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Terror, Tragedy, and the Quaker Peace Testimony: How Should Our Lives Speak Now?

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I want to begin tonight by naming a paradox in which I think we currently find ourselves, and which frames my thinking on our topic.

All of us have heard it said, perhaps too many times now, that “everything changed” on September 11. In some ways that is true.

On September 11, for the first time in 150 years, the United States experienced an attack by foreign ‘forces’ on the soil of this continent. Our collective sense of security as a nation simply disappeared in a few short, horrible hours. For many of us, our personal sense of safety as individuals disappeared too. Many of us experienced deep fear and real grief – if not for ourselves, then for our families or friends; if not for our immediate circumstances, then certainly for our future. For many, the fear and grief lingers still. Moreover, our government’s decision to pursue a military response has only deepened and widened the grief many of us feel.

This reality was captured in the comments of a woman interviewed by the Philadelphia Inquirer three weeks after the attacks. Describing the events of September 11 and their aftermath, she said:

“It was just so sad. The world is a scarier place. You know this happens in other places, but you don’t think about it happening in America. Everything’s different. Our lives are different.” [\[1\]](#)

Her view is shared by many, many people. For many of us some elements of, or at least our feelings about, our day-to-day life are different now.

However, I would offer us another quote which suggests why, from an alternative viewpoint that should be of particular significance for people of faith – and in a way that is most profound – nothing has changed. This quote is older than the first and comes from the Middle East.

“For the Word of God is right and true;
and God is faithful in all God does.

*God loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of God’s unchanging love.*

By the word of God were the heavens made,
Their starry host by breath of the Divine mouth.

God foils the plans of the nations;
And thwarts the purposes of peoples.

*But the plans of God stand firm forever;
the purposes of the Divine heart through all generations.*

(Psalm 33:4-6, 10-11)

The words of the Psalmist point to a different truth that must be comprehended along side of the first and held in tension with it. These words point to a deeper, more enduring context for our experience than the newspapers will ever speak of, which is the context provided by God’s love. These words speak the truth that the God of grace and mercy, of whom the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Koran speak, is still God; and this God’s love does endure and surround us and undergird us, as the Psalmists also tell us, “from generation to generation.”

We need to see that both these perspectives are true, creating the paradox of this time. Everything has changed; and nothing has changed. And the question I want to address tonight is what the Quaker peace testimony means in a time like this.



Let me start by saying something about the stance from which I will speak, which may already be apparent; and then outline what I intend to say, or at least to cover in what I say.

I speak from the stance of a convinced Friend in the Christian, Quaker tradition. That means I believe the claims we just heard from Psalmist: That there is a living God; a loving, eternal, creative, personal Divinity in the universe Who wants for us and for all creation to be marked by wholeness, harmony, love and beauty. Early Quakers believed in and proclaimed the reality of this Divine presence on the basis of their experience, as well as the teachings of the Bible; and their convictions about this shaped every aspect of their life and faith, including the “peace testimony.”

I believe this too, on the same basis, although I would not be so bold as to say it has shaped my life as deeply as it should. So I will speak tonight in the language of the Christian Quaker tradition, because it is my language. But I use it knowing it points to truths deeper than these words, truths of the deepest human and spiritual experience that transcend all particular traditions. And in that light I hope you will try to translate the words I use into words that work better for you, if the words I use are not ones which speak helpfully to your experience.

I want, then, to explore two major questions tonight.

- *First, what is “the Peace Testimony”?* Quakers use that phrase all the time, but do we know what it means? What did it mean to those first Quakers who formulated it? What is the content of this ‘testimony’? What does it testify about; and what – or whom – does it testify to?
- *Second, what could or should it mean to proclaim, give witness to, represent, or embody the Quaker peace testimony in these times?* If this is a time in which everything has changed and nothing has changed, then does the way we give witness to the peace testimony need to change, or not? And if it does, then change in what way?

Finally, I will consider briefly two critical difficulties I see in our giving witness to the peace testimony *with power and impact* in these times.

Let us begin, then, with the first of my questions.



What is the Peace Testimony?

To start, we must develop some clarity about what “Quaker testimonies” are. To do that I think it important to be clear about what they are not. The Quaker testimonies are *not* just assertions of ideas, *nor* primarily political policy or public policy statements, *nor* simply articulations of philosophical or social principles.

To be specific to our topic tonight, the peace testimony is **not** simply an assertion that peace is better than violence, or that war is unacceptable, or that it is immoral to use coercive means to achieve personal, social or political ends. Sadly, though, that is how I often hear the peace testimony presented by Friends today. Many also speak of it as if it is a testimony about peace; that is, a statement about the desirability of peace, or the practical need to make peace.

Many of us, perhaps all of us, agree with these assertions – that peace is a good thing, and morally preferable to war or violence in any form. There is, however, nothing distinctively Quaker about taking such positions. Furthermore, to state such positions this way does not constitute the offering of a “testimony” as that term is normally used.

So, what is a “testimony?” I think the dictionary can help us here.

“Testimony,” as defined in the dictionary, is “a declaration or statement [or presentation] of evidence, given in support of something.” I believe this is the way Quakers originally understood and used this term when they spoke of a testimony. We will explore that shortly.

For a moment, though, let’s work in the hypothetical. If this is what “testimony” means, then *one question we should ask tonight is, “What is the Quaker peace testimony, as originally conceived, supposed to give evidence of?”* If the peace testimony is a testimony in this sense – and we should assume that the first Friends had some reason for choosing this term – then what is “the Quaker peace testimony” as a statement or presentation of evidence intended to testify to? “To” not in terms who hears it, but rather in terms of what it points to, or what case it makes.

The answer is this: *The peace testimony, in fact all the “testimonies” – all those statements, positions, and actions that early Quakers framed in relation to social and moral issues which we came to call “testimonies” – were meant to stand as testimony to the reality and power and love of God!* This is surely what the peace testimony is all about.

How would I support this claim? By pointing to the origins of early Friends’ use of the term “testimony” to describe specific, distinctive positions and behaviors they asserted as a matter of faith. To see what they meant we should examine the biblical use of the same term, because early Friends were a highly Biblio-centric group, and most of their religious vocabulary derived from and was aligned with biblical use.

Then we should also examine the first public use of this term in their writings, which relates to the peace testimony and further confirms this view.

The Biblical Use of “Testimony:” When one goes to the Bible or a concordance to look for words “testimony” or “testify” (in translation), one sees many occurrences of these terms. In the Old Testament almost all derive from the same Hebrew root (*ayd --*) that is often translated as either “testimony” or “witness.” The same kind of phenomenon appears in the New Testament where there are again many instances of the words “testify” or “testimony” – or “witness” – and again the vast majority derive from a single Greek root (*martur--*).

Examining the uses in both Old and New Testaments becomes evident that these are (at first, at least) forensic terms, related to matters of legal concern or formal argument. So the patriarchs built markers and held ceremonies to “testify” to (*aydaw*) – meaning “stand as evidence of” – an agreement (Gen. 31:44-52; Joshua 22:26-34). In Exodus (25:16, 31:7) the “Ark of the Testimony” is the vehicle in which the Israelites carry around the tablets which contain “the law” – i.e. their Scriptures. And we could cite a number of additional examples.

In the New Testament we also find many uses of the terms testify, testimony or witness. All refer to a word, statement, or act that points to, confirms, or substantiates the reality of something else, as testimony in a court of law would. After Jesus heals someone he tells him to go present himself to the priests and offer a sacrifice “as a testimony to them” (cf. Mt. 8:4; Lk. 5:14), meaning to point to and give proof of and thanks for God’s power to heal. Later in the New Testament we are told that the ability of Paul and Barnabas to speak boldly to a hostile audience, and to do “signs and wonders” in the midst of that crowd, “testifies to” – meaning it is evidence of – God’s power and grace at work in them. (Acts 14:3)

These biblical concepts of what a testimony is shaped early Friends’ use of this term, for early Friends were immersed in Scripture. Understanding this background helps us see why they would choose the word “testimony” to explain some unusual statements they offered, or practices they followed, or both (i.e., statements about their practices) which they saw as central to their faith. The first, and one of the most important of these, was their statement about their refusal to participate in armed conflict, “the peace testimony,” which was directed to Charles II in 1661. So, let’s look at that for a moment.

The First Quaker ‘Testimony’: In 1661, after massive social upheavals and civil war in England, and following the restoration of the monarchy, Quakers were being described to the newly restored king, Charles II, as a movement of violent revolutionaries and a threat to the state. To defend themselves and their faith from this slander – and from persecution – the leaders of the young movement wrote a declaration to present to the king. The words are familiar to many Quakers.

“We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end or under any pretense whatsoever. And 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 as evil and again to move unto it; and we do certainly know, and so testify to the whole 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.” [\[ii\]](#)

This is the first public statement of “the Quaker peace testimony.” So we should look closely at a couple crucial points to understand what the peace testimony was and meant at Quakerism’s origins.

First, this is an articulation of Friends’ faith as much as anything else. Yes, Friends were stating a political position – that is, they would not use violence to oppose the government, nor support nor promote any violent opposition to it. But even more important is their explanation of why.

They said they would not do this, nor engage in any form of violence, because it is contrary to the teachings of Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This statement was designed to defend their reputation. Yet, as much or even more it intended to point to their unshakeable faith in the rightness of the teachings of Christ, and their trust in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, above and beyond the teachings or guidance of any human government or movement. This testimony points to the spirit of Christ, to the Divine, as the final, authoritative source of truth in these matters, which Friends saw overriding all political ideals, positions or circumstances.

Second, it is also a statement about the unalterable character of Christ’s teachings. Early Quakers state with absolute certainty that “the spirit of Christ is not changeable.” So this truth about the evil of participation in violence can never change, because its source is the Divine, the Eternal Unchanging Source of all Truth.

Third, we see a primary, foundational understanding here – which cannot be emphasized strongly enough – that it is God’s love that makes peace possible, empowers persons to find forgiveness and reconciliation, and allows persons to be peacemakers; and that cannot change either.

This understanding, about what empowers us (and others) to avoid war and violence is not articulated in this first presentation of the peace testimony; but is assumed here and captured in earlier statements of George Fox, the founder of Quakerism. We see this first when he was being recruited for one of the militias that fought in the civil wars preceding the restoration. He refused, responding simply, “I live in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars.”[\[iii\]](#) We see it again when he writes to other Friends who were caught up in the strife of the civil wars and says, “... this I charge you, ... Live in peace, in Christ, the way of peace, and therein seek the peace of all men, and no man’s hurt.”[\[iv\]](#) These are statements about the power of God’s love of to change our lives, and so to make us peaceable people who can help make the world more peaceful.

So, to summarize, the Quaker peace testimony was framed not as a political position, a public policy

statement, or a philosophical perspective. Rather it was – and I would argue should still be – seen as a statement of faith. This statement and the behavior which followed from it were meant to point to and give evidence of God’s love and power. I believe this should still be so.

It is thus a testimony in the proper sense of that word. It is a presentation of evidence, to be given by the way we lead our lives, and based in our experience of the God’s love, that *points to power and love of God and the teachings of Christ as an actual and effective foundation for conducting our lives in ways that will help create a world that is whole and at peace*. It is a testimony to the availability of the power and grace of the Divine Spirit as a force that can empower us and guide us to endure the suffering and find the joy involved in living nonviolently, and so contribute to a more peaceful world. And finally it is also a statement of conviction that this way of living is the only way that leads to real peace.

Now, if this is an accurate summation of the meaning of the peace testimony, then next we should inquire about how it has been, and can or should be, given expression. We need to see these questions are closely related, and that there has been an evolution of expression over time.

A friend with whom I have had long conversations about this argues, correctly I think, that the first articulations of the peace testimony were essentially focused on the conduct of individuals in their own lives. That is to say, they were exhortations or explanations that we as Friends should eschew violence ourselves. They are statements about what personal conduct is in keeping with the teachings of Christ and the love of God, and about what is required of those who would be faithful in this sense as regards their own relationship to violence.

I would argue that in later articulations, especially those of John Woolman, we find a fuller and more demanding view of what is required of those who would be faithful to the Christ’s teachings and God’s love in embodying the peace testimony. These statements encourage Friends to think *not only* about a refusal to participate in violence, *but also* about the need to root out the causes of violence in their own lives and in the communities of which they are part. More recent books of Faith and Practice typically reflect this more challenging vision.

Taking this yet one step further, in recent decades, since the 1960’s at least, we have seen Friends to thinking more about giving expression to the peace testimony in explicitly political terms. A new emphasis has emerged on framing the peace testimony in terms of influencing the actions of others, and government policy, not just our own actions as Quakers.

My belief is that this movement into political action can (often) be an appropriate and legitimate expression of our historic, spiritual vision; *but only* when it is deeply connected to and derives directly from

our religious experience, conviction, and calling as individuals. So, where this movement into political and policy work is disconnected from – or, worse yet, has come to supplant – our personal, spiritual commitment to be faithful servants of the God’s love as peaceful people in all aspects of our lives, then it is no longer an expression of the “the peace testimony.” Then it is just political action. And as such it will often not bear good fruit because it is not intimately connected to the only power that can really create and sustain peace – the power of God’s love.

Looking at the origins and evolution of the peace testimony in these terms I see at least two areas of focus or sets of dimensions that that are part of expressing this testimony. These can be seen as running in parallel, and may sometimes be experienced as being in tension; but they should never be divorced from one another.

- ◆ The first set are the dimensions of giving expression to the peace testimony in the personal sphere of our lives, in the ways we conduct ourselves daily with family and friends, in our work and our play, and in our Meetings and in our communities; versus the ways we give expression to this testimony in the public sphere of life, in efforts to address and solve public problems, and to speak to and influence the conduct and policies of others – both individuals and institutions.
- ◆ The second set are the dimensions of working with a focus on protesting violence, and the factors that generate violence; versus working with a focus on alleviating the causes of violence.

We need to understand that neither element of either of these polarities should be seen as excluding the other. Indeed, often they are necessarily and intimately connected.

Still, how we personally operate to give a faithful expression to the peace testimony, where we focus our own efforts to make the world more peaceable, will and should derive from our own experience, temperament, and giftedness. It also must depend on our own sense of vocation.

So let us turn our attention now to the question of how we live can proclaim and embody this testimony, in a time of terror and tragedy.



Proclaiming the Peace Testimony in These Times

The times in which the first Quakers first articulated the peace testimony were times of great social upheaval, civil unrest, and political and economic turmoil. Radical changes in information technology – in the form of the introduction of the printing press, and the publication of the Bible in English [\[v\]](#) – had

engendered serious challenges to the basic social and political structures of that society. As a result the vast majority of people lived in considerable fear and anxiety about both their short- and long-term futures. And, in those times (the 1600's), the development of alternative religious communities and traditions by and for those seeking spiritual insight was widespread.

Does any of this sound familiar? It should. We need to see that the times in which Quakers first articulated this peace testimony and our own times are not all that different, at least in some basic aspects of human experience. Again things have changed, and not changed.

However, this is not to say there are no differences between those times and these; and some are very significant. Obviously, our lives are interwoven with the lives of other people all over the planet now in a way that has never been true before because of the globalization of trade and other economic and political trends. And the instant international reach of the media make many people around the world far more aware of how our fates are shaped and intertwined by transnational economic, political, social, and religious systems.

So, on September 11 we saw an act of violence and terror unfold on a scale we had never seen before; and we literally saw it instantly. This act of violence originated in a far away place, but struck at the heart of this nation. It was implemented using the latest in modern, very sophisticated technologies (like cell phones and the internet) which are, nevertheless, widely available to common people. Most of the casualties of these events our government describes as “an act of war” were civilians who did not see themselves as part of or engaged in any conflict, or even know any conflict existed. Finally, the motivations for this act seem to derive from the sense of threat, injustice and oppression that those who undertook it feel from their experience of the same international economic and political systems that we have just noted touch and link us with people and cultures all over the globe. And the perpetrators justified their act on “religious” grounds.

Those who planned this act of terror perceive those systems as exploiting and oppressing their people, as well as threatening their faith, culture, and values. So they struck at the most prominent symbols and centers of those systems, the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon; and at the nation state they see as most important in promoting and supporting those systems, the United States.

Now this is a different kind of violence than we have ever seen. It derives from a complex interplay of economic, political, and religious forces unfolding in an international context in a way never witnessed before. And its effects are local and personal as well as international.

We are seeing new displays of prejudice against those viewed as ‘alien’ all over this country because of this. Social problems are already increasing in our own communities because of the economic difficulties that are

being experienced by families and individuals as a result of the economic consequences of this attack. Finally, our national government is taking this occasion to further alter the tax system, shift national resources from human needs to military purposes, and create a mountain of new debt for the nation in the process. All of these things may very well have serious, long-term, highly problematic consequences for our society and our world – especially if what we seek is justice and peace.

So how does the Quaker peace testimony apply to these times? How can we understand it, live it out, and proclaim it in a way that helps all our neighbors, our communities, and our society as a whole move towards a more peaceful world? I think we need to consider that question in both a moral, socio-political, strategic context; and in a personal context -- and these dimensions are not unrelated. As I have said, I believe the peace testimony is first a testimony meant to guide our personal conduct. But since liberal Friends are often uncomfortable with conversations about personal morality, perhaps we should address the political dimension first.

Among the pieces of good news in the present situation, I believe, is the clear evidence that a spiritual commitment to pursue reconciliation oriented, justice seeking, nonviolent strategies for conflict resolution aligns completely with the approaches that make the most sense in a careful cultural and political analysis of the problem of international terrorism. The moral insight of Jesus' teachings and the practical wisdom needed to make the world better now, instead of worse, line up squarely in this context for at least three reasons.

First, no amount of force will intimidate an enemy who has no regard for human life, including their own, and this is a common characteristic of terrorists. One reason security measures did not work very well against these terrorists is that those measures assume the perpetrators of a crime want to survive it. But these folk did not care.

Additionally we must understand that killing some of these people (and we will never get them all) with military action is likely to create more of them. Why? Because such actions are making casualties of innocent bystanders, thus convincing others we are heartless oppressors; and they make martyrs for the cause, and martyrdom is something some of these people aspire to. Which leads to the second point.

The attacks of September 11 may seem “senseless” or “crazy” to us, but they made sense in the world view of those who perpetrated them. They made sense to them because these people see the U.S. – and the economic and cultural powers of the West more generally – as forces of violence, oppression and injustice. Where we see many of our economic and cultural involvements with the wider world as offering ways out of poverty and alternatives to the traditionally oppressive values (in some cultures); some others see us as “a

great Satan” that is destroying their culture, disrespectful of their religion, and willing to do whatever is necessary to sustain our own materialistic lifestyle by exploiting them.

It is the myths about our evil intent as a people that terrorists use to justify their actions and to recruit young persons to their cause. We can act in ways that reinforce those myths, and look like “the Great Satan,” and strengthen their case; or we can act in ways that prove the myths false. When we take actions that result in the death and destruction of innocents we do the former.

Let me be clear, I think we have a right – I would even argue we have an obligation – to bring the criminals who committed and supported these attacks to justice. The question is how? If our nation can find a way to do this through the channels of international law and diplomacy, then we will begin to show we do respect other nations, religions and cultures, and we will undercut the terrorists’ rationale for their actions.

Finally, the record of history shows us that, almost inevitably, violence begets violence. To break the cycle of violence requires some persons with moral courage and practical wisdom to stand up in the public policy arena and say, “No more! We have to find another way!”

So I would agree that one way we should give witness to the peace testimony now is to be active in debates about public policy, to explain both the moral and the practical reasons for pursuing nonviolent responses to terrorist action. Moreover, we should make both the spiritual and the strategic arguments in the public square for proactive efforts on the part of our government (and others) to address the root causes that feed terrorist activity – like poverty, economic injustice, and the kinds of cultural imperialism that do not honor (in keeping with our own ideals) the rights to self-determination and cultural integrity of other peoples and nations. This is important work for Friends and others to do.

But I say to you as well, “This is not enough.” Philadelphia Yearly Meeting’s current Faith and Practice says, “Friends peace testimony arises from the power of Christ working in our hearts. Our words and lives should testify to this power and [so] stand as a positive witness in the world.”[\[vi\]](#) We have personal and spiritual work to do here too, Friends, individually and corporately, that must occur closer to home, and is critical to our making a case for the peace testimony in these times.

First of all, there has to be a quality to our lives and all of our interactions with others, in both public and personal life, that embodies God’s love, which is the soul of the peace testimony – and that quality is too often lacking. Second, there has to be a kind of integrity between our public pronouncements and our personal lives that has also sometimes been missing. Let me talk briefly about both these matters.

Too often I have sat in some meeting, even a meeting for worship, where the topic is how we can move our world towards justice and peace, and heard Friends speak in ways that paint our government broadly as callous or evil, that characterize military people generally as warmongers, that represent all conservatives as hard-hearted or stupid, or type all capitalists as exploitive. When I hear this, I know we are not rooted in God's love, and we are headed the wrong way.

We contribute nothing to progress towards peace by demeaning persons whose worldviews differ from our own. We will do nothing to help those in power – in the government, military, or corporations – hear or see alternative viewpoints, and make good decisions, by failing to acknowledge the enormous responsibilities they carry, and the fact that (for the most part) most of them are acting in good conscience and doing the best they can. We do nothing to foster constructive dialogue and problem solving when we refuse to admit the potential validity of some of the analyses of and perspectives on social problems of those who values differ from ours.

We will never make the case for the peace testimony by treating those who disagree with us as enemies. We will never show other people the power of God's love to bring reconciliation between parties who have been adversaries or been aggrieved by dismissing other's experiences as unimportant, their concerns as unfounded, or their views as invalid before we have fully opened ourselves to hearing the possible truth in them.

Only when we truly and consistently hear and speak with every person we engage in dialogue about these matters as a person in whom God's light shines, and who thus might illuminate our way, are we demonstrating how God' love makes peace possible, and so making a case for the peace testimony.

Second, if we want to be credible as peacemakers then we must hear and heed John Woolman's advice: "that we who declare against wars, and acknowledge our trust to be in God only, [should] examine our foundation and motives in holding [significant wealth]. We [should] look upon our treasures ... and try whether the seeds of war have any nourishment in ... our possessions or not."[\[vii\]](#) Woolman told us to look for the seeds of violence in our possessions and our ways of living, and deal honestly with what we see.

Given the complexity of our economic and social systems, none of us can be free of all involvement with some of the entities and forces we criticize as elements of injustice and oppression in the world. But we can be honest and humble about our complicity in these systems, whether that complicity is willing or not. And then, I hope, we can be humble and understanding about how difficult these issues are for others too.

In a meeting I attended recently a Friend rose to say he was tired of hearing the persons in the Trade Center described as innocent bystanders. He said that many of those people were in businesses that made profits trading in and with companies that contributed to the poverty and injustice in the Third World, and they should not be described as innocent. I wanted to ask him what gave him the right to make that judgment; and for that matter, if he knew where his pension funds were invested.

We are all part of the same free market, consumer, capitalist society we like to criticize as dependent on cheap third world labor and resources. I would not have us stop criticizing injustice and exploitation in this system. But let us do so with some humility about our involvement. And, frankly, let us do so with some recognition that an economic system that is both fairer and sustainable has not (frankly) yet been found or created.

Moreover, that said, we need each to do what we can to make this system less exploitive and fairer. This may not be easy and may look different for each of us, but most of us can do something. This may be a matter of seeing to it that (insofar as possible) our own investments are “socially responsible,” or driving a more fuel efficient car, or only buying products from companies that pay living wages to their workers. (Or, “all of the above.”)

Actually, I have an even wilder idea. Maybe it should involve our committing ourselves to the biblical vision of tithing. Maybe we each should make sure we “give back” at least 10% of our income to do good and build peace by directing that money to our faith communities and other organizations caring for those in need, offering a life affirming faith, and both nurturing the roots of the peace testimony and giving it expression in serious work in the world.

Put simply, if we want to “talk the talk” in the public sphere, then we need to “walk the walk” in terms of how we treat others and how we lead our lives in every sphere. The foundation for all sincere efforts to express the peace testimony must be a commitment to be open and attentive to the love and power of God in our own lives. Indeed, we have to be prepared to be personally transformed by that love and power.

If we expect the witness for peace we would offer to be distinctive, and actually make a difference in the world, then that witness must arise from the Divine Center not the political left. That means our witness for peace has to include really and truly looking for, respecting, and listening to that of God in every person, including those who run corporations or wear uniforms or vote Republican. It means really and truly trying to do “what is good” as the prophet Micah explained it to us. “To do justice, and love mercy, *and walk humbly* with our God.”



The Challenge Before Us

Let me conclude with a few remarks about where I perceive us to be now as a people of faith in meeting this challenge. In particular I want to look very briefly at what I experience as two critical impediments, or at least not infrequent stumbling blocks, to our making the case for the peace testimony in these times. As I do this I want to be clear hear that I am not meaning to speak in a negative, critical mode; but rather hoping to lift up the things we need to keep doing, or do even better, to be as faithful and effective as we might be in this work.

In fact, I am greatly heartened by many things I have seen in our membership and Meetings in the last two months. I am encouraged by:

- The turn to serious introspection, reflection, and prayer among us in this time;
- A productive collaboration among Quaker organizations of different types which is building on the strengths of each; and
- By the fact we are being sought out by newcomers to many of our Meetings who want to join us in the search for better answers to the problems of violence at both the personal and public level.

Now to build on this wonderful beginning, I would exhort us to pay close attention to two things are required for us to make a difference in our efforts to help make peace. We need a deeper faithfulness than we have often demonstrated; and we need a commitment to effectiveness that we too often eschew. Let me add that too often these qualities – faithfulness and effectiveness – are seen as being in conflict, even as contradictory; but that does not need to be so. They will often exist in tension, but that tension can be creative.

So, first, in all that we do to embody the peace testimony let us be concerned to be as faithful as we can to our experience of the Divine and the truth and love that reveals; as well as the principles and practices we have known to lead us to truth and love.

This may sometimes mean having to wait to act longer than we wish to, because we have not heard all the voices or found all the information or felt the guidance of the Spirit we need, in order to have the clarity required to act in a way that is most likely to make a difference for good. It surely means committing ourselves to the Quaker ideal of grounding all we do in worship. So it will mean stopping frequently – more frequently than most of us are used to – for contemplation and prayer.

Put simply, Friends, we will have to nurture a deeper and more constant spiritual life in ourselves and one another to be able to make the peace testimony real and meaningful in these times.

On the other hand, we must also be seriously concerned about the effectiveness of our actions and witness. It is true that often we cannot know the impact of many things we do in faith until long after they are done. The best results of our actions will sometimes be unanticipated, as is so often the case with the problems they create. But that does not mean we should not bring our best intellectual effort to this work, as well as our hopes and commitments of faith.

Too often I have seen good-hearted, well-meaning people working for peace and justice do more harm than good because they did not think it important to gather good data, do careful analysis, or think strategically about their efforts before they framed them. Not only have they often wasted their own, and other people's time and energy; in some cases they have given those around us a reason to not take our peace testimony seriously by saying things or acting in ways that make our position seem naïve, foolish or simply ill-informed.

There is a reason God gave us the capacity to think as well as pray. Quakers are, as a group, ridiculously over-educated. We have among us the skills and talents to do hard research, analysis and strategic planning. Moreover, those efforts can be grounded in and informed by our faith.

Careful intellectual work is not the antithesis of revelation; but rather can be preparation for revelation that deepens wisdom and insight. We need to do that kind of work to make a case for the peace testimony in these times.



So to answer my own question – the subtitle for this talk – here is how I think our lives should speak in these times.

- ♥ Let them speak first of our abiding faith in a God of love who is capable of and wants to make us whole and peaceful people who are ready to make the world a more just and peaceful world – for this is what the peace testimony is really all about. It is about God's love, and making that visible and meaningful in the world. This, the power of God's love, is what it is supposed to testify to.
- ♥ Let our lives speak next of our own willingness to serve the causes of justice and peace by our own hard work and sacrifices – empowered and guided by the Divine Spirit – in our day-to-day existence. Let us live as real peacemakers in our own families, Meetings and communities, embodying our testimony there, so our public pronouncements are grounded and authentic.

- ♥ Then let us speak of the ways in which the moral vision of Jesus and what is needed to make peace in our own communities and the world at large are now aligned. And let us then participate in the public debates about how to achieve peace with intelligence, conviction, humility and love.

Finally, I pray our lives will speak of our sure hope – a hope grounded in our certainty of God’s love for us and all creation – our sure hope for a more harmonious, merciful and joyful world for our children and grandchildren.

When our lives speak like this, then many will be moved, and some even persuaded, by our Quaker peace testimony; and the kingdom of God will be at least a little bit closer than it is today.

[i] Philadelphia Inquirer; October 3, 2001, p.1

[ii] George Fox. Journal. J.L. Nickalls (ed.). Religious Society of Friends, London, 1952.
p. 399-400.

[iii] George Fox, Journal, J.L. Nickalls (ed.). Religious Society of Friends, London, 1952. p. 65.

[iv] George Fox, Journal, J.L. Nickalls (ed.), Religious Society of Friends, London, 1952, p. 357.

[v] For a most insightful exploration of the ways in which the publication of the Bible in English led to a radical reorientation of English society, and the English speaking world as a whole, see Wide as the Waters, by Benson Bobrick (Simon & Schuster, 2001).

[vi] Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Faith and Practice. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting,
Philadelphia, PA, 1997. P. 76

[vii] John Woolman, A Plea for the Poor, Phillips Moulton (ed.), Oxford University Press,
New York, NY. 1971, p. 255.