



CENTRAL ATLANTIC CONFERENCE
FRANCIS X. PIRAZZINI, CONFERENCE MINISTER

October 25, 1967

Church Council
United Evangelical Church
United Church of Christ
East Avenue and Dillon Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21224

Dear Brethren:

Your August letter to me regarding the Pronouncement on Selective Conscientious Objection has been on my mind and heart since receiving it in September upon my return from summer vacation. I have not hastened to respond to it for two reasons. One is that the Rev. Warren T. Hilfiker, Associate Conference Minister, did address a reply to Pastor Rasche that I assume has been shared with all of you. The other is that I have been waiting for a time when I could sit down and prepare an adequate reply.

I. My first response is similar to the one stated by Mr. Hilfiker in his letter to you of August 10, written upon receipt of a copy of the letter from the Council. It is a response I should describe for myself as a deep disturbance caused by the real message and spirit of the letter, which is not that the Council disagrees with the position of selective conscientious objection. The real message of the letter is that the Council is intolerant of those in the Church who believe in the rightness of selective conscientious objection -- intolerant to the point of accusing them of possible treason and immorality, and of promoting cowardice. The appearance of such intolerance in the Church is the primary issue raised by this letter, and not the recording of a difference of opinion on selective conscientious objection.

Note the language used by the Council: "We have noted with shock, outrage and a profound sense of shame... the adoption of this 'Pronouncement' borders on treason... our implacable opposition... morally reprehensible and cowardly... must be expunged from the record." That kind of language, when used against either one's

brothers in the faith or one's countrymen, is the language of intolerance - the language of bigoted extremists who, in their blindness, can see no other understanding save their own, and who end up regarding as a righteous crusade the extermination of all opposition. That kind of language falls from the lips of members of the White Citizens Council, the John Birch Society, the Ku Klux Klan, the NKVD, and the S. A. I am not implying by this that the members of the Council are bigoted extremists. I am implying that their languages indicates a frightening bent toward such an unfortunate position. The appearance of this bent in the church tears my soul.

Consider some of those who are being maligned by the Council. The 131 delegates to the Third Annual Meeting of the Conference who voted for the Pronouncement. This simple majority represented only Christian brethren of whom I was one, and another was a high ranking officer serving in the Pentagon, who came to the Annual Meeting fiercely opposed to the position of selective conscientious objection, but who ended up voting for the Pronouncement because his understanding was changed as he participated in the dialogue at the Annual Meeting. Is the Council accusing them of treason and immorality? Then there are the 305 delegates to the Sixth General Synod who voted for the Pronouncement. Is the Council accusing them of treason and immorality? And what of such persons as Dr. Gabriel J. Fackre, a member of the Council for Christian Social Action and Professor of Theology and Culture at Lancaster Theological Seminary; Dr. Lewis I. Maddocks, a political scientist and Director of the Washington office of the Council for Christian Social Action; Dr. Roger L. Shinn, Professor of Applied Christianity and Dean of Instruction at Union Theological Seminary? Are they and others guilty of treason and immorality?

II. My second response is to raise a question as to the basic concern underlying this statement of the Council. Is it patriotic or theological? The tenor of the statement sounds as if it were penned by members of The American Legion or The Daughters of the American Revolution rather than the Council of a Christian congregation. I find the phrase "national and Christian loyalty and service" pertinent in this regard. It suggests that the authors believe them synonymous. They may be, but more often they are not. In a profound sense, Christians are aliens in any country in this world. Their ultimate allegiance is to the Lord of men and nations who is no respecter of national boundaries. In His eyes this is one world and one

human family. The Church in America is not the religious custodian of this nation's beliefs and values. The Church here is part of God's community of faith in this world called to serve Him. When the beliefs and values of the nation agree with those of the Kingdom of God, it is cause for rejoicing. When they do not, the Church must be prepared to suffer for what it knows to be a higher good.

Granted that "the life's blood of the youth of this nation is being shed in an alien land"; granted that "the treasure of our people is being consumed in incredible measure", and granted the threat of communism in Southeast Asia, there are those of us in the Church who deeply believe that we must fight for a cause so profound, that it cannot be set aside even though it mean either endangering the national community or risking persecution of the Church by the national community, or both, namely, the freedom and integrity of every individual under God. This is the ground of selective conscientious objection. If the cause of individual freedom and integrity is lost at home, it matters little that America achieve military victory abroad.

III. My third response addresses itself to the charge that selective conscientious objection is "administratively unworkable." I disagree. I grant that it would be difficult to administrate, but the preservation of individual integrity and freedom is difficult business. Are we to compel certain persons to act against their own conscience because of an administrative difficulty? The fact of the matter is that in Britain the difficulty has been handled.

IV. My fourth response addresses itself to the charge that selective conscientious objection is "legally unsound." I am neither an attorney nor a political scientist, therefore I cannot respond forthrightly on this score. However, Dr. Maddocks, who formulated the original statement which was mailed out to the congregations of the United Church on March 10, is a political scientist and a student of constitutional law. I have consulted with him and with others, and I have done some reading on this matter. I am learning that it may be the present situation of discrimination against the selective conscientious objector which is illegal. A recent article in The Christian Century for September 27, 1967, written by Dr. Walter Arnold, who teaches philosophy at Hunter College in New York City, argues that the present law discriminating against selective objectors is unconstitutional. He writes, in part:

"Moreover, perhaps the only indisputable 'natural right' is the right everyone has to be taken seriously as to his

deepest convictions. That is not to say that it would always be for the general welfare to allow everyone freedom of action on his deepest convictions, except insofar as these touch other basic liberties and rights. And as in the case of pacifists, it is for the good of the nation and in the public interest that the right of selective objectors be legally recognized, certainly if the United States wishes to continue as a democratic republic. I would argue therefore that the present law discriminating against selective objectors is unconstitutional.

"For the fact remains - after all the economic and social motives and all the historical inconsistencies have been duly noted - that this country was settled and this nation founded in order to give scope to individual freedom of conscience and belief. Aside from the portions of the Constitution which create the machinery of the federal system, the right and powers listed in this document are largely means of protecting important individual and social interests, among them rights of conscience. As Chief Justice Harlan Fiske Stone observed in 1919, in the aftermath of the terrible suppression of basic freedoms during World War I: 'Both morals and sound policy require that the state should not violate the conscience of the individual. All our history gives confirmation to the view that liberty of conscience has a moral and social value which makes it worthy of preservation at the hands of the state.' Until now, at least, all our institutions have been so ordered that the dictum 'one should obey God rather than man' was not understood to be treasonable, and that Thoreau's 'We are men first and only at a late and convenient hour, Americans' needed no apology. "

V. My fifth response addresses itself to the charge that selective conscientious objection is "morally reprehensible and cowardly." One could argue persuasively that the immorality may rest with those who refuse the right of an individual to make a moral decision that differs from that of the government; that it is immoral to require a man to turn his conscience over to the state. As to the position of selective objection being cowardly, one could argue here that it may require more courage to disagree with the judgment of the majority or of the government in power, than to agree and go to war.

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VI. I am wondering if the intent of the particular resolution calling upon the Church to provide information, assistance, and counsel to the selective conscientious objector has not been misunderstood by the Council. This is not a call to the Church to promote selective conscientious objection. Bear in mind that the United Church is not a pacifist church. It is a call to offer the same kind of Christian understanding and help to the person who has decided that he cannot conscientiously participate in a particular war as is now offered to the conscientious objector to all wars.

VII. If the Central Atlantic Conference or an instrumentality of the denomination should speak for selective conscientious objection, the claim would not be made that the agency is speaking for the entire constituency. And where there is a clear division of opinion, this situation is invariably noted with honesty in any statement made.

VIII. One last response to the criticism leveled at the Council for Christian Social Action, namely, "a group which might better expend its energies in the urban areas of this country and leave foreign and military affairs to those who understand and are qualified. . . ." In point of fact, the members of the Council do understand foreign and military affairs and are qualified to guide the Church in these areas. Further, they consult with persons who have special competence and experience on the issue under consideration before they do speak. As I stated above, and as an example, Dr. Maddocks is a disciplined political scientist who has specialized in constitutional law. Or, Dr. Alan F. Geyer, another member of the Council's staff, is a brilliant student of international relations. As a matter of fact, there are times when upon hearing or reading some of the statements made by our legislators and others in government, I find myself wishing that men like Maddocks and Geyer were serving in the government rather than in the Church.

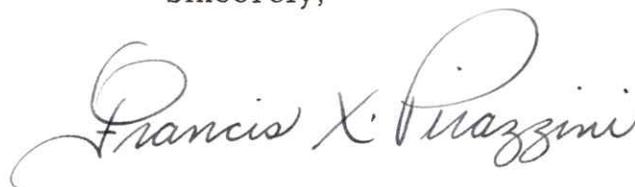
I apologize for the delay in responding to your letter, even as I express the hope that this exchange will prove helpful to both of us. I cannot urge you too strongly to continue your considerations of this issue. It is continued and careful probing and study which is needed here, and not vituperations. One suggestion I should make to you is the structuring of an occasion when you could meet with either Dr. Maddocks or Dr. Geyer and enter into dialogue on this question. If possible, Mr. Hilfiker and I both should like to participate in such an

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occasion. I am sure it could be arranged, and it would be most helpful to all concerned. I should be pleased to aid you in arranging it. If this is done, it should not be crowded into some evening, but it should take place on a weekend when we could give it at least three or four hours.

One last word, I deeply regret that it was not possible for me to accept the invitation to be the preacher on September 17 on the occasion of the 94th Birthday of United Evangelical Church. I do hope that in the near future you will provide me with another opportunity to worship with you on a Sunday morning.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Francis X. Pirazzini". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned centrally on the page, below the word "Sincerely,".

Francis X. Pirazzini

FXP:hpb

cc: Dr. Ben M. Herbster
Rev. Warren T. Hilfiker
Rev. Ray Gibbons
Rev. Kenneth B. Wyatt



St. John's United Church of Christ

S. Rolling Road at Wilkens Avenue, Catonsville
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21228

H. A. W. SCHAEFFER, D.D.,
Pastor

Due to the release of news items which appear to have the approval of all the various churches which are affiliated with the United Church of Christ, We, the Church Council of St. John's United Church of Christ, affiliated desire to make it known to the President, and Executive Council of the United Church of Christ;

Disturbed by the many press releases given in national and local newspapers, news periodicals, and by radio and television, which tend to create unwarranted public impressions that the various boards, councils, and committees of the United Church of Christ are speaking for each and every congregation who is affiliated with the United Church of Christ;

We therefore request that when public statements, pronouncements, resolutions, or reports of committees or individuals are released for publication, that the said releases clearly stipulate by whom the releases were made and by whom authorized, and that the releases themselves state clearly and concisely that the committees or individuals responsible for the releases are speaking entirely for themselves under their guaranteed constitutional rights, and are not speaking for the United Church of Christ as a body or for every congregation which is a member thereof;

We further respectfully request that in the event releases so published give the impression that the statement, resolution, or pronouncement is the opinion of the entire United Church of Christ, even though incorrectly reported, that the individual, board, or committee, respectively, issue and make a forthright public correction in the original media in which the erroneous impression has been circulated, even if paid advertisement to correct is necessary.



St. John's United Church of Christ

S. Rolling Road at Wilkens Avenue, Catonsville
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21228

H. A. W. SCHAEFFER, D.D.,
Pastor

October 12, 1967.

To whom it may concern:

On September 28th, the Church Council of St. John's United Church of Christ voted affirmatively to accept the inclosed proposal. Also, to distribute it to those in authority of our denomination and to fellow pastors of the Chesapeake Association. We would welcome your comments.

Sincerely,

The Executive Committee
of St. John's.

THE LOCKTOWN CHRISTIAN CHURCH
R. D. 2, Flemington, N. J.
08822
November 6, 1967

Dear Dr. Herbster,

This is to advise you that a special meeting of our congregation was called on November 1 to consider the shocking comments of Dr. Willis Elliott, of the staff of the Board of Homeland Ministries, made on WOR on August 10, 1967. A copy of his remarks is enclosed. You will note among other things that Dr. Elliott:

1. Encourages the use of terrorism in our cities.
2. Feels that Jesus made mistakes in His teachings.
3. Calls the President of the United States and our fighting men "war criminals".

The congregation discussed this matter for three hours and decided that, because of these remarks and other undesirable words and actions of other officials of the United Church of Christ, this congregation will:

1. Immediately discontinue financial support to the denomination.
2. Immediately decline any future financial support from the denomination.
3. Notify the officers of the denomination of our protest.
4. Consider a resolution to withdraw from the United Church of Christ at the next stated congregational meeting.

We realize that we are a small Church and that our voice may not be heard. Nevertheless we feel that this action is necessary in view of our desire to remain faithful to Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and our country.

I am sending a copy of this letter to all U.C.C. pastors in the Central Atlantic Conference for their information.

Sincerely,

Ralph D. Waters
Pastor