

Wrestling with the Peace Testimony: In Spirit and in Truth



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FOREWORD

This essay is the text of a presentation given at the peace conference convened in January 2003 by Friends World Committee for Consultation Section of the Americas. "Friends' Peace Witness in a Time of Crisis" is only the 5th conference in FWCC's history that was specially called to consider a major topic of concern to all Friends. It brought together Friends from all over North America and from all the branches of Quakerism that North American Friends represent.

Even though the Peace Conference took place before the U.S.-led war in Iraq, the messages presented are still timely. Presentations focused on the topics of the history of the Quaker peace testimony, its spiritual and biblical basis, individuals' struggles with the testimony, and information about various peacemaking efforts going on throughout the world. The participants reported feeling renewed and supported for continuing the work.

ORDERING INFORMATION

Both the book of the entire proceedings from the Peace Conference and a 5-CD set of recordings of all the presentations are available for purchase. Contact:

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Faith in Christ

As Friends, I believe that our religious tradition is rooted in something far greater than a profession of pacifism. It is rooted in a God whose "steadfast love endures forever" (Psalm 136:1) and who has searched and known us and from whom we cannot hide (Psalm 139:1, 7). Our pivot point of existence is the "true light which enlightens everyone" (John 1:9), the "light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it" (John 1:4), the Holy Presence that came to write the law upon our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33), not pacifism. I would like to begin by saying that my faith rests in Christ Jesus, not in the Peace Testimony.

The credalisation of the Peace Testimony

And, after a great deal of inward reflection, I find that I am not wrestling with the Peace Testimony. There is no confusion for me regarding pacifism, personally or corporately for Friends. What I am wrestling with is the 'credal creep' that has happened. In my tradition, so-called Liberal Quakerism, many Friends have become more concerned about demanding complete adherence to the Peace Testimony than to any theological belief. We are allowed full rein to wrestle with the texts of the Bible and theology, but there is seemingly no room to wrestle with the Peace Testimony. I am not looking to "open up the Peace Testimony for discussion;" however, I am open to new Light, from wherever it may come.

Particularly since the events of September 11th, 2001, the prevalent silencing of dialogue on the Peace Testimony has, in effect, become a credalisation of it. We need to let Christ teach us. To humbly open ourselves to questions, fears, concerns, and the movements of God in our conscience in order to allow the Inward Teacher to do His job¹. I believe that if pacifism is the rightly ordered witness of the Holy Spirit, then this will be affirmed. I am talking about exercising our spiritual disciplines of listening, waiting, praying, seeking, and finding, rather than advocating for intellectual discussion groups. Through spiritual wrestling, we are shown Truth; through such a process we will come to own and profess the Peace Testimony in more than words—it will radiate through our lived witness. Moreover, I fear

¹ The use of a masculine pronoun for God is only for lack of gender neutral language. God is spiritual Presence, equally masculine and feminine to the author.

that this practice of silencing questions (and perhaps conscience) and credalising any belief will destroy our community in due time. It is unloving, destructive, and violent. Indeed, this practice witnesses *against* the Peace Testimony.

Peace is not enough

In talking and practicing peace, we must look to the roots of what creates peace and conflict, in our lives, community, and society. For me, the Peace Testimony is far greater than a commitment to non-violence—it is about a way of living that seeds peace.

I would like to share two teachings that challenge me in my daily living. The first is to remember what the Lord requires of me: "to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with God" (Micah 6:8). Of course, this is much more complicated than it sounds! Each of us, I am sure, fails—and succeeds—in this task every week. It is a standard that asks us to work in our lives and communities to address the economic, social, and cultural inequalities that are at the root of most conflict.

And this brings me to the second teaching: remembering the roots of war. George Fox refused induction into the New Model Army, saying that he "lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars and [that he] knew from whence all wars did arise, from the lust according to James' doctrine" (*Christian Faith and Practice*, 613). What kind of lust was James speaking of? Envy, selfish ambition, boastfulness, falseness, covetousness, murder, deception, the loving of other things ahead of God (James 3:13-4:4). Those who have made friends with the world—that is the values and ambitions of the larger society—have abandoned God.

What Friends have to wrestle with most is that which undergirds the promise of peace, justice. God does not require peace of us; He requires kindness, justice and attendance to His voice which shows and reveals. I believe the Scripture states this for a reason. From these practices, peace will flow.

I am in service with the Canadian Friends Service Committee, a standing committee of Canadian Yearly Meeting. I love what I do. I cannot say this enough. While I am inspired by many amazing stories of hope and transformation, I hate the stories of suffering and injustice which cross my desk each week. They grieve me, they disturb my sleep (as they should) and often I feel quite powerless to stop the violence.

My colleague, Gianne Broughton, and I have been discussing the economic agendas that underpin civil wars.² Conflicts and forms of injustice in Canada and around the world can be traced back to issues often related to economic injustice. For instance, the Miqmaq Nation of the Mirimichi in New Brunswick are prevented from exercising their inherent right to fish and find themselves at war on the waters with the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] and with local fishers working for corporations. Rebels and governments in Colombia, Sierra Leone, the Sudan, and other countries fight to control lucrative resources extracted from the earth by transnational corporations for Western markets. The list goes on. The point is that we Westerners live our lives and support systems that are *antithetical to justice*, are rooted in the lusts according to James, and enable and maintain social and economic colonialism.

The War on Terrorism

And this brings me to the so-called war on terrorism. While the world did not change on September 11th, the USA did and, as the world's only superpower, militarily and economically, the Bush Administration has since adamantly pressed its agenda upon its friends and allies, such as Canada, and against its "enemies." (I know many of you feel "hijacked" too, but it is your elected government. It is not mine.) The catastrophe of 9/11 left the US with an opportunity to search its soul and find an appropriate response to violence. Sadly, this did not happen. For a year and a half, I have watched the rhetoric of anti-terrorism be picked up by countries around the world to repress legitimate dissent and political opposition and advance an agenda of war that has nothing to do with addressing terrorism. Many days, it seems impossible to reverse, but I know all is possible in Christ and this gives me hope.

There is genuine terrorism in the world which war can not address—and I would say this even if I were not a pacifist. Wars are large-scale operations that result in civilian casualties and environmental devastation. The pursuit of terrorist groups, like any international criminal organisation, seems best put in

² For more detailed information on this theme, I highly recommend the book *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (Ottawa, ON: International Development Research Centre, 2000) by Mats Berdal and David M. Malone.

the hands of entities that can work quietly—such as InterPol and special police units.

Terrorism is abhorrent and unjustifiable under any circumstances. As George Fox looked to the roots of war, we must look to the roots of terrorism. Frequently, behind these desperate and unconscionable acts are experiences of extreme poverty and oppression, hopelessness and desperation brought on by those same lusts described by James.

There are many forms of terror. I ask myself, what makes the suffering of the United States proportionally so much greater than the death and destruction of the Iraqi or Afghani people (for often it is portrayed this way)? Why is the suffering of peoples around the world, particularly of those with AIDS in Africa, of limited interest to people in the West, let alone the major powers of the United Nations? These questions trouble me, they anger me, and they make me hunger for even the tiniest morsel of justice.

The war on terrorism, even as wars go, is a dishonest war of ulterior motives. I give thanks for the dedicated work of the Quaker service agencies around the world, and all working for peace, in the midst of this mired situation. Still, it is the American people alone who can lift the veil on the actions of its government at home and abroad that limit the freedom and opportunities of others. Only the American people can stop this war of power and greed. Don't take my word on it—this is what our Foreign Affairs department is telling us! Yet, I want us to hunger for justice as much as Jesus did, in order to turn the tables in the temples of Washington (and Ottawa), in our home towns, in our hearts, and repent and work for change. I want to let Love overcome all our fears.

As much as I have said to the contrary, the times *have* changed. The USA is using its full force to implement policy crafted with a forked tongue which will spellbind many into thinking that the road ahead of the war on terrorism is one of justice, mercy, and freedom for the world. Read the *National Security Strategy* to understand this more completely. The US has spent two years walking away from and sabotaging a

multitude of multilateral agreements and conferences.³ They have made it clear that if an agreement is not in the preferred interest of the USA, it is of no interest at all. Repeatedly, Scripture warns against this kind of action; against this kind of exploitation. "Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord! Why do you want the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light" (Amos 5:18).

The United States is an empire without rival. It has the capacity to seed so much good in the world! With its extraordinary wealth, educated workers, and technology, the US does not need the preferential treatment it demands at the negotiating tables of the World Trade Organisation. This fuels such a righteous anger in me! What the United States needs to do is make restitution for the wealth it has pillaged from and the suffering it has caused in other countries and to do so generously. People in impoverished countries don't need our charity—they need us to renounce greed. These are immense challenges before each of us—American and Canadian. And I say this as someone who really likes the United States and its peoples. It's a beautiful country. Perhaps that is why it makes me angry—I see your potential.

The Lamb's War

So, when people ask me what are the answers to conflict in the world, a half dozen more personal and practical ideas immediately spring to mind:

1. First, stop shopping at Walmart. Better yet, stop shopping! North Americans consume a vastly disproportionate amount of the world's resources (at a huge cost to people and planet). Buy what you need, not what you want. And, more importantly, know what you need.
2. When you do make a purchase, buy fairly traded goods and goods from companies with socially and environmentally ethical practices. John Woolman reminds us to "look upon our treasures, the furniture of our houses, and our garments, and try whether the seeds of war have

³ The Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the UN Conference on Racism, the UN Conference on the Illicit Trade of Small Arms and Light Weapons, the Rome Statute creating a World Court, etc.

nourishment in these our possessions. Holding treasures in the self-pleasing spirit is a strong plant, the fruit whereof ripens fast."⁴

3. Reduce your consumption of fossil fuels. Good for the planet and for peace. Who hasn't heard that access to oil is a critical factor of a prospective war in Iraq? Sell your SUVs, take public transit, ride a bike.
4. As stewards, review your investment portfolio. Purge all the companies that do not have socially responsible practices through the use of "stock screens" by your investor (in fact, CFSC helped fund the development of the Jantzi Index, which screens companies with social and environmental criteria).
5. Perhaps most importantly, become educated and talk to your neighbour. Know what is going on. My American cousins, I plead with you to learn about worldviews other than your own. Your news media is frighteningly deficient. You are fed so much mis- and dis-information, it's a diet riddled with poison. Sign up to receive *Z-Net* on-line, order the *Guardian Weekly* or the *Globe and Mail*, subscribe to *Third World Resurgence*. Discover the complexities of the world for yourself. Better yet, order international news resources for your local library so everyone can benefit.
6. As informed citizens, hold your government to account for its actions on the domestic and world stage. This is critical, as government acts in our name.

The Peace Testimony is in response to war and conflict. And, sadly enough, the roots of conflict can be found in how we live our lives, just as Friends realized in the 1650s. It is time to change our lifestyles because now is the time to "let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:27).

This is what constitutes the Lamb's War.

To quote James Nayler, these "wars are not against creatures, they wrestle not with flesh and blood which God has made, but with spiritual wickedness exalted in the hearts of

⁴ John Woolman, *Journal*, Whittier Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1871). Appendix, p. 307.

men and women, where God alone should be ... Indeed their war is against the whole work and device of the god of this world, his laws, his customs, his fashions, his inventions, and all which are to add to or take from the work of God which was in the beginning.⁵

This war is fought by those who have allowed the Light to search them, to show and reveal how actions and indifference separate us from God. This war is fought not with weapons that are "hurtful to any of the creation; for the Lamb comes not to destroy lives nor the work of God."⁶ The times we are in are for donning the whole armour of God (Ephesians 6:13-17), rather than our own strength. Truth, righteousness, whatever will make us ready to proclaim the gospel of peace, faith, and salvation; these are the spiritual weapons that God puts in our hearts and hands to wage the Lamb's War.

And thus the Lamb in them, and they in Him, go out in Judgment and Righteousness to make war with His enemies, conquering and to conquer. Not as the prince of this world in his subjects, with whips and prisons, tortures and torments on the bodies of creatures, to kill and destroy men's lives, who are deceived, and so become His enemies; but He goes forth in the power of the Spirit with the Word of Truth to pass judgment upon the head of the serpent which does deceive and bewitch the world.⁷

We are called to let God search us, each decision we make, so we can change our lives to address the roots of conflict. Who do we think holds up corporations and injustice? Woolman knew; it is us, Friends. And change is a step-by-step process. This includes addressing our consumption of resources, as mentioned, and also our assumptions—what we think about each other, who we have as friends, how we value

⁵ James Nayler, *The Lamb's Warre against the Man of Sinne*. (London, UK: Thomas Simmons, 1657, p. 3)

⁶ Nayler, *Ibid.* p. 4.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 4.

our culture and ideals over that of others. This is at the root of the threat of global war—and it is in our capacity to turn the tide through our own actions in Love and educating our neighbours. This is the Lamb's War, both against that which is within us and that which is without. It is our greatest challenge; certainly, it is mine.

In Spirit and in Truth

"I, therefore, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (Ephesians 4:1). Friends have, I believe, a special calling to apocalyptic witness—in spirit and in truth we can witness to the end of the world as we know it. Not a physical end—a second big bang—but the end of the ways of the world, the priority of greed over justice, of unilateralism over multilateralism, of hatred over kindness.

According to William Durland in his Pendle Hill Pamphlet, *Apocalyptic Witness: A Radical Calling for our Own Times*:

The kingdom of God cannot simply be advocated. It must be lived and demonstrated through a renewed church incarnating Christian challenge to the present world order. Today, the Religious Society of Friends still testifies steadfastly to the light within. But the very function and nature of the light is not to be hidden nor darkened in an enclosure, but to be revealed to shine forth outwardly and to overcome the darkness. Our calling is to release that light, to be the salt of the earth once again, to be ready to suffer the consequences of the conflict that releasing of such light necessarily creates. Peace does not come without conflict. Division comes before peace. If we refuse to face the conflict, we refuse to welcome the peace. The peace will surely come, as it has been promised. Our call today is to continue the revelation of this light to the world as we journey through a life of spirit and truth, experiencing in ourselves the holy places of struggle and joy and the participation in the making of that peace.⁸

⁸ William Durland, *The Apocalyptic Witness: A Radical Calling for our Own Times* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, Pamphlet # 279, 1988), p. 31.

In this particular time of uncertainty (including a potential war that could result in 500,000 Iraqi casualties and 750,000 refugees, and ignite further unrest throughout the Middle East), we need to take radical action. Jesus knew there was a time for holy anger, a time to turn the tables in the Temple and say, "Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" (John 2:16). A marketplace, Friends. Now is that time, a time to listen deeply, to dissent publicly and powerfully, to let the light shine. This is not an easy path for any of us, and each of us must discern our unique call. We must be prepared to risk all, no matter how fearful we are—and I am—to witness to the Spirit of Christ, which cannot countenance war and killing for whatever reason. Yet, it may be too late to stop this war, but perhaps not the next one. Every act of injustice is another nail in Jesus' flesh, in someone's flesh. We may be asked to accept the cup of suffering; clearly, as Friends of Truth, we must be willing, for many are suffering without consent already. The Peace Testimony is Friends' cross to bear—life-giving and transformative, painful and trying. The American Empire is tragically taking the path of destruction fiercely and forcefully in these times and dragging countries like Canada along with it. I believe that you, more than anyone, have the power in your hands to change the course of history through your life choices and public witness. We Canadian Friends will undertake our witness, as led, and will support our American Friends in whatever ways we can.

Finally, in these dark times, Friends, I remind you that the Peace Testimony will not save you, it will not uphold you—but Christ will.



About the Author

Jane Orion Smith is General Secretary of Canadian Friends Service Committee, a standing committee of Canadian Yearly Meeting. This follows studies and service as Friend in Residence at Woodbrooke College and continued research on the life and writings of James Naylor at Pendle Hill. She has participated in the Liberal-Evangelical dialogue amongst women in the Pacific Northwest. A member of Victoria Monthly Meeting, her background includes work in international development, peace and the arts.



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