

*As yet not
approved for
Duplication*

FOREWORD

In 1526 Martin Luther wrote to a soldier friend in an attempt to help people in the military service who might feel that, because they were soldiers, they were lost souls. In our own times legitimate criticism of war has sometimes become a condemnation of anyone who enters military service, even though that person's decision to bear arms or to be in uniform in any capacity may have been for unselfish and laudable reasons. This tract was written not to argue the complete case for or against war or to provide the whole biblical or Christian points of reference which should be used to guide one's conscience. It is a limited attempt to say that there are reasons why persons in the service can know that God and the Lutheran churches have not denied their worth.

BERTRAM C. GILBERT

TO THOSE IN MILITARY SERVICE
YOUR CHURCH SUPPORTS YOU

No one likes to think about the possibility that our country and its armed forces could be engaged in another war. Some people dislike thinking about it so much that they convince themselves that if war is so awful to think about, it won't happen. There were people of that mind before World War I, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, but war did occur even though weapons of destruction had become increasingly devastating. This is not to suggest that we should stop asking questions about the consequences of war or Christian participation in it. We should not stop hoping, praying, and working for peace. In fact, people like you who are in the military service are apt to be especially conscious of the horrors of wars and want as it says in I Peter 3:11 "to seek peace and pursue it." This sinful world being what it is, however, many people understand that the international situation may cause our nation to continue a policy of both seeking peace while being ready to respond to those nations which still feel that they can dominate others by military power. They feel that to work for peace while being ready to resist with arms is similar to what we do when we give money to church or vote funds for playgrounds in a community while also paying for fire companies and police forces. Maintained for use in accordance with principles of justice, the military force of which you are a part can be thought of as a valuable source of order and security in the world.

In thinking about our country's character and role as a part of the community of nations, we may have realized that there are some points at which it can be criticized, but we might also conclude that it has in its record notable sacrifices for others and a pattern of responsiveness to the needs of its own people which are heartening to those who pray for God's guidance in the affairs of nations. America has been wonderfully blessed by God and you

could hardly be faulted for thinking that it does have something worth preserving and sharing with the world.

For the U.S. to have become such a country, a land to which people from all over the world come seeking refuge and reason for hope, has not been without a price. Part of that price has been the expenditure in war of treasures we have thought less valuable than freedom. Another part has been the courageous witness of a small number of sincere people who have opposed what they thought were the errors of our nation's policy and took the consequences of their actions. A very important part of the price of our liberties has been service in the military by a large and sufficient number of citizens like you.

Over the course of our history there have been millions of men and women who have served in the military before you. Most families can name brothers, sisters, uncles, parents and grandparents who did. Among them have been a proportionate number of Lutherans who realized with the gloomy writer of Ecclesiastes that, whether we like it or not, "there is a time of war and a time of peace"--and that for them the call of their country to serve in the military in wartime could not be ignored. Most of them have served with no limitation on the kind of service to be required of them. Others have served in what are called "noncombatant" roles. Among the last group have been many Lutheran clergymen who volunteered as chaplains.

Service or Servitude

It is safe to say that most people who have been in military service have thought of their duty to country as a way by which they were participating with others in order that justice might be theirs, might prevail on the larger scene, and even be enjoyed throughout the world. There have been some, however, who have thought of that service in the military as a tragic loss of years, limbs, and lives, which the nation had no right to ask of them. You have probably heard some of your fellow service people talking in this negative way about their

tours of duty. In their view, military service is a kind of enslavement or servitude (in a demeaning sense of that word). Sometimes the discomfort of necessary regimentation in the service can cause some to forget that service people must sacrifice certain liberties in order that the whole country can keep those freedoms. Military service can, however, be thought of as a significant confirmation of mature citizenship and a contribution to a country which has been a blessing to us. It is this latter sense of service which will be most helpful to you as you spend your days and years in uniform...not servitude but service to others which may also be an enriching part of your life. In taking this attitude you would not be in the minority of Lutherans.

Fireworks in Denmark

One Fourth of July a few years ago my family and I rode the ferry into Copenhagen, greeted by fireworks going off in a great celebration. We were surprised because we had forgotten that in 1776 the coming of the Revolutionary War had been a tremendously inspiring event to people all over Europe who dreamed of freedom. Those Lutherans who fought in that war helped to give the world hope that representative government could be a way in which human dignity could thrive. That's what those fireworks in Denmark were all about and that hope that America will remain a champion of freedom is the reason our country has concluded we need to keep our armed forces strong.

There were other Lutherans later on who fought and died to preserve the Union and to emancipate black slaves in a Civil War, convinced that they were making men free as Christ had died to make them holy. Many, many more Lutherans served in World War II, convinced that Hitler's Germany with its racism and threat of world domination was so great an evil that recourse to arms was right and just. In the face of Communist expansion and the dehumanization which they saw in nations ruled by that philosophy, still others sacrificed personal convenience, comfort and safety in Korea and Vietnam on behalf of peoples on the

on the other side of the world, as well as in defense of our own national interest. Then, too, in the years of relative peace since the Vietnam conflict there have been about 35,000 Lutherans of all ranks serving in the active forces at any one time. Lutherans, as a group of believers and in large numbers, have accepted the responsibility for military service. When convinced of the need for service in the forces they have chosen to be among those who stepped forward to be counted and counted upon.

Volunteers and Draftees

These people who served and you who are serving in the military now, got there in two ways. In some periods of our history the nation relied on volunteers, a method which on the surface seems to fit most aptly with our free society; but there have been other times, even times of great enthusiasm for military service, when, in order to insure that our forces were truly representative of our whole population, conscription or the draft became the method by which people entered the service. It is one way for example to make sure that the forces are not made up only of poor people. At times drawing lots was used in order to make sure that the call to serve did not depend on the whim or prejudice of some governmental official.

When conscription or drafting has been used, our people through our government have been very much concerned about the importance of the individual conscience. We have therefore provided opportunities for alternate service as civilians and in-service duty as noncombatants for those who want to accept their share of society's needs in that way. Some of you may have gone into the service as non-combatants. Others may be interested to know that even after a person has entered the service it is possible to change classification if he or she can document the change in philosophy. Any chaplain can give you information on the process.

Although our churches will support them, our system has not provided a method by which citizens can refuse to serve in some capacity solely because

they have decided that a particular war is unjust. The decision to involve our forces in any war is one made by representatives we elect and who are responsible to us. In times when the nation is not at war but seeking to maintain a military posture capable of keeping the peace, the question of the justification of a particular war does not yet apply. You and others who may have volunteered or have been drafted have been asked to serve in such times of peace in order that other nations can see that the U.S. is not unprepared to use military force. While teaching a lesson on spiritual power, Jesus used a military allusion and stated the practical worldly facts of military preparedness in Luke 11:21-22: "When a strong man fully armed guards his palace his goods are in peace. But when ~~a~~^{the} stronger than he assails him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil." Martin Luther talks of need for military readiness in his tract "Whether Soldiers Too Can Be Saved" "For if the sword were not on guard to preserve peace, everything in the world must go to ruin because of the lack of peace." There are legitimate questions which can be raised about the extent to which our nation should arm but while we as a people continue to support a military preparedness policy, there will be a need for people like you to serve.

Can I Remain a Christian in That Scene?

In that Luther tract I just mentioned, Luther answered his own question with a "Yes," and you are right now testing whether his answer is correct for you. You realize now that going into the service has not meant that you have departed from God's care and presence. Knowing that we are helpless in regard to our own salvation and in a world which in all its aspects is under judgment, He follows us wherever we go, Psalm 139 says:

"Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there. If I make my bed in Hell (or Sheol, the place of departed spirits),

behold Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me and Thy right hand shall hold me."

There is even a way in which your witness as a Christian in the military can be thought of as a way of being faithful under unusual circumstances in the manner of the Roman centurion, in whom Jesus "found no greater faith than this in all Israel." It would be tragic if our armed forces did not have the kind of devoted witness you and other consecrated Lutherans can provide.

While you are in the service you can help to keep that witness the kind of dynamic one it has been for many years. Right now there are worshiping fellowships of Lutherans at many military installations where you can continue your stewardship. Some of the largest groupings of Lutherans overseas are in such "congregations." You may find, as many Lutherans have, that your Christian leadership in ecumenical chapel communities is both a vital witness and a way of enlivening your own faith. To help you worship, work, and witness to the Lord, there are about 300 Lutheran chaplains ministering to active duty people and 240 civilian contact pastors serving as a way in which the church is following you wherever you go in the service. All this activity goes on with the support of the major Lutheran church bodies in association with the Lutheran Council in the USA and its Division of Service to Military Personnel.

While you are in the service, your church does not expect you to stop thinking about your position in regard to war and military service. You should and will probably continue to wrestle with questions about the use of violence and even the threat of violence--about whether it is possible for you to determine whether or when a war is justified; about your own personal response to an attack on a loved one and whether such private morality applies to warfare; questions about your own motives for service and the sort of witness you are making to Christ while a military person; and questions about continuing to fill the needs of the country along with others of your generation.

To those who have considered these and other questions on the subject and have concluded that they cannot participate, our churches have said they will support them in their witness as well as in the troubles which such a choice may bring.

To those of you who have concluded, as you have, that you can and should serve in the military, our churches with equal strength have said that they support you. Here is the way they have said it:

Church Statements

Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, July 1969:

"Resolved, That the Synod encourage its members to pledge themselves anew to loyalty and obedience to the government also in the matter of military service; and be it further

"Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm its historic theological position whereby it recognizes that conscientious objection to a war which an individual considers to be unjust is a valid stance; and be it further

"Resolved, That the members of the Synod respect an individual's decision not to engage in a war which his conscience, enlightened by the Word of God, considers to be unjust; and be it further

"Resolved, That the pastors and congregations of the Synod be urged to make use of the CTCR's documents "Guidelines for Crucial Issues in Christian Citizenship" and "Civil Obedience and Disobedience" in providing a counseling and supporting ministry to those who conscientiously object to military service as well as to those who in conscience choose to serve in the military."

Lutheran Church in America, June 1968:

"This church stands by and upholds those of its members who

conscientiously object to military service as well as those who in conscience choose to serve in the military. This church further affirms that the individual who, for reasons of conscience, objects to participation in a particular war is acting in harmony with Lutheran teaching."

The American Lutheran Church, October 1870:

"The ALC encourages Christians to active participation in service to the nation. It teaches the responsibility of all citizens to contribute to the needs of the country in ways appropriate to their skills.

"The ALC is grateful to its chaplains who minister to those of its members who serve the military needs of the nation. The church also renders pastoral care and understanding to persons in agony of conscience, and pleads that avenues of alternate service be open to them. Along with the 1968 General Convention, The ALC today urges its members, and especially its pastors, to counsel with and stand by those who conscientiously object to military service as consistently as they counsel with and stand by those who for equal reasons of conscience serve in the armed forces."

The Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, 1980:

The Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches is a full participant in the ministry to military members through the service chaplaincies. At the same time, the church's national office serves as a repository for statements of conscientious objection for those of its members who hold such convictions. An official policy will be considered by the AELC in its October 1980 convention--one which will no doubt give its support to the informed Christian conscience, and therefore both to the conscientious participant as well as the conscientious objector.