

# 4. WAR AND PACIFISM

America: Colonial period to Adventist organization

Anabaptist

(c. 1524)

“One particular outworking of embracing Jesus as a higher authority than the state that came to be central for Anabaptists and their Mennonite descendants was the rejection of participation in warfare. We see this early on in the trial that led to the execution of Anabaptist leader Michael Sattler—he explicitly refused to support wars against the Turks. Jesus calls us to love our enemies—that means we can’t take up arms against them.”

(<https://thinkingpacifism.net/2014/07/22/the-essence-of-anabaptism/>)

Medieval protesters of the Church and Anabaptists who valued a literal interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount shared the following declarations:

- The believer must not swear oaths or refer disputes between believers to law-courts for resolution, in accordance with 1 Corinthians 6:1–11.
- The believer must not bear arms or offer forcible resistance to wrongdoers, nor wield the sword. No Christian has the *jus gladii* (the right of the sword). Matthew 5:39
- Civil government belongs to the world. The believer belongs to God's kingdom, so must not fill any office nor hold any rank under government, which is to be passively obeyed. John 18:36 Romans 13:1–7
- Sinners or unfaithful ones are to be excommunicated, and expelled from the sacraments and from intercourse with believers saving that they atone, according to 1 Corinthians 5:9–13 and Matthew 18:15, but no violence is to be practiced against them.

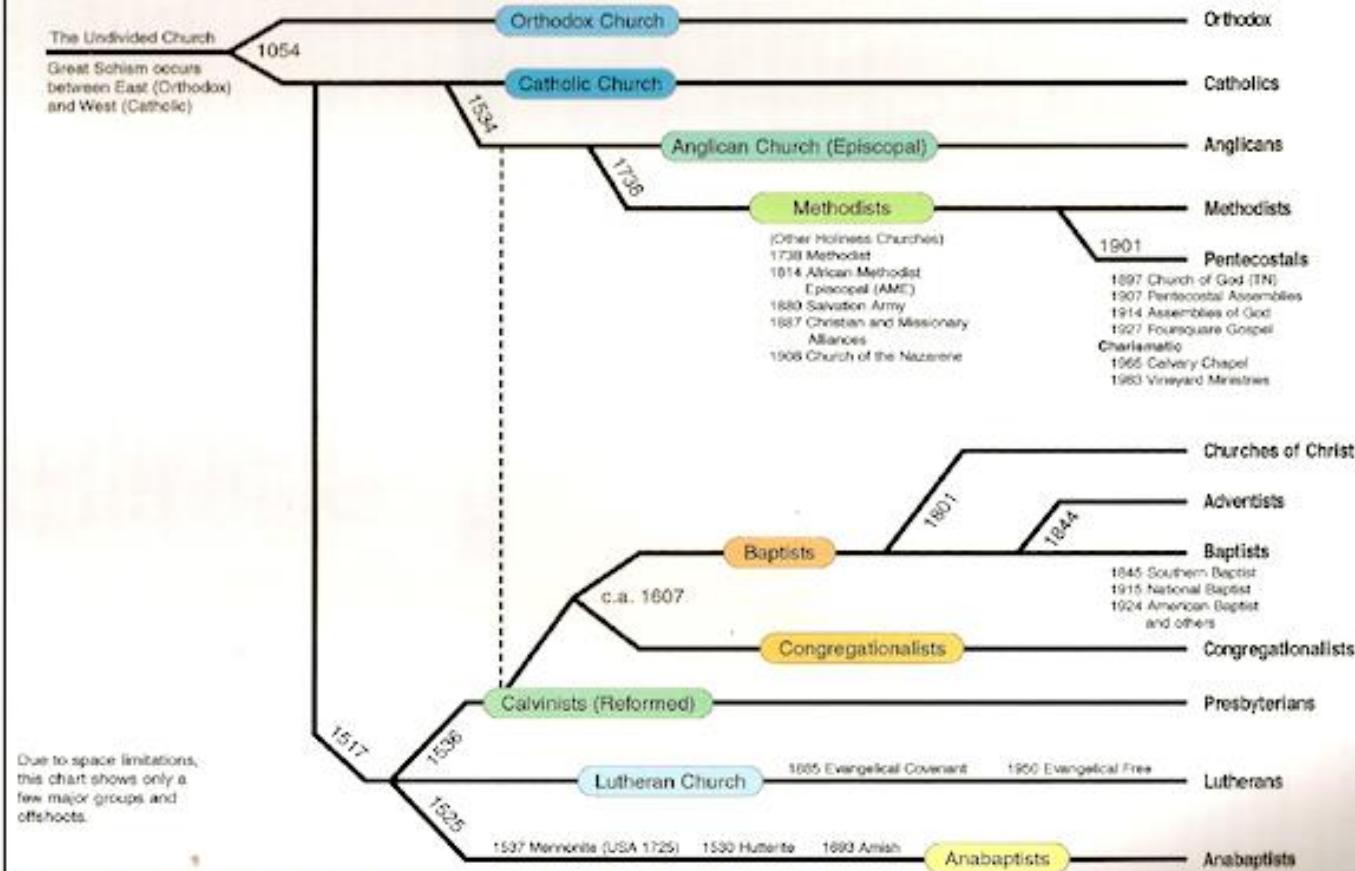
<https://www.christianity.com/church/denominations/who-are-anabaptists-learn-the-origins-and-history-of-anabaptism.html>

The early Anabaptists took Jesus' direct teachings as the center focus for their beliefs and practices, especially as expressed in the Sermon on the Mount. From very early, for most of the Anabaptists, the teaching of Jesus concerning love of enemies and turning from the sword led to a principled pacifism ... *Over the next several decades following the first Anabaptist baptisms in 1525, the beliefs about non-participation in war became one of the convictional pillars for these radical Christians.* As the movement gained a strong foothold in Holland, a former Catholic priest named **Menno Simons** became an important leader, and ultimately most of the various Anabaptist groups took his name—"Mennonites."

The Mennonites faced generations of harsh persecution in Switzerland, Germany, and Holland. Though Mennonite groups remain in those countries, many communities and individuals migrated to locales that offered them safety—including the Pennsylvania colony beginning in 1683. The state of Pennsylvania remains today the home of the largest concentration of Mennonite communities in the United States.

(<https://thinkingpacifism.net/2014/07/22/the-essence-of-anabaptism/>)

# Family Tree of Denominations



## The early generations

“Pacifism established itself in the North American colonies when the British government granted William Penn, a member of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), a charter to establish the colony of Pennsylvania in 1682. The Friends had emerged as a distinct movement in Britain in the mid-1650s under the leadership of George Fox. Fox combined a close adherence to the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount with a mystical sense of the presence of God’s Spirit in the believer’s heart, in the hearts of all other human beings, and in the broader creation.

(Peter Brock, The Quaker Peace Testimony, 1660-1914-  
<https://thinkingpacifism.net/2019/05/31/pacifism-in-america-part-one-the-roots-of-war-resistance/>)

## 1682 - 1756

“From the start, the colony of Pennsylvania lived with significant tensions between the ideals of its Quaker leadership and the realities of the broader colonial enterprise in North America not shaped by those values. In time, the numbers of colony residents who were not Quakers (or those of similar convictions) grew much larger than the population of Friends. In the face of growing conflicts with Natives in the western part of the colony, the Friends relinquish their leadership role by 1756.”

(Peter Brock, The Quaker Peace Testimony, 1660-1914-  
<https://thinkingpacifism.net/2019/05/31/pacifism-in-america-part-one-the-roots-of-war-resistance/>)

Early in the 18th century, a new movement arose in Germany, deeply influenced by Anabaptist convictions but remaining a distinct fellowship. Members of this emerging movement, numbering only in the dozens, migrated en masse to Pennsylvania not long after their emergence and in North America took the name ***Church of the Brethren. The Brethren, like the Mennonites and Quakers, had as one of their defining characteristics belief in non-participation in war.*** During the last few decades of Quaker rule in Pennsylvania, the Brethren and Mennonites offered what support they could—and welcomed the freedom to practice their faith (including the open commitment to pacifism).

(Peter Brock, The Quaker Peace Testimony, 1660-1914-<https://thinkingpacifism.net/2019/05/31/pacifism-in-america-part-one-the-roots-of-war-resistance/>)

Members of all three groups (sometimes called the ***Historic Peace Churches***) in time moved to the west and south from Pennsylvania, establishing communities in other colonies. The war that marked the American colonies effort to break free from British control proved difficult for Peace Church members, and a number migrated to Canada to avoid the conflict. By and large, though, the pacifism of Peace Church members was respected by government and they were allowed to avoid military involvement. Their presence was significant enough that James Madison, in an early draft of the Bill of Rights following the Revolution, included a provision establishing the constitutional right for conscientious objection in the face of war. Ultimately, this right was not granted. As a consequence, those seeking provisions of conscientious objection in face of the military draft have continually needed to request that Congress include provisions for COs in the draft legislation.

## The 19th century: The first peace societies and total war

“These early peace societies were notable for a couple of reasons. They signaled the spread of explicit convictions about **rejection of warfare** beyond the Peace Churches (a significant portion of those engaged with the peace societies were Quakers, but many were not). These may be the first organizations in the world with the specific purpose of furthering political opposition to war as an instrument of state policy. As well, some elements of this small peace movement connected with some elements of the much larger anti-slavery movement.”

(Peter Brock, The Quaker Peace Testimony, 1660-1914-<https://thinkingpacifism.net/2019/05/31/pacifism-in-america-part-one-the-roots-of-war-resistance/>)

# American Civil War

Apr 12, 1861 – Apr 9, 1865

April 12, 1861, to March 3, 1863

The first period was characterized by voluntary enlistment and presented no great difficulties, because Adventists could freely stay out of the conflict. Although some looked upon them with suspicion, supposing that they sympathized with the rebellion, they did not volunteer for or participate in war.

March 3, 1863, to February 24, 1864

The second period is known for the introduction of the mandatory draft. By the grace of God, the draft law had a provision that allowed for exemption on condition of the draftee's providing a substitute to serve in his place or the payment of three hundred dollars. During this time, the Adventists helped each other to obtain the money required for exemption.

February 24 to July 4, 1864

In the last period some amendments were added to the law, which remained in place until the war's end; exemption was still granted, but limited to individuals "conscientiously opposed to the bearing of arms." They also had to be members of religious denominations whose principles also opposed the war and were recognized as noncombatants.

April 12, 1861, to March 3, 1863

"I was shown that God's people, who are His peculiar treasure, cannot engage in this perplexing war, for it is opposed to every principle of their faith. In the army they cannot obey the truth and at the same time obey the requirements of their officers. There would be a continual violation of conscience." *Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, pp. 361-362.*

March 3, 1863, to February 24, 1864

During the Civil War, the U.S. Congress passes a conscription act that produces the first wartime draft of U.S. citizens in American history. The act called for registration of all males between the ages of 20 and 45, including aliens with the intention of becoming citizens, by April 1. Exemptions from the draft could be bought for \$300 or by finding a substitute draftee. This clause led to bloody draft riots in New York City, where protesters were outraged that exemptions were effectively granted only to the wealthiest U.S. citizens. *The Enrollment Act of 1863 (12 Stat. 731, enacted March 3, 1863) also known as the Civil War Military Draft Act*

February 24 to July 4, 1864

July 4, 1864, at which time the \$300 commutation privilege was withdrawn. However, on *February 24, 1864, a new draft law had been enacted which now granted alternate service,* previously open to anyone, only to those who had religious principles against bearing arms. Such individuals could, when drafted, be considered noncombatants and assigned to *duty in the hospitals, or to the care of the freedmen, or shall pay the sum of \$300.* *Act of Congress, February 24, 1864*

In the interval from February 24, 1864, to July 4, 1864, the Adventists did not even apply for the alternative service but continued to pay the original \$300 commutation money until it was no longer possible.

Only then did they make an open declaration to the government.

The Executive Committee of the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference, composed of John Byington, J. N. Loughborough and George W. Amadon, sent a "Statement of Principles" to the governor of Michigan on August 2, 1864, in which was made the following declaration:

"The denomination of Christians calling themselves Seventh-day Adventists, taking the Bible as their rule of faith and practice, are unanimous in their views that its teachings are contrary to the spirit and practice of war; hence, they have ever been conscientiously opposed to bearing arms. If there is any portion of the Bible which we, as a people, can point to more than any other as our creed, it is the law of the ten commandments, which we regard as the supreme law, and each precept of which we take in its most obvious and literal import. The fourth of these commandments requires cessation from labor on the seventh day of the week, the sixth prohibits the taking of life, neither of which, in our view, could be observed while doing military duty. Our practice has uniformly been consistent with these principles. Hence, our people have not felt free to enlist into the service. In none of our denominational publications have we advocated or encouraged the practice of bearing arms, and, when drafted, rather than violate our principles, we have been content to pay, and assist each other in paying, the \$300 commutation money. And while that provision remained of universal application, we did not deem any public expression of our sentiments on this question called for..." (Seventh-day Adventists in Time of War, p. 58)

With a declaration of loyalty to the Government, they requested to be recognized as noncombatants, a term which in those days included total objectors for reasons of conscience. The next day, the governor of Michigan issued a statement as follows:

"I am satisfied that the foregoing statement of principles and practice of the Seventh-day Adventists is correct, and that they are entitled to all the immunities secured by law to those who are conscientiously opposed to bearing arms, or engaging in war." (Seventh-day Adventists and Civil Government, p. 10)

Finally, on September 1, 1864, the Provost Marshal General Theo. McMurtrie gave the following response:

"Members of religious denominations, who have been drawn in the draft, and who establish the fact before the Board of Enrollment that they are conscientiously opposed to the bearing of arms, and are prohibited from so doing by their rules and articles of faith, and that their deportment has been uniformly consistent with their profession, will be assigned to duty in hospitals, or to the care of freedmen, or shall be exempt on payment of \$300 to such persons as the Secretary of War may designate." (Review and Herald, September 13, 1864)

Which of the three provisions open to them did the Adventists prefer? That the general practice until the end of the Civil War was the payment of \$300, is evident from the following statement of James White, about two and a half months before the end of the war: "It is said that the next draft will take about one in three of able-bodied men, liable to the draft. And it is supposed that this proportion of Seventh-day Adventists will be drawn; that is, one in three. In this case if each should pay into the treasury \$100, the same would be sufficient to pay \$300, for all drawn in the coming draft." (Review and Herald, January 24, 1865)

# Disfellowshipment of combatants

## Hiram N. Bates

“The church of Plum River and Green Vale, Ills., met on the 22nd day of January in business capacity, and, after due deliberation, withdrew their fellowship from Hiram N. Bates, who has voluntarily enlisted in the U.S. service, thereby showing that he was not in harmony with the views of the Seventh-day Adventists.

“By order of the church.  
SOLOMON MYERS, Elder.  
Green Vale, Ills., January 24, 1865.

## Enoch Hayes

“As voluntary enlistment into the service of war is contrary to the principles of faith and practice of Seventh-day Adventists as contained in the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, they cannot retain those within their communion who so enlist. Enoch Hayes was therefore excluded from the membership of the Battle Creek church, by a unanimous vote of the church, March 4, 1865.”