

NEYM Faith and Practice Revision Committee
Chapter 4: Integration of Faith and Life—
The Meaning, Understanding, and Use of Testimonies
Working Paper to be presented at NEYM 2008 Sessions

[Note to readers of this draft: paragraph numbers will not appear in the printed book.]

- 1 The earliest Friends wrote of a single testimony, the call to live in unity with the Divine Truth. This single testimony arose out of the direct encounter of individuals and the gathered community with the Inward Light, the Light of Christ. This Light reaches through and beyond all intermediaries to make its witness directly to the human heart. Friends' experience of the Inward Light has consequences. It brings a sense of conviction and clarity of understanding out of which an individual or gathered community feels led to act. Early Friends referred to this experience as "truth testimony."
- 2 The various forms of personal and social witness commonly called "the Quaker testimonies" are not "ours" so much as a witness to the Spirit of Truth which we, among others, bear to the world. Friends past and present have been consistently convinced of certain aspects of the Truth, and in trying to describe the essence of their witness have used words such as integrity, simplicity, peace, equality, and community. Our faith in continuing revelation means we expect that authentic and practical ways of witness will be given to those who are faithful. No definitive or exhaustive list of "Quaker testimonies" can be made. The temptation is that such a list might be treated as outward standards to which Friends are required to subscribe, shifting the source of authority from a living encounter with the Spirit of Truth to a quasi-creedal code of expected behavior.
- 3 Friends bear witness to the operation of the Spirit of Truth in every human heart and community of faith, in every social circumstance as well as every authentic religious circumstance. Early Friends were on fire with their discovery that "Christ has come to teach his people himself" and that his teachings were a reliable guide to daily living. In our worship we bear witness to the inward presence of the Divine without the need for outward symbolic representation, or outwardly expressed sacraments, such as water baptism or bread and wine communion. We hold that the life of Christ within can be known directly; that all of life might come to be practiced as a sacrament. Silence can be an opening for Divine grace, as we work to accept Divine guidance in both our worship and business practices.
- 4 Awareness of the Inward Light may impress itself upon us suddenly or may develop slowly over time. Our understanding of it deepens as new situations and insights arise. At every stage of life and in every situation we are called to live according to the Light we have, trusting that more will be given if needed. Inspired by the historical witness of Friends, it is the task of each generation to act on the promptings of Truth in response to current realities.
- 5 Friends believe in continuing revelation. At times we need to discern whether we are being called to fresh forms of witness.
- 6 Sometimes individuals may experience "leadings" which feel absolutely required of them. Such individual witness is best tested in corporate discernment, where it may be

found to be valid for the individual, but not a call for the active commitment of the community. Corporate witness, on the other hand, rises up when a whole meeting discerns a persistent call for shared witness. This is the lived and living result of the intertwining of our spiritual lives.

- 7 We are called to be faithful to our spiritual experience, to live close to the spiritual insights given us. Friends through the ages have described a deep sense of spiritual peace, a sense of grace that pervades their lives, even in times of great difficulty, when they live faithfully by what they are given. We are not called to be effective in our witness. Living the testimony of Truth is a matter of spiritual integrity, not of political or social effectiveness. Although the result of our witness may be helpful to those around us, it is often the example of the spiritual underpinnings of the action that gives rise to the most profound change.

ADVICES on Testimonies

- 8 Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts, which are the leadings of the Holy Spirit.
- 9 Remember a testimony does not originate with you, but with the Spirit of Truth. Bear its witness faithfully in large and small matters as it is laid upon you.
- 10 Keep your witness clearly grounded in faith, and regularly test your leadings within your meeting.
- 11 Keep your spiritual roots watered and nourished and let the energy which informs your witness be rooted and grounded in love. You will wither if you rely solely on your own energy.
- 12 Bear witness faithfully, whether or not others seem to be doing so. It is not your job to persuade them.
- 13 Be thankful for and encourage the witness of others in their faithfulness to Truth.
- 14 Your social witness is a form of ministry. Be careful not to outrun your guide.
- 15 You are not asked to "believe in" Quaker testimonies. You are invited to open yourself to the Spirit of Truth and let that Spirit bring you conviction.
- 16 Honor the spiritual witness of Friends from times past. When their forms of witness seem no longer relevant try to discern the principles which lay behind them.
- 17 Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come; that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them. Then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one; whereby in them ye may be a blessing, and make the witness of God in them to bless you.

George Fox, *Journal*, ed. Nickalls. London:
London Yearly Meeting, [1656]1952, p. 263.

QUERIES on Testimonies

- 18 *Although Queries may often be answered with a simple affirmative or negative, it is vital to ask corollary questions such as "why," "how," or "when." A qualified answer arising from introspection is more meaningful and constructive than an uncritical "yes" or "no."*
*North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative),
Faith and Practice / Book of Discipline, 1983.*
- 19 Have you committed your life to following the promptings of love and truth in your hearts?
- 20 What is preventing you from wholehearted obedience to the Spirit of Truth?
- 21 Do you bear witness to truth in love?
- 22 Do you remember the Source of the testimony to which you bear your witness?
- 23 How do you know when you have outrun your guide? What helps you back to faithfulness?
- 24 Do you uphold those who are acting under concern, even if their way differs from yours? Can you lay aside your own wishes and prejudices while seeking with others to find God's will for them?

EXTRACTS on Testimonies

4.1 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.

John 16: 13a (NRSV)

4.2 The Truth is one and the same always, and though ages and generations pass away, and one generation goes and another comes, yet the word and power and spirit of the living God endures for ever, and is the same and never changes.

Margaret Fell Fox, A brief collection of remarkable passages relating to...Margaret Fell, 1710, p.47.

4.3 All Truth is a shadow except the last, except the utmost; yet every Truth is true in its kind. It is substance in its own place, though it be but a shadow in another place (for it is but a reflection from an intenser substance); and the shadow is a true shadow, as the substance is a true substance.

Isaac Penington, The Life of a Christian, 1653, first page, unnumbered, not reprinted in his Works.

4.4 And this is our testimony to the whole world...that 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.

*Declaration to Charles II 1660,
George Fox, Journal, ed. J.L. Nickalls, 1952, p. 399.*

4.5 But to us creeds have no value save as they testify to the eternal realities which men must apprehend by spiritual experience and express by life and conduct. A vital creed is not static but dynamic; it can never be finally expressed in any form of words; it depends upon and is held in the most intimate connection with the developing life of the Spirit in the souls of men. Thus, while truth is eternal, our apprehension of it enlarges, and our expression of it changes.

Faith and Order Commission, Statement presented to London Yearly Meeting, 1920, in *London Yearly Meeting Proc.*, 1920, pp.116-17.

4.6 They were changed men themselves before they went about to change others. Their hearts were rent as well as their garments, and they knew the power and work of God upon them... And as they freely received what they had to say from the Lord, so they freely administered it to others. The bent and stress of their ministry was conversion to God, regeneration and holiness, not schemes of doctrines and verbal creeds or new forms of worship, but a leaving off in religion the superfluous and reducing the ceremonious and formal part, and pressing earnestly the substantial, the necessary and profitable part, as all upon a serious reflection must and do acknowledge.

William Penn, preface to George Fox, *Journal*, 1694, prelim leaf F1.

4.7 Testimonies are the experience of a people through time. We spoke of tradition and history. And then our energy began to flow more freely as we realized that Testimonies are a result of an experience with God. We meet God, encounter God, are found by God—and our lives are changed. We cannot behave in the old ways.

Summary Report from Small Group 1,
1988 Friends Consultation on Testimonies, Queries and Advices.
Quaker Hill Conference Center, 1988, p. 45.

4.8 But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.

James 2: 18 (NRSV)

4.9 Love was the first motion, and thence a concern arose to spend some time with the Indians, that I might feel and understand their life and the spirit they live in, if haply I might receive some instruction from them, or they be in any degree helped forward by my following the leadings of truth among them.

John Woolman, *Journal and Major Essays*, ed. Phillips P. Moulton.
New York: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 127.

4.10 I think I have wasted a great deal of my life waiting to be called to some great mission which would change the world. I have looked for important social movements. I have wanted to make a big and lasting contribution to the causes I believe in. I think I have been too ready to reject the genuine leadings I have been given as being matters of little consequence. It has taken me a long time to learn that obedience means doing what we are called to do even if it seems pointless or unimportant or even silly. The great social movements of our time may very well be part of our calling. The ideals of peace and justice and equality which are part of our religious tradition are often the focus of debate. But we cannot simply immerse ourselves in these activities. We need to develop our own unique social witness, in obedience to God. We need to listen for the

gentle whispers which will tell us how we can bring our own lives into greater harmony with heaven.

Deborah Haines, "Living in harmony with heaven on earth,"
Friends Search for Wholeness, 1978, p. 139.

4.11 True godliness don't turn men out of the world, but enables to live better in it, and excites their endeavors to mend it...

William Penn, *No Cross, No Crown*, 1682, ch. 5, sect. 12.

4.12 ...Only as friend meets friend in the joint actions of living do we experience the Truth; making love visible and making all things new.

This gathering will demand more power from us than our weekly meetings alone can supply. Only daily devotion in the family and individual moment to moment commitment to that of God within our friends and in ourselves can take the burden of this work out of time and make it a pleasure in spite of hardship and a joy in spite of suffering.

So now, when we hear of the "great people to be gathered," we must listen also for those words of acceptance, "Here I am; send me."

New England Yearly Meeting 1968, Extract from Minute 52

4.13 Many new members are attracted to Friends because they resonate with the testimonies of peace, simplicity, equality, community and integrity. While this kind of attraction is not necessarily bad, the danger is that these testimonies come to be held as ends in themselves - and thus become creeds. Testimonies embraced as ideals are without spiritual grounding. They may be "good" notions but they remain mere notions. They will fade and be lost when brought to the test in an encounter with a world that has contrary notions. This danger is real because often Friends do not do well at making it clear to others that their testimonies are the fruits of their spiritual foundation, not the foundation itself...We are Quakers because we have encountered something within that convinces us we can be and should be at peace, live simply, be loving toward all or live any other witness that may rise from this experience.

Robert Griswold, *Creeds and Quakers: What's belief got to do with it?*,
Pendle Hill Pamphlet 377, April 2005, p. 17.

4.14 Integrity calls for obedience, or if you prefer, faithfulness to conscience illumined by the Light Within. For Quakers this is the seat of religious authority and, therefore, the touchstone of our faith. Here Quaker truth and integrity take on an existential quality. It is truth which may well have objective validity, as I believe it does, but if it is not truth which is internalized in each of us, and for which we take ownership, then it is not truth which is valid and binding for us. But once it lays hold of us, it is truth which will not let us go until we have acted upon it. This kind of truth is new and fresh and therefore vital. It is not grounded in dogma, creeds, abstract philosophical ideas, or theological affirmations. It is not found in religious textbooks or Quaker books of discipline, but is grounded in a living faith and experience of the present moment. It is the basis for the Quaker testimonies - the testimonies which are a living witness to the inward leading of the Spirit of God in our lives.

Wilmer A. Cooper, *The Testimony of Integrity*,
Pendle Hill Pamphlet 296, 1991, pp. 20-21.

4.15 At our Yearly Meeting, 1759... way opened that in the pure flowings of Divine love I expressed what lay upon me, which as it then arose in my mind was first to show how deep answers to deep in the hearts of the sincere and upright, though in their different growths they may not all have attained to the same clearness in some points relating to our testimony, wherein I was led to mention the integrity and constancy of many martyrs who gave their lives for the testimony of Jesus, and yet in some points held doctrines distinguishable from some which we hold; and how that in all ages where people were faithful to the light and understanding which the Most High afforded them, they found acceptance with him; and that now, though there are different ways of thinking amongst us in some particulars, yet if we mutually kept to that spirit and power which crucifies to the world, which teaches us to be content with things really needful, and to avoid all superfluities, giving up our hearts to fear and serve the Lord, true unity may still be preserved amongst us; and that if such who were at times under sufferings on account of some scruples of conscience kept low and humble and in their conduct in life manifested a spirit of true charity, it would be more likely to reach the witness in others, and be of more service in the church, than if their sufferings were attended with a contrary spirit and conduct.

John Woolman, *Journal and Major Essays*, ed. Phillips P. Moulton.
New York: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 97.

Suggestions for responding to texts

Questions to consider when preparing group reflections on draft texts:

1. Do you want to turn the results of the discussion into a response to send to the committee?
2. What format do you want to use? Worship sharing? Facilitated discussion? Open discussion?
3. How do you plan to facilitate the discussion?
4. What materials might be made available in advance that would be helpful in preparing participants for the discussion and / or worship sharing?
5. Can the sessions be organized in a way that nurtures the spiritual life of your community?

Suggested questions for individuals and groups:

1. What parts of the text have life for you? (It is often helpful to start here rather than with “what is problematic?”)
2. What is challenging in this text?
3. What is difficult in this text?
4. What parts of the chapter (if any) were particularly inspiring to you? Could these passages be a source of continuing inspiration to you?
5. Try to remember your initial encounters with Friends, and how you learned about Friends beliefs and practices. Which parts of this document could have been particularly helpful to you?
6. Or, if you are new to Friends, how helpful is this document in addressing the questions and concerns you have about Friends?
7. Does this document adequately reflect the diversity of Friends in your meeting? In New England Yearly Meeting as you have experienced it? Is there additional material that should be included?
8. What additions to or changes in this chapter would make it more helpful for you?
9. Are there significant errors in this chapter that you believe need to be corrected?