

The Peace Testimony of the Religious Society of Friends

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) has opposed war, historically, and participation in war, calling on people to live in Christ's peace. Looking to the Spirit acting within the individual and within the community of the faithful, Friends have generally distrusted and avoided systematic theology.¹ The argument that will be developed in this paper rests, significantly, on an appeal to experience.²

HISTORY

The principal emphasis in early Quakerism was not so much on recovering the early church in an institutional sense as on recovering the life in Christ as lived by the first Christians. Early Friends believed that through experiencing the immediate presence of Christ, human beings could attend directly to the holy Master and harken without intermediary to the Teacher. This message produced in many people a tremendous sense of liberation from what they felt to be the dry, empty forms of traditional ritual and ceremony, and from the social and ecclesiastical hierarchies which in their eyes had been discredited. The "masterless" seekers, whose spiritual needs were not being addressed adequately by the established churches or by radical puritan groups like the Ranters, were led by George Fox and others to find guidance from Christ's inward teaching. They were eager to live in the Light of Christ and to share the good news that Christ was available to all.

Unlike the Ranters, who denied sin on the grounds that God created all, Friends were all too aware of the evil which we harbor within us and which we know from our own experience, not just in suffering evil but in struggles with temptations that have occurred in the course of our own spiritual journeys. For Quakers, sin was and is a matter of concrete experience. No Eighteenth Century Enlightenment optimism regarding human reason is found in Fox, who though arguably the most creative and perceptive of early Quaker theologians, distrusted abstract theory and "airy notions." He was especially suspicious of importing philosophical categories and frameworks into theological reflection. Yet after much suffering as a result of sin and the power of evil, Fox also came to recognize in his own experience, that faithful obedience to the inward promptings of Christ did save him from the sin which part of his nature desired.³ As a result, he was able to tell

¹ . Notwithstanding this generalization, several people contributed significantly to the theological framework of Quaker religious thought. These would include George Fox, Robert Barclay, William Penn, Isaac Pennington, Margaret Fell, George Keith (who eventually left Quakerism for the Church of England), Samuel Fisher, and Liliias Skene.

² . Those who are interested in seeing a Quaker's justification of the centrality of peace witness to the Apostolic faith by appeal to the "New Testament" or "Christian Bible" should read Paul N. Anderson's "Jesus and Peace," in *The Church's Peace Witness*, edited by Marlin E. Miller and Barbara Nelson Gingerich (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), pp. 104-130.

³ . John Nickalls, ed., *The Journal of George Fox*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952. pp. 14-16, 21.

those who in 1651 sought to enlist him in Cromwell's New Model Army⁴ that he "lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars."⁵ This was an unintended consequence of his faithfulness and he did not preach nonresistance or opposition to war at that time and for some years thereafter. He simply lived them.

In the 1650's there were many leaders of the movement which became the Religious Society of Friends: Edward Burrough, Edward Byllinge, Margaret Fell, Mary Fisher, Samuel Fisher, George Fox, Elizabeth Hooton, Francis Howgill, John Lilburne, James Nayler, and Isaac Pennington, to mention just a few. Some of these had been active in the Good Old Cause,⁶ which brought down the monarchy in the preceding decade. These tended to continue in the 1650's to look to the New Model Army to bring justice, if not the Kingdom of God, to England. Early Friends sought with some success to "convince"⁷ soldiers in the army, and newly convinced soldier-Friends often failed to see any difficulty in remaining soldiers. Indeed, in the mid-1650's Quakers were purged against their will from many military units on the grounds that they undermined military discipline, with their rejecting the use of honorific titles, their refusing to doff hats to "superiors", etc. During this period there is no evidence that either Fox or Nayler, perhaps the most influential of the early "publishers of Truth," tried to talk Quaker soldiers into quitting the military.⁸

From the beginning of the 18th Century, Friends tended to assume that Quaker opposition to participation was characteristic of the Society from its very inception. This has been challenged by modern historians. One view, that of the British historians Alan Cole, Christopher Hill, and Barry Reay, is that the Peace Testimony⁹ did not exist before

⁴ . In 1642 civil war erupted in England between the forces of King Charles I and the forces of Parliament. Oliver Cromwell, an officer in the Parliament's Puritan army persuaded the Parliament to reorganize the army on the basis of performance rather than on social class. This was the "New Model Army." It won the war. Charles I was executed January 30, 1648/49. In 1653 Oliver Cromwell named himself Lord Protector of the Puritan republic.

⁵ . Nickalls, *op. cit.*, p. 65. To "live in the virtue of that life and power..." is a 17th Century English expression which means to live under the sway of that life and power.

⁶ . The "Good Old Cause" refers to the English revolution and republican government 1640-1660, an important aspect of which was the effort to "level" English society by reducing, if not eradicating, class privilege.

⁷ . Quakers sought to "convince" others of the truth of their message. As Dean Freiday explains, "In a sense, it was a matter of being convinced, not only intellectually but also in the heart and by the power of the Spirit, of the truth of Christianity," *Barclay's Apology in Modern English* (Hemlock Press, 1967), p. 254, fn. 9. This was regarded as distinct from full conversion or turning one's life to God.

⁸ . See Peter Brock, *The Quaker Peace Testimony 1660-1914* (York, England: William Sessions Ltd., 1990), Chapter II "Quaker Attitudes to War before the Peace Testimony," pp. 9-23. Margaret Hirst, (*The Quakers in Peace and war*, New York: George H. Doran Co., 1923) however, notes that in response to an inquiry of January 26, 1659/60 George Fox forbade Friends from enlisting in a militia or accepting appointment as an officer, as "it was contrary to our principles, for our weapons are spiritual and not carnal" (p. 56) [I have modernized the spelling].

⁹ . Wilmer Cooper explains what a Testimony is, as the term is used by Friends, in this way: "From the beginning Friends believed that they could have direct and immediate communication with God which would enable them to discern right ethical choices. But they soon experienced certain common leadings of the Spirit which became formalized into testimonies. These testimonies served as common principles and standards of behavior and action." (*The Testimony of Integrity in the Religious Society of Friends*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet #296 [1991], p. 7.) These testimonies are printed in the books of discipline or faith and practice

1660/61, though they concede that there were a few pacifists among Friends, e.g. John Lilburne and the sailor Thomas Lurting.¹⁰ The picture these historians give is that opposition to war and participation in it in the 1650's was a matter of individual conscience rather than of corporate commitment. This picture is rooted in the following factors: the inchoate nature of the movement before the restoration; the absence of formal pronouncements on the topic by the community of Friends; the millennial hopes and apocalyptic utterances of many Friends, including George Fox; and the focus on England. This view is rejected by Hugh Barbour *et al.*, who complain that "these historians' Marxist outlook assumes that a revolution is a class struggle and that radicals turn nonviolent only in despair."¹¹ The Marxists, it is argued, do not give sufficient weight to the religious concerns and experience of the early Quakers. Peter Brock, a non-Quaker historian, is surely right in seeing "the peace testimony slowly emerging during Quakerism's turbulent first decade."¹²

If we look to the colonies in North America we find that in the latter half of the 1650's Friends (who first arrived in 1656) were causing consternation by refusing to participate in militias. Brock quotes a letter from the Rhode Island General Assembly to Massachusetts (which had opposed Rhode Island's accepting Quakers) that if the Quakers refused "to subject themselves to all duties aforesaid, as training, watching, and other engagements," as the Bay Colony had apparently warned, it would have to ask London for instructions.¹³ Until the Crown intervened, Massachusetts hanged the unwelcome Quakers who persisted in bringing their message to the colony. Such a warning would have made no sense unless Quakers already had some reputation for refusing to engage in such activities. The same year as the Rhode Island letter, 1658, officials in Maryland had Quakers whipped or chained "for not bearing arms in the militia, if called upon to do so."¹⁴

Back in England, on 6 January 1660/61 a rebellion was staged against the newly restored monarchy. To indicate that Quakers had no part in this rebellion, a Declaration was written by George Fox and Richard Hubberthorne "in behalf of the whole body of the Elect People of God who are called Quakers," eschewing violence and any attempt to overthrow the monarchy. It was signed by the authors and ten other prominent Friends and delivered to the King 21 January. This is widely regarded as the initial statement of the Peace Testimony. In subsequent decades, Friends were challenged to discern what faithful living required in relation to privateering, obeying calls to watch or to muster, conscription,

published by yearly meetings. The point the British historians are making is at least that no formal statement representing Friends corporately existed before 1660/61 which condemned participation in war.

¹⁰ . Lurting's conscience was aroused against war during a naval attack on Barcelona in 1757, the year in which Lilburne died. See Brock, p. 19, and Hirst, pp. 52 & 53.

¹¹ . High Barbour and Christopher Densmore, Arthur Mekeel, Arthur Worrall, "Wars, Revolutions, and the Peace Testimony," in *Quaker Crosscurrents: Three Hundred Years of Friends in the New York Yearly Meetings*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995. p. 48.

¹² . Brock, p. 24.

¹³ . Brock, p. 49.

¹⁴ . Brock, p. 51.

war taxes, mixed taxes, manufacture of armaments, transportation of soldiers and military supplies, etc.¹⁵

In 1681 William Penn received a grant to be proprietor of Pennsylvania. He set out to establish a colony that would be governed in a manner consistent with the principles of Friends. It was to have no colonial army or militia. The King was to be responsible for protecting Pennsylvania from privateers and European powers, and Penn adopted a policy of friendly relations with the Delaware, the Native American tribe which lived in South East Pennsylvania. Nonetheless, in accepting the Charter, Penn accepted the title, Captain-General. Until Quakers lost control of the Assembly in 1755, some 37 years after Penn's death, the compromise regarding provincial security was that taxes would be paid for the King's (or Queen's) use (which all understood would be used for the royal army), but that there be no formal provincial army, no conscription, and no taxes explicitly for war.

Peter Brock argues, in effect, that Quaker pacifism reached its maturity as a result of the reformation activities of John Woolman and others in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in the years leading up to the Revolutionary War. The reformers sought to persuade Quakers to withdraw from the Assembly, abandoning the Quaker magistracy. They argued that control of the Assembly had led to compromise of principle, since the Assembly was caught between the demands of the crown, on the one hand, and of a populace increasingly hostile to Quaker policies, on the other. Under the pressures of the Revolutionary War Friends were scrupulous in disciplining those whose practice failed to conform to the Peace Testimony as it had become more exactly understood. Friends could not join armies, supply others to serve in their stead, pay war taxes, transport materials or soldiers for the army, etc. Those who participated in war on either side were disowned, i.e. formally separated from membership. This discipline seems to have held until the civil war, during which, although Friends corporately held fast to the Peace Testimony, some meetings seem not to have disciplined members who fought. During the Twentieth Century, this latter pattern has become the general practice: the Peace Testimony held corporately, but without disciplining those individuals who fought in the country's wars.

THEOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATIONS IN THE 17TH CENTURY

The Declaration of 1660/61 was written in haste to meet immediate political exigencies. Its principal argument was the one which Fox had used in turning down a position in the New Model Army in 1651, namely, that war proceeds from human lusts as James said (James iv.1-3), but that the meek and faithful are redeemed from these lusts by the Lord and, as a result, are brought "out of the occasion of war, " to which was added the rejection of all "outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons for any end

¹⁵ . In England's efforts to achieve control of the seas, she exercised benign neglect, if not outright encouragement, of private efforts to seize ships under "enemy flags". This was called "privateering," and the goods stolen were called "prize goods." Friends sought to discipline themselves against both privateering and the purchase of prize goods.

"Calls to watch," refers to the practice of assigning men the responsibility to take a turn in the guarding of the community, usually at night.

"Mixed taxes" were taxes which produced revenue, part of which would be used for military expenditures and part for other purposes.

or under any pretense whatsoever."¹⁶ In more contemporary language, the argument is that the transformation wrought in the faithful by their encounter with and obedience to God turned them from the desires which support war and led them to reject war for any purpose. The authors anticipated the objection that the Spirit might just as well move them on another occasion to change their principle and to lead them "to fight for the kingdom of Christ."¹⁷ Their reply was that (1) "Christ's kingdom is not of this world," and thus cannot be gained by the weapons of this world, (2) "the spirit of Christ... is not changeable, so as once to command us from a thing as evil and again to move unto it," and (3) the faithful cannot desire the kingdoms of this world but rather desire that by God's power "the kingdoms of this world may become kingdoms of the Lord."¹⁸ The Declaration goes on to argue, (4) "he that hath commanded us not to swear at all (Matt.v.34), hath also commanded us that we shall not kill (Matt.v.21), so that we can neither kill men, nor swear for nor against them."¹⁹ These points echo the idea of the two kingdoms, the kingdom ruled by God, to whom the faithful owe absolute obedience, and the kingdom ruled by a mortal monarch to whom the faithful owe only that obedience appropriate to "caesar." Since war requires obedience to "caesar" over against the claims of the Lordship of God, they imply that warfare for kingdoms of this world is idolatrous. The argument is schematic and not worked out in detail.

The classic defense of the Peace Testimony was given by the theologically trained Robert Barclay in his, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (1675).²⁰ Whereas Fox had appealed principally to the doctrine of James and the transforming power of Christ operating within the meek and faithful disciple, Barclay gave more emphasis to the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew V), but also citing Paul (Eph.vi.12, 2 Cor.x.4, Gal.v.24), the prophets, and early church fathers such as Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian of Carthage, and Chrysostom. According to the argument, "the Spirit and doctrine of Christ" forbid resisting evil, fighting, and avenging oneself on others, for which many Biblical texts were marshaled. In keeping with the Declaration, Barclay argued that Christ brought a new dispensation such that those who receive it and live under it cannot engage in outward war. His interpretation of the scriptures was defended by appeal to the authority of the church fathers who also embraced non-resistance. Peace witness, Barclay argued in effect, is central to the apostolic faith both in obedience to the spirit of Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, which is echoed by Paul's counsel to the Romans (xii.17-21), but also in the call to bear the cross (Mark viii.34).

THE CENTRALITY OF PEACE WITNESS TO THE APOSTOLIC FAITH

¹⁶ . The Declaration is reprinted in *The Journal of George Fox*, edited by John Nickalls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), pp. 398-404. See p. 399.

¹⁷ . Fox, p. 399.

¹⁸ . Fox, pp. 399 & 400.

¹⁹ . Fox, p. 401.

²⁰ . This book is available in the original Seventeenth Century English or in a much more readable edition edited by Dean Freiday, *Barclay's Apology in Modern English*, 4th printing, Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 1991) first printed in 1967.

The purpose of the Consultation which gave rise to this anthology was not to rehearse theologies of past centuries but to explore how contemporary developments may contribute to "a revision of judgments made centuries ago, a healing of divisions within the church, and the development of a basis for common Christian witness."²¹ Toward this end, I offer a Friend's perspective on the centrality of peace witness to the Apostolic faith. In the manner of Friends, I need to begin with experience, pilgrim experience.

Pilgrim Experience

A familiar and enduring dimension of the unprogrammed meeting for worship is Friends' gathering together, in the presence of God, in silent searching. This searching is as multifaceted as prayer. It may include searching for surcease of sorrow, for spiritual sustenance, for guidance; it may include searching in wonder the face of God; it may include opening oneself attentively to God's searching scrutiny. These common elements of pilgrim experience, bring with them an awareness, *inter alia*, of our foolishness, our helplessness, our separation from God, our inability to direct our own spiritual journeys. Each of us knows by experience that he or she comes upon obstacles along the way. When finally, wondrously, "way opens," as Friends say, permitting us to surmount or pass through an obstacle, we discover that others have gone before us. What may have appeared to us in the experience as a great and glorious revelation, when put into words we often see to be commonplace. We learn that what rose up as mountains for us have by some been traversed without difficulty, and we become aware of things which have not stopped us though they have caused great difficulty for some others. We are conscious in all of this that it is none of our doing. We learn the futility of trying to control God; we learn humility-- again, and again. It is our experience that God often speaks to our own condition through other people, through people flawed and mortal like ourselves.

As we travel along the pilgrim path we learn something of what it is to live in the Spirit, however partial and fleeting realization of that life may be. Friends have found that the words uttered by James Nayler, as he lay dying in 1660 after being attacked by thieves, following his torture for blasphemy, have resonated with their experience:

There is a spirit which I feel that delights to do no evil, nor to revenge any wrong, but delights to endure all things, in hope to enjoy its own in the end. Its hope is to outlive all wrath and contention, and to weary out all exaltation and cruelty, or whatever is of a nature contrary to itself. It sees to the end of all temptations. As it bears no evil in itself, so it conceives none in thoughts to any other. If it be betrayed, it bears it, for its ground and spring is the mercies and forgiveness of God. Its crown is meekness, its life is everlasting love unfeigned; it takes its kingdom with entreaty and not with contention, and keeps it by lowliness of mind. In God alone it can rejoice, though none else regard it, or can own its life....²²

²¹ . From the leaflet announcing the consultation.

²² . James Nayler, *Works* (1716), p. 695, as quoted in *Faith and Practice*, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Philadelphia: PYM, 1972), p. 59.

It is the experience of Friends that to the extent to which we live in the awareness of the presence of God, we are called to live under the guidance of that spirit of which Nayler spoke.

The Blessed Community

To this point attention has been focused on the individual's experience of relationship with God. Often this experience embraces others. The communion with God is often a communion with the faithful community, or at least with those of the community present. To return to Friends' unprogrammed meetings for worship, the experience is typically not that of isolation in which silence walls off each individual in solitary separation from the other worshipers, each in her or his own separate dialogue with God. Were it so, there would be little point to coming together. There are those private conversations with God, to be sure, but there is also the awe-inspiring choir of silent prayer in which together we raise our hearts into God's presence. Sometimes those present are gathered by the Spirit into a palpable and powerful unity. On such occasions, wrote Thomas Kelly, Christ

has broken down the middle wall of partition between our separate personalities and has flooded us with a sense of *fellowship*. This unity with our fellow-worshipers, such that we are "written in one another's hearts," is in one sense created and instituted in the hour of worship. But in a deeper sense it is *discovered* in that hour that we are together in one body, which is the true and catholic church invisible. But the fact *disclosed* in the meeting, namely, that we *are* one body, hid with Christ in God, remains, secure from the ebb and flow of *feelings* and *emotions*.²³

In sustaining a visible unity over time, we human beings need institutional structures and processes. Enduring communities need to make corporate decisions. Friends approach all such decisions as occasions for coming into unity in and under the Spirit of God. The unity sought is not coerced, compelled, or commanded, but recognized and acknowledged. By approaching all corporate decisions as occasions for corporate discernment, Friends seek to live in that holy community which Christ announced. This commitment to corporate discernment carries with it an openness to seeing the light of Christ refracted through each and every one present and to hearing the Word in what each says in speaking to the issue at hand. The peace of God is in communion; it is available to us today, as we live.

Thus, it is our experience in both worship and corporate decision-making that we can become one in Christ; we can participate in the blessed community.

Waging Violent Warfare vs. the Lamb's War

If I were a bee with my human consciousness, I would have one community, a community so tight and cohesive that I would exalt it and it would give me ecstasy. As a conscious bee, I would experience the transcendence of myself. The bee gains this community by becoming wholly subordinate to it. It is the colony that is the organism. It

²³ . Thomas Kelly, "The Gathered Meeting," reprinted in *Reality of the Spiritual World and The Gathered Meeting* (London: Friends Home Service Committee, 1965, p. 44).

feeds itself; it reproduces; it stores honey to survive the winter. The individual bee is a member, a digit, as it were. As social animals, human beings are susceptible to the ecstasy of the bee; it is dehumanizing. War calls on participants to subordinate themselves to one human community: e.g. a nation, a tribe, an ethnic group. War may be seen to exhibit the triumph of that way of thinking by which we decide what to do by appeal to the consequences we expect our actions to have, rather than by appeal to absolute moral principles. War may also be seen to exhibit the triumph of human willfulness over humble attendance to the guidance of the Spirit. From this joint perspective, "just war" theory rationalizes peoples' collective assumption of responsibility for justice on earth. But it is not the case that *we* are sovereign. We cannot, acting collectively or individually, make one another just. When I disregard my own limitations, and the limitations of the groups and social institutions which I embrace, disregard the teaching and example of Jesus, assume responsibility for the just behavior of others, attempting to exact just violently upon them "if necessary," I am supplanting God's judgment with my own. There are elements of willfulness and *hubris* in taking up the sword or gun to impose justice on other human beings, elements quite incompatible with that life in the spirit to which we are called.

The approach sketched here to the centrality of peace witness to the apostolic faith appeals to an apocalyptic vision which provides support to nonviolence, on the one hand, and to a prophetic calling, on the other. It is suggestive that apocalyptic hopes were high in the first two centuries of the church, among Anabaptists in the 16th Century, and among radical Puritans and Friends in the 17th Century. Douglas Gwyn, building on the pioneering work of Lewis Benson, has brought out convincingly the apocalyptic dimensions of George Fox's teachings.²⁴ His is not the vision of the end of days, but that of realized eschatology: the Kingdom is come, though not yet in its fullness. The first Quakers experienced Christ's teachings as so revolutionary as to turn the world upside down. As Gwyn has put it, the Quakers proclaimed "that the vivid apocalyptic expectations of the people were now being fulfilled: *Christ had come* to lead the faithful in new paths, thus setting up a new order and government... [which] superseded all existing Church orders, governments, teachers, and ministers."²⁵ The real authority and touchstone was the Word of God, Christ himself, the Teacher, not the ancient words of scripture which had been inspired by *ho Logos*, the Word. As Dean Freiday has put it, "the Friends felt called both to proclaim and to demonstrate that Christ has indeed inaugurated the reign of God on earth."²⁶ The focus was, and is, not doctrine or theory, but the living presence of Christ whose power gathers us together. We are gathered together to join the "Lamb's war," a prophetic struggle against the powers of darkness using weapons not our own, carnal or otherwise, but weapons of the Spirit. Fox's writings are filled with martial language, often misinterpreted today. The struggle requires great humility and meekness in order that the continuing revelation be received. Dean Freiday cautions, in this regard, that this is

²⁴ . Douglas Gwyn. *Apocalypse of the Word: The Life and Message of George Fox (1624-1691)*. Richmond, IN Friends United Press, 1986.

²⁵ . Gwyn, p. 30.

²⁶ . Dean Freiday, "Apostolicity and OrthoChristianity" in *Apostolic Faith in America*, edited by Thaddeus D. Horgan. New York: Commission of Faith and Order, NCCCUSA, 1988. p. 44.

revelation "in the sense of *new applicational insights, not new doctrine*."²⁷ The apocalyptic nature of Fox's teaching is characterized by Douglas Gwyn as follows:

The experience of Christ... is the revelation of history -- not only the history *recorded* by scripture but also the end of history *foretold* by scripture. Christ first reveals one's alienation from God, giving an understanding of Adam's Fall in Genesis. If one remains in the light of this revelation, Christ will empower one to enter the city of New Jerusalem, as envisioned by John at the end of Revelation... History, as the vast realm of human activity carried out by men and women alienation from God and from one another, is *ended* as they hear and obey the voice of Christ, who reconciles them to God and one another... Thus, men and women are brought to the end of history by revelation of Christ.²⁸

It is fair to say, I think, that this apocalyptic vision has dimmed among Friends and yet, however they might shrink from the terminology employed by theologians, there remains among Friends an abiding hope in the coming of God's holy peace and order to this earth and the desire and endeavor to live in that peace and order.

The impulse toward nonresistance found in Nayler's words (quoted earlier) is balanced by the prophetic imperative, "the Lamb's war," the call to work against the forces of darkness. Early Friends suffered nonviolently the physical abuse to which their opponents subjected them. While they were led to nonviolent disobedience to those demands of civil authority which they saw as incompatible with the leadings of the Spirit, they were careful that this disobedience be open and they accepted the sanctions civil authority levied for that disobedience. In this way the authority of civil government was recognized and respected. The first Friends denounced the evils of their day and engaged actively in lobbying Parliament, Protector, and then King to change laws and policies seen to be unjust. They tried to adopt for themselves practices which they believed to be in more accord with the Kingdom of God than were those of the society at large, while seeking to extend the reality of the blessed community beyond the meeting house and beyond the meeting into the world. This prophetic stance has never died among Friends, though it has waned and waxed.

TOWARD RECONCILIATION REGARDING PEACE WITNESS

Augustine of Hippo would be unimpressed, very likely, by these efforts on behalf of justice. The Christian pacifist appeared to him to abdicate responsibility for innocent neighbors. In responding to this familiar criticism, I wish to highlight two developments on the side of the Religious Society of Friends in particular, and the "Historic Peace Churches" in general, which seem to be facilitating a dialogue that may lead to reconciliation regarding peace witness: (1) the willingness to participate, however critically, in the civil state, and (2) the realization that the third way between responding to evil with violence and responding to evil with submission to the will of the evil doer, can be much more

²⁷ . Freiday, p. 45.

²⁸ . Gwyn, p. 209.

robust than the unyielding nonresistance of martyrdom. Both of these points warrant some comment.

The Anabaptist proscription against entanglement in civil government concerned principally entanglements which would implicate the Anabaptist in acts of violence or idolatry. In light of this history, it is noteworthy that Dr. Barrett, the Mennonite theologian, invokes the notion of the holy nation of faithful Christians in order to ground involvement as peacemaker in civil states in which the church finds itself scattered; she does not rely, as Anabaptists once did, on withdrawal. Refusal to participate in civil affairs was once a major ground of contention between the established churches (especially Lutheran and Roman Catholic), on the one hand, and the Anabaptists, on the other.²⁹ The Brethren have also moved in this direction, as documented by Prof. Durnbaugh: "No longer were the Brethren thinking in terms of two realms or kingdoms, that of the church and that of the world. They began to think of the church as co-responsible with the government for the solution of the world's problems."³⁰ Of the three historic peace churches, Quakers have been more willing, historically, to become involved in civil governance, though on occasion this has caused major problems for the Religious Society of Friends. For all three historic peace churches, indeed for all churches in the USA, there must remain a tension between the prophetic approach to civil government, calling it to account in Christian witness, on the one hand, and a democratic approach which accepts the political validity of majority opinions with which the church must disagree. Neither theological nor moral questions are answered by votes.

The second point of movement is a greatly increased appreciation that one always has choices in addition to violent resistance to evil, on the one hand, and non-resisting submission to it, on the other. As Prof. Volf noted, "the option for nonviolence in reaction to violence should not be confused with that self-effacing attitude in which I completely place myself at the disposal of the others to do with me as they please."³¹ Although instances of nonviolent *resistance* can be found throughout history, I think it will be agreed by all that much has been learned about the efficacy of intentionally nonviolent strategies and techniques for combating evil. Whether or not we accept, as does Dr. Barrett, Walter Wink's argument in *Engaging the Powers*,³² that Jesus practiced and taught the "third way" of nonviolent action to secure both peace and justice, the historic peace churches, as they are called, have all been influenced by what has been learned about the power of nonviolent direct action for peace and justice. This is a significant shift. In the face of determined evil, nonresistance left the matter of justice almost entirely in God's hands; this was part of the faithful's humble service to God. Nonviolent direct action opened up the possibility of working diligently for justice without violating the proscription against warring with

²⁹ . Marlin Miller, "Toward Acknowledging Together the Apostolic Character of the Church's Peace Witness," in *The Church's Peace Witness*, edited by Marlin E. Miller and Barbara N. Gingerich. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994. pp. 198 & 199.

³⁰ . Donald Durnbaugh,.... (p. 19).

³¹ . Miroslav Volf, "The Suffering Messiah and the Rider on the White Horse: On Christian Faith and Violence in the Modern World," delivered at the Faith and Order NCCC/USA Consultation, "The Fragmentation of the Church in Its Unity in Peacemaking," University of Notre Dame, South Bend, IN, June 14, 1995. p. 11.

³² . Walter Wink. *Engaging the Powers*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.

carnal weapons. Indeed, peacemaker teams have been created in the last several years to intervene nonviolently in trouble-spots like Chiapas and Bosnia so as to forestall violence while working for justice. No one thinks that nonviolent strategies can *guarantee* justice, but neither does anyone think that violent strategies can *guarantee* justice. The calculations involved in decisions made in the course of nonviolent campaigns include, though they are not limited to, assessments of consequences. This opens up additional areas of common ground between the historic peace churches and others, regardless of whether deontological or characterological considerations also and importantly inform the churches' ethical decisions.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Every person has within, like Saul of Tarsus, that which can respond to divine love, which can harken to the movement of the Holy Spirit, that can hear and respond to God. To say this, is not to deny that there are those who refuse to attend and to heed. It was this faith that led Friends to deal with the Delaware Indians with respect. It is this faith which underlies the Alternatives to Violence Project. Just one example of a program that reflects a commitment to peace-making, AVP was begun in 1974 in response to a request to Quakers from inmates at Greenhaven prison, Stormville, NY, to help them persuade teenagers in trouble to abandon violence. The project, as it turned out, focused instead on the adult convicts. It runs workshops which help them discover in themselves irenic alternatives in the sorts of circumstances which otherwise would have triggered their acting violently. So successful has the project been in transforming lives that it has spread across the U.S.A. and to many other countries throughout the world.

The World Council of Churches has launched a Programme to Overcome Violence designed for "challenging and transforming the global cultural of violence in the direction of a culture of just peace." The deeper imperative is for the churches to acknowledge the centrality of peace witness to the apostolic faith. In this essay I, as a Friend, have drawn on the experience of Friends, but the intent has been to point to experience which will be familiar in content, if not in context, to Christians generally. It is the experience of the Prince of Peace calling us to rise up and follow, calling us to the Peaceable Kingdom, calling us to live in the Spirit.³³

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