

**“THE EYES OF THE AUTHORITIES
ARE UPON US”:
THE BRETHERN AND WORLD WAR I**

Elisabeth Wilson

The previous article discussed Brethren attitudes to authority and government, and hence their theoretical response to war.¹ This article will look at the actual response to wartime demands, with reference to Australia, New Zealand and Great Britain. Some of the material was obtained from respondents to a questionnaire used as part of the research for a thesis on this topic.²

The general atmosphere in the community is well known: the fervent patriotism of many,³ the ‘white feathers’ for those who did not enlist, the Kitchener poster (‘YOUR COUNTRY NEEDS YOU’), the emotional recruiting rallies. I will be assuming that the reader is familiar with this background. In Britain, under the Military Service Act all unmarried men between the ages of eighteen and forty-one were deemed to be

¹ Elisabeth Wilson, ‘Your Citizenship is in Heaven: Brethren attitudes to authority and government’, *BAHNR* 2:2 (2003), 75-90. Responses to war have also been discussed by Peter Brock, ‘The Peace Testimony of the early Plymouth Brethren’, *Church History* 53:1 (1984), pp. 30-45.

² Elisabeth Wilson, ‘Brethren Attitudes to Government and Authority, with particular reference to pacifism’, Master of Humanities thesis, History Department, University of Tasmania, 1994. All the questionnaire responses and related correspondence is in my possession and I am happy to answer any questions about further detail from them. The quotations have not been footnoted in this article for reasons of space, but ‘Q’ after a name indicates that this was a respondent.

³ E.g., Carter, personal communication 30.6.94: ‘Patriotism was blatant and jingoistic in 1914-1918 and our assembly was affected by it, particularly in the earlier years.’

enlisted, though there was a last minute provision for conscientious objection. Allowance was made for absolute, conditional or temporary exemption, although as it turned out absolute exemption was rarely granted.⁴ It is difficult to get accurate figures of British conscientious objectors in the First World War, but it appears they were under 0.5 per cent of all enlisted men.⁵

In Australia the government held two referenda on the proposal to introduce conscription for service overseas in order to meet the promised monthly quota of men. Both were defeated, by relatively small margins, after campaigns which aroused strong feelings and much sectarian bitterness. However the pressure to enlist was very strong, and at one stage men had to apply for exemption from military service.⁶

The situation in New Zealand was different again. After conscription was brought in there was no absolute exemption, and such provisions for exemption as existed were far more stringent than those obtaining in Britain. The original ground of appeal was that 'a man was on 4 August 1914 and had been continuously since, a member of a religious body whose tenets declared the bearing of arms and the performance of military service to be contrary to divine revelation, that this was also his own conscientious belief, and that he was willing to perform non-

⁴ It was however a more generous provision that any in the British Dominions, none of which allowed for absolute exemption.

⁵ John Rae, *Conscience and politics: The British Government and the conscientious objector to military service 1916-1919* (London, 1970), p. 71, estimates 0.33 per cent (16,500: 4,970,902).

⁶ I have a copy of my grandfather's 'Notice of Date of Hearing of Application' under the War Service Regulations 1916. He was applying for a 'Certificate of Exemption from Military Service'. This was in November 1916, and the hearing did not go ahead as the referendum proved negative.

military work in New Zealand.’⁷ This was amended to include overseas service, and to include service in the Medical Corps or the Army Service Corps.⁸

The relevant regulations were, furthermore, interpreted very narrowly by the Military Service Boards, and they also adopted a requirement that the ‘religious body’ must have something approaching a formal written constitution prohibiting military service. These requirements clearly made it very difficult to get any kind of exemption, as the groups whose members were most likely to appeal did not have formal constitutions or fixed tenets.⁹ (Political objectors did not have any ground for appeal at all.) Altogether 273 men were imprisoned, and objectors and their families suffered ostracism and scorn from the general community.

Such groups as the Brethren, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the Testimony of Jesus (‘Cooneyites’) who relied on literalistic Biblical interpretations had major difficulties as Baker points out: ‘the relative autonomy of their churches and theological idiosyncrasies of many of their members made [their stand] impossible to substantiate.’¹⁰ Some assemblies did try to petition the Governor, stating that ‘we are a religious community...

⁷ P. S. O’Connor, ‘The awkward ones—dealing with conscience, 1916-1918’, *The New Zealand Journal of History*, 8: 2 (1974), pp. 119-120.

⁸ *Ibid.*, and see Rae, *Conscience and politics*, pp. 49-50. The United States and Canada had similar provisions.

⁹ The Quakers and Christadelphians, and eventually the Seventh Day Adventists, managed to produce appropriate documents, although even members of these groups suffered imprisonment. Members of mainstream denominations were just as badly affected, because their churches did not require pacifism as a requirement of membership, and indeed the Church of England under Article 37 sanctioned the bearing of arms.

¹⁰ P. Baker, *King and Country Call: New Zealanders, Conscription, and the Great War* (Auckland, 1988), p. 173.

[with] a large number of our assemblies... in communion with one another... whose tenets and doctrines entirely oppose the bearing of arms...’,¹¹ but this was clearly not the position of all the assemblies, and, if indeed presented, was not successful in altering the situation.

My previous paper established that at the onset of World War I the Brethren generally speaking respected the authorities but regarded themselves as separate from the political system. It is clear that the potential for considerable tension existed, both within the movement and with the authorities, and that the new demands of a total war could upset the careful isolation which they had hitherto maintained. One has the impression that the war took the Brethren by surprise, and forced many of them to examine their views on the state afresh. There was private agonising over decisions, and some public debate and disagreement.¹²

Some outsiders believed that Brethren were non-combatants. Graham includes them as conscientious objectors with sects like the Christadelphians who ‘felt it consistent with their beliefs to accept work in the NCC [Non-Combatants Corps] or RAMC [Royal Army Medical Corps].’¹³ Writing in the middle of the war, Margaret Hobhouse thought the same.¹⁴ Brock believed that

¹¹ The photocopy I have been sent is of the petition as forwarded to other assemblies for signing, so it is not clear how widely it was taken up.

¹² A correspondent in *The Harvester*, June 1937, confirms this view. A. D. Western pleaded for help to be given to young men regarding ‘militarism’, because ‘the outbreak of the Great War caught many of our assemblies quite unawares, and caused numerous dissensions.’ W. Thompson made the same point.

¹³ J.W. Graham, *Conscription and Conscience 1916-1919* (London, 1922), p. 348.

¹⁴ Mrs H. [M.] Hobhouse, *I Appeal to Caesar* (London, 1917), p. 34: ‘[they] found war inconsistent with their Bibles, and held aloof from the actual

‘The high percentage of Brethren conscientious objectors in World War I in relation to the sect’s numbers indicates... that nonresistance... had become generally accepted.’¹⁵ Neither picture is entirely accurate.

Hunter Beattie, a Scottish Brethren evangelist who strongly advocated total conscientious objection, wrote that ‘the ‘Brethren’ and ‘Quakers’ were mentioned by the Government in Parliament as the two bodies whose members refused to participate in war, and to whom the authorities were willing to grant exemption from military service’, and that the government was surprised when many Brethren enlisted.¹⁶

Rae makes it clear that despite popular conceptions, anti-conscriptionists in Britain were not only Quakers and socialists, though they have been the ablest exponents and historians of the cause. Over 1700 Christadelphians obtained exemptions, by far the largest single group, but only 750 Quakers.¹⁷ It is difficult to establish how many Brethren may have; Rae lists 146 as referred to the Pelham Committee,¹⁸ the body established by the

slaughter, but accepted service in the Army which did not directly involve killing anyone.’

¹⁵ Brock, ‘Peace Testimony’, p. 44. He does point out (n. 41) that some Brethren bore arms in both wars.

¹⁶ Hunter Beattie, *The Christian and War* (Glasgow, n. d. [?c. 1920]), p. 125. I have not been able to substantiate this claim, and in any case both Quakers and Brethren were imprisoned, often because the tribunals were unwilling to grant total exemptions, or were ignorant of their ability to do so.

¹⁷ Rae, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.250-1. There may have been more, as 240 men are listed as ‘Denomination not stated’. Brethren who took a stand as conscientious objectors were also more likely to refuse what they saw as a denominational name than those who did not. Of those who were referred to the Pelham Committee, 1716 were Christadelphians, 145 Brethren, 140 Quakers, 112 Methodist, and other groups range from 73 down to 1.

government primarily to assist the military tribunals in finding alternative work for conscientious objectors, and says that ‘such figures as are available indicate that the most prolific sources [of conscientious objectors from the predictable groups] were... the Christadelphians, the Plymouth Brethren, and the Jehovah’s Witnesses.’¹⁹ G.H. Lang, a widely-travelled full-time minister of the word who obtained a permit to visit men in prison, refers to ‘hundreds of young brethren that went through that ordeal’ and says that there were ‘usually forty or fifty brethren from ‘Open’ assemblies’ in Dartmoor at any one time.²⁰

However there is also evidence that some British Brethren found enlistment acceptable. Beattie quotes an article in the press which claimed there were 297 Brethren men and women from Glasgow ‘doing their bit’ at the front.²¹ (Many of these seem to have been performing non-combatant duties such as stretcher bearing, dispatch-riding etc.) R.B. Carter (Q), listing eligible men from South Park Chapel, Essex, gives eleven names, of whom only one was a conscientious objector.²² Rendle Short volunteered for medical work, being already a surgeon of some note,²³ and John Laing, the builder who was later knighted, was

¹⁹ *ibid*, p. 77.

²⁰ G.H. Lang, *An Ordered Life: an autobiography* London: (London, 1959), pp. 174 and 173 respectively. Rae, *Conscience and politics*, p. 176, mentions Brethren with Jehovah’s Witnesses as the main ‘apocalyptic sectarians’ in the camps.

²¹ Beattie, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

²² R.B. Carter, personal communication 30.6.94. Another man left England as a missionary in 1915, after some difficulty obtaining a passport. The rest all served in the Army or Navy, most as volunteers.

²³ W.M. Capper and D. Johnson, *Arthur Rendle Short: Surgeon and Christian* (London, 1955), pp. 52-3.

commissioned even though he was promptly discharged.²⁴ Presumably the gesture was made to indicate support for the war effort. William Dobbie, later a colonial governor who was also knighted, was an officer in France, mentioned in dispatches seven times and decorated.²⁵

This confused picture naturally told against Brethren who registered as conscientious objectors.²⁶ Beattie explicitly makes the charge that public support for the war by the editor of *The Witness*, Henry Pickering, had made it harder for him and others at tribunal hearings.²⁷ It was obviously very difficult for an objector to base his appeal on the grounds that he was Brethren, and that *ipso facto* he had an objection to war.

Lang also experienced something of this attitude, finding that ‘few others were ready to share’ in helping young men to state their objections before the tribunals. He also says that ‘there were leaders in assemblies who opposed this testimony to

²⁴ F.R. Coad, *Laing* (London, 1979), p.67. Coad mentions the strong Brethren pacifist tradition, but says despite Carlisle meeting's early Quaker influence, Laing was not touched by it.

²⁵ For Dobbie's war record, see *Who was Who 1961-1970* (London, 1972), p. 196; and John Keegan, ‘Dobbie, Sir William George Shedden (1879-1964)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [accessed 28 Dec 2004: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37362>].

²⁶ Rae, *op. cit.*, p.75 has what is probably a fair summary: ‘The Open Brethren were the least explicitly non-combatant and some of their members joined the armed forces. The Churches of God... emphasised, in their memorial to the Government in 1915, the incompatibility of war with the teaching of Christ. The Exclusive Brethren particularly emphasised their unwillingness to be ‘unequally yoked with unbelievers’ in the army.’

²⁷ Beattie, *Christian and War*, p.135: ‘...the evidence of *The Witness* was held as the strongest evidence against our young brethren, and was largely responsible for their suffering.’

separateness from the world and even asserted in the Press that it was not the recognized attitude of the 'Brethren'.²⁸

Beattie's conflict with Pickering was symptomatic of divisions within the Open Brethren over military service. These demands were not the sort they could ignore, like the right to vote. The disagreement became public in an article in the Scottish *Sunday Post* which has several remarkable implications. Beattie quotes it thus:

CHRISTIAN BROTHERS REPUDIATE BEATTIE.

Mr Charles P. Watson and Mr Henry Pickering write us... to say that the Hunter Beattie pamphlet (exposed in the "Post Sunday Special" of Nov. 25th) does not represent the views of the churches of Christian Brethren. The "great mass of those composing the assemblies of Brethren," they state, "repudiate the teachings of Mr Hunter Beattie," and they enclose a list of 297 young men and women from Glasgow assemblies who are "doing their bit" at the front. This list, they explain, "represents more generally the attitude of leaders and rank and file, who seek to 'fear God, honour the King,' and 'be subject to the powers that be.'"²⁹

Many Brethren would have been unhappy about any statement purporting to represent their views in general, or naming as them as a discrete group, and mention of 'leaders' and 'rank and file' sits oddly with the emphasis on the priesthood of all believers. The last sentence shows how Watson and Pickering had placed themselves firmly at the 'subjection' end of the separation/subjection spectrum. Conscientious objectors, on the other hand, came down at the separation end (arguing that they had no part in the state or its military machine), and those who chose non-combatant service seem to have done so either as a

²⁸ Lang, *An Ordered Life*, p.175.

²⁹ Beattie, *Christian and War*, p.123. One has to assume that the paper reported them correctly.

(perhaps confused) compromise, or because they rejected the logical end of the separation argument, but felt as Christians they could not take life.

Watson and Pickering evidently desired to minimise the controversy, by emphasising conscience; a move men such as Beattie saw as equivocation rather than reliance on what to them were the clear principles of God's word. He talks of a 'conspiracy of silence' at conferences,³⁰ and quotes (scathingly) a *Witness* article after the war which appeals for unity, trusting that 'all will respect that most sacred thing called 'conscience''.³¹ *The Witness*, on the other hand, saw itself as maintaining a neutral, perhaps even statesmanlike, ground. In 1915 it published answers from nine different correspondents to the question of conscription or enlistment, summing up very carefully that the Christian's first duty is to obey the law, but emphasising waiting on God for guidance, and pointing out that 'even under conscription [there would be opportunities for] medical work,

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 67.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 133: '*The Witness* noted: We have been frequently urged during recent years to advocate certain views concerning the Christian and War. One class urging us to condemn those whom they judged were disloyal to the King and disobedient to those placed in authority by God. Another class urging us to declaim against those whom they asserted had forgotten their heavenly citizenship, whose hands were stained with the blood of their fellows, and whose true place was outside the assembly. Both sides drafted subtle, one-sided questions which could only be answered to the condemnation of those against whom they were drafted.

Now that the warring earth is in measure at rest, we trust the warring spirit is not to be introduced into Assembly life, and that all will respect that most sacred thing called 'conscience', whether found in the 'Conscientious objector', or in the '*conscientious fighter*'... Let Christ be the centre of unity in worship and service, and blessing will be manifest to the circumference of that circle of unity, however weak and feeble it may be.'

conveying the wounded, food supplies, telegraph, postal, translation, and many other non-combative duties.³²

There was an obvious reluctance to force a division—almost a horror of schism.³³ Some of the magazines did publish articles designed to give some guidance,³⁴ although one of Beattie's correspondents expressed disappointment at letters in *The Witness* which evidently supported military involvement.³⁵

In Australia *Australian Missionary Tidings* did carry a number of comments on the war, all carefully worded, but unmistakably hinting at either ignoring the recruiting drive or only accepting non-combatant service.³⁶ There was only one mention of 'strifes and divisions which now trouble us',³⁷ and occasional letters from soldiers were published,³⁸ as were those

³² *The Witness*, 45 (1915), pp.31-34.

³³ Nevertheless Beattie, *Christian and War*, p.134, cites examples of open conflict and bitter division: 'One dare not pray publicly for God's saints in prison without being assailed by a torrent of abuse. One leading brother in a large assembly rose in a rage and called these saints in prison 'Conscientious Cowards'—while another leading brother in another Assembly said publicly that if he had his way 'they would every one be shot'...'

³⁴ In *Australian Missionary Tidings* [hereafter *Tidings*], December 1914, p.576, readers are referred to 'the 'Witness' for October, and 'Echoes of Service,' September, part II, and October, part I, as containing much interesting information concerning events at the seat of war affecting our workers, and details of God's special care and deliverance; and also helpful articles on the present condition of things, and the right attitude of Christians.'

³⁵ Beattie, *Christian and War*, p.89: 'How I wish some of our brethren could see militarism as some of us have been made to see it [i.e. in the military prison].'

³⁶ *Tidings*, November 1916, p.859.

³⁷ *Tidings*, May 1915, p.631.

³⁸ E.g., *ibid.*, March 1917, p.931.

from non-combatants (also called conscientious objectors).³⁹ But in the context of the times the overall impression is quite a radical one. The *Gleaner*, the magazine of the Hopkins Brethren, a group of assemblies which had strict views on reception into fellowship and which were nicknamed after Rice Hopkins who was a major influence on them,⁴⁰ had only a couple of allusions to the war, one being an article on 'Subjection to the Higher Powers' which ended: 'The fact that the higher powers make this or that compulsory does not affect a single word of Scripture. If I have refrained from certain things because I believe it to be the mind of God... then no ordinance of man is to be allowed to compel me to adopt a different attitude. No Act of Parliament ever framed changed a single principle of God's unerring, unchanging Word.'⁴¹

References to the war tend to be in such terms as 'this terrible war',⁴² 'this sad war',⁴³ 'this awful struggle'.⁴⁴ Prayer meetings were held for world conditions and for young men affected by recruitment and call-up.⁴⁵ In general non-combatant service was approved, on both separatist and pacifist grounds,⁴⁶

³⁹ E.g., *ibid.*, November 1917, pp.1059-1060.

⁴⁰ On Hopkins see Ian McDowell, 'Rice Thomas Hopkins 1842-1916: an open brother', *BAHNR*, 1 (1997-8), pp.24-30.

⁴¹ *Gleaner*, November 1915, pp.5-6. There is absolutely no mention of contemporary events or military service in the article.

⁴² *Gleaner*, January 1915, p.6; *Tidings* October 1914, p. 547.

⁴³ *Tidings*, February 1916, p. 744.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.745.

⁴⁵ *Tidings*, November 1916, p. 869: 'Realising the need of special waiting upon God in these solemn days, a week of prayer was arranged [in Brisbane]... and on the day of the opening of the Military Court... a meeting was held for prayer at 6.45 a.m., on behalf of the young men...'

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 869: 'It can be said that our young men have a conscience about taking life...'

and was called conscientious objection.⁴⁷ There was relief when the conscription referendum was defeated.⁴⁸

As far as numbers go, the majority of Brethren seem to have stayed out of the war effort, or enlisted as non-combatants. This is the definite impression from *Tidings*,⁴⁹ and is endorsed by what personal information I have been able to gain. Gilbert and Jordens say that the Brethren (with others) ‘generally accepted the stigma of wartime dissent. Representatives of each petitioned parliament to insist that even the exigencies of war could not shake their religious objections to bearing arms.’⁵⁰

As noted above, New Zealand had a rigid approach to conscription. Under this system at least twenty-three Brethren were imprisoned out of a total of 273,⁵¹ and the general tenor of comment in *Treasury* was against army service. Lineham however notes that ‘the issue was warmly debated, and many of

⁴⁷ *Tidings*, December 1916, p. 884: ‘Up to the time of writing only one of young men has been called upon to face his tribunal, but we are thankful to say that his case for partial exemption (non-combatant service) was considered genuine from the outset, and the magistrate granted what was asked for on conscientious grounds.’ Also *ibid.* p. 887: ‘...the eyes of the authorities are going to be upon us and our conscientious objectors.’

⁴⁸ *Tidings*, January 1917, pp. 902-3.

⁴⁹ *Tidings*, November 1916: (Queensland) ‘... the young men ... are availing themselves of the exemption clauses of the Defence Act. Most, if not all, are willing to do non-combatant duty.’

⁵⁰ Alan D. Gilbert & Ann-Mari Jordens, ‘Traditions of Dissent’, in M. McKernan & M. Browne (eds), *Australia: two centuries of war and peace* (Canberra, 1988), p. 343. I have not been able to find this petition in the Parliamentary Papers; it seems it was not ordered to be printed.

⁵¹ P. Baker, *King and Country Call: New Zealanders, Conscription and the Great War* (Auckland, 1988), p. 243. Baker says the Testimony of Jesus (28) was the largest single group among the sects. However the total for Brethren (14), Plymouth Brethren (7), and Gospel Hall (2) is 23, and others would almost certainly have been among the ‘not stated’ numbers. As Baker gives the numbers, Brethren were 8.42 per cent of the total.

the sons of leading brethren volunteered for the army... in non-combatant roles. Feelings ran high among representatives of both points of view.⁵² In view of my earlier survey of Brethren writing on war, I believe he is entirely correct when he says ‘their attitude to society was at stake.’ He contrasts the ‘outgoing approach... of witness, evangelism, and involvement... to the traditional concept which withdrew brethren from the world...’.⁵³

In all countries Brethren saw the war as an opportunity for evangelism, with the likely death of many soldiers giving added urgency. Letters abound in *Tidings* from missionaries who had contacts with soldiers and from workers at home who were distributing Scriptures and tracts to servicemen.⁵⁴ One full-time worker entered the Medical Corps so that he could get closer to the men he was trying to reach.⁵⁵ There was also a plea for more workers in the camps, hoping that those who had escaped conscription would be ‘diligent in ministering to those who are voluntarily going to the front.’⁵⁶ A.T. Grace wrote to the editor seeking support for a tent to be used as a centre in the camps. His motive was not only evangelism, but also his feeling that

⁵² Peter J. Lineham, *There We Found Brethren; a history of assemblies of Brethren in New Zealand* (Palmerston North, NZ, 1977), p. 157.

⁵³ *Ibid.* Lineham writes about separation from the ‘defilement of the world’, but in view of what was written on this issue, I do not believe this is quite the right word. Separation was from the systems of the world, seeing them as temporary, and the believer's part in them non-existent. Of course when rendered down to its simplest form, there was a tendency to equate separation with ‘separation from evil’, and evil with ‘the world’.

⁵⁴ E.g., *Tidings*, April 1915, p.625; June 1915, p.651; September 1915, p.687; November 1915, p.705; February 1916, p.744-5; August 1916, p.831; November 1916, pp.868, 870; November 1917, p.1060.

⁵⁵ *Tidings*, September 1916, p.833. Archie Law, Victoria: ‘I seem to have had a continuous congregation where one needs to be instant in season and out of season.’

⁵⁶ *Tidings*, January 1917, p.897.

increased exposure meant that ‘there will not be so much difficulty in the court explaining who brethren are and what is their position in the community as Christians.’⁵⁷ Brethren in both countries were urged to contribute generously to those who were suffering as a result of the war. The separation theme came through in the comment ‘we may not feel free to contribute to some of the public funds’, but readers were asked to remember missionaries ‘whose usual channels of supply are closed’.⁵⁸ A special circular letter was sent to assemblies, suggesting special collections for ‘the poor Saints affected by the war, not only in Belgium but in other parts’.⁵⁹ An indication of the worldwide links of Brethren is that the offerings were to be distributed through Echoes of Service in Britain.

Those who were conscientious objectors, both in Britain and New Zealand, suffered both psychologically and sometimes physically.⁶⁰ Beattie speaks of ‘...the sufferings of... saints, personally known to me, at the hands of some of these Tribunals, when scorn and contumely was poured upon them with such vindictiveness that even the unsaved protested against the manifest injustice.’⁶¹ In his dramatised example of tribunal hearings, he quotes a chairman as calling ‘Pilgrim’ ‘the most awful freak that ever walked the earth.’⁶²

A vivid example in New Zealand of the emotions of the times was provided to me by a niece of two objectors. Charles

⁵⁷ *Tidings*, December 1916, p.887.

⁵⁸ *Tidings*, October 1914, p.547.

⁵⁹ *Tidings*, February 1915, pp.598-9.

⁶⁰ See Graham *Conscription and Conscience* and O’Connor, ‘The awkward ones’. Graham mentions a Brethren man, Bennett Wallis, who died on 29 Sept. 1917, among his ‘case histories’ of some of the 80 who died, pp.319-20.

⁶¹ Beattie, *Christian and War*, p.45.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.47.

and Stanley Read ‘went bush’ and then decided ‘you couldn’t run away for years, that would be no sort of a life at all, so as a Christian you just had to go and face up to it and get imprisoned.’ They agreed to ‘come down and meet the police and the train at Koputaroa Station away from Levin [their home town] where feelings ran high.’ Their younger brother was continually humiliated at primary school because he had three brothers in prison. ‘Often [the] teacher would start the day quite deliberately to provoke him by saying “*Stand up all those who will go to war*” and each morning David would refuse to stand despite the pleading of his friend... [Being] in a small town, he was aware of strong feelings of antagonism towards his family because of their pacifist stand. He remembered a white feather being sent to the family one day.’⁶³ Both the authorities and the community tended to underestimate the determination of Brethren (and others) not to betray their consciences.

One other way in which Brethren reacted to the war was to use it in preaching and writing as a metaphor and a challenge for the Christian life. J.H. Todd wrote ‘Many today are deeply concerned as to their responsibility to their King and country... but how many of those... are listening to [God] to hear what he would have them do in the greater war with the forces of darkness.’⁶⁴ Tribunal questions suggested parallel ones for Christians to think over.⁶⁵ The war was used as an illustration in

⁶³ Cheryl McGettigan, questionnaire response.

⁶⁴ *Tidings*, July 1916 p.805.

⁶⁵ *Tidings*, November 1916 p.859: ‘Questions Suggested by those submitted to Conscientious Objectors:

1. State precisely your reasons for not being actively engaged in missionary work, in view of the command and commission of Mark xvi.15 and Acts i.8?
2. If not actively engaged in missionary effort, what other branch of Christian work do you take part in?
3. What sacrifices have you made to help forward the Gospel message?

a leading article in the *Gleaner*, ironically written to strengthen believers in their stand against ‘compulsion’ (of whatever sort).⁶⁶

Thus at the end of the war the Brethren, particularly in the United Kingdom and Australia, had been to some extent shocked out of their insularity, although instinctively they seemed to close ranks again and strove to bury and forget the divisions. This inevitably resulted in some lingering resentments and confusion, which blurred the hitherto reasonably sharp lines of ‘separation’. Those who had faced the demands of the military machine had been forced to think through their position, and had been made aware that they could not ignore the changing world around them. However, like much of the rest of society, their lives in the interwar years seemed to indicate that they hoped against hope that the Great War had been an unfortunate aberration, until the events of the 1930s threatened complacency.

4. Is there any penalty for neglecting the Lord’s commands?

5. What is the reward for faithful service?’

⁶⁶ *Gleaner*, June 1915 [p.1].