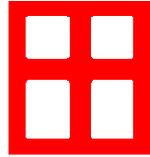


Remembering the Catholic Conscientious Objectors of the First World War



Pax Christi

Stories and prayers about conscientious objection to military service, especially the pioneers who won recognition for that human right by their courage and endurance in the First World War.

Use these stories and prayers for personal reflection or as part of a liturgy, school assembly, or public event. The last two pages are ready to be photocopied for a church service. Suitable occasions would be the annual International Day of Nonviolence on 2 October, or Remembrance weekend.

Further resources:

The Way of the Cross – with reflections drawn from the First World War Conscientious Objectors available from Pax Christi

www.paxchristi.org.uk/shop

short video of the poem *Conscientious Objector*

www.theatrix.co.uk/conscientious-objector/4544061234

The Ones who said No – song by Sue Gilmurray

<http://paxchristi.org.uk/news-and-events/remembrance-2018/liturgy-and-poetry-for-remembrance-2018/>

More information about conscientious objection can be found on these websites:

www.paxchristi.org.uk

www.ppu.org.uk

www.wri-irg.org/en

www.fau.quaker.org.uk/

www.search.livesofthefirstworldwar.org/search/world-records/conscientious-objectors-register-1914-1918

Words of Pope Benedict XV, during the First World War, 1915

“In the holy name of God, in the name of our heavenly father and Lord, by the blessed blood of Jesus, we conjure you to put an end once for all to this awful carnage which has already been dishonouring Europe for a year.”

The Second Vatican Council, 1965

“We cannot but praise those who renounce violence in defending their rights and use means of defence which are available to the weakest, so long as this can be done without harm to the rights and duties of others or of the community.

It seems right that laws should make humane provision for conscientious objectors, so long as they accept another form of service to the human community.” (*The Church in the Modern World* #78-79)

Words of Pope Francis

"Every legal system should provide for conscientious objection because it is a right, a human right... I am always moved when I read, and I have read it many times, when I read the *Chanson de Roland*, when there were all these Moors lined up before the baptismal font, and they had to choose between baptism and the sword. They had to choose. They weren't permitted conscientious objection. It's a right and if we want to have peace, we have to respect all rights." (Pope Francis, 2015)

Lord God of peace, hear our prayer!

We have tried so many times and over so many years to resolve our conflicts by our own powers and by the force of our arms.

How many moments of hostility and darkness have we experienced;
how much blood has been shed; how many lives have been shattered;
how many hopes have been buried... But our efforts have been in vain.

Now, Lord, come to our aid!

Grant us peace, teach us peace; guide our steps in the way of peace.

Open our eyes and our hearts, and give us the courage to say: "Never again war!" "With war everything is lost".

Instill in our hearts the courage to take concrete steps to achieve peace. **Amen.**

(Pope Francis, 2014)

STORIES

Maximilian: third century North Africa

In north Africa in the year 295 Maximilian, the 21-year-old son of Fabius Victor, a recruiter for the Roman military, publicly refused to be drafted into the Roman army. He was put on trial. His testimony was written down in a document called the *Passio* and later quoted throughout the Church as an example of true Christian discipleship.

"I cannot serve," Maximilian told the Roman court, as his height was being measured. "I cannot do evil. I am a Christian". When they tried to give him the imperial military seal, Maximilian rejected it: "I cannot wear a piece of lead around my neck after I have received the saving sign of Jesus Christ my Lord, son of the living God."

The Proconsul then argued that other Christians were serving as soldiers, but Maximilian replied: "They know what is best for them." "What harm do soldiers do?" asked the Proconsul. "You know very well what they do," answered Maximilian.

Maximilian was then executed for disloyally refusing the military oath.

The Allen brothers: twentieth century Britain

Tom Allen was one of three Roman Catholic brothers from Nelson in Lancashire who made a stand against conscription by becoming Conscientious Objectors. Tom was the eldest son of the Allen family and had two younger brothers - Peter and James, and two sisters, Margaret and Mary Jane. The family had a history of anti-war activism and Tom's father had been involved in organised opposition to the Boer war.

Peter and Tom were unusual conscientious objectors as they did not go before a local tribunal. Instead, correctly predicting that conscription was on its way, they moved to Ireland to set up a business as shoemakers, hoping to evade the entire process. Unfortunately for them, while conscription was never introduced in Ireland, they were arrested and brought back to England regardless! By April 1916, they were back in Nelson before the Magistrates court, where both Peter and Tom were fined 40 shillings and handed over to the military.

By May 1916 Tom and Peter were in Gosport Military Prison, sentenced to 28 days imprisonment for disobeying military orders. During this sentence they were treated brutally and their case became well known in the CO movement. After this short but violent sentence, they were released into the main body of the army only to disobey orders again and find themselves sentenced to two years hard labour. After several months, Tom was transferred to Wormwood Scrubs.

While in Wormwood Scrubs, Tom went before the Central (Appeal) Tribunal which would assess his suitability for the Home Office work scheme. Despite clearly being determined to resist all efforts to force him into the army, Tom was not judged to be a "genuine CO" and was not offered the compromise of the Home Office Scheme. Roman Catholic COs often had a difficult time convincing Tribunals that they were genuine. Aside from a still widespread anti-Catholic bias, as members of a denomination whose leaders in Britain supported the war, Catholic COs could not argue from authority. They were usually asked why, when Catholic chaplains supported the war, they believed they knew better than a priest? For many COs this was a difficult question to answer.

After being rejected by the Central Tribunal, Tom was transferred to Felixstowe prison, and sentenced to another two years hard labour. It was during this, the third of Tom's prison sentences, that tragedy struck his family. The CO newspaper, *The Tribunal*, recorded what happened to Peter in December 1918.

It is our sad duty this week to record one of the most pathetic tragedies which our movement has yet seen. At the end of September Tom, Peter and James Allen of Nelson were given two days leave from prison to attend the funeral of their mother.

A fortnight ago they were again given leave for the death of their youngest sister and found on their arrival that their eldest sister had collapsed. James Allen, from Durham prison, who has served two years, was in failing health and was ordered by the family doctor to go to bed at once and not to return to prison without his permission.

A request was forwarded to the home secretary asking for an extension of leave for Tom and Peter from Ipswich prison so they could assist at home. Permission was given for James to stay on receipt of a doctor's certificate, but Tom and Peter were ordered back to prison. By this time, however, these two were confined to bed and certificates were sent in their case also.

On Thursday December 5th Tom Allen died and two days later Peter also passed away. They were interred on December 10th.

From the end of 1917 deaths after temporary release from prison were becoming ever more common. The Allen brothers' deaths were typical. A CO, malnourished, denied exercise and kept in cramped, filthy conditions suffering from mental and physical anguish would be released while already near-fatally ill. Weak as they were, they couldn't resist the epidemic of disease that accompanied the end of the war. Responsibility can be squarely laid on the government which had imprisoned them so needlessly despite their legal right to their Conscientious Objection.

Tom is commemorated alongside his brother on the Conscientious Objector memorial plaque held by the Peace Pledge Union, which records many of the COs who died as a result of their treatment during the war. The inscription on the plaque reads: "it is by the faith of the idealist that the ideal comes true."

From Peace Pledge Union website - The Men Who Said No

WHO WERE THEY? SOME OF THE 100 CATHOLIC CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

There were at least 100 Catholic conscientious objectors in England, Scotland and Wales in the First World War - and possibly more - out of an estimated total of 20,000. For some, Christian faith and morality was the determining reason for refusing military service. For most though, their faith was mixed in with other motives: socialist politics, Irish identity, a sense of the international 'brotherhood' of humanity, or of personal vocation to particular work and opposition therefore to enforced conscription, the pressing needs of family members, and so on. Here are some of the Catholic COs, whose names and stories you may like to read out:

The **Allen** brothers - **James**, a confectioner, **Peter** and **Thomas Allen**, both shoemakers, of Nelson, Lancs. All were imprisoned, and let out briefly in September 1918 to attend the funeral of their mother, and then in November (after the Armistice in fact) that of their sister, who had also died of influenza. Peter and Thomas themselves fell ill and died of pneumonia in December 1918. They are buried in Barrowford Catholic cemetery. James was only released from prison in January 1919, on health grounds.

Charles Boardman, a printer's apprentice from Manchester, son of a cotton weaver, took the 'absolutist' position not to cooperate in any way with conscription. He was a member of the No-Conscription Fellowship. On hunger strike in Winchester prison in January 1918, he was released under the Cat and Mouse Acts when he became dangerously weak, then returned to prison and not released until July 1919. (The war ended in November 1918.)

Cuthbert Clayton (b.1882) was a social worker at Hulme Settlement, Manchester, who was given Exemption from Combatant Service on condition he joined the Friends Ambulance Unit. He served from 1916 onwards with the FAU and then Friends War Victims Relief Service, in Holland, Belgium and Poland, until 1923.

William Denis Eden, 38 years old and married, was an artist living in Yarnton near Oxford. He had a heart problem but was willing to do work of national importance. However, after a few months he went absent, questioning why he had to leave his own work! Arrested, he was referred back to a tribunal, spent a few weeks in Wormwood Scrubs, and was then sent to Wakefield work scheme. Eden's paintings are in collections in Liverpool and at the Palace of Westminster today.

Alfred Evans was a 20-year-old piano tuner from Southall. He spent 28 days in Harwich Redoubt, a fort built in 1810, three days in the dark, dripping, rat-infested punishment cells where it was impossible to sleep. Then he was sent to France where, for refusing to obey orders in the war zone, he and 34 others were sentenced to death - commuted to 10 years penal servitude thanks to the intervention of the No-Conscription Fellowship. Evans was not the only Catholic to reject the Church because the clergy were so enthusiastic about the war. He recalled that fellow parishioners would not speak to him because of his conscientious objection, and some spat on the ground when he came out of Mass. He became a Quaker attender.

Paul Leo Gillan, born in Ireland and living near Marble Arch in London, was a Sinn Feiner. His defiant words sum up his beliefs: *"To submit to military discipline means to me the negation of all that is noble, all that is loving, all that is pure and kind, that negation of all that is divine, in short, the negation of all that constitutes a man. I proudly refuse to place my soul in the keeping of any military caste."* In February 1918 he was moved from prison in Plymouth to Winchester to enable him to attend Mass, but was seriously ill, and died the following month, aged 41. Questions were asked in the House of Commons about his death in prison.

William Heinzen from Whitechapel, born in London, was the 19-year-old son of a German baker, whose older children had been born in Germany. William told his Tribunal that he was willing to serve in a labour battalion, but at home in England. His conscientious objection was dismissed and he went to Wormwood Scrubs. After several months in prison he gave up his objection and joined the military unit he'd been assigned to, and became a 'soldier CO'.

Bartholomew and **James Kelly** were socialists and members of the Durham Miners' Union from West Stanley, Durham. **Bartholomew**, an engineer's clerk, went on hunger strike in Leeds gaol and was forcibly fed 28 times before being released on health grounds. **James** was a coal pit head driver who was still in prison in May 1919. Their activist sister was Secretary of the Stanley branch of the Women's Peace Crusade. Bartholomew later became a Labour councillor.

Francis Meynell, son of the poet, Alice Meynell, worked for his father's Catholic publishing house, Burns & Oates, and for the socialist *Daily Herald* newspaper. At his tribunal he argued: *"I cannot surrender my conscience, my right of judgement, to anybody else's keeping..."* and continued, *"as a Catholic I pay some heed to what the Pope says even on a political matter... that it is a war which is 'dishonouring humanity'"*. When his CO application was refused, he went on hunger and thirst strike in Hounslow Barracks and was discharged as 'unlikely to become an efficient soldier'.

Together with **Stanley Morison**, the typographer, who was a publishing colleague and friend, they started 'The Guild of the Pope's Peace' in 1916. This tiny organisation tried to make known the persistent peace appeals of Pope Benedict XV by printing leaflets and a prayer book.

In a letter to his Tribunal, **Stanley Morison** explained his views: *"I shall be only too pleased to undertake Ambulance or other work in a civil capacity... I am genuinely anxious to serve my country. I am not a conscientious objector to National Service but only to Military Service."* His application was turned down, he was court-martialled and given 56 days hard labour in Winchester prison before being sent to a notorious work camp at Dyce in Scotland.

James Miles from Edinburgh was a 20-year-old student at Oxford who volunteered for the Friends Ambulance Unit in 1915. Based at Dunkirk he worked on the ambulance trains which ferried the wounded to hospitals away from the Front. After two years he was assigned to agricultural work, before returning to Dunkirk from May 1918 until February 1919.

William Mohan, aged 26, was manager of a butcher's shop in Glasgow. He agreed to join the Non-Combatant Corps, part of the army but not in a fighting role. He served in France for 2½ years from May 1916 until 27 October 1918, when he died of influenza and pneumonia in hospital in Abbeville – just two weeks before the Armistice.

H. Gordon Moore, a 24-year-old clerk from St Pancras, London, went to prison. He stuck to his principles and later became a member of PAX when that started in the 1930s. In a 1943 article for the PAX Bulletin he recorded: *"At Dartmoor I was one of the twelve Catholic Objectors..." There were Catholic 'Absolutists' and Catholics in the Non-Combatant Corps. "I cannot say I recollect a single priest who let it be known that he wholeheartedly supported our attitude"*.

Stormont Murray aged 19 in 1917, was living at Whiteway Colony, in Stroud, Gloucestershire. This was a Tolstoyan anarchist community with an egalitarian and pacifist philosophy. During the Second World War Murray was, once again, a conscientious objector. A Catholic convert, he became an influential leader in PAX, still advocating a simple, back-to-the-land lifestyle as the way to build a peaceful society.

Ernest and **John Nunan** of Marylebone, London, were Irish patriots and Sinn Feiners who refused to cooperate with the military system. John refused to sign enrolment papers or to have a medical. Both were court-martialled and given prison sentences with hard labour. In February 1917 both were released from prison and discharged by the War Office which explained that their services were no longer required.

John O'Brien, a post office sorter, asked a priest from his parish to send a testimonial to his Wood Green Tribunal. Unfortunately Fr Cohen's letter did not help. He had written *"I have no doubt that his objection is sincere"* but continued *"Considering the number of Catholics serving with the Colours it should not be necessary for me to add that such objections are not held by him because he is a member of the Roman Catholic Church"*. Unsurprisingly, O'Brien's application was rejected by the Tribunal. However the Post Office retained him in his 'work of national importance'.

Patrick O'Daly was a gardener at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew who applied to Brentford Tribunal for exemption as a CO. *"I am a Catholic, Socialist and an Irishman, and hold war to be organised slaughter"* he explained. *"It is no reason that because a number of Irishmen have taken part in this war that every Irishman should do so."* But the Brentford tribunal concluded: *"He evaded the question when asked if he would fight for Ireland if Ireland were attacked."*

Claughton Pellew Harvey was an artist who became a Catholic in 1913. His friend, the philosopher E.I. Watkin – another member of the Guild of the Pope's Peace – influenced his Catholic pacifism. At the barracks in Weymouth Pellew refused to wear uniform or to march, for which he was stripped naked and beaten with wet knotted towels. Unable to accept exemption from combatant service only, Pellew was imprisoned in Dorchester, Winchester, Manchester Strangeways, Dyce work camp and then Dartmoor. His faith sustained him during what he called *'the slow death of solitary confinement'*. After the war he worked as a painter and engraver, and is particularly admired for serene Norfolk landscapes.

Amos Rowbottom was a joiner from Stalybridge who said *'I shall resist military service in every possible manner'*. His application for CO exemption was rejected and he was sent to the Artillery Training School. After more than two years military service in Salonica, for which he was decorated, he came home in March 1919. His army papers are marked 'Amos Rowbottom, Conscientious Objector'.

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Gathering song: Praise to you O Christ our Saviour
Bernadette Farrell © 1986 OCP Publications

Welcome and opening prayer

L: Come to us, O God

All: Come to us with light and truth

(a candle is lit)

L: In your presence and with the saints of every age

All: we meet to be encouraged and inspired

L: Open our hearts and minds, O God

All: as we reflect on the witness of Catholics who refused to fight and kill

L: and strengthen our commitment, O God

All: to be peacemakers in our world today.

First reading: Conscientious Objector
poem by Edna St Vincent Millay

I shall die, but that is all that I shall do for Death.
I hear him leading his horse out of the stall;
I hear the clatter on the barn-floor.
He is in haste; he has business in Cuba,
business in the Balkans, many calls to make this
morning.
But I will not hold the bridle
while he clinches the girth.
And he may mount by himself:
I will not give him a leg up.

Though he flick my shoulders with his whip,
I will not tell him which way the fox ran.
With his hoof on my breast, I will not tell him
where
the black boy hides in the swamp.
I shall die, but that is all that I shall do for
Death;
I am not on his pay-roll.

I will not tell him the whereabouts of my friends
nor of my enemies either.
Though he promise me much,
I will not map him the route to any man's door.
Am I a spy in the land of the living,
that I should deliver men to Death?
Brother, the password and the plans of our city
are safe with me; never through me Shall you be
overcome.

Second reading: Psalm 46

Penitential prayers: *Response: Have mercy on us O God*

For the times when we fear to stand up for what we believe...

For failing to challenge those who exert power unjustly...

For choosing to sit back and let others do the work of justice and peace-making...

For resisting the call to suffer persecution for the sake of justice and peace...

For the times we go about our busy lives, forgetting our brothers and sisters whose struggle is to survive that day...

Song: Will you come and follow me
John L. Bell & Graham Maule ©1987 WGRG, Iona Community

Gospel reading: Mark 13: 9-13
Expect trouble but do not worry

Prayer of remembrance for those who have suffered nonviolently in the cause of peace.

L: Let us remember those who courageously and with a clear conscience say no to war, especially the conscientious objectors of all nations, giving thanks for all who have shown us nonviolent ways to respond to conflict.

The response to each is: We remember you

Catholic Conscientious Objectors from World War One
Ben Salmon, American Catholic CO,
All other Conscientious Objectors from World War One
and World War Two, including Franz Jägerstätter,
Josef Mayr Nusser, Otto Schimek
All COs since 1945
Members of the Society of Friends
Followers of the Mennonite and Anabaptist tradition

The COs of recent wars with Iraq, Afghanistan; the COs of Israel & Palestine; those imprisoned in Korea, Eritrea, and other countries where the right to refuse to kill is still not recognized.

Please mention names of other war resisters... followed by a short time of silence

Prayers of intercession

The response to each is: Hear our prayer, Lord, and guide our steps to peace

Let us give thanks for the witness of the conscientious objectors of one hundred years ago. Their bravery paved the way for the international recognition of conscientious objection as a human right. We pray that people throughout the world will be inspired to follow their example in situations demanding a similar choice.

Let us give thanks for the members of PAX who, with other writers and peace campaigners, prepared the Vatican Council to recognize the rights of conscience. We especially remember: Gordon Zahn, Eileen Egan, Charles Thompson, Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Hildegard and Jean Goss Mayr, Jim Douglass, and Barbara Wall.

We give thanks for the bishops from various countries who persuaded their colleagues at the Second Vatican Council to endorse the right to conscientious objection. Among them we remember Cardinal Alfrink of Utrecht, Cardinal Liénart of Lille, Patriarch Maximos of Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria, Archbishop Hurley of Durban, Archbishop Flahiff of Winnipeg, Bishop John Taylor of Stockholm, and English delegates, Archbishops Thomas Roberts SJ, formerly of Bombay, and George Beck of Liverpool, Bishops Gordon Wheeler of Middlesbrough and George Dwyer of Leeds, and Abbot Christopher Butler OSB. Let us pray for our Church leaders today, that following this tradition they too will speak up boldly for the abolition of war.

We pray that God will sustain those men and women imprisoned and punished today for refusing to join the armed forces in countries which make no provision for objection to compulsory conscription. We pray for War Resisters International and other organisations working for their release.

Let us offer ourselves to God, that we may be peacemakers and true followers of the nonviolent Jesus. May we be given the grace and courage to take

what action we can to promote good and prevent evil, at whatever cost to ourselves.

Please feel free to add your own prayers

L: We join our prayers together saying:
Our Father...

L: We end by sharing the grace:

All: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us today and always. Amen.

Final song: Lead us from death to life
Verses by Marty Haughan ©1985 GIA Publications Inc

or
The Ones who said No

Sue Gilmurray © 2013

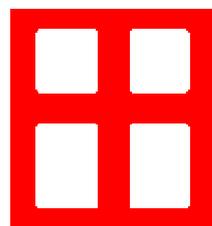
or
Sing a song of peace and justice

*to the tune of Cwn Rhondda
Words Shirley Erena Murray ©1992 Hope Publishing Company*

Sing a song of peace and justice
Speak for those who cannot speak!
Claim the world of peace and justice:
Let the strong support the weak.
*Light a candle in the darkness
Hope and freedom must not die! Hope and freedom must not die!*

You who live in happy places,
Who can laugh and speak and sing,
Listen for the other voices
Mute with fear and suffering.
Light a candle...

Thousands cry in nameless prisons –
Plead with power that hold the key:
Plead that human rights be honoured,
That the innocent go free.
Light a candle...



Pax Christi
St Joseph's
Watford Way
London NW4 4TY
0208 203 4884
www.paxchristi.org