



Center on Conscience & War

National Interreligious Service Board for Conscientious Objectors

Conscientious Objectors

In our efforts to educate Congress about conscientious objection (CO), it is important to recognize that COs can be placed on a wide spectrum of range and depth of beliefs. The government defines a CO as someone who is “opposed to participation in war in any form based on a religious or moral belief.” In reality, however, not all COs can fit into such a strict definition. The range of CO beliefs are as follows:

- **Every person is a *conscientious objector*.** Everyone has ethical, moral, or religious objections to their participation in some form of war, violence, preparations for war, or paying for war. Everybody has moral standards that their conscience will forbid them to cross.
- *Conscientious objectors* are those who are **opposed to participating in a particular or an unjust war**. There are some who believe that there can be certain wars that are justified. While they do not oppose their participation in just wars, their conscience, however, will not allow them to participate in unjust wars.
- *Conscientious objectors* are those who will serve in the military **only as non-combatants**. Some do not oppose being part of the military, but their conscience will not allow them to carry a weapon or kill another person.
- *Conscientious objectors* are those who are opposed to participating in all wars. Some believe that there can be no wars that are justified. Their participation in any war will be a violation of their conscience.
- *Conscientious objectors* are those who **refuse to register with Selective Service**. Many COs are willing to comply with Selective Service by registering. There are, however, many others who **cannot, without violating deeply held beliefs, register for the draft**. They would rather forego government aid for college and face other serious penalties than violate their beliefs.
- *Conscientious objectors* are those who **refuse to perform alternative service** during a draft. Most COs are willing to perform alternative service in the event of a draft. However, there are others who believe that by performing alternative service, they are legitimizing the draft system. As a result they would rather go to jail than violate their conscience.
- *Conscientious objectors* are those who **refuse to pay military taxes**. There are some COs who believe that it is wrong for them to pay taxes which fund the military. They would rather have property taken from them or live below the poverty line and avoid paying for war, than violate deeply held beliefs.