

About Friends

Be obedient to the Lord God . . . be valiant for the Truth . . . be examples . . . that your . . . life may preach. . . Then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one. . . . [1656]¹

George Fox and the Founding of the Religious Society of Friends

George Fox (1624–1691), the English founder of the Religious Society of Friends, began to “profess the Truth” in the mid-seventeenth century during a period of political and religious turmoil in England. Fox wanted to recapture the original purity and spirit of early Christianity that he believed had been clouded by later accretions and try to recreate a New Testament way of life in his place and time. Although he did not intend to establish a new religious sect, by midcentury one had formed. Originally, it was called Friends in the Truth; later it became known as the Religious Society of Friends, still its formal name. The sobriquet “Friends” had its origin in scripture: “Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth; but I have called you friends. . . .”² The term “Quaker” is said to have been first used in 1650 by an English judge Gervase Bennet of Derby. When George Fox was charged with a violation of law, he told officials that they should tremble before the word of God; Judge Bennet reportedly replied that it was Fox who was the “quaker.”³ Throughout this book, the Quakers will be variously referred to as Friends, Religious Society of Friends, Society of Friends, or the Society.

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John . . . sent to bear witness of the Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”⁴ Fox stressed this inner light—that of God in every human being—and held that everyone should seek to “answer” this light in each other. The primacy of truth and truth-telling was central as was Friends’ refusal to fight, either in war or in their relations with others. Quakers were originally cautioned not to go to law against Quakers, but later this was expanded to anyone.

Fox established a rather simple organizational structure for the Society, which continues to this day—a system of Monthly, Quarterly, and Yearly Meetings divided by geographical regions. The Monthly Meeting, the smallest unit, is part of a larger Quarterly Meeting, which is contained within a Yearly Meeting, the largest in terms of members and encompassed geographical area. The Monthly Meeting (there may be one or more in a city) gathers every First Day (Sunday) to worship and again once monthly to transact business. Despite its structure, the Society of Friends is more akin to a fellowship than to an institution.

Truthfulness and Integrity

“Justice is truth in action.”⁵

The critical importance of truth and truth-telling to Quakers is germane to an inquiry into the nature of any tension between their testimonies⁶ and the practice of law, the primary focus of this book. In theory there is no conflict because the purpose and goal of the English legal system, and its later derivative in America, was justice through a search for and discovery of truth. The system’s basic premise is that, ideally, truth will emerge from adversaries’ spirited advocacy for their respective positions—justice as truth in action. While truth may be the *ideal* and ultimate goal of our Anglo-American jurisprudential system, abuse of any of the myriad steps in the legal process could compromise truth in seventeenth-century legal practice, as it can still in the United States today.

Over the centuries, various philosophers and scholars have wrestled with the concept and meaning of truth. Plato, the great Greek philosopher, wrote in *Phaedrus*, “In the law courts nobody cares . . . for the truth about what is just or good, but only about what is plausible.”⁷ Some of his dialogues attack the Sophists, ancient Greek teachers known for their clever and sometimes fallacious and deceitful arguments. The “role of the advocate became more absorbing than that of the adherent, conquest more important than truth.”⁸

Lucius Annaeus Seneca, the Roman stoic philosopher who lived during the time of Christ had views on truth that sound startlingly similar to those of Friends. For instance, he believed that speech devoted to truth should be plain and straightforward, that truth is everlasting and never perishes, and the language of truth is simple. Like Fox’s “so say and so do” seventeen centuries later, Seneca drew a correlation between one’s language and one’s life. Another interesting parallel between the latter’s thinking and Friends’ was the dwelling of the spirit within each person.⁹

Hugo Grotius, the early-seventeenth-century Dutch lawyer, magistrate, and ambassador is considered the founder of international law. Contrary to Seneca’s belief that speech should be devoted to truth, he believed that falsehoods

are sometimes justifiable and so, from a moralist's viewpoint, should not be considered lies.

The name some gave the earliest Quakers—Friends in Truth—is significant because integrity and truthfulness were then hallmarks of Quaker belief and life and remain today a pivotal tenet of the faith and a steadfast goal of its practice. “He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart” shall dwell in the Lord's holy hill.¹⁰ In fact, earlier Friends' passion for all truth-telling even caused some to shun theater and literature because actors necessarily expressed feelings that they did not truly feel, and novelists wrote about events that did not actually occur.¹¹ Some Quakers leaned over backward to tell only exact and verifiable truth and, in doing so, resorted to careful understatement. There is a story, probably apocryphal, of two Quakers walking together along a country lane. One remarks to his companion that the sheep in the adjacent field have recently been shorn. His friend replies that yes, they had indeed been shorn, *at least* on their sides that faced the lane,¹² that is, the sides of the sheep they could clearly observe from their vantage point!

To Friends, a critical component of truthfulness is consistency. Even as a boy, Fox was disturbed by the divergence of precepts and behavior he noticed among members of his English church. Perhaps for that reason, his writings were replete with the advice, “So say and so do.”¹³ And, perhaps due to Fox's strong early influence, Friends have consistently attempted to conform belief to conduct, that is, what one is in words, he or she should also be in life. This Quaker effort at a convergence of belief and action is particularly germane to discussions of some common legal practices that conflict with Friends' beliefs.

The exhortations of Fox and other Quakers over past centuries have produced in Friends a substantial awareness of this unity of thought and action—the essence of integrity. Integrity derives from the Latin *integritas*, “wholeness,” which derives from *integer* or “whole.” A person who has integrity is of one piece, entire, and relatively unbroken by inconsistencies and contradictions. The truth spoken should be consistent with acts performed. Truth and “testimonies” are to be lived.

For example, this single standard resulted in Friends' refusal to swear to tell the truth in a court of law or to swear oaths of allegiance to the sovereign. The standard for truthfulness was the same; whether testifying in court or conversing with a friend, a Quaker was bound at all times to tell the truth. Therefore, a simple affirmation should suffice to show that statements in court were only part of the usual integrity of their speech. Fox wrote in a 1656 epistle, “And ye all walking in this Light, it will bring you to all plainness and singleness of speech which will make the Deceit to tremble.”¹⁴ The great Greek playwright Sophocles wrote similarly about oaths; Theseus speaks to Oedipus, “I will not bind thee . . . with oaths.” Oedipus replies, “Oaths were no stronger than my simple word.”¹⁵

Over the centuries Friends, like other imperfect beings, have tried to attain integrity or wholeness with varying degrees of success. The influential Friend John Woolman wrote of the less successful: “. . . Where men profess to be so meek and heavenly minded, and to have their trust so firmly settled in God that they cannot join in wars and yet by their spirit and conduct in common life manifest a contrary disposition, their difficulties are great. . . .”¹⁶ Nevertheless, most Friends *persistently aim* to achieve this wholeness of belief and action, a powerfully significant and distinguishing attribute of Quaker faith.

The issue of integrity becomes important in regard to the professions Friends choose. To be consistent, the practice of a chosen career should be consonant with how they are led by faith. Relatively early in its history, the Society of Friends recognized the possibility of conflict between its beliefs and members’ professions. A 1795 extract from London Yearly Meeting’s Minutes and Epistles states, “Circumscribed even as we are more than many, it is not unusual, in our pursuit of the things of this life, for our gain and our convenience to clash with our testimony.” Thus Quakers’ attempt to live united in belief and action also extends to their life occupations.

An 1851 Advice similarly cautioned:

In conducting your outward affairs, whether in agriculture or trade or as professional men . . . scrupulously avoid doing anything that may compromise our Christian testimonies, or lessen their excellence in the sight of others. Maintain strict integrity and plain dealing, marked by Christian courtesy and respect to all. . . . In transacting his business, and in providing things honest in the sight of men, the true Christian may, in his daily work, exalt his profession and commend his principles to others.¹⁷

For early Friends, the office of magistrate was incompatible with Quaker testimonies because it required the administration of oaths and organizing of the militia in times of civil unrest. A central question explored in this book is whether practicing law in the United States around the turn of the twenty-first century is likewise incompatible with Quaker testimonies. Can one maintain “strict integrity” and “scrupulously avoid doing anything that may compromise our Christian testimonies” and practice law today?

The Quaker Testimonies

The primary Quaker testimonies are harmony or peace, community, simplicity, and equality with truth-telling infusing all. Quakers’ use of “testimonies” to

indicate their beliefs is significant. The word “testimony” is derived from Latin *testis*—witness, which means giving evidence, being present, or seeing personally. “Testimony,” then, connotes active participation; in the language of Quakers, “letting one’s life speak.” It transcends “belief,” which implies a certain acceptance, trust, and passiveness.

The four primary testimonies comprise the essence of Quaker “theology” and are usually mutually reinforcing with one exception, which will be discussed later. For instance, simplicity is related to individual peace because a pursuit of material wealth can entail competition with and exploitation of others, and material goods can contain and nourish the seeds of war. A Quaker has explained the testimonies as the “ways we understand God has called us to *live* our social, political, and economic lives as aspects of our spiritual lives.”¹⁸ James, the New Testament epistle encapsulates each testimony: “And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.”¹⁹ (harmony, peace); “. . . the wisdom that is from above is . . . without hypocrisy”²⁰ (simplicity); “. . . the wisdom that is from above is . . . without partiality . . .”²¹ (equality); and “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself”²² (community).

These testimonies together with the belief that there is that of God, the Light or Inward Spirit in every person form the wellspring of Quaker activism. “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, . . .”²³ “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? . . .”²⁴ “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”²⁵ Matthew also lauds the activist spirit: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”²⁶

The Golden Rule, “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them . . .”²⁷ figured prominently in early Quaker thought and practice. If followed, this rule obviates the need for other rules because it not only calls for empathy to consider the effect of one’s actions on others, but it also expands one’s perspective to include a concern for the greater good.

Friends’ concern for service gave rise to the American Friends’ Service Committee (AFSC), founded in 1917. The AFSC’s original purpose was to provide Quakers and other conscientious objectors an opportunity to perform alternative service in wartime. Its goals subsequently broadened to include the protection and promotion of civil rights and liberties. Its work reflects and embodies Friends’ testimonies: equality, by the impartiality of its aid and relief efforts to persons and groups of all political, social, and economic persuasions; simplicity, by the standard of living necessarily required of its workers; community, by its efforts to unite the world’s people into an interdependent community; and harmony, through its main objective, the promotion of peace.²⁸

Testimony of Harmony/Peace

“Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God.”²⁹

Early Friends arrived at their position of pacifism as they did their other testimonies—by following the Light and writings from scripture. One of Fox’s deservedly famous statements, “I lived in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars,”³⁰ is valuable because it suggests, albeit vaguely, a way of living that would prevent wars in the first instance.

On January 21, 1661, Friends set forth their pacifist stand to England’s King Charles II in *A Declaration from the Harmless and Innocent People of God, called Quakers, against All Plotters and Fighters in the World*:

[W]e . . . do 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 . . . [T]he 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. . . .³¹

Friends have enduringly held fast to opposition to war because they believe it contrary to the spirit and will of God. Moreover, a focus on the Inner Light in every person empowers them to resolve disputes—even those between nations—without resort to the machinery of war.³² In fact, many Quakers look and work toward a time when arms and other military machinery will no longer be part of any government.

A Maryland Monthly Meeting once discussed Friends’ peace witness in terms of both its individual and communal aspects. The individual peacemaker is called on to deal with violence and aggression within himself or herself and to find ways of living in harmony with one another. The community too can engage in positive peacemaking by promoting peaceful methods of conflict resolution, international exchanges, and peace education and research, as well as bearing witness to peace through public demonstrations. Its members can also support conscientious objectors and those who refuse to pay taxes when such revenues are used to pay for war. The Quaker peace testimony then is broader than the refusal to participate in war because it includes answering that of God in others and attempting to remove wars’ *causes*.

Friends’ peace testimony encompasses a negative refusal to participate in war as well as a positive affirmation of the power of peace and good to overcome evil. Countless Friends have undertaken preemptive affirmative acts to remove

the seeds of war, and, when war occurs, to repair its damage. In the twentieth century, the AFSC has led this effort and, with Quaker Peace and Service, shared the 1947 Nobel Peace Prize. In his speech awarding the prize, the chairman of the Nobel Committee quoted a young Quaker worker who said that he and others tried to rebuild “in a spirit of love what had been destroyed in a spirit of hatred.” The chairman added that religion means little until it is translated into positive action.³³

Harmony in Relation to Other Friends’ Testimonies

A discussion of harmony in the context of other Quaker testimonies is bound to raise some important queries as activism in the latter may present hard choices. Should the testimony of harmony ever be suspended so that those of community or equality or truthfulness can be more fully realized? If so, under what circumstances? Or should there be harmony at any cost? And if so, how is the cost measured? Dissecting the principle of harmony might seem intellectual hairsplitting, but for Quakers who have attempted from the time of George Fox’s “so say and so do” to live their beliefs, the meaning of harmony in the nitty-gritty of daily living deserves scrutiny.

Harmony can be at odds with speaking the truth and acting against injustice. Justice, tolerance, and other good qualities exemplified in the life of Christ are models against which many Friends measure their lives. What are Friends to do then when a powerful intransigent injustice appears? Do they passively preserve harmony or actively and inharmoniously protest against it?

The premise underlying a view that harmony should always be maintained is that lack of it is worse than injustice or oppression. But one can challenge that. An insistent pursuit of neutrality in a conflict can be a way of siding with the oppressor. Hitler’s viciously inhumane treatment of Jews is an example. Must those who live in the light seek harmony by silence in the face of such evil and at the expense of equality that would have allowed the Jewish oppressed to keep dignity and indeed their very lives?

In spite of what moral relativists might think, the way is often quite clear: justice is as clearly discernible from injustice as are the oppressed from the oppressor. It is not invariably true that all conflicts are based on misunderstandings, and blame is always to be found on both sides. Nor is it invariably true that Quakers will always choose harmony. Suspension of harmony may, in fact, be necessary to speak against tough problems of systemic injustice. As we will see in chapter 4, several Quakers sued in court to rectify wrongs despite the traditional injunction against going to law. The vindication of rights in cases decided by the U.S. Supreme Court set precedents that subsequently aided others in similar situations.

Simplicity

For Friends, simplicity includes avoiding self-indulgence, keeping material goods proportionate to needs, and speaking and acting without hypocrisy, the latter also related to truthfulness. The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's 1955 *Faith and Practice* stated:

Friends are watchful to keep themselves free from self-indulgent habits, luxurious ways of living and the bondage of fashion. . . . Undue luxury often creates a false sense of superiority, causes unnecessary burdens upon both ourselves and others and leads to the neglect of the spiritual life. By observing and encouraging simple tastes in apparel, furniture, buildings and manner of living, we help do away with rivalry and we learn to value self-denial.³⁴

Of the Quaker testimonies, simplicity is the least salient among modern Friends and is a relatively rare example of a difference in the teaching and practice of early vis-à-vis contemporary Friends. In earlier times, Friends' practice of simplicity was more patent with a distinctive lack of adornment in dress. Quakers' clothing was plain—black hats and jackets such as those depicted on a Quaker Oats box, plain breeches for men, and simple black dresses and white caps for women. Although some Friends may strive for simple living today by resisting the frenzied accumulation of material goods, relatively few are able to attain truly simple living. Religious practice is not immune from society's influence, and in today's America, simplicity can be an elusive goal.

And because Friends place great importance on sincerity and genuineness, speech in earlier times was likewise simple, unadorned, and without obsequiousness. Truth-telling and simplicity overlap when elaborate language designed to flatter is avoided in favor of more truthful plain speaking. A cogent example of Fox's literalness and desire to avoid flattery was his conversation with Major Ceely who interviewed Fox in Launceston jail in 1656. Doffing his hat, Ceely greeted Fox, "your servant, Sir." Fox replied, "Major Ceely, take heed of hypocrisy and a rotten heart, for when came I to be thy master and thee my servant?" and then asked if it was usual for servants to put their masters in prison.³⁵

Moreover, simplicity is evident in the interiors and exteriors of Quaker meetinghouses, and even those that have been renovated remain plain and without ornamentation. There are no altars, stained glass, elaborate pulpits, or soaring arches usually found in other houses of worship. For unprogrammed Friends, the name of their place of worship is "meetinghouse" rather than "church." The plain benches in the meeting rooms are often oriented toward the center.

The worship that takes place in such meetinghouses is itself simple, especially in “unprogrammed” meetings where the worship is silent and contains no set program, sermon, or music.³⁶ And because these Friends believe that a sincere and inwardly attentive worshipper can commune with and try to ascertain the will of God without an intermediary, there is no officiating minister or priest, “no outward expression except the prophetic voice which had been heard in the New Testament Church at the beginning.”³⁷ Neither do these Friends uphold the sacraments of ordination, baptism, or communion. For them, the inward experience renders such outward rites unnecessary and even distracting. In the silent “waiting,” all formal ritual is subtracted, making possible a direct undiluted reception of the Spirit. This permits “a fresh and direct facing of facts under conditions in which the conscience becomes sensitized.”³⁸

Equality

“Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted;
But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass
he shall pass away.”³⁹

Friends’ testimony of equality embraces respect for all persons and a corresponding absence of racial, class, or hierarchical distinctions in speech or conduct. Friends’ refusal to pay “hat honor,” doffing one’s hat as a sign of social deference, meant that Early Friends would not remove their hats before a king or other high-ranking official but would do so only when addressing God in prayer. Like many Quaker practices, the origin of this refusal was scriptural: “Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes; lest ye die, and lest wrath come upon all the people. . . .”⁴⁰ “David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, . . . and had his head covered . . . and all the people that was [*sic*] with him covered every man his head. . . .”⁴¹ This same standard of respect for all, regardless of their station in life, caused Friends to use full names, but no titles.

They also exhibited equality in speech by using second-person singular pronouns in addressing others. Although it was customary to speak to “inferiors” familiarly as “thou” and to “superiors” more respectfully as “you,” Friends would speak to everyone in the singular, manifesting a single standard of respect for all persons⁴² equal before God. Even Quaker children would address their parents as “thou.”⁴³

In matters of race the testimony of equality was manifest by Quakers’ belief that God is in all persons. Francis Daniel Pastorius protested slavery of Negroes as early as the 1680s. In his address to Germantown Monthly Meeting in 1688, Pastorius noted:

there is a saying that we shall doe [*sic*] to all men like as we will be done ourselves; making no difference of what generation, descent, colour they are . . . to bring men hither, or . . . sell them against their will, we stand against. . . . Pray, what thing in the world can be done worse towards us, than if men should . . . steal us away, and sell us for slaves to strange countries; separating husbands from their wives and children.⁴⁴

As other Friends gradually evolved to realize that slavery of a person was wrong, they began to work toward its abolition. Quakers defied the 1793 Fugitive Slave Law⁴⁵ by helping slaves escape, harboring or concealing them, or helping prevent their recapture and return; doing this subjected them to a \$500 penalty. A popular avenue of escape was by the Underground Railroad, which was neither underground nor a railroad; Levi Coffin, a Friend, was called its “president.” In 1850 Congress amended the 1793 statute to authorize the appointment of new commissioners to aid slaveholders in reclaiming their “property.”

In the course of 80 years, Friends Advices became progressively less tolerant toward slaveholding. In 1696, they advised against the importation of Negroes; in 1730, against buying imported Negroes; in 1754, against buying any slaves. In 1758, Friends visited with all Quaker slaveholders to persuade them to set their slaves free, and in 1762 the Advices suggested Friends should “labor with” those who still held slaves. By 1776, meetings could disown Quaker slaveholders.⁴⁶ Quakers formed a Free Produce Association, which boycotted products made by slave labor.⁴⁷ Just as their testimony against war has sometimes caused Friends to become adversaries of the state, so too did their witness of equality. For instance, they objected when blacks, Native Americans, or Japanese Americans in the 1940s were treated unequally and as if they were innately inferior. Again, some Friends chose the path of civil disobedience in their resolve to obey God’s law over man’s when the two were opposed.

Equality is also evident within the internal structure of the Quaker meeting. The administration of the meeting *and* its worship was, and remains, in unprogrammed meetings a corporate responsibility. No individual has special religious duties or is literally or figuratively elevated above others. Mostly in earlier times, elders or overseers and wise and “weighty” Friends, did exercise an advisory function “not *over* the meeting, but *under* it, as the instruments of its will.”⁴⁸ Members also share and participate equally in the “meeting for worship with a concern for business,” held once every month.

Community

Community is reflected in Quakers’ concern for others—in widening circles from the smallest group—the Monthly Meeting, outward to the larger Friends’

communities, Quarterly and Yearly Meetings—and still further to non-Quaker communities from the smallest to the largest, the world. The testimony of community embodies care for others' welfare because Friends believe that all persons are children of God who share alike in his Light. Working toward the alleviation of human suffering and injustice is in political, social, and economic terms the equivalent of the command to love God and one's neighbor as oneself.⁴⁹ The Golden Rule,⁵⁰ too, emphasizes empathy and responsibility toward others.

The use of mediation and arbitration as early Friends' preferred means of solving disputes figured importantly in the nurture and preservation of community. "The success of non-legal dispute settlement has always depended upon a coherent community vision. How to resolve conflict, inversely stated, is how (or whether) to preserve community. Only when there is congruence between individuals and their community with shared commitment to common values, is there a possibility for justice without law."⁵¹ Friends not only regard community as worthy of preservation but as central to their faith.

Light

"Ye are all the children of light. . . ."⁵²

Children of Light was another name given to early Friends. Fox believed that Friends must learn how to understand scripture in "that Light and Spirit which was before Scripture was given forth, and which led the holy men of God to give them forth. . . ."⁵³ For Friends, Light is powerful as both symbol and reality and, like many spiritual ideas, it defies precise definition. English Quaker lawyer William Braithwaite wrote about such human-divine words in the early 1900s. He, for instance, could give no full definition of the word "spiritual," "which ranks high among the elusive words of the language." He hoped that it would always escape capture and definition because he thought we should have some words that belong both to earth and heaven.⁵⁴

Light is beyond conscience because it shines through conscience to instruct, sensitize, and transform it. "If we are faithful to our measure of Light, we shall be guided up toward God, and up to a greater measure of the Truth"⁵⁵ in a process of enlightenment and evolvment. Light can also refer to Christ and can connote truth and love. Because Friends' faith is not a series of static tenets but an evolving process, Light may have various gradations of meaning for Quakers. Many Friends have written about the Light. Isaac Penington in *Naked Truth* (1674) wrote, "The same light which discovereth the darkness, also chaseth away the darkness, . . . and purifieth the mind; for the light hath not only a property of enlightening, but also of cleansing and sanctifying."⁵⁶

Another view of Light is found in a legal brief written for Friend Rosa Packard who sought to avoid paying her portion of federal taxes used for

war: “Quakers believe each individual can know God directly by experience because . . . [according to] John . . . 1:6–9, the Light is placed in us as a birthright, a capacity and potentiality. But direct experience alone is not enough; it must be tested for its truth-bearing value and, if found trustworthy, lived by. . . . [T]he ‘Inner Light’ has long been a dominant Quaker image to describe how God works in us.”⁵⁷ Another view of the light is the truth, God’s own goad and probe, as described by Margaret Fell: “let the Eternal Light search you . . . for this will deal plainly with you”⁵⁸

Friends’ believe that persons evolve in moral consciousness. If Friends are true to their “measure of light,” they will be guided up toward God and to a still greater measure of truth. For instance, we have seen that Quakers have always rejected war as against God’s will. However, if a person’s conscience urges him to fight, he must be faithful to the measure of light he has. If he continues his faithfulness and “waits upon the Lord and sensitizes himself to the reception of more Light, a greater measure will be given him. He will then see the wrong in fighting. In his first state, he would be a coward if he did not fight; in the second, he would be a coward if he did. . . .”⁵⁹ Both courage and patience play a part in this Quaker process of spiritual evolvment.

This quintessential Quaker spiritual principle—the Light of God within every person—is closely related to the testimonies. The Light is a source of unity and community for Quakers because it is shared by all persons, a bond that brings them together with God and each other.⁶⁰ For Friends, the best way to interact with others is to “answer” that of God, or the Light, in them. Put in graphic terms, “[t]he vertical relation to God and the horizontal relation to man are like two co-ordinates used to plot a curve; without both the position of the curve could not be determined.”⁶¹

Friends’ social concern stems from this belief in the interconnectedness of all persons sharing the light. Connectedness engenders compassion, which strengthens Friends to help others afflicted by poverty, conflict, and injustice. New York Yearly Meeting’s 1995 *Faith and Practice* describes the Quaker process of individually and communally testing a “concern” or social action “in the light,” another part of Friends’ “gospel order”:

Individual concerns can become the means by which the community can bring the power of the Spirit into social action; the method Friends have developed to do this involves the progression and deepening of concerns from monthly to Quarterly to Yearly Meetings. This process is another part of our gospel order, by which we wait with a concern and test it individually, then with a friend or family member, then with a group of Friends and the monthly meeting itself, and finally with quarterly and yearly meetings. Friends are thus available at each step to ‘test the concern in the Light,’ to consider

the concern in relation to all they know about the situation and the persons involved and, most important, to hold the concern up to the light of the Inward Teacher, although we do not need to share, agree with, or endorse each other's concerns in order to support them.⁶²

In a broader way, the Light can be viewed as a kind of sieve through which concerns, ideas, thoughts, and prayers are sifted, cleansed, and clarified. In such a sifting process, what remains salient is probably the truer, better, and clearer course. The Light is often spoken of in connection with leadings: "The Inner Light does not lead men to do that which is right in their own eyes, but that which is right in God's eyes."⁶³ Friends "hold in the Light" persons immersed in sickness, grief, or difficulty so that God may support and uplift them.

Friends further believe that the Light within every person generates an unquestioned capacity for goodness and that its power can redeem and transform those who falter. "[I]f we feel that even in the most evil of men there is that of God, we can appeal to it, and we may . . . reach it and set in motion a process of transformation from within."⁶⁴ This belief in a person's potential for rehabilitative transformation will resurface in a discussion of a reason for Penn's reduction of capital crimes in the early laws of Pennsylvania.

Friends' Relationship with God and Others

Unlike most religious groups, the Society of Friends does not have a theology in the sense of a body of doctrine or dogma for its members' adherence. It is a noncreedal religion with no formal doctrinal statements issued from a religious hierarchy. Indeed, unlike virtually all other Western religions, Friends' "concept of authority and doctrine flows upward from the individual to the group, rather than down from an ecclesiastical authority . . . to the laity."⁶⁵ A Quaker has suggested that "our theology is our testimonies and how we live them; our theology is in our hands."⁶⁶ For Quakers, the Spirit of God is the ultimate authority in governing the individual.

Addressed "to the Children of Light," a 1656 statement on Quakers' lack of dogma accompanied the 20 Balby Yorkshire [England] Advices, these stated, "Dearly beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule to walk by, but that all with the measure of light which is pure and holy may be guided, and so in the light walking and abiding these may be fulfilled in the Spirit—not from the letter for the letter killeth, but [from the Spirit which] giveth Light."⁶⁷ Friends believed that to have unity in their search, they had to forego any desire to impose unity on each other. For instance, Friends have no single view vis-à-vis the Bible or the state.

More than 250 years after the Balby Advices, *The True Basis of Christian Unity* was presented to London Yearly Meeting in 1917. It noted that formulated statements of belief tend to crystallize thought on issues that are beyond embodiment in human language, hamper the search for truth, and erect barriers that may exclude seekers who would otherwise gladly come in.⁶⁸ New York Yearly Meeting's 1995 *Faith and Practice*⁷⁰ explained that instead of imposing rules of conduct, the Society lays upon its members the responsibility to live by the Spirit of Light and Truth. The 1972 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting *Faith and Practice* explained that Quakerism is rooted in an increasing experience and appreciation of God and his creation, inwardly felt.

Instead of formulated statements, Friends refer to *Faith and Practice*,⁶⁹ an evolving guide to individuals and meetings on various aspects of faith, subject to revision as the spirit of truth and new experience shed further insight through a continuing process of discernment and revelation. Each Yearly Meeting's *Faith and Practice* also includes thoughts and spiritual insights of Friends over the centuries and can vary slightly from one meeting to another.

Common principles are defined and expanded in simple declarative "Advices," the first, the Balby series written in 1656. The Advices are well-suited to Quakers' practice of divining their own "leadings" from God or the Light. In addition to "Advices," Friends use "Queries," sets of questions, to challenge and guide them in self-examining the extent to which their lives are expressions of what they profess. Examples are: Do you show a forgiving spirit and a concern for the reputation of others? Where differences arise, do you try to speedily end them? Are you just in payment of debts and honorable and truthful in all your dealings? Do you encourage efforts to overcome racial prejudice and antagonism?⁷¹ Both advices and queries grow out of Friends' collective experience in attempting to live in the Light.

The Society of Friends shares some beliefs with the descendants of the Anabaptists⁷²—pacifism, no infant baptism, no swearing of oaths, and little if any interest in formal theology. Descendants such as the Mennonites are active in social service and have joined Friends in efforts to support conscientious objection to war and other forms of peacemaking. Although the Church of the Brethren is also active in social service, other pacifist groups or subgroups have tended to withdraw from the world rather than live in its midst. In this respect, the latter differ from Friends who lobby Congress through Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), bring and defend court actions, file amici curiae briefs, and are active in peace and social justice issues through the AFSC and Yearly Meetings. Friends believe that one's life cannot be compartmentalized into various areas. This holistic approach with its infusion of faith into all aspects of life has remained a distinguishing characteristic of the Society since its beginnings.

A distinctive Quaker process is one by which members seek and discover guidance by listening for a “leading” from God, the Light. “Each [Friend] is responsible for discerning how she or he is called to act, but each person is also part of a fellowship of faith, responsible to and supportive of one another.”⁷³ The initial responsibility is the member’s own, then his or her individual discernment followed by communal support for the “leading.” “A significant Quaker contribution is the ethic by which individual discernment is blended into the group. It is a staged process, rather than a theory, that leads to “openings” or revelations both for the individual and the community and might be said to begin with quieting impulses, addressing concerns, gathering consensus, finding clearness, and, finally, bearing witness.”⁷⁴

Friends and the State

“. . . We ought to obey God rather than men.”⁷⁵

Obedience to the state is secondary to Friends’ primary allegiance to God. A 1915 London Yearly Meeting statement explained Friends’ stance on conflicting claims between God’s law and that of the state: “Christ demands of us that we adhere, without swerving, to the methods of love, and therefore, if a seeming conflict should arise between the claims of His service and those of the State, it is to Christ that our supreme loyalty must be given, whatever the consequences.” A half-century later, the 1972 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting *Faith and Practice* reconfirmed this in the context of the peace testimony:

Since our first allegiance is to the god of love, we must obey the law of God rather than the law of man when this allegiance is challenged by the demands of the state. We support both the young men who oppose war by performing work as conscientious objectors and those who resist any cooperation with the military. . . . Since our peace testimony is not only opposition to active participation in war but a positive affirmation of the power of good to overcome evil, we must all seriously consider the implications of our employment, our investments, our payment of taxes, and our manner of living as they relate to violence.⁷⁶

The often-quoted exchange between George Fox and William Penn illustrates how the Light works through the individual’s conscience and how the testimonies are “lived.” After Penn became a Quaker in 1667, he still wore regalia, including sword, of a gentleman who frequented the English court. One day he asked Fox whether he, now a Quaker, should continue to wear his sword. Fox simply

advised, "Wear it as long as thou canst."⁷⁷ Fox meant that at some point, the inner Light would sensitize Penn's conscience so that he could no longer wear the sword. Not long after this conversation with Fox, Penn was without his sword; he had worn it as long as he could.

This strong and individualistic conscience has animated Friends' actions throughout their history and continues to do so. Howard Brinton explains this by reference to Paul's letter to the Galatians. Paul noted that Christianity was neither the old Mosaic law nor the new law but freedom from law, a liberty of conscience, not the command of external law but one's own "internal guidance" based on the love of God.⁷⁸

Friends respect the state as an instrument for the maintenance of an orderly society and give it loyalty and cooperation, but when it acts coercively, for example, to force citizens to participate in violence, which is contrary to divine law, Friends seek to protect liberty of conscience by engaging in civil disobedience or actively encouraging a change in laws that violate God's law against killing, or both. Quakers are, and have often been, civil disobedient activists who speak truth to power in order to better align laws toward God's law and the greater good. In 1678 William Penn wrote to the "Children of Light" that true godliness does not turn men from the world but excites their endeavors to mend it.⁷⁹ And, in fact, Friends see their refusal to accede to the state's unjust demands as a measure of loyalty to the government and may reach others' consciences so they might together improve society. In their view their civil disobedience is not an oxymoron.

This civil disobedience derives from a deep and rich tradition within the Society. For centuries, Friends have presented demands for justice to those in positions of authority with the power and ability to effect change, reasoning that if we are to achieve peace and justice, the habit of implicit obedience to authority must be broken, especially when the authority becomes evil.⁸⁰ Quakers also spoke or wrote to heads of state, legislatures, and courts to make them aware of specific injustices and attempt to persuade them to take remedial action. During George Fox's imprisonment in Worcester in 1674, his wife Margaret Fell traveled to London to speak with King Charles II and ask for Fox's release by "laying before him [his] long and unjust imprisonment, with the manner of [his] being taken, and the justices' proceedings against [him], . . ." ⁸¹ Friends' numerous petitions and tracts indicate little diffidence; it was similarly so when, as defendants, they spoke directly to jurors during trial. Friends believed that confronting persecutors or jurors would prick their consciences and cause them to discover the Light within themselves. Speaking against injustice, rather than silently suffering it, had a twofold advantage: it helped their own immediate situation and could help others by resulting in positive change in the future. For example, Elizabeth Fry expressed her concern about English prison conditions directly to Queen Victoria and AFSC representatives later urged the Nazi Gestapo to implement emergency feeding

programs and faster emigration of Jews. Although the concept and practice of speaking concerns directly and truthfully to those in power dates to Friends' beginnings, the phrase itself—"speaking truth to power"—is a twentieth-century Quaker construct subsequently adopted by others.

As we will see in chapter 4, Friends continue this tradition by bringing civil rights actions in the courts and by lobbying Congress through the FCNL.

Friends' Gospel Order

Friends' testimonies of harmony and community are particularly pertinent to gospel order, one aspect of which was the Society's early and extensive use of such as mediation and arbitration to resolve disputes in a gentler and more private way. "[I]n corners of our [American] historical experience are intriguing experiments that testify to a persistent counter-tradition to legalism."⁸² One "corner" included the Quakers' use of extralegal alternatives and William Penn's provision of an arbitration statute in the early laws of Pennsylvania province. He may have been influenced by Friends meetings' internal system of dispute resolution, initially created to resolve intra-Quaker disputes outside the public eye and to heed the scriptural caution against "going to law."

Friends generally preferred this extralegal means of settling differences and restoring peace and harmony. This early brand of communitarian justice is traceable to Matthew:

[I]f thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church. . . .⁸³

This sequence of steps became a part of Friends' gospel order—in England and America. Gospel order was recommended in a 1681 minute⁸⁴ adopted by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting: "It's Agreed if any Differences Arise between any Persons professing the Truth that they do not go to Law One with Another, before Endeavours have been made and Used for the Ending thereof, by the Particular Monthly Meetings they belong to." The phrase "between any Persons professing the Truth" referred to Quakers. Although initially gospel order was used only among Friends, it was later expanded to include all persons with whom Friends had differences.

Suing a Friend without necessity and without the meeting's consent was strongly discouraged and could, in certain meetings and times, lead to disownment by the Society. Even now, some Friends discourage suits, although despite this,

Quakers did (and sometimes do) take disputes to court. This was especially true if mediation or arbitration had been tried. Some sued on ordinary matters such as trespass or debt, but later they also brought actions to maintain the integrity of the testimonies and rights to freedom of religion and conscience. A Quaker's liberty of conscience became an issue in *Elfbrandt v. Russell* when the plaintiff refused to take an oath of loyalty required of Arizona schoolteachers. Racial equality was litigated when some Pennsylvanians were denied club membership *because* they were black.⁸⁵

Traditions and Practices Unique to Friends

Meeting for Worship

Early Friends gathered regularly to worship in silence as unprogrammed Friends do today. In this kind of worship, each person focuses inwardly toward direct communion with the divine Spirit. As worshippers expectantly wait in God's presence, the sense of fellowship with God and each other becomes strengthened. Whereas the worship does not rely in unprogrammed meetings on preplanned words, neither is it silence qua silence. Robert Barclay, a learned seventeenth-century Friend, likened the gathering in communal silence to the augmentation of light by many glowing candles. Barclay wrote: "when I came into the silent assemblies . . . I felt a secret power among them, which touched my heart."⁸⁶ He described silent worship as consisting "not in words, so neither in silence, as silence; but in a holy dependence of the mind upon God, from which dependent silence necessarily follows in the first place, until words can be brought forth which are from God's Spirit."⁸⁷

All who attend meetings actively participate and share equally in the responsibility to listen, to be receptive to continued silent waiting, and to be open to a leading to stand and speak. Usually when persons speak in meeting, they try to be brief and plain and keep "close to the root." Out of a worshipper's words or out of the silence, a "concern" may develop, a sense of a direct intimation of God's will to do something or to demonstrate sympathetic or empathetic interest in some individual or group.⁸⁸

Some may wonder about the value of gathering as a group and waiting in silence, but many who have experienced this have found that group devotion heightens insight and increases awareness of the Inward Light. In Quaker parlance, a "gathered meeting" is "awake, and looking upwards. . . . In the united stillness . . . there is a power known only by experience, and mysterious even when most familiar."⁸⁹ At the close of worship or "rise of meeting," Friends greet each other and shake hands.

Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business

Friends' business meetings are meetings for worship with a focus on matters such as finance, social action, meetinghouse upkeep, and care of members. Those who attend do not vote but reach a unified consensus by communal discernment and deliberation. After consensus is reached, the clerk rephrases the "sense of the meeting," and then it is approved and recorded. The clerk tries to be sensitive to the search for truth and unity, but if there is a thorny issue on which opinions diverge, he or she may ask for silence during which members can discern, through divine "leading," that which corresponds with God's will. Alternatively, a difficult matter may be "laid aside" to be reconsidered later when a sense of unity may be more likely to emerge.

Examples of queries related to meeting for business are: Are these meetings for held in a spirit of worship, understanding, and forbearance? Is the meeting aware that it speaks not only through its actions, but also through its failure to act?

Marriage

The Quaker marriage ceremony has remained essentially unchanged through the centuries, and as in earlier times, the meeting gives its approval to the marriage in advance of the wedding day. Held as a silent meeting for worship, a marriage "after the manner of Friends" has no official to administer vows. The bride and groom enter the meeting room together and sit where all can see them. After their entrance, any person may stand to share a memory or prayer. Then in the presence of God and the community, the bride and groom promise to each other to be loving, caring, and faithful. An appointed Friend reads the marriage certificate aloud to the gathering, and the couple signs it; after the rise of meeting, each guest also signs. A Meeting Committee is responsible for legal recordation of the marriage.

The Clearness Committee

A process unique to Friends is the clearness committee, which helps members achieve a measure of "clearness" on an important decision, change, or challenge in their lives, another example of Quakers' individual and communal discernment. The Friend who seeks clearness on a matter convenes a meeting of several chosen members to help discern whether a leading toward a resolution or new direction is consonant with the Spirit and to help the Friend clarify what, if any, action to take. The meeting also uses such a committee when a member seeks to marry under the care of the meeting or a person seeks membership in the