

- Share what you learn with family, friends, coworkers, places of worship, and the media. Help people understand that COs and SCOs are not traitors or cowards but people living out their faith and following their consciences.

- Talk with young people before they enter the military. Learn about the many reasons for joining the military, and the influence that factors such as race and class have on that decision and on treatment while in the military.

RESOURCES

National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Challenge of Peace*. Washington: USCC Office for Publishing and Promotion Services, 1983.

National (U.S.) Conference of Catholic Bishops, excerpts from *The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace*. www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/justwar.htm Brief discussion on Just War Theory.

National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Human Life in Our Day*. Washington: USCC Publishing and Promotion Services, 1968, nos. 143-153.

Schlissel, Lillian, ed. *Conscience in America: A Documentary History of Conscientious Objection in America, 1757-1967*. New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1968.

United States Catholic Conference, *Declaration on Conscientious Objection and Selective Conscientious Objection*. Washington: USCC Publishing and Promotion Services, 1971.

Zahn, Gordon C. "Conscientious Objection: Catholic Perspectives." Erie, PA: Pax Christi USA, 1991. (PCUSA Item #525-188, \$1 each.)

Zuses, Rachel S. *Words of Conscience*. 11th ed. Washington: Center on Conscience and War, 2001.

Organizations:

Center on Conscience and War, 1830 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20009; 202/483-2220 or 800/379-2679; nisbco@nisbco.org; www.nisbco.org

Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors, 1515 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102; 215/563-8787 or 630 20th Street, Oakland, CA 94612; 510/465-1617; info@objector.org; www.objector.org

GI Rights Hotline, 800/FYI-95GI; www.girights.org (nongovernmental resource for servicemembers encountering difficulties or wanting information about discharges)



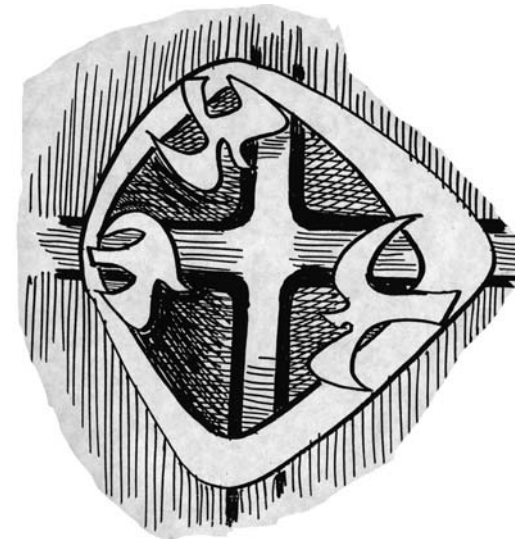
Pax Christi USA is the national Catholic peace movement, committed to the gospel imperative of seeking peace through nonviolence. Pax Christi USA is a section of Pax Christi International.

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For bulk orders of this brochure, please contact Pax Christi USA at 814/453-4955, ext. 228. Also available: "Conscientious Objection and Catholic Teaching" and "Conscientious Objection and the Military."

Selective Conscientious Objection and Catholic Teaching

Published by Pax Christi USA



For thousands of years, the question of when to go to war has been debated by philosophers, theologians, politicians and citizens of the world. Some people believe that they cannot participate in or support any wars or particular wars. "Conscientious objector" (CO) is the term for those whose consciences forbid their participation in any war. "Selective conscientious objector" (SCO) is the term for those whose convictions forbid their participation in a particular war or types of wars. SCOs might believe it is immoral to serve in a capacity where they would be responsible for developing or using nuclear weapons. Or they might decide they couldn't morally participate in a particular war, such as one in which civilians or civil society were a major target.

CATHOLIC CHURCH TEACHING

Teaching on War

For the first three centuries, followers of Christ almost universally refused to serve in the Roman army: they could not kill when the principal Christian command was to love. Official church teaching changed with the introduction of Just War Theory. Just War Theory lays out strict conditions under which a war is acceptable. A war must fit all of the criteria, including being an action of last resort declared by a legitimate authority, with a reasonable probability of succeeding, without disproportionate destruction (especially of civilian life).

Primacy of Conscience:

Catholic teaching states that one must follow one's conscience. Conscience calls us to loyalty to God and God's teachings above loyalty to any person, institution or nation-state. Catholics who believe war and participation in war violate their consciences are morally bound to refuse to participate.

Many individuals who sincerely love their country have refused to kill in its name. The life and teachings of Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount, the fifth commandment, the call to forgiveness, the recognition of all people as God's children, and the command to love our enemies are some of the reasons Christians are conscientious objectors.

Support for COs and SCOs

Catholic thinking on war evolved after the massive destruction of World War II. Both the Vatican and the U.S. Catholic Bishops support conscientious objection as wholly consistent with Catholic teaching on war and conscience. This includes support for those who refuse to participate in war in any form (total conscientious objectors – COs) and those who refuse to participate in types or particular wars or certain branches of service (selective conscientious objectors – SCOs).

REALITY OF MODERN WARFARE

Today, many people question whether any war can be considered just because of the potential destruction from nuclear, biological or chemical weapons, as well as the massive destructive power of conventional weapons, such as cluster bombs. Wars are no longer fought primarily on battlefields between men in opposing armies; instead, wars often kill and harm civilians and destroy the infrastructure upon which their lives depend. By the 1990s, civilians accounted for 90 percent of war casualties.

The purpose and reality of military life is to prepare for and fight wars. The military, which emphasizes obeying orders absolutely and unquestioningly, does not allow for conscience. This obedience is even more heavily emphasized during times of war, precisely when critical, moral life and death decisions are made.

U.S. MILITARY LAW

The U.S. military either reassigns or exempts those it classifies as COs: people who reject war in any form due to conscience (both those who come to that position while in the military and those who face a potential draft). Unfortunately, the U.S. military does not recognize selective CO.

Catholics who follow Just War Theory or their consciences but are not led to reject all war cannot be classified as COs by the U.S. military. For years, the Catholic Church has been among those asking for changes in the definition of CO to include selective COs.

WHAT IF I AM A SELECTIVE CO?

If you believe that you (or someone you know) may be a selective CO, you need to

begin asking hard questions. Many of these are similar to those the military uses to determine if someone is a CO: What beliefs guide your life? How do they contradict war? How and when did you acquire these beliefs? How do these beliefs influence your life?

Document your answers in a file and include background materials, such as teachings from your church, letters from others, etc.

Upon examination of these questions, you should apply a "reality check." Do the wars that you would participate in ever happen with today's military technology? Perhaps you will discover upon examination that you actually are opposed to today's wars in any form.

If you are not, your choices become much more difficult. You should consult a trained counselor and lawyer. If in the military, you may want to explore other discharge options. Or, you may feel strongly enough to challenge the existing regulations. In the past, cases have succeeded in changing the legal definition of CO.

It is important to make the distinction that COs of all types reject war – violence on a mass scale. This does not necessarily mean that a person must reject any use of force (such as police or defense against a personal attack).

WHAT CAN I DO?

- Learn more about Catholic teaching on war, conscientious objection and conscientious objectors.

- Contact the Center on Conscience and War to learn about the legislative efforts to change the definition of CO and to gain legal protection for those following their consciences. (CO protection is currently a privilege granted by the military, not a legal requirement.)