

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
HEADQUARTERS TENTH AIR FORCE (RESERVE) (AFRES)  
BERGSTROM AIR FORCE BASE, TEXAS 78743



10 September 1980

Chaplain B.C. Gilbert  
LCUSA/DSMP  
475 L'Enfant Plaza  
Washington SW S2720 DC 20024

Dear Bert (or is it Burt)

Enclosed is not only a forwarding letter to the Lutheran, but also a draft of some of my words which I'd like you to edit and consider for inclusion in the article. Some may be repetitious, and some may not be appropriate at all. You may want to distribute bits and pieces here and there in the article, you may wish to put whatever you keep together, or you may wish to trash it all. I'll respect your judgment in terms of achieving acceptance, readability, and maximum impact.

Thank you for taking the ball and running with it. May God guide our efforts that his will be done.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ralph C. Erchinger", is written over the typed name.

RALPH C. ERCHINGER, Colonel, USAF  
Director, Disaster Preparedness

2 Atch

1. Ltr to Lutheran w/encls
2. Addn copy for article

P.S. Perhaps you could call me as soon as you have considered this input. At this end, as soon as I get your article, I'll use your input with mine and will be ready to compare views when you call. Unless there are advantages to mailing from DC, I think I should be able to get the package in the mail just as fast here as you could there.

Thanks again

8302 Silver Ridge Drive  
Austin, Texas 78759  
September 15, 1980

Rev Edgar R. Trexler  
THE LUTHERAN  
2900 Queen Lane  
Philadelphia, PA 19129

Dear Pastor Trexler

I was greatly disturbed recently when I read Paul Johnson's article, "About the Draft, Son," which appeared in the September 3 Lutheran. My Christian convictions do not make Christianity and Patriotism inherently contradictory. For me, the thrust of the article is definitely in this direction. It strongly suggests that the word of God calls each of us to a posture of pacifism. This in turn would compel a Christian potential draftee to seek conscientious objector status. The article begs for a "counterpoint."

The enclosed article is submitted for publication as a humble effort toward providing a counterpoint. In preparing it I have sought counsel, advice, and theological "expertise" from Lutheran pastors, including military chaplains, in Colorado, Texas, and Washington DC. However, I must accept lay responsibility for its shortcomings and inadequacies. If you cannot publish this as a feature article, perhaps you could edit the article and this letter and combine them to provide an appropriate submission for "Letters to the Editor." Or I can write you another letter.

I found your Editor's opinion "The Dangers of Easy Answers" to be profound and relevant to many questions including the issue of conscientious objection. Seeking conscientious objector status may sometimes be seeking one of those easy answers. Nonrecognition of the "threat" may be a result of "turning off the data flow and not wanting to be bothered." Certainly, complexities must be presented and explored if we are to make informed judgments.

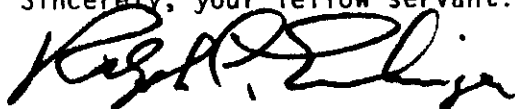
Among my concerns is the belief that Johnson's article could lead many of our youth to seek conscientious objector status for reasons of narcissism, ignorance, or simple avoidance, rather than true pacifism. I respect a Christian's right to embrace an ideal of total pacifism. I am convinced that if this posture prevailed as a matter of national will or policy the free world would be rapidly subjugated by Soviet Russia. The true pacifist/conscientious objector would accept this situation and would not want self nor others to bear arms to avoid this occurrence or for any other reasons. It seems to me that commitment short of this is a "cop-out" and not worthy of conscientious objector status. On the other hand, if a citizen's responsibility to bear arms for the common defense is accepted as Christian, then the individual must generally allow the corporate decisions of government (including its citizenry) determine what measures need to be taken to satisfy defense needs.

I believe a balanced examination of the commitment a Christian makes when declaring himself to be a conscientious objector is worthy of further clarification--or at least exploration--in The Lutheran. I suggest a more thorough theological treatment since my remarks may well be somewhat "half-baked," as I feel Paul Johnson's were. The 1974 "Studies" tract on the witness of U. S. Lutherans on Peace, War and Conscience, distributed by the Division of Theological Studies, LCUSA, seems to provide such a perspective.

It is my belief that the vast majority of Christians are patriotic and recognize the need for them to be active in their nation's defense from outside aggression. The problem is one of understanding the threat. For most, conscientious objection is not recognized as being an imperative call of God's word.

About me. I'm a lifelong Lutheran and an active duty Air Force Officer currently Director of Disaster Preparedness, Tenth Air Force. My wife Ellie and I have always been in the midst of congregational and community life. Since we've been in Austin, Texas, we've been involved members of Triumphant Love Lutheran Church where we dearly love Pastor Dan (a pacifist) and Nova Kolander. Ellie and I are advisors for our church-sponsored Explorer Post and are active committee members of a Boy Scout troop committee. Our son Bob is a senior at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, majoring in Pulp and Paper Technology. Dave is in his second year, and Tom his first, at the Air Force Academy. Dave expects to pursue a career in computer science while Tom plans to become a physician. Paul is a high school sophomore. I have 5000 hours of flying time and have served in Libya, the Philippines, Vietnam and Greece besides many US locations. We expect to remain in Austin after military retirement in 1982.

Sincerely, your fellow servant.



RALPH C. ERCHINGER  
Colonel, USAF

Enclosures

1. Article
2. Biography

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Ralph C. Erchinger  
8302 Silver Ridge Drive  
Austin, Texas 78759  
(512) 345-9310

MORE ABOUT THE DRAFT, SON

Dear Paul,

Since the possibility of a draft is pretty significant to you these days, I know you have been reading those articles on it published in The Lutheran. I've been reading them, too. I am concerned because they present only one view and really don't represent the traditional position of our church. It's my guess that they don't represent the opinion of most of our people, either. My convictions in no way make Christianity and Patriotism inherently contradictory as some might suggest. So I thought it important for me to share some perspectives with you to help you examine the issues as you seek to be in harmony with God, others, and yourself--a tall order in our sinful world.

Certainly your mother and I didn't raise you or your three brothers to be soldiers. But we wanted you to grow up with Christian concepts of stewardship and responsibility which include service to God, your country, and your fellow man. Our feelings have always been that patriotism, good citizenship, and military service are not contrary to God's word. We, as you, have taken pride in the ideals and tenets of our Lutheran heritage, of our nation, and of many of our institutions, including the Boy Scouts of America where you all four achieved Eagle. (Of course we frequently note imperfections and shortcomings in these human institutions, but we accentuate the positive, not the negative.) We have tried to guide you to "follow the way in which you should go that you might not stray from it." We have been happy to see each of you active in church, school, and community.

We are and will continue to be equally proud and supportive of each of you as you continue to make decisions only you can make. No matter what our primary occupations are, I feel our citizenship carries with it responsibility to support our nation's quest to provide for its common defense. Thus, military service--

voluntary or involuntary, part-time or full-time--seems appropriate.

Lutherans have usually seen government as given by God for the good of the people and have taught that responsible Christian living requires involvement in government. "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right." (1 Peter 2.13-14). We have also recognized that government is capable of error and that particular government policies may never be totally identified with the will of God for civil affairs. What does a Christian do then? Luther quoted Acts 5.29 as pertinent advice to a soldier who believed his government was wrong, "We must obey God rather than men."

So it is that respect for the institution of government as ordained of God does not necessarily require acceptance of every specific policy of government. There are times when one's sense of God's will for his life may lead, as with Luther, to disobedience of government demands--or any other demands. In all our dealings with one another we have the moral, ethical, Christian obligation to refuse to do that which is contrary to our conscience. Thus, I stand ready to violate or disobey not only military or civil authority but also requests of social or business associates. <sup>If</sup> We must, however, be ready to suffer the consequences. In our imperfect society human and national failings often cloud the issues and make our decisions difficult. However, for the Christian the pain of making a hard choice does not include anxiety over the need to justify oneself before God, for we are set free in Christ (2 Cor 3.17). We are free to choose the course most likely to be helpful to the world, as we understand the will of God, confident that God's forgiving grace covers the sin attached to that choice. We are free also to know as much as can be known about issues--and then to decide.

The issues are complex. The literature is vast. Facts are not always evident. Answers are not easy. I'd like to give you another side to some of the arguments that are put forward by those who are against the draft.

They often start with a claim that our involvement in Vietnam proves how faulty our government is in deciding when we should go to war; from that they somehow draw the conclusion that a person should be against anything which has to do with military service. We have discussed that war and its consequences, including the current fate of those poor Cambodians left to the mercy of the Vietnamese communists. We have concluded that our manner of waging and ending that war left a great deal to be desired. It isn't right, however, to decide that since our government may have been wrong in one instance it should not be supported in another. Martin Luther, you know, specifically warned against that kind of thinking. As a citizen in a democracy you have a responsibility both to affect its policy and to accept the privilege of service to it. That service, according to the teachings of our church, may include military service.

Another argument raised is that the idea of trying to contain communism is a bad one. The containment concept is a policy which is very complex and includes all kinds of economic, political, diplomatic as well as military pressure; it shouldn't be wiped off with an anti-military eraser as worthless. There's a lot of misunderstanding about the issues and use of national power with respect to the countries rich in oil. The real question today has to do with what threat there is to the stability of Japan, Western Europe and the peoples in the Near East who live in or near those oil rich lands. The Afghanistan example doesn't give much hope for a policy of ignoring the threat. We ourselves might eventually be able to dig enough coal and conserve enough energy to get by but we really shouldn't take that kind of isolationist stance.

Sometimes the anti-draft writers imply that when we have used military force or the threat of it we have ended up supporting despotic rulers and the privileged elite instead of ~~the real~~ needy people and their ~~kind and~~ noble leaders. ~~Not~~ We have sometimes done that. But at other times we have done a good job of raising the economic standards and helping others to gain justice and freedom. Sweden, Denmark, Germany, France, Belgium, Holland and England are among those <sup>countries</sup> ~~people~~ whose fates

would be far different if we had not intervened in World War II.

I pretend no great biblical scholarship, but it bothers me when writers talk about Jesus being willing to give His life for others right in the context of trying to tell you not to be willing to do just that in the Armed Forces. They usually couch it in terms of military service being the business of killing. They seem not to understand that the reason for our armed forces is primarily to inhibit or deter war by having forces of men ready to sacrifice themselves for others.

In regard to the scripture and military service, Luther was always quoting Jesus before Pilate when He said, "If my kingdom were ~~of~~ this world, then would my soldiers fight." But you might say, "But Jesus' kingdom and ours isn't of this world." I wish we could live all the time in the Kingdom of heaven but the fact is that we live in two kingdoms all the time and we are continually being faced with demands for sacrifices for which there is no surely good result. We are always being called upon to make decisions when the choice is between two courses of action which in God's sight are both imperfect. The real and ultimate question is whether you are willing to sacrifice and have the courage to decide. For the sacrifice can be total with either choice--in this case in military service or as a conscientious objector. God judges our actions not by their worth but by our faith.

I guess what concerns me most about the way anti-draft folks use scripture is the way they equate their position with God's word and suggest that those who don't agree haven't read or heard it. Well you have read and heard it and you know that in one place (Luke 22: 36-38) Jesus tells his disciples to buy swords. You know that the advice John the Baptist gave soldiers was not that they become conscientious objectors. You know that while Jesus surely was a turn the other cheek person, He didn't tell the centurion to quit being a military man and you know that St. Paul says that rulers bear swords as ministers of God to execute wrath against those who do evil.

Finally I'd like to encourage you to make your decision not on the basis of a narcissistic waiting until you are threatened personally by an enemy or our country is threatened by an enemy about to invade us but rather on the basis of justice and peace. On the basis of the best way to provide for justice and peace for all the world's people and not just ourselves.

If you will do that and will accept the sacrificial consequences of being a conscientious objector or a conscientious soldier, sailor, marine or airman, I'll be proud of you. If you and your friends do that I will not fear for my country's fate or the future of the church.

As in all things, seek to inform yourself fully, take it to the Lord in prayer, and allow his Holy Spirit to guide your decisions. I love you.

Dad



# THE *Lutheran*

THE MAGAZINE OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

2900 Queen Lane, Philadelphia, Pa. 19129

Editorial (215) 438-6580

Advertising (215) 438-6179

Subscription (215) 438-6193

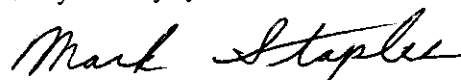
October 28, 1980

Col. Ralph C. Erchinger  
8302 Silver Ridge  
Austin, TX 78759

Dear Col. Erchinger:

At this point we want to acknowledge gratefully your fine article on the draft which we were able to run in our Nov. 5 issue. We think the two articles we've been able to carry on this subject sensitively illustrate how persons of faith can come down earnestly on different sides of an issue. Your article enabled us to provide a balanced perspective. Thanks so much for writing for us. A payment will be coming within two weeks and two copies of the magazine have been sent under separate cover for your review.

Very truly yours,



Mark A. Staples  
Managing Editor

MAS:mv

*9/20<sup>th</sup> done to ATLC.*  
*E*

November 4, 1980

Mr. Ralph C. Erchinger  
c/o Triumphant Love Church  
Austin, Texas

Re: Letter to Son concerning Draft

Dear Col. Erchinger:

There is no way I could let your letter in The Lutheran magazine go without adding my own comments. The enclosed letters are copies of those I recently sent to various persons concerning the "spiritual realm" in the Church that we have NOW entered...called the Kingdom Age.

Once you are in the Kingdom realm era, the Church Age is OVER - in its present form - having completed its course of error as did the Old Testament in the time of Christ.

The "Second Eve" event in history (which will complete the prophecies of the Old Testament) will be known in this decade and clarify many of your questions concerning the subject of "KILLING". When you quoted the Gospel of St. Luke 22: 36-38 and Jesus' remark about the sword - He did this for ONE REASON ONLY...to show that Human Beings ARE NOT TO USE THE SWORD --as He stated in the Garden of Gethsemane. If none of the disciples had carried a sword and tried to use it on the "enemy" (whom Jesus said to LOVE) we never would have known Jesus commandment of TOTAL LOVE (and HE AND THE HEAVENLY FATHER ARE ONE PERSONALITY). When Peter cut off the ear of the soldier, he gave satan a "channel" to get even with him sometime in history - which satan did in Peter's violent death through the power of deception.

ALSO, Jesus demonstrated His total knowledge both as Human (the ONLY HUMAN SO FAR IN HISTORY) and as Divine. As Divine His Heavenly Father guarded the Kingdom Age (heaven and all the power that it acknowledges) with an angel and sword--the explanation of St. Paul is sufficient--meaning the "sword of the Word" as preached in the NEW TESTAMENT (not Old).

All who kill - will be in satan's hands for satan's own pleasure through that person's soul journey in time. Parapsychology will prove this during the 1980's. You are on the brink of God's full knowledge. Deception throughout the ages has blinded all Mankind--until the Second Eve event in history. Who would better know than the soul of Eve through God's timetable of events the devastating destruction of satan's "conniving" through deceiving the mind? Until you fully understand the significance of your deception throughout all history, you will never UNDERSTAND THE LOVE OF GOD.

The enclosed documents will help broaden your knowledge. You sign your son's death warrant by encouraging him to kill--JESUS NEVER KILLED, and HE AND HIS FATHER ARE ONE PERSONALITY.

A Sister in Christ,

*Phyllis Tyson*  
Phyllis Tyson  
66 E. Grattan, Apt C  
Harrisonburg, VA 22801

P.S. I might add, I am no novice concerning demonic power. I have worked 7 years with one of Michigan's top criminal attorneys as his private secretary, typed pleading after pleading in the defense of murderers, rapists, armed robbers, etc. and also was married 24 years to a Lutheran minister. I know everything I talk about - and when you once reach the "spiritual realm" and understanding through New Testament teaching - you, too, will be horrified how deceived you have been throughout your life. May my Heavenly Father open your eyes and ears.