The Friends Peace Testimony

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Friends United Press
Richmond, Indiana

THE SPIRITUAL BASIS OF THE PEACE TESTIMONY

> *"I told them I knew from whence all wars arose . . . and that I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars; that I was come into the covenant of peace which was before all wars and strife."*
>
> George Fox (1650)
> (to the Commonwealth
> Commissioners)

The Quaker peace testimony can only be understood against the background of the rise of that religious group in seventeenth-century England. In that time of religious and civil turmoil, thousands of people were seeking a more satisfying religious experience than they had ever had. To large num-

bers the message of George Fox and his followers was satisfying and transforming. It "spoke to their condition."

In essence that message was an attempt to recapture the authenticity and vitality of first-century Christianity. To those early Quakers — as to the early Christians — their lives were to be modeled after that of Jesus and his injunction to love God and to love one's neighbor as oneself. Therefore love was the keystone of their faith.

Believing that there was that of God in every human being, their attempt was to discover in all human beings that Divine Seed and to cultivate it. That meant that selflessness rather than selfishness was to dominate their dealings with others; reconciliation rather than revenge was to govern their relations with those with whom they had disagreements. Early Friends tried valiantly to replace the ancient practice of an eye for an eye with the injunctions of Jesus to turn the other cheek, to be peacemakers and to love one's enemies.

Taking those admonitions seriously, early Quakers became Christian pacifists, like the followers of Jesus in the first two or three centuries of Christianity. A favorite quotation of theirs was Martin's reply to Julian the apostate, "I am a soldier of Christ, therefore I cannot fight."

Many early Friends found that their experience of the presence of Christ (the Light and the Seed) was so transforming that they could honestly say that the Kingdom of God was breaking into human history. They felt that they had begun to live on that holy mountain where "none shall hurt or destroy" (Isa. 65:25).

From the beginning Friends have understood the close connection between economics and warfare. John Woolman was particularly attuned to the impact that our personal love of luxury has upon social structures. "May we look upon our treasures, the furniture of our houses, and our garments, and try whether the seeds of war have nourishment in these our possessions" (*A Plea for the Poor).*

Currently many Friends also have coupled their religious pacifism with economic and social arguments against fighting, pointing out that wars do not settle any issues and merely cause widespread havoc: the enormous loss of lives in battles and through famine and disease, the destruction of property and the laying waste of land, the dislocation of economies, and prolonged bitterness and hatred. Despite the fact that the Quaker peace testimony has been broadened greatly in recent times, it is still primarily a spiritually-based concern.

PEACE AS A GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL TESTIMONY

> *To turn all we possess into the channels of universal love becomes the business of our lives.* John Woolman

Throughout Quaker history the peace testimony has been upheld by groups of Friends and interpreted in many different ways by individuals. The first public and dramatic statement of a personal "leading" in this regard came from George Fox in 1650 when he was offered a captaincy in the Commonwealth army by Oliver Cromwell. In declining that appointment, Fox addressed the Commonwealth Commissions in these words, as recorded in his *Journal*:

> *I told them I knew from whence all wars arose . . . and that I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars; that I was come into the covenant of peace which was before all wars and strife.*

In 1660 came the first known statement of Friends as a group. Addressed to King Charles II, it

said:

> *We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fighting with outward weapons for any end or under any pretense whatever; this is our testimony to the whole world. The Spirit of Christ by which we are guided is not changeable, so as once to command us from a thing of evil and again to move us unto it; and we certainly know and testify to the world that the Spirit of Christ which leads us into all truth will never move us to fight and war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the Kingdom of Christ nor for the kingdoms of this world . . . . Therefore we cannot learn war any more.*

Over and over through the nearly 350 years of Quaker history, Friends have upheld this testimony against war and peace. Monthly meetings, quarterly meetings, yearly meetings, national bodies of Friends, and international Quaker groups have reaffirmed their belief that war is wrong and contrary to the spirit of Christianity. Even Friends who have supported various wars or taken part in them have often urged Quaker groups not to abandon this historic testimony.

But the application of this concern has sometimes caused serious difficulties for Quakers. In

seventeenth-century England some Friends were imprisoned for failing to fight. In 1756 in Pennsylvania the Quaker members of the state legislature finally resigned rather than vote funds to help support the French and Indian War. In the nineteenth century Friends in Norway refused to carry out their required military service, and most of them eventually emigrated to the United States. In the twentieth century British and American Friends often were treated harshly and some of them imprisoned for their pacifist beliefs, especially during World War I.

In other instances Friends have had difficult choices to make. During the Civil War many American Friends were placed on the horns of a dilemma as they favored the victory of the North and the abolition of slavery but were loath to serve in the army. In the earlier periods of Quakerism, members were usually disowned if they took part in fighting. In more recent times the right of individuals to follow the leadings of their consciences or the Light has been recognized more and more and some yearly meeting *Disciplines* today counsel Friends to be "tender" with members no matter what course of action they take regarding military service.

But important decisions have had to be made by thousands and thousands of young Quaker men. For decades it was a question of whether they would fight or not. But by the time of World War II the choices were wider. In the U.S.A. men could enlist in some branch of the armed services if they were drafted. Or they could file for IAO status, indicating their willingness to do non-combatant service. Or they could take their stand as a pacifist and enter one of the CPS (Civilian Public Service) camps run by the Quakers, the Brethren, or the Mennonites. Or they could state that the government had no right to conscript its citizens — and be incarcerated in prison. In World War II young Quaker men took all of those different stands.

Sometimes individuals also are confronted with decisions regarding employment. Should they work in an industry which produces airplanes, tanks, or other equipment used in wars? The testimony takes on broader implications as individuals and institutions often make conscious decisions not to invest in companies which produce military equipment. Officials of Quaker schools and colleges and a few other groups also have begun to examine their consciences about investments in firms in South Africa where the use of force and racial discrimination by the govern-

ment are deeply involved.

Increasingly Friends have struggled in recent years with the question of whether they could in good conscience pay their federal income taxes when they were aware that a large portion of that money would be used for military purposes. So a sizeable group of Friends in the United States are withholding the part of their taxes which are used for military purposes.

And in a few instances in England and in the United States such withholding has involved groups of Quakers as the governments have held their employers liable for fines when individual employees have refused to pay their taxes. In recent months, therefore, some yearly meetings and Quaker institutions have been struggling with the question of what to do when their employees have refused to pay a part of their federal income taxes on grounds of conscience.

THE MANY-SIDED NATURE OF THE PEACE TESTIMONY

"Our position with respect to Peace cannot be isolated without loss from the rest of

our faith . . . . Our witness is not narrow and negative but far-reaching in its scope and intensely positive in the active service for Christ's peaceable Kingdom to which it calls us."

Christianity and War
London Yearly Meeting

The peace testimony of Friends has never been just one of protesting war and refusing to take part in it. In every generation and in every part of the world where Friends have lived, they have wrestled with the positive implications and applications of this deep-seated concern. Through Divine Guidance, buttressed by human knowledge and understanding, they have sought positive ways to diminish the world's reliance on force and violence. They have explored ways of applying the power of love and reconciliation to resolve or lessen individual, group, national, and international tensions.

One positive approach has been peace education. Often that has included a better understanding of the peace testimony by members and attenders at Friends meeting through forums, study groups, and the dissemination of peace literature. There have been meetings for the public and statements

on public issues in local and national newspapers.

In the last few years in the United States there has been the cooperative venture of the historic peace churches (the Church of the Brethren, Friends, and the Mennonites) in A New Call to Peacemaking. In a few instances peace education has included work with other churches, too.

Ever since the founding of the American Friends Service Committee in 1917, that organization has been active in various forms of peace education. Three especially unique forms that work has included have beeen the International Institutes held in various parts of the United States during the summers for adults, the Peace Caravans of young people, and the seminars of young diplomats from different parts of the world.

Fairly recent in education are the Peace Studies Programs in Quaker colleges. These train young people for a variety of jobs in the broad field of peace.

A few years ago a group of New York City Friends, under the general direction of Robert Gilmore, started a program of peace education in the public schools which has become the outstanding example of such work with boys and girls in the United States. Currently that program is called Global Perspectives in Education.

Two peace organizations in which Friends have been very active have been the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Many Quakers have been active in the national branches of those groups and some in the international organizations. For example, several women Friends from the United States have served as international president of the W.I.L.P.F.

A second and quite different positive approach to peace has been the public protests of Friends, frequently at the local level but sometimes nationally. In recent years those have included public vigils for peace and public demonstrations against the war in Vietnam and other parts of Indochina against actions in Central America, and against the escalation of the nuclear armaments race.

A third positive approach to peace work has been the support by Friends of the work camp movement as one which has provided what William James called "the moral equivalent of war." Launched by the International Fellowship of Reconciliation at the close of World War I, those camps received enormous support from Pierre Ceresole, a Swiss Quaker, who devoted most of his life to that movement.

During the administration of President John F.

Kennedy, the work camp program was embraced by the United States government by the formation of the Peace Corps. Later the United Nations instituted a similar form of service in many parts of the world.

For decades there have been Friends who believed in the importance of international, intergovernmental organizations — a fourth approach to peace. The earliest of those Friends were William Penn and John Bellows who envisioned a European federation more than two hundred years before such an organization eventually was started. When the League of Nations was established after World War I, Friends in several countries supported it vigorously, and a Japanese Quaker, Inazo Nitobe, became its Under Secretary-General.

Many Friends also have strongly supported the United Nations, formed after World War II, and several Quakers have served in various parts of the U.N. and in several of its specialized agencies. In addition, many Friends in the United States have supported such organizations as the United Nations Association — U.S.A. and the U.S. Committee for UNICEF. In fact one Friend, Elmore Jackson, was at one time the executive secretary of the United Nations Association — U.S.A., and another Quaker, Lloyd Bailey, was for many years the

executive secretary of the U.S. Committee for UNICEF.

In addition, Friends long have had a small staff at the U.N. headquarters in New York City and Geneva, as well as at the headquarters of the European Community in Brussels, Belgium.

Unwilling to take part in various wars, Friends have contributed much to relief and rehabilitation efforts at the close of conflicts — a fifth approach to peace. As early as 1690 Quakers became concerned with the plight of prisoners of war in the Irish Revolution and distributed food and clothing to them. Ever since that time Friends have been in the forefront of relief and rehabilitation activities. That work probably reached its peak after World War I when more than a million children were being fed in Germany at one time. In more recent years similar efforts have been carried on in several parts of the world, including Bangladesh, Nigeria, and parts of Central America. Many Friends Meetings are part of the sanctuary movement for Central American refugees. Food, shelter, emotional and spiritual support and help finding jobs are offered to those who have had to flee for their lives.

Not satisfied with such measures, Friends have tried often to mediate between conflicting factions

to avert open warfare — a sixth approach to peace. Such was the case, for example, when New England Friends in 1675 tried to stop what became King Philip's War. Other examples include the work of John Fothergill and David Barclay in attempting to prevent the American Revolution; Joseph Sturge's efforts to mediate the conflict between Germany and Denmark over Schleswig-Holstein; and John Bright's endeavors to prevent the Crimean War between England and Russia between 1854 and 1856. More successful was Frederick Libby's efforts through the National Council for the Prevention of War to avert an open conflict in the 1920s between Mexico and the United States. Two outstanding examples from recent years have been the efforts of Friends to achieve accommodations between the Arabs and Jews in the Middle East and between the warring factions within Nigeria. The story of many such efforts is told by C.H. Mike Yarrow in his recent volume on *Quaker Experience in International Conciliation.* An earlier book on *The Meeting of Minds*, by Elmore Jackson, is also pertinent on this broad subject.

Friends in the United States have not been very active as legislators at the national level, but they have had considerable influence as lobbyists — a

seventh approach to peace. They have worked to cut military spending, to strengthen disarmament negotiations, to support the right of dissent and to oppose conscription, to promote friendlier relations with the U.S.S.R. and to arrest the intervention of the United States in Central America. Most of this effort has been carried on under the aegis of the Friends Committee on National Legislation, headed for many years by E. Raymond Wilson and in more recent years by Edward Snyder.

A relatively new approach in which individual Friends have been active is in the field of peace research and conflict resolution — an eighth approach to peace. One of the pioneers in that movement was Lewis Fry Richardson, an English Quaker. Two other Friends who have contributed much to such research are Kenneth and Elise Boulding, well-known American Quakers. Several other Friends also have been active in their own countries in such work and/or in the International Peace Research Association.

In recent years more and more Friends have been concerned about the question of tensions and violence in homes, including those of Quakers — a ninth application of the peace testimony. Particularly disturbing to many was the recent survey

by Judy Brutz of the application of non-violent measures by Quakers in dealing with family issues. Her provocative study revealed that Friends as parents apparently are not more successful in applying peaceful measures in their homes than other parents. The rise of crime and the increase of violence in most societies in the so-called Western World also has stimulated some Friends to investigate the causes for such violence and to try to do something about them. This ninth approach is in its infancy but may well develop in the foreseeable future.

There is another application which Friends have not investigated fully. That is to examine the economic and social systems of the countries in which Friends live to see how they contribute to national and international tensions and to wrestle with the incredible gap between the rich and the poor in many nations, especially between the wealthy industrialized countries of the Western World and those of the economically poor nations or Third World. In a few international conferences of Quakers in the 1980s at which several representatives of yearly meetings in the Third World have been present, some Friends from the affluent part of the world have been shaken by their realization of the enormous economic disparities in the

world today. Perhaps this will stimulate more Friends to grapple forthrightly and realistically with this vast and important but much neglected aspect of the Quaker peace testimony. Perhaps Friends will examine how such disparities lead to national and international tensions and conflicts — and what can be done about poverty in the midst of plenty. Surely that is an approach which is long overdue.

OUR PART IN THE PEACE TESTIMONY

> *"Peace is not a boon our ancestors bought and paid for once and for all. It must be purchased in the installment plan and each generation has to pay its quota of the price."* Rachel Davis DuBois

Inasmuch as Friends have no creed or dogma and believe implicitly in the importance of Divine Guidance for individuals and groups, each Friend and each Quaker group needs to examine carefully and prayerfully their part in the Quaker

peace testimony. Following the historic approach of Quakers of posing questions for examination rather than telling people what they should think or do, here are a few queries for individual and/or group consideration regarding the peace testimony:

1. Too often we project onto others our personal frustrations and tensions. To what extent are we at peace with ourselves inwardly? What can we do to improve our self-respect and our personal integration as Children of God?

2. In what ways do we try to cultivate "that of God" in every member of our family? To what extent have we been able to resolve conflicts without recourse to violence, physical or verbal? In what respects can we improve our home as a non-violent, caring, loving community?

3. In what ways are we introducing the children and young people in our home and/or in our meeting to the Quaker peace testimony without trying to force them to accept it? What books and other materials are we using? What people have they talked with? What opportunities have we provided for them to meet and learn to respect persons of different economic, ethnic, and national backgrounds than theirs? What else should we do?

4. To what extent is diversity respected in our monthly meeting? How well is unity, without uniformity, encouraged. To what extent are tensions among members and attenders reduced? How? What else could we do?

5. In what ways is the broad-based peace testimony of Friends considered in our meeting? To what extent is it religiously based? What should we do to increase and/or improve such considerations?

6. How are we as individuals, families, or as a meeting helping to remove tensions in our local communities? Where they have arisen, what are we doing to help resolve them? What else might we do?

7. How are we as individuals, families, and as a meeting becoming well-informed on the tensions in our nation and in the emerging world community? How could we increase and/or improve our efforts in this regard?

8. How well-stocked and up-to-date is our meeting library on the Quaker peace testimony and on conflict situations? What could we do to improve it?

9. What Quaker organizations promoting peace are we helping to support by our contributions and/or our personal involvement — individually,

as families, or as a meeting? What non-Quaker organizations are we supporting similarly?

10. To what extent have we considered the current economic, social, and political order nationally and globally as containing the seeds of violence and war? What measures should Friends support to bring about more justice and economic equality in the world?

FOR FURTHER READING

George Fox's Attitude Toward War
by T. Canby Jones

Christian Pacifisim
by Michael Snow

Waging Peace
by John Lamoreau and Ralph Beebe

National Defense Through Stable Peace
by Kenneth E. Boulding