

Article

Australian Christian Conscientious Objectors during the Vietnam War Years 1964–72

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Abstract: Many young Christian men faced a moral dilemma when selective military conscription was introduced in Australia during the Vietnam War from 1964–72. The legislation was the National Service Act in 1964 (NSA). Some believed that their Christian conscience did not allow them to kill or serve in the army. Most of them sought exemption as a conscientious objector decided at a court hearing. Others chose non-compliance with the NSA. All exercised nonviolent Holy Disobedience in their individual opposition to war and conscription for it. Holy disobedience stresses the importance of nonviolent individual action, which was an idea of A.J. Muste, a great Christian pacifist. The research reported here is strongly influenced by his approach. It is believed to be the first study which explicitly considers Christian conscientious objectors. A data set was compiled of known Christian conscientious objectors during the Vietnam War years from authoritative sources. Analysis allowed identification of these men, the grounds on which their conscientious beliefs were based and formed and how they personally responded to their moral dilemma. Many of their personal stories are told in their own words. Their Holy Disobedience contributed to ending Australia's participation in the Vietnam War and military conscription for it.



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1. Introduction

1.1. A Moral Dilemma

The Australian government introduced selective military conscription for twenty-year old men during 1964, with amendments to the National Service Act (NSA). Soon after, it integrated conscripts with the regular army and units were sent to fight in the Vietnam War. The introduction of military conscription created a moral dilemma for many young men. Did their conscience allow them to participate in the violence that is war?

A Christian man who was conscripted had a number of choices in resolving his moral dilemma. First, he could accept the call-up to the army and serve in both combatant and non-combatant roles, judging they were compatible with his conscience. Second, he could apply to be registered as a conscientious objector based on his Christian pacifism, and argue he be exempted from both combatant and non-combatant duties. Third, he could apply to be registered as a conscientious objector based on his Christian pacifism, and argue he be exempted from combatant duties only. Fourth, he could refuse to comply with the NSA and become a conscientious non-complier (CNC). The government did not offer a fifth choice by refusing to offer a civilian alternative to military service. There was another choice, to become a draft evader. It is assumed that no man of conscience chose that option.

The research reported here concerns known Christian conscientious objectors who resolved their moral dilemma by choosing the second, third, or fourth option. It was a choice in favour of non-violence because they believed that this was what their Christian faith demanded. Intentionally or unintentionally their individual actions affected social change. Relevant here was the end of military conscription and an end to Australia's participation in the Vietnam War.

1.2. *The National Service Act*

On 24 November 1964, the Australian government amended the NSA to provide for the selective conscription of young men turning twenty years old during 1965 ([Parliament of Australia 1964](#)). A ballot was conducted, which involved the drawing out of a number of birthdates. This was subsequently undertaken every six months. If a man's birthdate was selected, he was liable for call-up and subject to a satisfactory medical examination. The number of birthdates selected each six months depended on the required number of conscripts desired by the army. The government also amended the Defence Act 1903 during May 1965 to allow for conscripts to be integrated with regular army personnel ([Parliament of Australia 2016](#)). On 8 March 1966, it announced that military units, which involved conscripts, were to be sent to fight in Vietnam. ([Australian Government. Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 1966](#)). This was euphemistically called "special service overseas" ([Langford 1997](#)). Australia had not declared war on anyone ([Parliament of Australia 2010](#)).

With the introduction of selective conscription, a young Christian man of nineteen or twenty years was faced with the same moral dilemma as any other. Does he register for National Service with the Department of Labour and National Service (DLNS), as mandated by the government? If he does, then he has complied with the NSA and now waits for the results of a lottery ballot to see if his birthdate marble is selected. If it is he now has to decide whether he continues his compliance by reporting for the mandatory medical examination, and if passed, to obey the call-up notice and be conscripted into the army. Alternatively, he can apply to be registered as a conscientious objector and be granted exemption from combatant and non-combatant military duties, or exemption from combatant duties only ([Parliament of Australia 1964](#), s.29A).

If a man did not register under the Act, he breached it and was liable to sanctions. If this was intentional, it was an act of non-compliance. If it was a matter of conscience, religious or humanist, he was a CNC. The strength of his conscience was often demonstrated by repeated acts of non-compliance, which under the NSA attracted more severe sanctions.

The NSA made provision for "automatic" exemption from military service for a number of categories. One of these was theological students, ministers of religion, and members of religious orders. This had been the case since the passing of the Defence Act 1903 ([Parliament of Australia 1903](#), s.61A). The justification for this is difficult to discover. This has also been acknowledged for America. It has the same exemption and it has been discussed within its legal framework ([Smith 1970](#)). It acknowledged that the legislative purpose of the exemption was not clear. It was suggested it probably involved deference to both the spiritual needs of the people and the inherently peaceful nature of religious ministry. This probably also applies for Australia. The question of whether the exemption is an aid to religion at a personal and institutional level, and therefore unconstitutional, has never been tested in Australia. Smith concluded that the exemption was unfair and unconstitutional ([Smith 1970](#), p. 1003). During the Vietnam War years, 553 eligible men were granted this exemption in Australia ([Langford 1997](#)).

Graham Jensen from Sydney was a theological student at Wesley College, Sydney University. As such, he would have been "automatically" exempted upon registration under the NSA. Graham refused to register for the July 1968 intake because he believed the Act to be immoral. He informed Minister Bury of the DLNS of his non-compliance ([Peacemaker 1969a](#), p. 5). He said he "was a Christian pacifist and that the law was immoral as is anything which mandates that a man must fight and possibly kill another. This is against the will of God". On 29 January 1969, Graham was convicted and fined with the prospect of twenty-five days imprisonment if he failed to pay the fine. He decided not to pay the fine. He was arrested on 30 July 1969 and taken to Long Bay Jail in Sydney to serve twenty-five days.

Obviously, Graham was opposed to the Vietnam War and stated that, "I am concerned that we celebrate Anzac Day and forget what our soldiers believed they were dying for—peace; we talk about our fight for peace and yet we are not willing to give it to the

Vietnamese" (Peacemaker 1969c, p. 6). On 6 May 1970, he was again convicted under the NSA for refusing to attend a medical examination and was fined. He was also imprisoned for seven days because of his refusal to give an assurance that he would obey a future notice to take the medical examination. Graham remained a peace activist and non-complier until the suspension of the Act in 1972.

The original Defence Act of 1903 allowed for conscientious objection to be based on religious pacifism only, and it was confined to those churches doctrinally opposed to war and military service (Parliament of Australia 1903, s.63A). Interestingly, it allowed for conscientious objection to a particular war. Just prior to WWII, it was amended to disallow this. It was also amended to allow pacifist conscientious beliefs that were non-religious. Again, it was amended so that religious pacifism was no longer confined to those religious institutions doctrinally opposed to war (Parliament of Australia 1939). The NSA of 1964 incorporated these amendments. Obviously, the Act did not permit a conscientious objection to itself, but that military conscription was unjust and constituted a violation of human liberty.

Despite the amended provision about a particular war, there were a few Christian conscientious objectors who applied for exemption from military service on the grounds that the Vietnam War was unjust. A prominent case from that time was John Zarb, a Catholic from Pascoe Vale South, Victoria (Peacemaker 1968e, p. 1). John was a postman. He registered under the NSA and then made application to be exempted from all military duties as a conscientious objector. Magistrate Elvish heard his application on 2 November 1967. The magistrate stated he was satisfied that John was sincere in his beliefs and that he was a conscientious objector. He dismissed the application because the NSA did not permit him to grant an exemption based on an objection to a particular war. John then appealed and adopted non-compliance. He was convicted on 14 October 1968 at the City Court, Melbourne for failure to obey a call-up notice and was sentenced to two years imprisonment at Pentridge, a civil prison in Melbourne. During the prosecution John repeated what he had stated at his original court hearing. He had a conscientious objection to aiding and abetting what he regarded as an unjust and immoral war, the Vietnam War. He indicated that he was not a pacifist and was prepared to undertake military training. This was tested in the High Court of Australia but it unanimously dismissed all grounds of John's appeal. He was released early from his sentence on 21 August 1969. The government portrayed this as an act of compassion given his parents' poor health. A close reading of the cabinet minutes suggests that it was undertaken for political reasons (National Archives of Australia 1969). John had become an embarrassment to the government.

1.3. Christianity and War Violence

Table 1 shows the number of adherents for each Christian denomination in Australia according to the 1966 census (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1966). The population of Australia in 1966 was 11.6 million. It reveals that an overwhelming number of Australians claimed affiliation with a Christian denomination. Less than 1% of the population belonged to a non-Christian religion, and less than 1% claimed no religion.

If a large denomination is defined as having 10% or more adherents, then four denominations dominated in 1966. They were the Church of England at 37.99%, Catholic at 29.75%, Methodist at 11.01%, and Presbyterian at 10.22%.

A review of important "official" statements from the denominations reveals their teaching about war and under what circumstances a Christian may participate. A Christian man in responding to military conscription is likely to have sought from his denomination guidance and support. It is supposed he had an advantage if he belonged to an historic peace church, which usually includes The Society of Friends (Quakers), Brethren, and Mennonites. In contemporary Australia, they represented a tiny proportion of Christian adherents. Only the Brethren were considered important enough for census purposes to be identified as a denomination, even then they only accounted for 0.15% of Australian Christians.

Table 1. Australian Christian Adherents 1966.

Denomination	Number	Percentage
Baptist	165,487	1.62
Brethren	15,516	0.15
Catholic	3,036,130	29.75
Church of Christ	102,545	1.00
Church of England	3,877,473	37.99
Congregational	76,588	0.75
Lutheran	177,324	1.73
Methodist	1,124,310	11.01
Orthodox	255,493	2.50
Presbyterian	1,043,570	10.22
Salvation Army	56,501	0.55
Seventh Day Adventist	37,617	0.36
Protestant (undefined)	105,233	1.03
Other	131,261	1.28
Total	10,205,038	100.00

The Quakers in Australia explain their position on war and violence, “the Quakers believe that there is a spirit within each of us that joins us all together—some call it ‘that of God’. It follows that we cannot deliberately harm or kill another person without damaging that spirit. That was as obvious to 17th Century Quakers as it is to us today” (Quakers 2021). They also make the point that “pacifism is not just *thou shalt not kill*. It is an active process of removing situations where violence and war may occur. It is also a complex process of understanding how different forms of violence are related and of accepting that peace does not come overnight”. The Brethren (Brethren 2021) and Mennonites (Mennonites 2021) share this view, but express it more strongly in their doctrinal statements and expect it be accepted and followed by their adherents. Christadelphians have sometimes been described as a peace church. This is consistent with its official Statement of Faith, which “forbid its members to participate in war in any form” (Christadelphians 2021).

Jehovah’s Witnesses teach “that as Jesus disciples they obey his command to be no part of the world (John 17:16) by being strictly neutral in political matters, including participation in the military”. It shares with other Christians “the imperatives to beat their swords into ploughshares (Isa. 2:4), to not take up weapons of warfare (Matt. 26:52) and by accepting that in the early church being a Christian and a soldier was irreconcilable” (Jehovah’s Witnesses 2021).

The Church of God was strongly pacifist at its beginnings but has gone through much iteration over the following decades. This waned over the years. There is now little official reference to war and military service except in general terms. For others, they remain strongly pacifist. It observes that “God alone confers life (Gen. 1:1–31); therefore, we are responsible to God to care for our physical life and that of others. If the circumstances require, we must be prepared to risk our life in the service of our neighbour (John 15:13); but the general rule is that we must respect our physical life and employ every worthy means to maintain it” (Church of God 2021a, 2021b).

The Seventh Day Adventist church is unusual in that it opposes a combatant role for its adherents but finds a non-combatant role consistent with Christianity. It states that, “this partnership with God through Jesus Christ who came into this world not to destroy men’s lives but to save them causes Seventh Day Adventists to advocate a non-combatant position, following their divine Master in not taking human life, but rendering all possible service to save it” (Seventh Day Adventist 2021).

All the denominations referred to above represented a very small proportion of Australian Christian adherents during the Vietnam War years.

Authoritative statements from the large denominations on war and Christian participation usually affirm the desirability of peace and non-violence for the Christian. The statements usually move to qualifications and exceptions to that affirmation. The theory of

a just war or similar construct are common in this discussion on exceptionalism. They ultimately conclude that whether an adherent participates in war is a matter of their individual conscience with God.

The Lambeth Conference is an opportunity for the world-wide member churches of the Anglican Communion to present their thinking on Christian life. The 1930 conference passed resolution twenty-five which stated strongly that, “the conference affirms that war as a method of settling international disputes is incompatible with the teaching and example of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Lambeth 1930). However, resolution twenty-six acknowledged that peace will never be achieved until international relations are controlled by religious and ethical standards, presumably after the manner of Jesus Christ.

The 1998 Lambeth Conference made a number of points on war, including abhorrence of the evil of war but did not commit to pacifism (Lambeth 1998). Article thirty-seven of *The Articles of Religion* found in the 1662 Prayer Book, which is affirmed by all ordained clergy of the church, makes one short statement about Christian participation in war. It states “it is lawful for Christian men, at the command of the Magistrate to wear weapons and serve in the wars”. It is may, not must, wear weapons. Ultimately it is a matter of conscience.

The Catholic Catechism of 1965 discussed the moral question of war when dealing with the Ten Commandments. (Catechism 1965, 4, 2, 5). Article five of that section examines the fifth commandment *You should not kill*. War is not prohibited so long as it is defense against an aggressor. The authorities have the right to impose obligations on citizens to participate in that defense and they must fight honorably. The catechism makes explicit reference to Just War Theory.

It also expressly states that “public authorities should make equitable provision for those who for reasons of conscience refuse to bear arms; these are nonetheless obliged to serve the human community in some other way”. In a separate area of the catechism, it deals with moral conscience where it teaches “a human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience” (Catechism 1965, 3, 1, 1, 6).

Other denominations share a similar view that war is contrary to the life and teaching of Jesus, but in an imperfect world lacking the necessary moral and ethical standards, it is often the lesser of two evils. The decision to participate is left to the individual’s conscience. Such ambiguity was likely to generate anxiety for the Christian man attempting to come to terms with his conscience during the Vietnam War years.

2. Materials and Method

2.1. Research Purposes

The primary purposes of the research are to: first, identify Australian Christian conscientious objectors to war during the Vietnam War years; second, examine the grounds for their conscientious beliefs; third, describe how these conscientious beliefs were acted upon; and fourth, assess what impact, if any, their actions had on societal change.

Specifically, the research was guided by a series of questions which included: what do we know about these Christian conscientious objectors as individuals? How numerous was this group? Are any denominations over-represented or under-represented amongst the group? Who complied and who adopted non-compliance with the NSA? What were the specific grounds justifying their conscientious objection? What denomination did each identify with and is there any evidence they referenced denominational teachings in explaining their position? Were their arguments different from those not identifying as Christian? Were Christians treated differently under the Act than non-Christians, and if so, did it impact their response to it? How did the Christian objectors impact on societal change, specifically the end of Australia’s participation in the Vietnam War and the end of military conscription?

2.2. Research Scope

The scope of the research is narrow and is confined to known Australian Christian conscientious objectors during the Vietnam War years. The term “Christian conscientious

objector” means eligible young men under the NSA who self-identified as a Christian. It includes those who complied with the Act by registering and, at a later time, made an application for exemption from military service by a court. These are conscientious objectors by decision of a court (CODC). It also includes those who refused to comply with the Act for their Christian conscience sake, the CNC.

The focus is on individuals, their personal stories, and their non-violent response to conscription for it. It does not report on the non-violent movement of churches and other groups. These existed, and it became more important over time. Many Christian conscientious objectors were part of this. It is an area in need of greater research.

2.3. Research Method

A data set of known Australian conscientious objectors was prepared (Sandy 2021). It summarizes personal details for each man on the list. It records his conscientious beliefs, how they were formed, and how he acted upon them. The data set consists of two major subsets, CODC and CNC. Those who self-identified as a Christian form a further sub-set for the each of the two major sub-sets.

An official DLNS list of the names of CODC has not been located. Langford (1997) suggests a number of 1242 for CODC, of which about 66% were granted full exemption, and 17% exemption from combatant duties. The data set of known CODC number 426, which represents 34.29% of 1242. Christian CODC number 122, which is 28.63% of 426. This is a good-size sample as a basis for making sound generalizations. Information is more difficult to locate for the CNC. If a total of 1000 is assumed, then the data set contains 283 names which represent 28.29%. Known Christian non-compliers total 17, which is 6% of 283.

The data set was prepared from a number of authoritative sources. The most important source was The Peacemaker newspaper of the Federal Pacifist Council of Australia. The Canberra Times newspaper was also important. These were supplemented by other records including the National Archives of Australia, National Library of Australia, State Libraries, Cabinet Papers, Private Papers, Proceedings of the Australian Parliament, Australian Security Intelligence Organization files, the media, and personal interview. The transcripts of court hearings have largely been destroyed.

The issues of The Peacemaker span vol.1, no.1 from September 1930 to vol. 33, nos. 9–12 ending September/December 1971. A full set is available from the National Library of Australia or the State Library of Victoria. The value of this research is that many conscientious objectors are identified together with their personal stories, and often a summary of the court hearing interchanges is provided.

An analysis of the data set was conducted in accordance with the research purposes and questions within the specified scope. The findings and their significance are discussed in the next major section.

The research approach is strongly influenced by the writings of the Christian pacifist Abraham Johannes Muste, especially his pamphlet titled *Of Holy Disobedience*. He was born in Holland in 1885 and came to the United States in 1901, the year that the Commonwealth of Australia was created. He was ordained in the Reformed Church in 1909. During 1918, he resigned under pressure because of a refusal to keep silent or abandon his Christian pacifist convictions (Peacemaker 1967c, p. 1). His emphasis was on the individual Christian. In another of his pamphlets, (Muste 1942, p. 24) he stated, “If gods peaceable Kingdom is ever to come to earth it must, as Isaac Pennington wrote in 1661, ‘have a beginning before it can grow and be perfected’. And where should it begin but in some particulars (individuals) in a nation and so spread by degrees”.

Muste talks of non-conformity as Holy Disobedience. This is “not to substitute Resistance for Reconciliation. It is to practice both Reconciliation and Resistance . . . it is of crucial importance that we should understand that for the individual to put himself in Holy Disobedience against the war making and conscripting state, wherever it or he be located, is not an act of despair or defeatism. Rather I think we may say that precisely this individual

to go along is now the beginning and the core of any realistic and practical movement against war and for a more peaceful and brotherly world" (Muste 1966, pp. 350–57). He died 11 February 1967 when peace and brotherly love was absent from Vietnam.

2.4. Research Importance

No known previous research explicitly focusses on Christian conscientious objectors during the Vietnam period. Many were included in the pioneering work of Oliver (Oliver 2014). This research builds on her work with an explicit focus on Christians. Four Australian works which proved useful for this research were (Langford 1997; Hamel-Green 1989; Jordens 1989; Forward and Reece 1968). Langford, in particular, provides a detailed description of how the NSA operated with meticulous use of dates and statistics. Tollefson (1993) discusses conscientious objection and the Vietnam War as it related to the United States. Most conscientious objectors were Christians because religious pacifism was the only permitted ground for registration as a conscientious objector at this time. Another useful American work is by (Fox 1982).

This research is important, not only to Australian religious history, but also to Australian history generally. There exists an imbalance in Australian history, with research and publications about war and conflict dwarfing that of peace and non-violence (Lake et al. 2010; Stocking 2010). An examination of a select bibliography of the Vietnam War in 1991 attests to this (Grey and Doyle 1991). Much has been published since. This research is a modest attempt to correct this imbalance.

There is a growing international literature on conscientious objection during previous conflicts, especially WWI. Important for Australia is the excellent work of Oliver (1997). She discusses the period of 1911 to 1945. Many of the personal stories and experiences are for Christian men, and the parents from the boy soldier period. Kramer has documented many of the stories from WWI and WWII for the United Kingdom (Kramer 2013a, 2013b). Also, Burnham (2014) has documented stories from WWI for the UK. These and other authors document a past where conscientious objectors were often accused of cowardice and shirking. They were ostracized and vilified. Some lost their job. Some were maltreated. Some were jailed. Some were forcibly handed over to the army and sent to the front. A classic case was the brutal treatment of Archibald Baxter and other conscientious objectors in New Zealand which has been told by Archibald himself and Grant (Baxter 2021; Grant 2008). The conscientious beliefs of many of these men were grounded in their Christian faith. Baxter was a Christian socialist. By the time of Vietnam the negative attitudes and poor treatment towards conscientious objectors had moderated in Australia. Nevertheless conscientious objectors still faced a difficult and often hostile environment as illustrated by some of the personal stories to come. This research adds to this growing literature.

The Vietnam War was as divisive to Australian society as the 1916 and 1917 conscription plebiscites (Forward and Reece 1968, pp. 30–45). The plebiscites were the first attempts to conscript for military service outside of Australia. They failed and historians even today remain at a loss to explain why (Archer et al. 2016). This divisiveness remains to the present time, although it has somewhat abated. It was the first "television" war of a brutal guerilla conflict where millions were killed and maimed (Hastings 2018, p. 639). The Christian young men who acted on their conscience, together with non-Christian conscientious objectors, were important in turning Australian opinion against the Vietnam War and conscription for it (Hall 2020; Department of Veteran Affairs 2020). They should be remembered and celebrated as part of Australian history, including its religious history, as are the militarists. For many in contemporary Australian society, the Vietnam War was never just and the legislation that introduced selective conscription was an unjust law.

3. Findings and their Significance

An analysis of the data set (Sandy 2021) of known conscientious objectors who self-identified as Christian was undertaken. As much as possible the words of these men are heard unedited. A discussion of the major findings and their significance is now provided.

3.1. Finding 1

Apart from their Christianity, they share characteristics with the non-Christians objectors. They were young men in their early twenties. This is to be expected as the NSA aimed to conscript when a man turned twenty years of age. The majority were from the states of New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria (VIC). Again, this is not surprising because these were and remain the two most populous states of Australia. All were contributing to society through employment or being educated for a profession or trade. The spread of occupations was similar. They were no shirkers.

3.2. Finding 2

Christian and non-Christian CODC represented a small percentage of those who were balloted-in during 1964–72. According to Langford (1997), 804,286 eligible men registered under the NSA. Of these 567,238 were balloted-out. This left 237,048 men potentially available as conscripts. Of these 63,735 (26.88%) entered the army. It has been estimated that approximately 50% of those balloted-in failed the medical (Langford 1997; Parliament of Australia 1968a). CODC numbered 1242, which is 0.52% of those balloted-in. As such, they represent a tiny group of contemporary Australian society. CNC commonly refused to register under the Act. Assuming they may have numbered 1000, their numbers are also very small compared to those who registered.

Despite being tiny in numbers the government was concerned about conscientious objectors, especially the CNC. On the surface, its concerns were their refusal to fight and/or their refusal to comply. In the government's view, they violated their social contract they had with society. Over the period it strengthened the legislation and increased penalties for non-compliance (Parliament of Australia 1968b; Peacemaker 1968b, p. 1), yet the government and military were not concerned that conscription would not meet the army's required numbers, despite the high medical failure rate. Often, an army prefers that soldiers be volunteers rather than conscripts, or if conscripts are used, that they be willing rather than unwilling. This preference is motivated by good morale and combat effectiveness. Judge Amsberg gave expression to this view after granting full exemption to Stanley Lewry, "he didn't understand the Army's attitude towards conscientious objectors; they probably made rotten soldiers anyway" (Peacemaker 1968a, p. 3).

The governments concern was invariably politically motivated. They wished to be seen as strong on national security and avoid losing face. Over the period there was substantial shift in public opinion towards opposition to the Vietnam War and conscription for it. The spectacle of fining and jailing young men acting on their conscience contributed to this shift in public opinion. The government reversed its authoritarian approach to combat the political damage. Three examples are usually mentioned. First, it ensured that troublemakers, including men who had already been declared medically fit for service, failed a medical. These included Peter Hill, Roger Kelly, Desmond Phillipson and John Poole-Johnson.

Second, it displayed a growing reluctance to enforce the mandatory jail sentence for repeated non-compliance offences. Dozens of young men being jailed was perceived to be politically damaging to the government (Peacemaker 1970d, p. 7). Third, in 1970 Minister Snedden introduced an amendment (reg. 32A) to the NSA which allowed the Government to refer a person to a court to determine if they had conscientious beliefs as prescribed by the Act (Peacemaker 1970c, p. 1). If so, the Minister could remove men from the non-complier list who were to be fined or jailed to the conscientious objector register. This looked better for the government. The referral to a court was often undertaken without the person's consent.

3.3. Finding 3

Out of the 63,735 conscripts who served in the military, it is safe to speculate that a large number of Christians served and found it compatible with their Christian conscience.

This is an important area for future research, which would probably necessitate a large number of personal interviews.

3.4. Finding 4

Christian CODC were pacifists to all war which is not surprising because s.29A of the NSA only allowed a court to grant exemption from military duties if the applicant could convince the court of his pacifism, whether it be religious or humanist based. What may be surprising is the larger number of persons (208) whose pacifism was not grounded in religion, but in some other ethical system.

Graham Roberts's conscientious beliefs were grounded in Christianity. He was a Quaker from Hobart, Tasmania. His hearing was before Magistrate Bingham 20 April 1966. In his written statement he said, "My conscience does not allow me to take up arms against any person, no matter to what country, class or creed the other may belong. I therefore cannot participate in preparation for war in any way for it is essentially the training of young men to take the lives or cause suffering to their fellow human beings" (Peacemaker 1966a, p. 3). This is a classic exposition of Quaker beliefs.

3.5. Finding 5

Some Christian pacifists who would have had a strong case in gaining exemption from military service chose instead non-compliance. A common theme in their communications is that making application under the NSA for exemption was seen as tacit approval to the government that it had the moral right to conscript. Non-compliance was seen as a stronger conscientious response. The experience of the Mowbray triplets from Sydney, NSW is a good example.

The triplets David, Graham and Robert, all refused to register for national service during 1967. All were Christians and active in the Methodist Church. As such they had a good chance of gaining full exemption from military service as conscientious objectors. However, they all chose non-compliance. (Peacemaker 1968c, p. 1; 1969a, p. 6; Australian War Memorial 2014). This is evident in a statement made by Robert which was shared by his brothers, "I believe that conscription for military service is immoral. I recognize that I have an opportunity to place my beliefs before a court and gain exemption. However, I do not consider this sufficient. I must reject the right of a government to conscript anyone to kill".

He stated further that, "Christian discipleship challenges me to resist an Act which crushes basic human rights and sends young men off to a war which world opinion condemns. By my own university experience training and the experience gained in everyday life I am seeking to equip myself to give the kind of service to mankind which will promote justice and help remove the causes of war" (Peacemaker 1968c, p. 1; 1969a, p. 7). Graham made a similar statement (Peacemaker 1969d, p. 7).

Robert was sentenced to seven days imprisonment in Long Bay Jail on 24 March 1969 for refusing to undertake a medical examination. His brother, Robert, shared the same fate (Peacemaker 1969b, p. 6). The response of the authorities to David's resistance bordered on the farcical (Peacemaker 1970a, p. 1; 1970c, p. 4; 1970e, p. 7). David described himself as a Christian, pacifist, ecologist, and revolutionary. He was required by the order of the NSW Supreme Court to report to Phillip Street Police Station in Sydney. He with his girlfriend and parents were stopped by media people as they approached the station. David started answering their questions about why he was going to jail for seven days as had his two brothers before him. Three plain clothes policeman who said excuse me to the media persons pulled David's arm behind his back and dragged him into the station. Brian Mowbray, David's father, entered the station and requested an interview with a senior police officer. After fifteen minutes this was granted. Brian complained of the unnecessarily and unwarranted coercion used upon his son who was quietly and peacefully complying with the Supreme Court order.

The Mowbray triplets were deemed, during 1971, by Minister Snedden to be conscientious objectors under reg.32A, and were not proceeded against for their non-compliance. The Mowbray's was one of a number of cases that was causing unwelcome political pressure on the government.

Kevin Booker wrote to the Minister DLNS on 5 April 1970 informing him of his refusal to register for national service and saying, "I believe in Jesus Christ, I believe his teachings condemn militarism in any form. Hence, in my opinion the Government has no moral right to conscript myself, or anybody else for military duties" (Peacemaker 1970b, p. 6).

John Jedryka, a Christian, wrote a letter not only to the Minister but it was addressed also to the citizens of Australia. He informed all that he refused to register and the reasons why. He ended on a very personal note saying, "I have a nauseating horror at the thought of killing, and to me the highest ideal that I can reach is that I would prepare to die than kill. I am therefore totally and absolutely opposed to any organization, system or whatever that requires a man to kill" (Peacemaker 1970b, p. 6).

It was common for those who intentionally broke the law to view any sanctions that followed as a means of strengthening their non-violent opposition to the NSA. Many expressed the view that they "welcomed" imprisonment as a means of embarrassing the government and testing its will to continue with conscription.

3.6. Finding 6

A number of serving soldiers, conscripts already inducted into the army and those in the Citizen Military Force (CMF) made application for exemption from military service. These include Darrell Nolan, a Catholic who was already conscripted in the army, and Colin Park a Christadelphian who was a serving soldier. With all these men conscientious beliefs had developed after induction, or had matured during their time, in the military. Evidence from the applicant's statements at court hearings, including court martial, was that their military training was often an important factor.

William Rodgers of Dandenong, VIC was aged twenty-three years and married. He had been a member of the Citizen Military Force but had resigned and made application to be registered as a conscientious objector. His case was reported in the (Peacemaker 1970b, p. 3). He explained to Magistrate Foley hearing his application that the CMF training was important in the development of his conscientious beliefs. He stated that "we went on a training camp to Williamstown and the targets for target practice were shaped like human beings, some lying down and some standing up. We were to shoot at them". He told the court that he believed it was immoral to kill another human being and that he had become a conscientious objector during the past two years when he had become a Christian. He was a member of the Church of Christ. As a result he said that "he would not kill a human being or take part in the military machine". William was granted exemption from all military duties by the magistrate on 27 March 1970.

For some men their Christian faith became important after they joined the military and that experience was the catalyst for their conscientious objection. For others, like Rodgers, the military experience led to an awakening of a Christian conscience.

3.7. Finding 7

Not all Christian conscientious objectors were pacifists to all war. Some were selective pacifists and refused to serve in the Vietnam War. The personal story of John Zarb was told earlier. Another was Darrell Nolan a Catholic from VIC, aged twenty-three years (Peacemaker 1968e, p. 3). He was an accountant. He had registered under the Act, passed the medical and was duly inducted into the army during February 1968. He applied for exemption from military service based on his objection to the immoral Vietnam War. His application was dismissed by the magistrate 28 November 1968 saying the NSA did not recognize conscientious objection to a particular war.

Little explicit mention is made by applicants to Just War Theory but it undoubtedly informed the conscience of a number, as the terms 'unjust war' and 'immoral war' are common in their statements.

3.8. Finding 8

Invariably Christian conscientious objectors argued that killing others was incompatible with Christianity and so could not perform combatant duties. They also usually held that they could not serve in any capacity with an organization dedicated to killing human beings. This ruled out non-combatant military duties. However, there were some that held that a non-combatant role was compatible with their Christian conscience. Graham Edser was one of these. The (Peacemaker 1968b, p. 3) reported that Graham was from Toowoomba, Queensland and by trade a pattern-maker. He was a Seventh Day Adventist. He applied for exemption from combatant military duties only, as was common for adherents of his denomination. Graham said this was based on his understanding of the 6th commandment *Thou shalt not kill*. Magistrate Peacock granted his application 26 April 1968.

Bruce French was from Lower Barrington, Tasmania (Peacemaker 1970b, p. 3). He was a Baptist and a school teacher. He applied for and was granted exemption from combatant duties by Magistrate Crisp at Devonport 7 February 1970. Bruce told the magistrate that "my Christian beliefs convince me that life is sacred and therefore the only acceptable form of defence is in terms of constructive aid and mutual understanding". The magistrate asked Bruce "how do you meet aggression". He started to answer by saying "I am prepared to prevent aggression starting". Crisp interjected "If our shores were attacked what would you do". Bruce responded "Diplomacy would be a more effective means of defence. I would not kill. I can say that categorically". Bruce explained that his beliefs had crystallized in study groups at the Hobart Baptist Church and at the University in Hobart. He was asked on what authority he based his antipathy to war. Bruce responded by saying his beliefs were based on the Old and New Testaments.

3.9. Finding 9

Despite the fact that some Christian conscientious objectors applicants were clear in their statement to the court that their conscientious beliefs were based on the teachings of Jesus and the bible, their application was dismissed, and often also dismissed on appeal.

Gavin Goudie of Moama, NSW was aged twenty and a welder by trade. He told the magistrate he had applied for full exemption from military duties based on the teachings of Jesus Christ. He could not convince Magistrate Murray of the Court of Petty Sessions in Melbourne of the sincerity of his conscientious views. His application was dismissed 30 May 1968. The Minister's legal counsel attacked Gavin verbally and called him selfish. Gavin made a second application and was granted a full exemption (Peacemaker 1968b, p. 3; 1968d, p. 3; 1970a, p. 3).

Appearing before a court was formidable for these young men. Often the magistrate and the state's legal counsel were hostile to conscientious objection and sometimes to Christianity itself.

3.10. Finding 10

Christian conscientious objectors were opposed to all war or a particular war, but many were opposed to conscription itself. It was viewed as unconscionable. This was something strongly shared with other objectors.

Sometimes Christian objectors to conscription expressed their opposition to it in terms of their Christian faith citing violation of their Christian freedom as they only answered to God. Also, secular life (the military) was seen as ungodly. This view was common amongst Jehovah's Witnesses and Brethren, but not only them.

Roy Scott, aged twenty-three years was a Jehovah's Witnesses from Gordon Park, Queensland (Peacemaker 1968b, p. 3). Magistrate Martin granted him full exemption from military service on 3 April 1968. This came after he had an application refused, and had

been committed to the army. In terms of his faith tradition he stated, “He had refused to answer to the term ‘private’ and to wear an army uniform, and had been jailed by the Army for refusing to co-operate”. He further stated that “he would not bear arms or indulge in violence and his sect was opposed to violence or participation by members in any other organization”. In other words, he belonged exclusively to the faith community of Jehovah’s Witnesses who only answered (took orders) from God.

3.11. Finding 11

Over 50% of known CODC are those who did not identify as Christian. One of the most celebrated cases during the Vietnam War years was that of William White (Bill) a primary school teacher from Gladesville, NSW ([National Archives of Australia 1966a](#); [Peacemaker 1966a](#), p. 3; [1966b](#), p. 3; [1967a](#), p. 3; [1968e](#), p. 3). After having his application for full exemption dismissed he appealed to a higher court. In a written statement to the court he reiterated that, “man’s chief purpose is to live-therefore the taking of a human life is wrong and unjustifiable. I cannot, with a clear conscience, kill a person, or be part of any organization that is able or willing to kill or make war, no matter how disconnected from actual killing that part may seem to be, for any individual part may seem to be, for any individual part of such an organization must be such as to increase the efficiency of the whole towards its end-that is to kill”. For Bill the grounds of his conscientious beliefs and the words that express them are very similar to that of a Christian.

Despite his clear statement of his long-held conscientious beliefs Judge Cameron-Smith dismissed his appeal. William was sacked from his school teaching position and dragged from his home by four policemen in front of family, neighbors and friends. He was forcibly committed to the army and then jailed for non-compliance. He was finally granted full exemption after a second application was heard. He was not reinstated to his former teaching position by the NSW Education Department.

Many non-Christian conscientious objectors were pacifists, with their pacifism was usually grounded in humanism. An examination of their letters to the Minister or their court hearing statements, where available, often read very similar to those of the Christian pacifists. They of course do not mention God, Jesus or the Bible. They express the same abhorrence to killing other persons, the immorality of war and the Vietnam War in particular.

3.12. Finding 12

The large denominations were under-represented in per capita terms amongst Christian CODC. Conversely the small denominations were over-represented. This is shown in [Table 2](#) Known Australian Conscientious Objectors by-decision-of-a-court 1965–72 by Denomination. Column 3 shows the percentage of known objectors by denomination. Column 4 shows the percentage of total Christians according to the 1966 census by denomination as shown in [Table 1](#).

Table 2. Known Australian Christian Conscientious Objectors by-Decision-of-a-Court 1965–72. By denomination.

Denomination	Number	Percentage	Percentage of Total Christians by Denomination: 1966 Census
Jehovah’s Witnesses	31	25.40	na
Christian	30	24.59	na
Church of England	11	9.01	37.99
Catholic	10	8.19	29.75
Christadelphian	10	8.19	na
Society of Friends	7	5.73	na
Church of God	7	5.73	na
Church of Christ	5	4.09	1.00
Baptist	5	4.09	1.62
Seventh Day Adventist	4	3.27	0.36

The Church of England accounted for 37.99% of total Christians but only 9.01% of known objectors. The Catholic Church accounted for 29.75% of total Christians but only 8.19% of known objectors. The largest group of known Christian conscientious objectors simply referred to themselves as “Christian” and did not disclose a denominational affiliation.

The Jehovah’s Witnesses were too small to be of interest to the census but accounted for 25.40% of objectors, and similarly for the Christadelphians (8.19%), The Society of Friends (5.73%) and the Church of God (5.73%). All of these denominations had a strong tradition of opposition to war and participation in the military. Findings 13 to 18 discuss what is behind these statistics. There were no known Christian conscientious objectors from the Congregational, Lutheran, Orthodox or Salvation Army denominations. All these were identified for 1966 census purposes.

Peter Graf referred to himself in court as a Christian pacifist and refused to register for the 1969 intake. Peter was born in Swatow, China where his Dutch parents were missionaries. He wrote a long letter to the Minister Snedden which was published ([Peacemaker 1970a](#), p. 6). He informed him, “that I am in conscience not able to register or comply with the National Service Act in any way”. He continued, “As a Christian I am committed to an allegiance to Jesus Christ, which constrains me to live according to this God-given moral law as interpreted by individual informed conscience, and my attitude to all other laws is governed by this same guidance”. Peter referenced Dr Martin Luther King, St Thomas Aquinas, the Apostle Peter (Acts. 5:29) and St Augustine concerning unjust laws. He stated that “this makes disobedience to an unjust law not only a moral act but also a moral imperative”.

Peter stressed that “while I am opposed to all war Conscientious Objection as understood in the NSA is unacceptable to me because strictly speaking, the Conscientious Objector expresses nothing more than an objection to war alone”. He further stated that an objector by complying endorses the Act. Further he strongly opposes conscription and the sanctions it imposes on law abiding citizens who are treated like criminals. He concludes his letter by declaring that “the ultimate criterion is obedience to God rather than man (Government). It is interesting to note in this regard that the apostle who wrote the injunction to obey the Government in Rom. 13 was on many occasions jailed for disobedience to laws judged on such criteria. As I have explained above this is the position I have reached in regard to the National Service Act”. At 11 p.m. on 11 June 1971, whilst at home in bed, Peter was arrested and jailed for eight days ([Peacemaker 1971](#), p. 12).

3.13. Finding 13

There were a number of Church of England men who applied for exemption from military service. There is some evidence that magistrates hearing their case presumed their views were markedly differed from their denomination’s teaching on war, namely that its tradition was not strongly opposed to war. This is exemplified in the two personal stories to follow. This presumption proved an additional obstacle for a Church of England applicant to overcome in order to achieve a successful court outcome.

Geoffrey and Peter Whale were identical twin brothers from Roseville, NSW. They both applied for full exemption from military duties on the grounds of Christian pacifism ([Peacemaker 1968c](#), p. 3). Magistrate Rogers dismissed their applications March 1968. He ruled that their Church’s religious beliefs did not prevent them from taking part in non-combatant duties. This was beyond his expertise and an error under the NSA. The twins appealed the decision. It was heard by Judge Hicks in the Sydney District Court. The judge gave a reserved judgement and within it he stated that the applicant’s beliefs differed from that of their denomination. He made two errors. First, the judge was required to determine if the beliefs were genuinely held and not whether their beliefs differed from the denomination they belonged to. Both he and Rogers presumed this. Second the Judge was apparently unaware of article thirty-seven which has been mentioned previously. Fortunately, Hicks granted a full exemption to both men on 25 June 1968.

Geoffrey Sandy from VIC sought a full exemption based on his Christian pacifism ([National Archives of Australia 1970](#); [Certified Court Extract 2018](#); [Sandy 2018](#)). Like many other conscientious objectors he was also opposed to the Vietnam War, which he considered to be immoral, and conscription which he believed was a violation of individual liberty. However, his application could not be based on the latter two grounds. His birthdate was selected in the first ballot on 10 March 1965. He applied successfully on 27 May 1965 for deferment whilst he completed his University studies. During 1966 Geoff travelled overseas to India and then in 1967 to New Zealand. He successfully sought permission from the government for both trips as was required under the NSA. Upon successful completion of his university studies he was required to attend a medical examination 16 October 1968. He attended and passed the medical examination. On 21 November 1968 the government notified him he would be called-up on 29 January 1969.

He made application for registration as a conscientious objector 30 November 1968. Geoff stated in his application that, "taking part in war (combatant) or support of war (non-combatant) was immoral for the Christian". His hearing was at the Court of Petty Sessions in Melbourne on 23 January 1969. Geoff's father, who served in the Royal Australian Air Force during WWII, gave testimony that his son's pacifism was of long-standing. Magistrate Smith was hostile to conscientious objectors and Christianity. He expressed surprise that teaching Sunday school did not require formal training. He asked Geoff's other supporter the Revd. Stephen Cherry a Church of England minister, about church beliefs concerning war. The Revd. Cherry replied that, "he disagreed with Geoff's view but ultimately the church believed it was a matter of personal conscience". Magistrate Smith initially dismissed the application. Both the applicant's legal counsel, Alf O'Connor, and the state's legal counsel N Gregory, remonstrated with the magistrate stating that the case had been proved. The magistrate responded there and then by changing his mind and granted the applicant full exemption.

3.14. *Finding 14*

There were a number of Catholic men who applied for exemption from military service. Benedict Chu was from Sydney, NSW ([Peacemaker 1966a](#), p. 3). He was previously a Chinese subject from Canton and was naturalized two days before the introduction of conscription. He registered and was balloted in. He made application for full exemption from military service. His court hearing was 18 August 1965 before Magistrate Rogers who refused his application. It seems that Benedict was one of many to receive an unsuccessful outcome from NSW magistrates. In the early years some concern was expressed about the disparity of application "success rates" between NSW in particular, and other jurisdictions. ([Langford 1997](#); [Parliament of Australia 1968c](#)). Benedict appealed Rogers's decision and this was heard by Judge Head on 24 February 1966. The Judge delivered his reserved decision on 1 June 1966. He noted that the applicant "believes that he should not engage in any form of military service and that such is binding on his conscience". He granted full exemption.

John Kobelke aged twenty-one years was studying at St. Thomas More College, Crawley, Western Australia ([Peacemaker 1970e](#), p. 3). He was granted full exemption from military service by Magistrate Malley on 27 October 1970. John said "that his objections to war were based mainly on his Roman Catholic beliefs. The essence of the Christian message was that we must try to love. Violence completely contradicted this. All violence was wrong. He could not justify any wars". The magistrate responded and said "that although Kobelke's reasoning was not always logical and was confused in places, he was convinced that his views were sincere and arrived at by a careful process of thought, Evidence from Kobelke and corroborating evidence from the Roman Catholic chaplain of the University, Father John Harte, convinced him of Kobelke's sincerity".

It was often difficult for men from the two largest denominations to convince a magistrate that they were sincere in their conscientious beliefs because of the perceived 'support' for war and the military by their denomination.

3.15. Finding 15

There were a few objectors from large Protestants churches who applied for exemption from military service. They include Wettenhall and Smalley.

Simon Wettenhall was a twenty year old from Armadale, VIC and a member of the Presbyterian Church ([Peacemaker 1970a](#), p. 3). He probably startled the court when he offered an abstract symbolic oil painting as evidence of his Christian beliefs and his concern for moral issues. He was appealing the magistrate's decision granting him exemption from combatant duties only. In the County Court 6 November 1969, Simon told Judge Southwell that "his beliefs were based on the Bible, especially the Sermon on the Mount, where Christ taught *thou shalt not kill*. The judge upheld his appeal and granted him full exemption.

Douglas Smalley was also a Presbyterian from VIC. His was the first conscientious objector hearing 3 June 1965. Magistrate Murray asked Douglas about the beliefs of the Presbyterian Church rather than his own personal beliefs, casting doubt on his sincerity. Despite that he granted full exemption ([Peacemaker 1965](#), p. 1; [Daily News 1966b](#), p. 5).

3.16. Finding 16

Quakers were well represented amongst the Christian objectors but the Brethren, also a "peace church", were not.

David Jones was a Quaker from Glebe, NSW. He expressed a strong pacifist view of most Quakers in a letter to Minister Snedden February 1970 ([Peacemaker 1970b](#), p. 7; [1970d](#), p. 2; [1971](#), p. 10). He gave his reasons for his non-compliance in not registering under the Act. He stated he had strong pacifist beliefs and that they were greatly influenced by the Quakers. He stated that he objected to military service of any kind which took human life and the use of war as a solution to misunderstandings and conflict between nations. He stated "these objections stem from belief both in the uniqueness of every individual and in a spirit or inner self which is part of every person-often spoken of by Quakers as *that of God in every man*. To take the life of another person denies the existence of this common spirit and prevents any possibility of creating understanding through this spirit, between persons on opposing sides of the conflict".

David also believed that the government did not have the right to conscript. He also made the point, common to non-compliers, when he said "were I to register as a conscientious objector I would be tacitly acknowledging the Governments right to conscript 20-year-old men for military service. For this same reason I would not be willing to accept alternative civilian service under the Act". That opportunity was not open to anyone at the time as the government refused on two occasions to introduce it, as was previously mentioned.

Noel Collett was a member of the Order of the Exclusive Brethren and had a difficult time in convincing three courts that he had a conscientious objection to killing ([Peacemaker 1967a](#), p. 3). He was a farm labourer from Nambour, Queensland. His application for exemption from combatant duties was dismissed in the Court of Petty Sessions, and also the District Court in Brisbane. He appealed again to the Court of Petty Sessions but Magistrate Loane said he had no jurisdiction to hear a further application. Noel appealed to the High Court of Australia in August 1966 and in a split decision they decided Noel's beliefs at the time of the hearing was the relevant question for the court to consider ([National Archives of Australia 1966b](#)). Noel said his attitude had not changed but with further study of the scriptures it had strengthened his views. Magistrate Loan who now had jurisdiction to hear the case again granted Noel exemption from combatant duties.

3.17. Finding 17

Christadelphians and Church of God were also well represented among the Christian objectors.

Paul Schipper of Thebarton, South Australia was a Christadelphian ([Peacemaker 1968b](#), p. 3). In a reserved judgement Magistrate Beerworth granted him full exemption from military service in Adelaide on 22 May 1968. Rodney Payton, also a Christadelphian,

was from Western Australia ([West Australian 1966](#), p. 16; [Daily News 1966a](#), p. 18). Magistrate Blackwood granted him full exemption in the Perth court 31 May 1966. George Domazetis who belonged to the Church of God was also granted full exemption from Magistrate Bennett on 15 December 1966 ([Peacemaker 1967a](#), p. 3). All had argued on the grounds of Christian pacifism.

It appears less difficult for men from the small denominations to convince a magistrate that they were sincere in their conscientious beliefs because of their strong pacifist teachings. Historically legal precedents had been established by the time of Vietnam

3.18. Finding 18

The strong doctrinal teaching of separateness from society and exclusivity of belonging only to God's kingdom largely explains why Jehovah's Witnesses caught up in the ballot sought no participation with the army. Adherents are significantly over-represented in per capita terms.

Robert Lacars of Blacktown NSW was a minister and bookbinder. He was granted full exemption. He told the magistrate at his court hearing that "as an ambassador of Christ he had immunity from the laws of the country. He was already serving in a spiritual army and could not serve in any other" ([Canberra Times 1967](#), p. 3). Christopher Nelms of Mordialloc, VIC was also granted full exemption on appeal. He told Judge Nelson, "only God can tell me I must go and kill" ([Canberra Times 1966](#), p. 17; [Peacemaker 1966c](#), p. 3).

Richard Pettit was a Jehovah Witness from Corrimal, NSW who lived and worked on the Watchtower Society's Kingdom farm at Ingleburn ([Peacemaker 1968a](#), p. 3; [1968b](#), p. 3). He informed the magistrate that every night was spent on some religious activity. He was granted exemption from combatant duties only. He appealed and stated to Judge Brennan in the Wollongong District Court 11 March 1968 that "he would go to jail if forced into the army either as a combatant or non-combatant". The judge granted him a full exemption.

Michael Cutrapi and Bill Perry had a different outcome and experience than Robert, Christopher and Richard. They were from New South Wales and their story was told in [Peacemaker \(1967b, p. 3; 1967c, p. 3\)](#). They could have expected to have received a full exemption from military service given their church's strong neutrality to all war. Instead they were exempted from combatant duties only. They became non-compliers when they refused to obey a call-up for non-combatant duties. They were summoned before the Special Commonwealth Court in Philip Street Sydney. They were then forcibly drafted into the army and sent to 1st Recruit Training Battalion at Kapooka. Both men refused to obey any orders, in particular signing for their army issue and putting-on their army uniform. They stated that they refused to obey orders because they were contrary to their Christian beliefs. As a result the army responded with a court martial on 1 March 1967 and sent them to Holsworthy Correctional Facility. Michael and Bill both stated they were placed in solitary confinement on bread and water. The cell contained no furniture and the men were forced to sleep on a concrete floor with just three blankets issued to them. It is unknown what their ultimate fate was.

Again historically over time legal precedents had been established that led magistrates to usually acknowledge the strong doctrinal beliefs of this denomination, which usually resulted in granting full exemption from military service.

4. Conclusions

Four important aspects should be noted in concluding. First, the influence on a Christian man's conscientious objection was strongest if they were an adherent of a denomination with a strong pacifist tradition or one that viewed secular organisation, like the military, as "ungodly". In respect to the former this is particularly so for the Quakers and Christadelphians, and for the latter the Jehovah's Witnesses. The contrast is stark with the large and dominant denominations of the Church of England and Catholic.

Second, the study confirms the expectation that for Christian conscientious objectors their conscientious beliefs were related to their strict interpretation of the sixth commandment, and in following the example of the non-violent life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

Third, during the Vietnam War years Australians overwhelmingly claimed allegiance to Christianity. The study reveals that for all CODC, about 50% did not identify as Christian. Also Christians were a small proportion of the CNC. There exists a disconnection. Conscientious beliefs grounded in humanist ethical systems were at least as important as Christianity.

Finally, Australian Christian conscientious objectors during the Vietnam War years were individuals who adopted non-violent opposition to war and conscription for it. As A.J. Muste would describe it they engaged in holy disobedience. This is attested by their personal stories just related.

Most complied with the law as it allowed a Christian pacifist the opportunity to convince a magistrate of his sincerity. Nevertheless this was an act of disobedience. It was an act of non-conformity and therefore a challenge to the powerful forces in contemporary Australia. They rejected war violence as a means of achieving societal change. Specifically they rejected killing other human beings viewed as enemies of the state. They rejected military conscription, which was justified by those in power, as being necessary to defend Australia from the godless forces of world communism. They argued if Vietnam fell to communism then Australia would be at risk.

Each of these young Christian men said no to killing other human beings. In doing so they challenged and embarrassed the government and other powerful forces. These young men could also be an embarrassment to their own denomination, especially those that were ambiguous in their teaching about the participation of the Christian in war. A small number adopted conscientious non-compliance with the law which they viewed as unconscionable. They considered that a stronger “holy disobedience” was required to effect societal change. The immediate change or goal was the end of Australia’s participation in the Vietnam War and conscription for it.

As the Vietnam War progressed individual Christians together with non-Christian objectors became part of a wider protest and change movement. This wider movement was largely non-violent. No known Christian conscientious objector was involved in violence. This wider movement, especially the role played by religious organisations, requires more research.

Many of the personal stories demonstrate how the powerful forces arrayed against them increasingly adopted more severe sanctions to quell the holy disobedience. As an indication of the success of these non-violent actions the government turned to “face-saving” measures to save it loss of political support, and from having to defend the indefensible. Sanctions were softened or not enforced.

The individual Christian conscientious objectors who have been the subject of this study contributed through their non-violent actions, to the considerable loss of support for the Vietnam War, and conscription for it. This culminated in the defeat of the (Conservative) Coalition Party in December 1972 by the (Democratic Socialist) Labour Party. One of the first acts of the incoming government was to suspend the NSA by administrative fiat, thus ending military conscription. The hope was “for a more peaceful and brotherly world”.

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