of its funds in many ways transformed ADRA into an arm of American foreign policy: for example, it distributed a great deal of aid to projects in Honduras during the Contra War but nothing in Nicaragua (interviews).

The relationship arrived at in the U.S. became the model in many parts of the international church. During the last two decades Adventist leaders in many countries, who were by this time typically citizens of those countries, increasingly sought to facilitate their endeavors by building exchange relationships with their governments. They were especially successful with authoritarian governments in Eastern Europe and the Developing World, where the fact that they had avoided a deviant position on military service was usually an important prerequisite.

Adventists sought liberties (freedom to evangelize, to observe the Sabbath, protection of their institutions) and favors (for example, accreditation of schools, facilitation of projects through duty-free import of equipment) and, in return, were willing to help legitimate or otherwise assist regimes. Such relationships were especially numerous among the military regimes of Latin

America, from Guatemala to Chile, in parts of Asia, such as South Korea and the Philippines, and Africa, especially Kenya. Adventists were also successful in establishing exchange relationships with several of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, such as Poland and Romania (interviews).

The original decisions in these countries to compromise by training and serving with weapons and, later, to pursue close relations with governments, seem to have been largely a matter of local initiative. However, church leaders took increasing pleasure in such relationships and the legitimacy and status they afforded to the Adventist Church, and intervened directly to further them. For example, Neal C. Wilson, President of the General Conference 1979-1990, saw himself as something of a traveling diplomat and basked in photo opportunities with heads of state; Robert S. Folkenberg, his successor, told proudly that when he was located in Guatemala City as the leader of the church in Central America he knew General Fernando Romeo Lucas Garcia, the President of Guatemala, so well that he would visit him in the presidential palace and that he was the first Protestant leader to be given a state farewell reception when he was about to move to a new position (interview). During his term as world president, Wilson took the lead in cementing exchange relationships with the state in both the USSR and Hungary, where schismatic Adventist groups were bitterly opposed to such ties. At a time when Soviet leaders were anxious to silence the anti-government propaganda of the True and Free Adventists, he issued an open letter to all Soviet Adventists:

The General Conference can recognize only one Seventh-day Adventist organization in any country. This would normally be the one recognized by the authorities. ...we encourage all who consider themselves to be Seventh-day Adventists to identify with the recognized body of believers (Wilson and Lohne, 1979).¹⁰

During a subsequent visit to the Soviet Union, Wilson established a close relationship with Konstantin Kharchev, the chair of the USSR Council on Religious Affairs, who later visited church headquarters and major educational, medical, and publishing institutions in the U.S. These contacts resulted in approval for the creation of an Adventist seminary outside Moscow. As the relationship deepened, Adventists praised Soviet religious liberty in their respected *Liberty* magazine and awarded Kharchev, at their Third World Congress on Religious Liberty in 1989, a citation honoring him as “Spokesman for Human Rights, Promoter of Religious Freedom” — at a time when Gorbachev was seeking eagerly to liberalize the Soviet image (Editorial, 1988:44; Hegstad, 1987:2-6; Wilson, 1987:8; Nixon, 1989:7). They subsequently received permission to establish a publishing house, a medical clinic, and church headquarters. When he was asked about his dream for the church, Wilson replied that it should “grow numerically and financially, and in terms of world acceptance and influence” (Coffin, 1986:9).

In sum, then, this case study suggests that the concept of tension with society put forward by Stark and Bainbridge provides researchers with an excellent measure of the degree of sectarianism of a religious group and of its shifts in position along the sect-denomination continuum.¹¹ However, while the level of tension surrounding a deviant stance on military service is often a good indicator of sectarianism, it is not as accurate as a more comprehensive measure that

encompasses all the main components of tension. This is because tension with the state may be lowered by extraneous factors, such as the commitment of the state to religious liberty and accommodations it has already made with other groups holding a deviant position on military service.

NOTES

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1. Since the U.S. had no established church, but a number of "mainline denominations," the latter became the preferred term among researchers here, especially those exploring the dynamics of change from "sect" towards "denomination."

2. Yinger distinguished a "church" from a "universal church", and thus used it as the equivalent of what others would identify as a "denomination."

3. On the other hand, social science departments at Adventist colleges are typically weak, so that there has been little sociological research.

4. Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2:13-17.

5. In 1989 the Adventist Church in Germany issued a public apology for its toadying to the Nazis (interviews).

6. The major exception to this pattern in Western Europe is France, where the majority choose to train with weapons rather than face the longer alternative service. However, most of them still try to arrange release from work on the Sabbath.

7. 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 (interviews).

8. It would have been a much more accurate measure of sect-state tension in the case of both the schismatic Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses (Lawson, 1995b).

9. A recent example of this was the hiring of a public relations firm to divert the media from identifying the Adventist Church with David Koresh's Seventh-day Adventist Branch Davidians (Lawson, 1995a).

10. Wilson took a similar position during the 1980s concerning a schism in Hungary triggered by ties between the church and the Communist regime, when he declared again that the General Conference would recognize only groups that themselves had government recognition ("Small Committee" Correspondence; Reiners, n.d.; interviews).

11. I have argued elsewhere that most of the variables that have been commonly listed as indicators of position on the church-sect continuum are ingredients to shifts in the state of tension with society (Lawson, 1995b).

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