

QUAKER TESTIMONIES

There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath had different names, it is, however, pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion nor excluded from any, where the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, of what nation so ever, they become brethren, in the best sense of the expression.

John Woolman

(This purity) consists in the removal of all that is insincere, false, egocentric and conventional. It opens the way for a corresponding effort to face directly and freshly the naked Truth purified of all that is contrary to it. To wait upon the Lord is such an exercise and it is easy to see why it resulted in social pioneering. The conventional, the insincere, the self-centered will seldom desires change for the better. Only the will which "centers down" to the deeper, more genuine, more universal Life which unites us from within, can feel that Truth which is not yet embodied in the world.

Howard Brinton

PEACE TESTIMONY

"We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end or under any pretence whatsoever. And this is our testimony to the whole world... The spirit of Christ, by which we are guided, is not changeable,...and we do certainly know, and so testify to the 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 the kingdoms of this world."

George Fox

"A good end cannot sanctify evil means; nor must we ever do evil, that good may come of it... It is as great a presumption to send our passions upon God's errands, as it is to palliate them with God's name... We are too ready to retaliate, rather than forgive, or gain by love and information... Let us then try what Love will do: for if men did once see we love them, we should soon find they would not harm us. Force may subdue, but Love gains: and he that forgives first, wins the laurel.

William Penn

"Quaker pacifism is an obligation, not a promise. We are not guaranteed that it will be safe. We are sure it is right. We desire to make our individual decision in harmony with it, and to help our fellows to do so."

Friends Peace Committee (1940)

EQUALITY

Equality was the earliest Quaker social testimony. Even before the Quakers became pacifists Quaker soldiers were dismissed from the army because they refused to treat their officers as superiors... The Quaker doctrine of equality does not mean equality of ability, economic resources or social status. It means equality of respect and the resulting absence of all words, and behavior based on class, racial or social distinctions. It did not...place an economic equality on employer and employee or master and servant ... (rather it) tended to eliminate the sense of superiority or inferiority.

Friends refused the use of titles of honor and salutations which implied that one person was superior to another. There were three reasons for this. First, the Quakers wished to remove all recognition of social distinctions based on class and race. Secondly, they were opposed to any form of flattery which tended to puff up self-esteem. And, thirdly, most titles were out of harmony with the truth. Addressing a superior by the plural "you" instead of "thou" which was the customary practice in the seventeenth century was given up for these reasons.

Howard Brinton

SIMPLICITY

The testimony of outward simplicity began as a protest against the extravagance and snobbery which marked English society in the 1600s. In whatever forms this protest is maintained today, it must still be seen as a testimony against involvement with things which tend to dilute our energies and scatter our thoughts, reducing us to lives of triviality and mediocrity. Simplicity does not mean drabness or narrowness but is essentially positive, being the capacity for selectivity in one who holds attention on the goal. Thus simplicity is an appreciation of all that is helpful towards living as children of the Living God.

Faith and Practice (Britain)

John Woolman would have had small sympathy with the modern argument that in buying luxuries people aid the poor by providing employment. He firmly believed that luxuries are a source of vanity, oppression and ultimately war. If men would remain humble and confine their desires to real needs, overwork, oppression and strife would disappear and there would be enough of the necessities of life to go around.

Howard Brinton

HONESTY AND INTEGRITY

The Quaker testimony to truthfulness is central to the practice of ...the Religious Society of Friends. From the beginning Friends have believed that they could have direct and immediate communication with God which would enable them to discern right ethical choices. They soon experienced common leadings of the Spirit which became formalised into testimonies.

Faith and Practice (Britain)

A neighbor...desired me to write his will: I took notes, and, amongst other things, he told me to which of his children he gave his young negro: I considered the pain and distress he was in, and knew not how it would end, so I wrote his will, save only that part concerning his slave, and carrying it to his bedside, read it to him, and then told him in a friendly way, that I could not write any instruments by which my fellow-creatures were made slaves without bringing trouble on my own mind. I let him know that I charged nothing for what I had done, and desired to be excused from doing the other part in the way he proposed. Then we had a serious conference on the subject, and at length, he agreeing to set her free, I finished his will.

John Woolman 1756

Throughout their history Friends have refused to take oaths, and they underwent much hardship before provision was made by statute allowing them to affirm.

Faith and Practice (Britain)