

November 8, 1980

The Lutheran
2900 Queen Lane
Philadelphia, Penna. 19129

Dear Editor:

Col. Ralph Erchinger's article promoting the injuring, maiming and killing of other human beings simply because the government tells us that we should is an absolute travesty. The article is intellectually shallow, factually inaccurate and theologically flawed. One might expect publication of such a piece in a military veterans magazine but not in a magazine published by a church which worships the pacifist named Jesus of Nazareth,

The example of Jesus of Nazareth should be the most dramatic and powerful lesson against the brutality of violence and death by one human being against another that exists in the written record of human civilization. His life and teachings should be profoundly moving to a person who seriously questions whether he ought to kill or hurt another human being. And Jesus' absolute, clear and incontrovertible pacifism -- from the Sermon on the Mount to his refusal to physically resist the soldiers of the high priest and the Romans -- ought to set the tone for all Christians consideration of the issues of war and peace.

What Erchinger, Ronald Reagan, and other advocates of instant and frequent military intervention in the affairs of the world have failed to do is provide a persuasive rationale for deployment of American military forces anywhere on earth. By failing to accomplish that task, they have coincidentally failed to make even a weak case justifying the use of deadly force on another human being by a person involved in the American military machine.

The concept of the "just war" was central to Luther's interpretation of Christ's teaching, and Luther even said that to participate in a war which one believes is unjust is to commit the sin of murder. Erchinger has failed to make a persuasive case that any American military involvement since World War II was just. In fact, the historical record clearly shows that every American military action since August, 1945 has been initiated on behalf of despots and has ipso facto, been therefore unjust. Not once has American military might been deployed to protect American -- or even North American -- security. And not one of the proposed areas of potential American combat -- Iran, Afghanistan, Israel, Ecuador, and the rest -- harbor any threat to America's security whatsoever. The result is that proposals to involve this country in foreign wars unrelated to our national security are proposals that we unjustly use our military force as the self-appointed policeman of the world, compelling weaker countries to do what we tell them to do simply because we have the might and that might makes right.

Conscientious objection is the most persuasive way to prevent use of American military power in an unjust way. Because of that, conscientious objection ought to be not only tolerated, but encouraged and recommended. We need to make damn sure that if and when we go to war, we have a just cause and that military action is the last -- rather than first -- resort.

It is distressing that Erchinger -- and the letter-writers previously published who seem to froth at the mouth in delight at the thought of war -- seem to have confused Mars, the god of War, with Jesus, The Prince of Peace. Military personnel are so brainwashed by the time of their discharge that it seems likely that their indoctrination supersedes their religious instruction and they mistake Jesus and his teaching as the rationale for killing and for war. To take the views of any military man seriously regarding conscientious objection or the general issues of preparedness or specific military intervention is stupid folly.

President John F. Kennedy once said of former Air Force General Curtis LeMay that "LeMay is the kind of man you want in the lead bomber when you have to go to war...but he is exactly the kind of man you don't want to have making the decision whether to go to war." That same lesson is true for Ralph Erchinger and the other military apologists who claim a birth in the Christian church.

Sincerely,

Thomas A. Prentice

THOMAS A. PRENTICE
2203 Dove Springs
Austin, Texas 78744

old Reagan, and other advocates of instant and frequent military intervention in the affairs of the world have failed to do is provide a persuasive rationale for deployment of American military forces anywhere on earth. By failing to accomplish that task, they have coincidentally failed to make even a weak case justifying the use of deadly force on another human being by a person involved in the American military machine.

The concept of the "just war" was central to Luther's interpretation of Christ's teaching, and Luther even said that to participate in a war which one believes is unjust is to commit the sin of murder. Erchinger has failed to make a persuasive case that any American military involvement since World War II was just. In fact, the historical record clearly shows that every American military action since August, 1945 has been initiated on behalf of despots and has *inco*, *f*acto, been therefore unjust. Not once has American military might been deployed to protect American -- or even North American -- security. And not one of the proposed areas of potential American combat -- Iran, Afghanistan, Israel, Bosnia, and the rest -- harbor any threat to America's security whatsoever. The result is that proposals to involve this country in foreign wars unrelated to our national security are *propos* that we unjustly use our military force as the self-appointed policeman of the world, compelling weaker countries to do what we tell them to do simply because we have the might and that might makes right.

Conscientious objection is the most persuasive way to prevent use of American military power in an unjust way. Because of that, conscientious objection ought to be not only tolerated, but encouraged and recommended. We need to make clear that if and when we go to war, we have a just cause and that military action is the last -- rather the first -- resort.