



## SIEBENTEN-TAGS-ADVENTISTEN

### Statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Germany regarding the centennial anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War

On July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1914, a war broke out in Europe. Its dimensions eclipsed everything before it. Many Adventists saw the outbreak of the “Great War” as a sign of the end of the world. Before the war, many Adventists had served in the military but refused to carry out duties on Sabbath, risking potentially severe penalties. Now, other Adventists considered it part of the preparation for the imminent return of Jesus to refuse to carry weapons or to participate in the military immunization program.

However, shortly after the general mobilization on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1914, the Central European leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Hamburg issued a circular letter to the Adventist congregations in Germany recommending, “Insofar as we are members of the military or receive orders to enlist in military service, [we should] fulfill our military duties wholeheartedly and with joy [...] In Joshua 6 we read that the children of God bore weapons and also served on Sabbath.” This letter and other publications provoked a complex protest in Adventist congregations, leading to tensions and divisions. In 1915, this state of affairs led to the rising of a separate organization, the self-designated “Reform Movement”, which accused its mother church, the “greater church” of a Babylonian apostasy from the true Advent faith.

Today we recognize and concede that during these disputes our Fathers often did not act in the spirit of love and reconciliation demonstrated by Jesus. Out of concern for the survival of the denomination in Germany, advice contradicting the Word of God was given which led to division and profound hurt. We also concede that the former Adventist leadership did not adequately fulfill their responsibility to the congregations. They unjustly accused members who contradicted them of having “fallen” from the truth, and in individual cases went as far as having people pursued by the authorities.

During negotiations with the Reform Movement from June 21<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1920, in Friedensau, Germany, Pastor Arthur G. Daniells, then President of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, objected to the statement of the German Church leadership regarding military service and emphasized, “We would not have made such a declaration.” At the Pastors’ meeting, which took place immediately after the negotiations in Friedensau, those responsible for the documents rescinded their statements as “erroneous”. On January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1923, they again expressed their regret “that such documents have ever been released.”

Even though none of those directly involved are still alive, we ask their descendants and relatives along with the two still existing groups of the Reform Movement for forgiveness for our failings. From these painful experiences we have learned that the children of God are called to be people of peace, and to reject every form of violence against the innocent. We believe that disciples of Jesus are truest to the statements of the Holy Scriptures when they act as ambassadors for peace and reconciliation.

On June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1985, Pastor Neal C. Wilson, former President of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, expressed the same idea in his “Declaration of Peace” to the General Conference in Session in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA. “In a world full of fighting and hatred, a world of ideological and military conflicts, Seventh-day Adventists want to be known as peacemakers, and want to advocate for global justice and peace under Christ as the head of a new humanity.”

Hanover/Ostfildern, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014

In the name of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Germany

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