

To the Meeting and all whom it may concern,

As it stands, I am now registered for the United States Selective Service. As is required by law, if my country decides that it needs me in the armed forces, I have no choice but to comply. Although I respect those who have made the choice to join the military, following my own moral rules as influenced by Quaker values and the Christian teaching to love my neighbor I cannot intentionally harm another human being regardless of the purpose. I believe that there is no situation where it is justifiable to kill another person, no matter the circumstance. As such, I am requesting status as a conscientious objector.

Quakerism has been an integral part of my life, and I draw my values and moral guidance from our Quaker testimonies and from the Meeting. Due to conflicts between the desire to right wrongs and the desire to protect life, the question of a 'just war' or similar is one steeped in controversy. I recognize that throughout history there are many atrocities that lend themselves to the justification of war; however, the concept of a just war relies on the idea that it is sometimes justifiable to take someone's life from them. It is not. All people have a spark of the divine within them, and I refuse to extinguish that sacred light for any reason. Therefore, I am a committed pacifist. I have heard many counter arguments to pacifism: if there are atrocities being committed, is it not moral to intervene? The real life significance of pacifism hinges on considering a broader picture. Violence begets more violence, and the only successful way of preventing atrocities is not to kill those committing them but to create an environment where people are not pushed to a state of desperation where they would consider those atrocities justifiable.

To say that a war is 'just' requires one side to have the moral high ground, yet once the first life is damaged beyond repair from one's actions all claim to moral superiority is forfeit. The lesser of two evils is still evil, and, indeed, the choice never comes down to such a stark binary; there is always another way. Perhaps a more fitting analogy would be this: if you saw a liferaft where one person is attacking another for their meager food, would you kill the attacker so that the other could survive just a few days more, or would you rescue them both? The core of pacifism is simple: all people have but one life, and it is not morally defensible to take that from anyone.

The most trying yet crucial part of Quakerism and Christian teachings is to love not just your friends but also your enemies. It is difficult to follow at times because it is antithetical to the concept of an enemy. And yet there is no one that is so evil that they do not deserve love in some degree; they may be dangerous or despicable but ultimately it is not justifiable to kill or hurt them. People always point to Hitler as the epitome of an evil human being—surely there is no case to be made that Hitler should not have been shot on sight? However, to say that one would shoot Hitler if they had the chance ignores a tragic but omnipresent fact: any act of violence—even before WWII—would not solve the systematic and debilitating socioeconomic problems facing post-WWI Germany. If a time machine is ever built, perhaps instead of vowing to kill Hitler it would be more wise to go back and to help the people of Germany rebuild instead of letting them wallow in poverty? Desperate people are dangerous people, and so to remove the danger it is unhelpful to attack and make them fear for their lives but rather to help them be secure

and no longer feel the need to instate fascist regimes or commit horrible acts for their own security.

The fact that war exists is a symptom of a larger, flawed whole that has roots in inequality and thrives on strife and violence. The only way to stop the cycle of suffering is to exhibit compassion and to acknowledge that it is not justifiable to kill and that there is always another way. I affirm my faith that if we all choose to love our enemies, war and violence would cease and we would move closer to when the lion would lie next to the lamb. As such, I request that I be recognized as a conscientious objector.

Respectfully,
Finn James