

Hasel, Frank M., Barna Magyarosi, and Stefan Höschele, eds., *Adventists and Military Service: Biblical, Historical, and Ethical Perspectives*. Madrid: Safeliz, 2019. vi + 225 pp. Softcover. Paperback US\$ 18.99.

The present book discusses the view of the Seventh-day Adventist Church regarding military service from biblical, historical, and ethical perspectives. It is a collection of chapters written by scholars who see military service from different angles. These chapters complete one another to lead the Adventist readers to understand how they should respond to the calling of governments to work in a military domain. This book counts nine chapters, underscoring the idea of military service from various perspectives. The contributors write the following articles: (1) Violence and War in the Old Testament; (2) War and Nonviolence in the New Testament; (3) Ethnicity, the Church, and Violent Conflicts; (4) Military Service and Just War: An Historical Overview; (5) Pacifists, Conscientious Co-operators, or Combatants? The Seventh-day Adventist Loss of Clarity on War and Military Service; (6) Adventist Opposition to War in Europe: Cases of Non-conformity and Conscientious Objection; (7) Ethical Challenges in Military Service; (8) Psychological Effects of War and Pastoral Care; and (9) Adventists and Military Service: Conclusion. The three remaining sections are the appendixes that deal with the statements of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on military service, peace, noncombatancy, and war.

The introduction sets the ground to guide the reader to comprehend how the whole world is involved in war, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In this context, the author demonstrates that as long as we live in war-like conflicts, SDA members could easily adhere to different groups that practice violence or even bear weapons by pursuing a military career. This section summarizes the position of each contributor to the book regarding the military domain and then the position of the SDA Church on this matter. This section seems to implicitly state that joining a military career or bearing arms equals violence.

In chapter one, Barna Magyarosi discusses the idea of war and violence in the Old Testament through several approaches. He mainly addresses the

concept of “holy war” to support that the OT is strict against violence and war. He defines “holy war” as a war oriented towards the culture and society of Canaanites to uproot the polytheistic traditions. In addition, he argues that most wars and conflicts between nations were God’s. This means that Israel never waged any battles against the nations. Rather, they were attacking neighboring countries to respond to the divine command as an expression of judgment. The attacks against the nations were also to eradicate the foreign practices, which could contaminate the Israelite monotheistic culture or worship of the heavenly God.

In chapter two, Johannes Kovar sheds much light on the idea of war and nonviolence from the context of the New Testament. This section is grounded in the beatitudes, the sermon on the mountain, to promote a nonviolent and peacemaking lifestyle. This was at the heart of Jesus’s teachings. The author suggests that the NT never supported war, violence, or aggressive attitudes. However, at the same time, the author provides a couple of instances, including Cornelius, that show individuals who worked in the military service and state positions but who were faithful and did not betray the Christian principles. In this section, the author focuses much on the anchor passages of the Gospels, besides a few in the Pauline letters and others, to uphold the nonviolent attitude to discourage people from joining the military.

The third chapter is a case study in which Kwabena Donkor explores cases of war and violence worldwide, especially in Africa. He differentiates two concepts that have almost the same meaning but are contradictory at the same time, which people should understand to overcome social problems in the Church community: ethnicity and ethnocentrism. Based on the biblical arguments, he argues that ethnicity will not divide people within the Church, while ethnocentrism will. He provides several examples of cases that occurred in the twenty-first century, such as the genocide against Tutsis in Rwanda that cost more than one million human lives. Donkor postulates that at the heart of ethnocentrism, there is “sin” that provokes misunderstanding and violent conflicts in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He concludes by proposing a curative principle that Christians should implement to overcome the idea of ethnocentrism: conversion. A sincere conversion within the Seventh-day Adventist Church will help the members to see each other as one unique universal Christian family.

In the fourth chapter Zoltán Szallos-Farkas assesses the understanding of military service through history from the pre-Constantine era until the twenty-first century. The main concept analyzed in this chapter is the idea

of “just war.” This concept was initially introduced by Augustine, who reasonably seems to defend the right cause of joining the military service as a civic duty and a response to the call to serve and protect the nation. Szallos-Farkas shows that the Christian church strictly forbade its members to exercise military duties in the pre-Constantine era. Those who joined could be subjected to Church discipline or even be disfellowshipped. However, after Constantine joined the Church, military service was Christianized. When Constantine joined the Christian church, the mindset about the military career started to change, and Christians started to join this domain. The concept of “just war” became more popular over the years and became a foundational doctrine for how Christians should relate to military service. Szallos-Farkas demonstrates that the idea of just war was adopted by the later Christian movements, even the reformers, except Mennonites, Hutterites, Amish, Brethren, and Friends.

The fifth chapter states the position of the SDA Church regarding war and military career. Morgan’s point enforces what Kovar wrote in the second chapter about war and nonviolence in the New Testament. In the same way, Morgan centers his points of view on the teaching of Jesus where He explicates that bearing arms or engaging in war is a violation of the sixth commandment—You shall not kill (Exod 20:13). Nevertheless, he shows how the SDA Church was born in the context of military service. In addition, he provides several examples of many members who joined the SDA Church after their military career or even when they were still rendering their services to their countries as soldiers. This chapter does not show a clear position of the SDA church concerning military involvement. Instead, the position seems to be subjective—it changes with time. On the one hand, it accepts military service without being involved in violent acts and wars. If a SDA member engages in a military career, he should work in medical services or chaplaincy. Therefore, Morgan seems to argue that military service itself is not a problem while killing is a violation of the sixth commandment.

The sixth chapter narrates the hardship and persecution SDA members endured during the First and Second World Wars. Those who joined because of the political pressure fought even on the Sabbath. Daniel Heinz shows that during these times nonconformist and conscientious objector Adventists openly opposed conscriptions into the military by various governments. The countries involved in these wars forced their populations—including Adventists—to participate in the conflicts. Some resisted and were martyred, while others joined the military service. In this section, Heinz demonstrates the hardships many nonconformist and conscientious

Adventists faced because of their Christian convictions. He also suggests that military service was an ethical matter rather than a violation of religious principles.

In the seventh chapter, Frank M. Hasel articulates the ethical challenges people in military service encounter when exercising their profession. He contends that before exercising their functions, they must make vows that they will faithfully serve the country no matter the cost. He argues that soldiers pronounce the military creeds before joining the military career. He stipulates that these vows sometimes become barriers and cause Christians to compromise their beliefs.

The eighth chapter is a psychological discussion about consequences that last even when the individual has retired from his military career. Andreas Bochman raises these facts to explain how military service can have lasting consequences, that can affect even later generations. The eighth chapter is the conclusion. Hasel summarizes the whole book by stating the position of each contributor to the book.

This book is a very informative work that provides information about military service and the understanding of the Seventh-day Adventist Church from different perspectives. It explores the idea of Christians who enroll in military service, especially SDA members. The contributors see this concept from biblical, historical, and ethical lenses. This analysis enlarges the reader's understanding, and clarifies the position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The main idea of the book seems to be that Christians, especially SDA members, should not enroll in military careers where they might betray ethical and religious principles.

Concerning the content of the book, I disagree with the idea that SDA members should not enroll in military service because of the danger of violation of some religious and ethical principles. First, what Magyarosi calls "holy war" to justify Israelite wars may also be understood in parallel with the concept of "just war" by Augustine, for he defines "holy" as having the right reason to wage war and fighting for a noble cause. For Magyarosi, holy war belongs to God, and he states that most of the wars that Israel waged in the Old Testament were according to a divine command. All the contributors express the same idea that a Christian should never be involved in the military to avoid violent acts and wars. However, from my understanding, as someone who lived in war-like situations, military service must not be understood synonymously with violence and the compromise of ethical principles. One can argue that even military systems can work in accomplishing a divine plan. Thus, one can enroll in a military career and still be a faithful Christian.

It is obvious that military service can influence non-committed Christians to compromise. Still, on the other hand, this cannot be a weight reason for Christians to resign or to not participate in military tasks. Military service is analogous to understanding politics in the Seventh-day Adventist church. The SDA Church opposes and does not adhere to political systems. Nevertheless, many SDA members engage in political parties while remaining committed to their fundamental beliefs. Based on biblical principles, there are several God's servants who faithfully accomplished administrative and political duties without compromising their ethical principles, such as Daniel, Nehemiah, and Ezra. Therefore, the military service can also be a way through which the divine can execute the divine plans, whether by using a peacemaking process or sometimes violence.

One of the arguments that the contributors give for their view is that military service betrays the fundamental beliefs of the SDA members. Nevertheless, one can ask the question: if political systems can function on God's account, why not military service? In addition to that, one may ask the following questions: (1) Is being a soldier synonymous to engaging in violence? (2) Does the sixth commandment "You shall not kill," apply even in the context of battle and war? (3) Would Adventists support the idea that countries should live without military systems? If not, why Adventists should not participate in it? (4) Is defending the nation or standing to defend the victimized people a crime? (5) Shouldn't Adventists contribute to developing their countries in various ways, including the military service? (6) If Adventists can tolerate the participation in noncombatant duties, will it not be an indirect contribution to the war-like acts? My point is to argue that it is correct to enroll in military service as long as it does not break the ethical and moral principles considering the place, time, and circumstances. It is a civic task that every citizen is called to partake in, including the SDA members.

To conclude, I would argue that the issue of military service in the SDA Church is ethical rather than biblical. The context of what Magyarosi calls "holy war" may not be a convincing argument to forbid someone from enrolling in the military service because of the context, time, and place. As far as I understand, this issue must be decided depending on the place and situation. I support the concept of "just war," which stipulates that as long as people fight for a good reason, it is legitimate. In war-time, despite the propaganda and sometimes emotional decisions, I would suggest that people should engage in military service: To serve community interests, defend the

nations or rights of the populations, and guarantee the safety of national territory and people's goods.

Etienne Munyamashara Irakiza
Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, PHILIPPINES
