

Conscientious Objector Letter - Liliana Wuerth

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Chapel Hill Friends Meeting

Until I sat down to write, I always thought my conscientious objector letter would be much longer. It is my nature to explore every aspect of an argument, to anticipate and to respond to any counterargument. Yet, while I wrote this, it seemed much more simple.

I understand that conflict is inevitable. I understand that there will be rifts along the lines of religion, policy, culture, and morality. I understand that some such rifts call for action, discipline, or condemnation: a solution. I cannot accept that any such solution should entail the destruction of human life—either of “our own” or of “the opposition.” The loss of life is always a net loss for all parties involved. Every battle is lost. Every war is lost.

We often equate killing with championing a cause; the idea is that a victory that derives from death can still be a victory because it symbolizes some greater morality or ideal. But the individual lives lost are not abstract like ideas. They are flesh and spirit. They are made up of their ties to family and friends, their memories, their experience, their suffering. You are not killing an idea, you are killing a real live human being.

It is a common sentiment, especially in liberal circles, that the “other” party in a war is “like us,” separated only by a few cultural markers. This is false. They are us. They are people with families, fears, plans, hopes, and dreams. At the moment when conflict is the most violent, the most dangerous, they want only to survive and for the people whom they love to survive. Thus, at the moments of their deaths, they are us, for we too, under such conditions, are defined by the same desires. In such matters of life or death, all distinctions we make between one another—religion, race, politics, nationality—are arbitrary.

I cannot support any killing for the name of any cause, because when we kill, we are not championing an ideal or superior morality, we are extinguishing another life. It is that simple.

Although I have never been engaged in combat and I cannot begin to understand how it would feel, one thing is clear to me: I cannot destroy, or even aid in the destruction of, the same

humanity that is within me. I cannot look at anyone else and see “the opposition”—all I will see is a mirror image. I will not kill myself.

It is with my unalienable connection to all humanity in mind that I ask the Chapel Hill Friends Meeting to accept this letter as a declaration of my status as a conscientious objector. My objection to the aid of and participation in war is deeply held and stems both from my personal ethical convictions and my Quaker belief that there is that of God in everyone.