

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



24 November 1980

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

Dear Chaplain Gilbert

Well, our joint project got published. Thank you for calling after it appeared in the Lutheran. Sorry I missed you, but Ellie passed on your remarks.

I hadn't thought about a payment being made for the article. We got \$120.00. It's my intention to donate it to our church to be used for landscaping or picnic tables or something like that as we are in the early stages of building our first church structure. If you don't feel good about that, please let me know.

There's plenty of room for a much deeper study of the subject. In a forum much more could be said on both sides of the subject. I think it might be an appropriate subject for an adult bible study. Perhaps if study materials were developed such studies would be undertaken in many of our churches.

Perhaps enough controversy is being shown that the Lutheran will provide further helps for its readers as they seek answers.

I enclose two mailings I've received since publication. You may be used to such "feedback", but this is a new experience for me. A bit unsettling.

Thanks again for your quick and rapid response to my need. Seems we each helped the other in an effort of mutual concern.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ralph", is written over the word "Sincerely".

RALPH C. ERCHINGER, Colonel, USAF

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Dear Son:

(Chaplain Gilbert's)

I'll bet that since the possibility of a draft is pretty significant to you these days you have been reading those articles on it published in The Lutheran. I've been reading them too and am concerned because they 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. So I thought I'd warn you about 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 and from ^{somehow} that draw the conclusion that a person should be against anything which has to do with military service. You and I have discussed that war and it's consequences including the current fate of those poor Cambodians we left to the mercy of the Vietnamese communists and 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 and 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. George Kennan you remember always gets the credit or blame for the containment concept and Harry Truman for drawing the line. It's a policy which is very complex and includes all kinds of economic, political, diplomatic as well as military pressure and shouldn't be wiped off with an anti-military eraser as worthless. The real question today

however 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 Afganistan 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. Well 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 peoples 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 as though they did not know 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

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decisions when the choice is between two courses of action which in God's sight are both imperfect. The real question is whether you are willing to sacrifice and have the courage to decide, 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 centurian to quit being a military man and you know that St. Paul says that rulers bear swords as ministers of God to excute 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 worlds 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.

LUTHERAN COUNCIL IN THE USA

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3 December 1980

Colonel Ralph C. Erchinger, USAF
HQ Tenth AFRES
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Dear Colonel Erchinger:

No, I never get used to the hatred which seems to be in the hearts of those who cry peace. It may be helpful to you to know that when I talked to the editor of PARTNERS, the LCA publication for pastors, he told me he thought your article was beautiful. High praise!

Whatever you want to do with the money is fine with me. I knew you would get some and figured you would donate it. Just for fun, I'll say you could have considered giving it to DSMP...No, the landscaping thing is better, particularly if you tell where the money came from.

There are many forums being held on the subject. Unfortunately, most of them are being sponsored by advocates of a pacifist position, so they will not be very helpful. I feel quite frustrated about it, since I really shouldn't appear as the defender of the military. If I do it will then appear that chaplains may be judged to be militarists. A good many already consider the chaplaincy illegitimate on these grounds.

Yes, we did help each other, but I feel I'm the greater debtor.

Many thanks.

BERTRAM C. GILBERT
Assistant Executive Director
Division of Service to Military Personnel

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