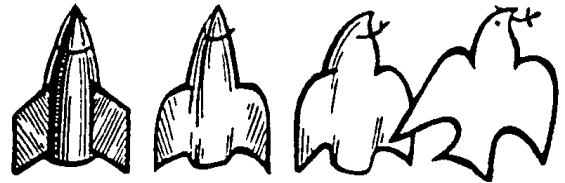


Holy Obedience



When Brethren find themselves between the call of government and the call of faith, they have chosen God's way, accepting the consequences of their decision. To follow the dictates of the government by serving in the military and killing others has even more serious consequences than breaking a human law. Here are several examples of what some have called "holy obedience." Instead of obeying the laws of governments, courageous people were obedient to the teachings of Christ.

Solingen Brethren

In 1717, six Brethren in Germany were arrested for leaving the Reformed Church (the official state church) and identifying with Pietists (an illegal group of religious dissenters). They would not repent for their association with Pietists and were held in prison for nearly four years. Despite nearly dying in a terrible, dank dungeon, the Brethren were treated with respect by their captors because they accepted their imprisonment as an expression of their faith. They were lightly guarded on work detail and never tried to escape, preferring to be in jail for their faith than free with a bad conscience. (*The Brethren Encyclopedia*)

Christopher Sauer II

Christopher Sauer II remained supportive of the British Crown during the Revolutionary War period. He was forced by revolutionary forces to flee his home several times because he opposed the "war spirit" and was arrested as a traitor of the revolution. "He was marched off at bayonet point, tormented, and placed under arrest at Valley Forge. On the fifth day he was released through the efforts of Gen. Peter Muhlenberg, who interceded for him with Gen. George Washington." The rebel forces arrested him again for being a traitor. His belongings were auctioned and his house and businesses were sold, leaving him destitute. (*The Brethren Encyclopedia*)

Civil War Brethren

During the Civil War, some northern states allowed conscientious objectors to perform noncombatant service, like working in hospitals. Some states even allowed men to pay a fee of \$200 or \$300 to be exempt from military service. In the South, the fee was higher, \$500 in some cases. Southern authorities abused some Brethren who refused to fight, even killing a few. John Kline is the most famous of these, perhaps, but John Bowman of Tennessee also lost his life when Confederate soldiers tried to requisition his horse. "Henry Bowman, a minister in Virginia, was led off and apparently killed in Barbour County, Virginia." ("Civil War," *The Brethren Encyclopedia*)



The Goshen Conference

In 1917 when the United States entered World War I, the Brethren were suddenly faced with a draft. This time there was no alternative service, no fee to pay, and only a few noncombatant jobs in the military. The leaders of the church called a special conference in Goshen, Indiana, to talk about what to do in the face of a draft. The delegates to the conference “approved both a resolution that was sent to the U.S. president and other government officials and also the ‘Goshen Statement,’ an expression of the traditional Brethren position on peace and military service that was intended to give official denominational support and encouragement, to Brethren conscientious objectors who faced conscription.” Despite the church’s long history of opposition to war and also its good record of loyal citizenship, the government treated their action as sedition (treason), and threatened to prosecute the officers of the conference, charge enormous fines, and send them to prison. Eventually, the church withdrew the Goshen Statement from circulation and reassured the government of its loyalty. (“Goshen Conference,” *The Brethren Encyclopedia*)

Maurice Hess

During World War I, Maurice Hess, a member of the Old German Baptist Brethren, decided he could not support the war effort, not by putting on a uniform, not even by carrying a stretcher. He was imprisoned at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and for 38 days he was in solitary confinement, shackled to the bars of his cell for part of each day. In a letter he said, “I know the teaching of Christ, my Savior. He taught us to resist not evil, to love our enemies, to bless them that curse us, and do good to them that hate us. Not only did he teach this, but he also practiced it in Gethsemane, before Pilate, and on Calvary. We would indeed be hypocrites and base traitors to our profession if we would be unwilling to bear the taunts and jeers of a sinful world, and its imprisonment, and torture or death, rather than to participate in war and military service.” (“World War I,” *The Brethren Encyclopedia*)

Ted Studebaker

Ted Studebaker was drafted during the Vietnam War and chose alternative service instead of military service. Over the years, conscientious objectors have been ridiculed as cowards, unwilling to give their lives for their country. To the contrary, it is the taking of life that is unconscionable, he believed, not the giving of one’s own life. Ted Studebaker showed that he was just as willing to go into harm’s way as a soldier and to take the same risk for peace that a soldier takes for war. In fact, he volunteered to go to Vietnam to work as an agriculturalist with people in rural Vietnam where he was killed by a Vietcong raid on the village where he lived, one week after he married Ven Pak Lee of Hong Kong.

Phil and Louise Rieman

Another form of conscientious objection is the refusal to pay for war through taxes. Just as citizens refuse to kill in wars, people of faith have refused to let their dollars be conscripted for war efforts. Phil and Louise Rieman were co-pastors of several churches during the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. In each place, they respectfully declined to pay for war and asked the congregation to back them in their actions. At one point, the IRS seized the Riemans’ Volkswagen bus and sold it at public auction to cover the taxes owed.