

Conscientious Objection

Editor's Note: *The following essay is an abridged version of the booklet of the same name published by the Apostolic Christian Publishing company. It is the work of one of the Braun Brothers of the Syracuse, NY congregation, and was most likely prepared as an official filing with the U.S. Government's Selective Service System (military draft board) on behalf of the Apostolic Christian Church (Nazarean). The content was dictated to a secretary and recorded in shorthand, creating some negligible discrepancies in the biblical quotations.*

The original purpose of this document was two-fold: To delineate our denomination's stance on the limitation to non-combatant war service, and to extend the claim of conscientious objector protection to those among our congregations who at the precise moment of military call-up were not yet actual "members", but who nevertheless who had made known, or had given some declaration or testimony of, their desire and intention to become members. These were known as "Friends of the Truth".

The document has been reprinted here, as an unaltered excerpt, for the purpose of demonstrating our denomination's biblical and historical position with regards to warfare, and a reflection of our beliefs as outlined in point number twelve of our Statement of Faith: WE BELIEVE that government is ordained of God to enforce law and order and to prevent evil works. Government should, therefore, be supported and obeyed. Laws and ordinances - local, state and national - are to be respected and conscientiously obeyed, except when to do so violates the commandment of God. The call to military service, likewise, is to be respected and obeyed, but with the limitation to non-combatant service, as taught by Jesus Christ; "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." Matthew 5:44, Romans 13:1-10, I Peter 2:13-15

It is undeniable that if the nature of the Christian dispensation were fully understood and if the law by which it is regulated were exactly obeyed, conversion would be uniformly accompanied with abstaining from taking up arms for the shedding of human blood, for it was the Lord Jesus Himself who promulgated these principles and promulgated them as distinguishing His dispensation from that of the law. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you—That ye resist not evil; but whosoever should smite thee on the right cheek turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at law and take away thy coat let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. Ye have heard that it hath been said Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy, but I say unto you Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be the children of the Father which is in Heaven, for He maketh the sun to shine on the evil and on the good and the rain on the just and the unjust. For if you love them which love you, do not even the publicans do the same? And if you salute your brethren only, what do you more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect." *Matthew 5:38-48. (Compare Luke 6:27-29).*

The Apostle Peter commands the believer not to render "evil for evil nor railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing." *I Peter 3:9.* And Paul says: "Dearly beloved avenge not yourself but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine." I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him, if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good." *Romans 12:19-21.* By these commands, our Lord has laid His axe to the root so that believers may be

brought, by obedience, to a conformity with the attributes of the Father and thus also were established certain principles, which if honestly observed, will put an end to every evil practice; these principles, if carried out, cannot fail to show the error of shedding human blood.

The great law of Christ, which His disciples are ever bound to obey, is the law of love. And since war can never be reconciled with this law of love, it is indisputable that where the love is, human destruction must cease.

The clear duty of every believer (or Friend of the Truth) is to obey this law of love without wavering and on every occasion. If these believers and friends are surrounded by a host of enemies, however violent and malicious these enemies may be, the Christian law must still be unbroken. According to the law of Christ it is the duty of individual believers to abstain from taking human life nor can they set aside such a course if they follow the law of love or these fundamental rules, these eternal unchangeable principles.

This is the stand taken by the Apostolic Christian Church (Nazarean) that all participation in this shedding of human blood is forbidden by Christ and especially by that condition of it which enjoins the love of our enemies. We must, in order to do full justice to the subject of conscientious objection, turn to another equally important principle which makes irreconcilable the practice of participating in combative duty, with the true character of a believer. This principle is that human life is sacred and that death is followed by infinite results.

Those who read the words of Jesus and the Apostles can no longer hide from themselves the fact that man is born for eternity, that when his body dies his soul ascends into paradise or is cast into condemnation and after the day of resurrection and judgment, they shall also reap the eternal reward of obedience or disobedience.

Believers (and Friends of the Truth), who read and understand this must acknowledge that the future welfare of a man is of greater importance than the present temporal welfare of an entire nation and these take upon themselves a most serious responsibility when they cut short the days of their neighbor and transmit him, prepared or unprepared, to the awful realities of an everlasting state.

Since the New Testament clearly declares that the Kingdom of Christ is not of this world and that His followers are not after the flesh, we believe that for one man to kill another is unlawful under Christ's dispensation.

On such grounds our Believers (and Friends of the Truth) consider it to be their Christian duty to abstain for the practice of combative warfare.

For the true believers or those who have been truly converted, for those who are seeking the truth, for those who would "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth", for them the shedding of human blood is never right.

Far better that one should lay down his own life because of his convictions, derived from true teachings, than for one to allow himself to be instrumental in the taking of another's life. The Apostolic Christian Church (Nazarean) Congregation believes that according to the Word of God, believers shall refrain from taking up arms for the shedding of human blood.

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