

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

A Social Document of the
ULCA



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

A Series of Statements of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1940, 1944, 1946

1940: Minutes, 12th Biennial Convention, ULCA, pp. 138, 345.

The position of The United Lutheran Church in America, based upon the Scriptures and interpreted by its Confessions, may be summarized as follows:

1. It is the function of the Christian Church to proclaim the Gospel of Redemption and Peace.
2. It is the duty of the Christian citizen to obey and support lawful government. Concerning such duty we hold what is plainly taught by Scripture and stated in the Church's Confessions, that "lawful civil ordinances are good works of God,... it is right for Christians to bear civil office, to sit as judges,... to engage in just wars, to serve as soldiers, to make legal contracts, to hold property, to make oath ... save only when commanded to sin, for then they ought to obey God rather than man." Augsburg Confession, Article XVI. Romans 13: 1-7; I Peter 2:13-17; Titus 3:1; Matthew 22:17-21; Acts 5:29.
3. We hold not only that a justifiable war may be possible, but that the Christian citizen is in duty bound to bear arms and to offer his life if need be in defense of his country.
4. We believe that the conscience of the individual, informed and inspired by the Word of God, is the final authority in determining conduct. Acts 5:29. Conscientiousness is one of the essential virtues of good citizenship. Therefore, under this evangelical principle of freedom of conscience we recognize the individual right to conscientious objection to service in a war. Such recognition does not imply the church's approval of such conscientious objection but does proclaim its devotion and respect for the Scriptural principle of the supreme moral responsibility of the individual conscience. Acts 5:29. As the exponent and defender of Christian principle the Church must respect and safeguard the right of the Christian in his exercise of that responsibility. The obvious difficulties involved, such as the abuse of the principle by hypocrites using conscience as a cloak for cowardice, does not excuse the Church from its sacred obligation of defending the principle at stake. They do challenge the Church to special care in judging the spirit and motives of those who may call

upon the Church for safeguarding in such a position. They also challenge all Christians to a heart-searching study of what the Word of God and the witness of the Church teach concerning the duties of the Christian citizen to the State. We reiterate that duty to be loyal support and service to the nation whose protection and benefits be enjoys.

5. Therefore we recommend that The United Lutheran Church in America provide that communicant members of our churches, who are conscientious objectors, may file with the Executive Board a written statement as to their position. Such filing shall be done through their pastors and the presidents of their synods.

1944: Minutes, 14th Biennial Convention, ULCA, pp. 347, 397.

That, while the Church does not acknowledge any legal responsibility for the support of its members who are in camps for conscientious objectors, yet it authorize the Board of Social Missions to create and establish a fund to meet the financial support of such conscientious objectors and their dependents as are not able to support themselves, such fund to be raised from sources other than money received on the Income Objective of the Church and the fund to be disbursed by the Board of Social Missions on the basis of information obtained by that Board.

1946: Minutes, 15th Biennial Convention, ULCA, pp. 461, 467.

The Convention resolved:

That the Church approve the release of conscientious objectors from Civilian Public Service Camps in the same ratio as men are being released from the armed services of the country.

That the Church urge the proper authorities that rather than maintain conscientious objectors in camps on unproductive projects their labors be utilized on farms and in other institutions where labor is sorely needed and that these men be properly compensated for such work.

That we urge Federal authorities the granting of amnesty and the restoration of civil and political rights to all men imprisoned because of conscientious objection to the war.