

trying to understand and follow its leadings. It grows afresh in every life, in every worshipping group, in every generation.

At the heart of this conviction is Friends' experience that there is something of God -- the seed of the Spirit -- in all people. Quakers believe that more can be accomplished by appealing to this capacity for love and goodness, in ourselves and in others, than can be hoped for by threatening punishment or retaliation if people act badly. This is not to ignore the existence of evil. It is to recognize that there is no effective way to combat evil with weapons which harm or kill those through whom evil is working. We must turn instead, in the words of early Friends, to the 'weapons of the spirit,' allowing God to reach out through us to that of God in those with whom we are in conflict. 'Spiritual weapons' -- love, truthsaying, nonviolence, imagination, laughter -- are weapons that heal and don't destroy.

- Mary Lou Leavitt, from a pamphlet published by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting

There is no guarantee that our resistance will be any more successful or any less risky than military tactics. At least our means will be suited to our end. If we seemed to fail finally, we would still rather suffer and die than inflict evil in order to save ourselves and what we hold dear. If we succeed, there is no loser or winner, for the problem that led to conflict will have been resolved in a spirit of justice and tolerance. Such a resolution is the only guarantee that there will be no further outbreak of war when each side has regained strength. . . .

The places to begin acquiring the skills and maturity and generosity to avoid or to

resolve conflicts are in our own homes, our personal relationships, our schools, our workplaces, and wherever decisions are made. We must relinquish the desire to own other people, to have power over them, and to force our views on to them. We must own up to our own negative side and not look for scapegoats to blame, punish, or exclude. We must resist the urge towards waste and the accumulation of possessions.

Conflicts are inevitable and must not be repressed or ignored but worked through painfully and carefully. We must develop the skills of being sensitive to oppression and grievances, sharing power in decision making, creating consensus, and making reparation. In speaking out, we acknowledge that we ourselves are as limited and as erring as anyone else. When put to the test, we each may fall short. We do not have a blueprint for peace In any particular situation, a variety of personal decisions could be made with integrity. We may disagree with the views and actions of the politician or the soldier who opts for a military solution, but we still respect and cherish that person.

What we call for in this statement is a commitment to make the building of peace a priority and to make opposition to war absolute. What we advocate is not uniquely Quaker but human and, we believe, the will of God. Our stand does not belong to Friends alone—it is yours by birthright. . . .

Let us reject the clamour of fear and listen to the whisperings of hope.

- from a statement by Aotearoa/New Zealand Yearly Meeting, 1987

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On the Quaker Peace Testimony

Quakers have been notable over the centuries for a set of behaviors they have called testimonies. Of these, the most notorious has been our refusal to participate in war or the preparation for war, which is usually called the peace testimony. In recent years Friends have treated these testimonies as valuable in and of themselves, but to our spiritual forebears this was not the case: they were the naturally-occurring outward signs that a more important and fundamental change had taken place within the individual.

Early Friends described themselves as persons who had undergone a radical transformation--George Fox called it "passing through the flaming sword"--which had brought them much nearer to Christ who was the Truth of creation, and to a fuller understanding of that Truth. They were changed people inwardly, and their outward lives changed as a result. These outward changes were called the testimonies of their lives, which were now seen as witnesses to the Truth.

Today we often put the cart before the horse, and speak of the testimonies as being the heart of Quakerism; but our spiritual forebears made no such mistake. They knew "experimentally" what we often forget; outward change and/or societal reformation are not by themselves sufficient to change human beings even if they were possible by themselves, and they are not in fact possible without a concomitant inward transformation.

An attempt to adhere to the testimonies alone does not make one a Quaker: one's inner reality is stronger than one's will

concerning outward behavior. As Paul said,

The good thing I want to do, I never do; the evil thing which I do not want--that is what I do. But every time I do what I do not want to, then it is not myself acting, but the sin that lives in me . . . So I am brought to be a prisoner of that law of sin which lives inside my body . . . What a wretched man I am!

Until there has been an inward change brought about by receiving God's merciful grace, all our attempts to make the testimonies our standards of outward behavior are doomed to be revealed as false witness, because we will behave not as we want, but as a "prisoner of that law of sin which lives inside" our bodies. Each of the four basic testimonies (Harmony, Community, Equality, and Simplicity) points to inward changes that make possible new and radically different outward behavior, which in turn reflects and gives testimony about one's new inner reality.

The *peace testimony* is really a special case of the testimony of harmony, but has become so important in the minds of Friends and non-Friends alike that it requires special treatment here. The peace testimony is not simply a denunciation of the violence that is war, but a positive declaration that a more fundamental change has taken place in the individual which makes war irrelevant. George Fox expressed this when he was offered a commission in the army of the Commonwealth in 1651:

But I told them I lived in the virtue [i.e., strength] of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars, and I knew

from whence all wars did rise, from the lust according to James' doctrine....But I told them I was come into the covenant of peace which was before wars and strifes were.

Fox was saying that he had been changed, and as a result there was no reason for him to participate in any war; the occasion had been taken away by the life and power in which he lived--the life and power of Jesus Christ.

While it is the refusal of most Friends to participate in war or the preparation for war directly, and the refusal of some to finance war with their taxes, which draws the attention of the world to our religious society, the real message we have to offer is that there is an alternative way to live, made possible by the Indwelling Christ who guides our daily activities. By the grace of God we have been changed, and now see the world through new eyes and with new understanding, which makes war not simply deplorable, but irrelevant. If when the attention of the world is focused on Friends our lives give testimony to the work of Christ in us, then hearts will be touched and lives will be changed . . .

from "On Remembering Why They Are Called Testimonies" by Lloyd Lee Wilson in Essays on the Quaker Vision of Gospel Order, pp. 163-168.

Meeting at a time when the nations of Europe are engaged in a war of unparalleled magnitude, we have been led to recall the basis of the peace testimony of our religious Society. It is not enough to be satisfied with a barren negative witness, a mere proclamation of non-resistance. We must

search for a positive, vital, constructive message. Such a message, a message of supreme love, we find in the life and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. We find it in the doctrine of the indwelling Christ, that re-discovery of the early Friends, leading as it does to a recognition of the brotherhood of all men.

Of this doctrine our testimony as to war and peace is a necessary outcome, and if we understand the doctrine aright, and follow it in its wide implications, we shall find that it calls to the peaceable spirit and the rule of love in all the broad and manifold relations of life.

Thus while love, joy, peace, gentleness and holiness are the teaching of the life and death of our Lord, it is to these that we are also impelled by the indwelling of the Divine in men. As this spirit grows within us, we shall realise increasingly what it is to live in the virtue of that life and power which takes away the occasion of all wars.

- London Yearly Meeting, 1915

Friends' peace testimony is not a creed, in the sense of a statement of belief true for all time. Nor is it a code of behavior, a set of rules to which all Quakers individually and corporately must adhere. On the simplest level, "testimony" means "bearing witness" and Friends' long heritage of witnessing to peace can be found in public statements and personal reflections, in their refusal to bear arms in times of civil and international conflict, in acts of prophetic confrontation and of quiet, reconciling diplomacy. But these are merely outward and visible signs of inward conviction. This conviction springs from a living Spirit, mediated through the human experience of those