

Sir,

It is my belief that it would benefit you as well as myself to provide some account of the events which transpired that have culminated in my standing before you as the defendant facing charges of desertion and missing movement. As I am certain is usually the case when a person is on trial, I find it will take some thorough narration to make my rationale and moral justification perspicuous. I would like to begin some years ago so that I can describe the nature of my life and person and the circumstances which motivated me to enlist in the military.

When I was about 15 years old my parents made the decision to evict me from my house, or what could be accurately be termed "their house". In of itself this is no reflection of my person as in previous years my older siblings were disposed of in similar fashion. At any rate, I moved in with a good friend of mine in his grandfather's house. Removed from the control of my parents I quickly discovered that life at my friend's house provided a near limitless freedom. Without anyone to dictate the course of my life I created my own rules of conduct; I attended school only when I wanted to, I used drugs or alcohol whenever the mood struck me, I associated and became involved in the affairs of persons who were malign influences. In short, I began to live with no regard for the needs or wants of anyone other than myself. In this haze of wickedness I lost sight of the God I was raised to love and revere. Yet it was not with reluctance that I watched him depart from me but rather with a certain satisfaction at having buried the last vestiges of moral restraint that I possessed. However, my juvenile revelry was one that was not made to last. Paradise came crashing down upon me suddenly when, in an awkward turn of events, my friend and benefactor was unexpectedly evicted from his own home. I was

permitted, temporarily, to remain in the house at least until I could move to a new residence.

As I pondered my next habitation I soon embraced the bleak reality that I had no where to turn to. I knew of no one who was willing to provide for me and at 16 I still lacked the faculties to substantiate myself. At some point the idea dawned upon me that enlisting in the armed forces could be the solution to my predicament. I set my mind upon this course of action and within the next few weeks was able to secure a high school diploma and turn the requisite 17 years old.

On July 6, 2005 I found myself beginning one station unit training in Fort Knox, Kentucky for the occupational specialty cavalry scout. Needless to say being deprived of even the most basic freedoms for the duration of 16 weeks was not an experience I relished. Fortunately, however, being constantly occupied with new and diverse tasks eases the passage of time and I soon found myself among the graduating class of Alpha Troop 5-15.

My first duty station was an assignment to the Stryker Brigade in Fort Lewis, Washington. Once again free to experience the civilian world I eagerly resumed my former habits and vices. There is a definite proclivity in the Army, at least among the lower enlisted, to live life very much for the moment. This generally manifests itself in the form of drinking binges, promiscuity and general rowdiness. As you can imagine I felt very much so at home in my new environment. I spent 8 months in Ft Lewis before our regiment reflagged to 2<sup>nd</sup> SCR and moved to Rose Barracks in Germany. Once there, a new range of opportunity became available due to the relative lack of drinking age requirements in Bavaria. I threw caution to wind and enthusiastically plunged headlong

into the world of bars and nightclubs. My reckless nature, amplified by gratuitous portions of alcohol became the catalyst to much aggression and violence. My friends and I would commonly find ourselves involved in fistfights inside bars or outside in the streets surrounding them. It wasn't long after arriving in Vilseck that I was struck with a beer glass and received 12 stitches in my face. Even now I bear the scars which serve as reminders of my foolishness and arrogance.

Life persisted in this haphazard manner until about a year and a half ago when I found myself home in Connecticut enjoying December block leave. An older sister of mine had been for some time engaged to a man named Dustin. He was an intelligent and charismatic fellow and, although I wouldn't say we were especially close, in the time I had known him grown quite fond of him. On New Year's Eve Dustin found himself at a house party in Hartford that consisted mostly of high school students and people in their early 20's. Dustin had already been there for some time and drank considerably when he became entangled in a dispute with another partygoer. Their irritation mounted as insults were exchanged and the eventually came to blows. In the scuffle the high school student, a 17 year old boy, drew a knife and stabbed Dustin repeatedly in the chest before fleeing. Dustin's brother, who witnessed the scene, immediately placed a 911 call. The dispatcher told his brother to bring him to the end of the street in order to facilitate a faster transfer. Dustin's brother did as he was instructed; he carried him to their car and drove to the corner of the road. As they waited for the ambulance, Dustin died in his brother's arms.

News of his passing brought to me strong feelings of loss and sadness as well as an acute dissatisfaction with the harsh reality of death. While I sat on pondered on these things, I began to gravitate towards a mood of introspection. I couldn't help but to see in

Dustin a close resemblance of myself. My life, my actions and choices, my attitude and demeanor, the way I dealt with anger and confrontation, what I considered to be a good time, these all seemed to be reflected in Dustin. What then can we designate as the fruits of this lifestyle? Sorrow, pain, anger, frustration, death. I suddenly imagined myself as having died and then been resurrected on the Day of Judgment. In my vision I stand before a great white throne and the glory of the one who sits upon it shines so that his face cannot be seen. Though my eyes are transfixed upon the throne I am aware of the presence of something around me. I stand inside a tremendous sea, vast beyond measure and yet calm and still. I do not drift in this tide but rather am one of the infinite particles that comprises it. This sea is the dead. All the souls of those whose mortal bodies have returned to earth stand in wait with me. Tomes, upon which the deeds of the dead are written, are brought forth and opened in our presence. I can make out that one of them is inscribed "the Book of Life". Suddenly my name is spoken and though it resounds like booming thunder I cannot tell from where it comes. The sound of the voice is piercing and unlike any I have ever heard and I fall upon my face and tremble in fear. I see now that the one who speaks is a snow white lamb who sits positioned at the right hand of the throne. The lamb continues "How often have I desired to shelter you under my wings, why did you not heed my call?"

What does one answer when they have forsaken righteousness at every turn? How does one respond? Sorry I just couldn't fit you into my busy life, I would have gone to the sermon but I was hung-over, I was ashamed to confess your name before my peers, I honored you with my lips but alas my heart was far from you. These answers do not merit entrance through the gates of life into God's Kingdom. Narrow indeed is the gate and

hard the road that lead to life. It was there that I made the decision to rededicate my life to God and to obey his commandments.

But where to start? One need only open a bible to find God's word which he inspired righteous men to transcribe in ancient times. Years had passed since the last time I read scripture or entered into a church so I approached my task with a sort of naivety. This innocence, however, protected me from applying any preconceived notions or biases in my discernment of the underlying meaning in the passages. What I deduced need not fit with any denominational creed or particular theology, I merely sought the earnest truth. Day after day I poured over the scriptures growing slowly but surely in my knowledge of righteousness. The principles I saw taught in the books of the New Testament became as binding precepts to me. I strove to always uphold them even though, in some instances it seemed that rigid adherence could only make my life more difficult. Occasionally I came across a commandment that was difficult to understand or that I didn't really know how to put into practice. One issue in particular proved to confound me despite the full application of my resources directed towards deciphering it. There exists a thoroughly prominent message in the New Testament of employing a peaceful and loving response in the face of even the harshest adversity. Jesus in the sermon on the mount preaches, "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 shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." Later he expounds, "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." When Simon Peter attacked a soldier of the High Priest Jesus rebukes him saying, "Put up again thy sword into his place: for all

they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.” Pontius Pilate cannot understand why he would not resort to the use of violence. Jesus explains to him, “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.” Paul in his second letter to the church in Corinth writes “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.” Elsewhere in his letter to the church in Rome Paul writes, “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, 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.”

What then is one to make of these verses and many other of a similar nature? Given their frequency they most certainly cannot be tossed aside and forgotten or ignored. Could we perhaps relegate them to empty rhetoric by insisting that because they are not practical they must not be taken literally? Unfortunately there is nothing in their context to suggest that they were intended for a symbolic or metaphorical interpretation. But to take it to the obvious conclusion that injurious force be rejected no matter what the cost would violate our most basic instinct. To renounce violence is to defy our nature and society’s rule that self defense is a fundamental and inalienable right. It is universally understood that the use of lethal force to defend ones self, ones family and one’s country is a noble and righteous cause. Could God’s will really be so diametrically opposed to human convention?

It occurred to me that I couldn't be the first person to find himself in this predicament. I went online and discovered that a wealth of literature had been written on the subject of Christian pacifism. I purchased and read through works by prominent and well respected theologians such as John Roth, John Howard Yoder, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Leo Tolstoy, among others. I spent some weeks in deep study of Christian treatises, close scrutiny of the scriptures, and ventured even into the study of pacifism in the early Christian church from first hand sources such as Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Tertullian, Hippolytus, and Origen. Above all else however I put stock in the power of my prayer and communion with God. I felt convinced that the holy spirit would guide me to the truth that had so far remained a mystery. At long last I came to the conclusion that even to this day I hold firmly. It is my sincere and wholehearted belief that willfully taking the life of another human being is entirely immoral and sinful. It follows that any action of rendering assistance, however slight, to the cause of taking life must in of itself also be wrong.

Needless to say these beliefs are absolutely incompatible with service in the military. With the assistance of a non-profit Mennonite organization, I began the long and arduous process of seeking recognition as a conscientious objector. After submitting the requisite paperwork the first task I faced was to be interviewed and scrutinized by an army chaplain. Captain Carrothers was appointed and I spoke with him until he felt satisfied that he had enough information to make an authoritative recommendation. He concluded, as you will observe in my 'good soldier' portfolio, that I am genuinely and sincerely opposed to the taking of life and participation in warfare. For the next step the army assigned an officer, Captain Smith, to serve as an investigating officer for my case.

His job was not especially concerned with the theological particulars of my beliefs but rather to ascertain how I conducted myself in my public and private life. He set about his task by interviewing everyone who had regular contact with me. He collected sworn statements from my roommate, my friends, my first-line supervisor, my platoon sergeant, my platoon leader, my troop commander, my troop 1<sup>st</sup> sergeant and so forth. Next he conducted a formal hearing where I answered his queries under sworn oath. Upon completion of the inquest Captain Smith examined all the evidence he had gathered and submitted a summary. In this report, which is also included in my portfolio, he recommends approval based on his findings that I have a firm, fixed, and sincere objection to participation in war and the bearing of arms.

While I waited for the next in the process my unit began deployment to Iraq. I had initially planned to resist but after submitting the matter to the Lord in prayer I decided against it. The CO proceedings hadn't been completed so I would have denied the army system a fair chance to operate. Moreover, I felt that the only time I would be justified in breaking the law would be when I had exhausted every legal means and had no alternative.

Once downrange the process resumed with every member of my chain of command providing their own recommendations. These officers, most of whom had never met or spoken with me, determined unanimously that I should not be granted CO status and wrote their statements to that effect. From there my application moved to the final deciding authority, the Department of the Army Conscientious Objector Review Board. In spite of my best efforts and the strong evidence presented in my favor the board

decided against me with a vote to 2 to 1. With my application denied I had two courses of action open to me. I could abandon my sentiments, my beliefs and my faith and continue serving in the army for the sake of avoiding any legal repercussions or incarceration. Or conversely I could stay true to my convictions and refuse to participate in service that I believed to be inherently wrong and against the will of God even at the price of my freedom. Certainly it is true that a man cannot serve two masters. What then should a Christian do when they are asked to choose between loyalty to the state and allegiance to their God? Fortunately a scan of the bible reveals many instances of how to respond in such a situation and there is one in particular that I would like to recount.

The author of the book of Daniel tells us that Daniel was a devout and God fearing man. God blessed Daniel for his piety and gave him the power to interpret dreams and visions. It was this gift that led Daniel to become highly favored with King Belshazzar who appointed him to be one of the 3 rulers of his kingdom. Shortly thereafter, Belshazzar was slain in his sleep and his successor Darius took the throne. Darius recognized the excellent spirit within Daniel and determined to set him over his whole realm. This provoked the other lords and rulers within the kingdom to such jealousy that they sought to destroy him through subtlety. They learned that there could be found no fault in him with regard to his public office so instead they plotted to use his faith against him. They knew that he prayed to God every day without fail so they created a proposal for a royal edict whereby, for the space of 30 days, no man could petition except it be unto the king. Darius, out of his vanity, signed the proposal into law enacting a penalty of death for any who were caught violating its precepts. Despite the prospect of a horrific and gruesome death in a lion's den Daniel determined to continue

steadfastly in his supplications unto God without so much as attempting to conceal them. On the following day, as was Daniel's custom, he opened the windows in his chamber, kneeled down facing the direction of Jerusalem and gave thanks to God. When he was seen by his enemies to have done this they brought him before Dairus who commanded that he be delivered to the lions. He was cast into the den and a great stone was moved to seal its entrance. The next morning when the king returned to the lion's den he discovered that Daniel was yet still alive. The king was overjoyed and commanded that he be brought out of the den. Because Daniel had trusted in God he was protected and not a single mark was found on his body.

When I thought of Daniel I knew that I had only to stay faithful to God and to put his word before and man made laws. I decided that I would not return from r & r leave as I was scheduled to, but rather desert the army and return at a later date to accept the consequences of my actions. I have laid all this before you so that you may observe that my actions were not hasty or reckless nor were they carried out with spite or contempt. I hope that you can see that I took no pleasure in transgressing the law and that I only resorted to it when I had no remaining avenue for legally pursuing the recognition and preservation of my beliefs. While I stand here a convicted and disgraced man, I have hope because I know that there is a judge higher than any on this earth and it is before him that I desire to be exonerated. More important than anything else is the knowledge that I have done right in the sight of God.

The book of Acts records that the apostles were taken by the temple soldiers before a council of the Sadducees, an aristocratic Jewish sect who held civil

authority. The high priest questions them saying, “We strictly charged you not to preach in this name and behold you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching.” But Peter and the apostles answered and said “We must obey God rather than men”.