

MEET THE Friends

by Paul Anderson

FRIENDS AS PEACEMAKERS

If my kingdom
were of this world,
then would my
servants fight.

Jesus (John 18:36)

Similar to Quaker testimonies about oaths, simplicity, and plain speech, the peace testimony emerged as a conviction about what it means to follow the way of Jesus. This testimony was not simply the result of philosophizing about the evils of war; rather, it was *couched in experience*.

In 1651 George Fox received notice that he would be released from prison if he would assume the post of "captain" and lead a troop of Commonwealth soldiers against the Royalist army. But Fox refused, saying, "I told them I lived in the virtue of that life and power which took away the occasion of all wars." For this refusal he was sent to the dungeon for six more months, where no doubt his decision had a chance to deepen and mature within his heart. Friends continued in the belief that the peace of Christ can never be accomplished by inward or outward violence.

In 1660 Margaret Fell took a letter to King Charles II, stating the peaceful intent of Friends. It said, "We are a people that follow after those things that make for peace, love, and unity; it is our desire that others' feet may walk

in the same, and [we] do deny and bear our testimony against all strife and wars and contentions."

Friends were keenly aware of how the cause of Christ had been falsely used to rationalize political expansion by military means, and they spoke clearly to the fact that carnal warfare was the opposite of Christ's way. Friends even avoided any semblance of learning war with the conviction that if people would only listen to Christ's Spirit working in their hearts, they would feel no need for outward weaponry. Concerned about the militaristic implications of William Penn's wearing a decorative sword, and convinced of the power of the Spirit's conviction, Fox said simply to Penn, "Wear it as long as thou canst."

PEACEMAKING is not simply a matter of a refusal to fight. It also involves the inward spiritual fruits of love, joy, peace, etc. For instance, during the Civil War Solomon Frazier, a young Friend from North Carolina, was hung by his thumbs, suspended on a cross, bound, gagged with a bayonet, and "otherwise tortured" in an attempt to get him to enlist. He responded, "If it be thy duty to inflict this punishment

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upon me, do it cheerfully; don't get angry about it." At that point, the officer himself gave in: "If any of you here can make him fight, do it. I cannot."

Peacemaking also involves working constructively to bring peaceful solutions to tense predicaments. During the Seven Years War, John Woolman proposed a creative alternative to the "war tax." He encouraged Friends to tax themselves voluntarily and give the money to Indians who had lost their land and to colonists who suffered due to the war.

PEACEMAKING involves being reconcilers between estranged parties. In 1850 Joseph Sturge led a delegation of four to try to keep Germany and Denmark from a possession dispute. Finally, in 1854, Sturge reasoned with the Russian Czar with regard to ending the Crimean War. This peacemaking endeavor was not entirely successful, but the testimony is clear. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers," and we are to be actively engaged in working for peace between estranged peoples, whom God loves equally.

Friends desire peace with unanimity, but it is fair to say that not all Friends are of one mind as to what would be the most effective deterrent to war. In contrast to our tradition, some feel that a strong defense would decrease the likelihood of a military challenge or injustice. Others recall the tragic results in history that follow the proliferation of arms. The amount spent on arms rather than people's needs and the rising threat of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons *cannot but* cause the sincere Christian to do some *serious* thinking about the gravity of the issues we face. Quakers received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947 for their peacemaking endeavors, and Friends seek to contribute to peace locally, nationally, and internationally.

All in all, the Friends peace witness is based on our allegiance to the Prince of Peace, Christ Jesus. Our commitment to be peacemakers has less to do with the notion that if we disarm ourselves so will our enemies. If we disarm, we indeed may be destroyed. The root of our stand is that we are involved in another war, which is the *Lamb's War*. We follow one who says, "whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it," and our passion is to imitate our Lord. We cannot imagine Jesus clad in gladiator garb, learning methods of torture, and if we would truly be His followers neither can we learn war.

A Quaker labored for hours in discussion with an officer in the Revolutionary War, and finally the soldier said something like, "All right, I'd love to lay down my arms, but only after everyone else has." The Friend responded, "I see you would be among the last to follow Christ; I hope to be among the *first*."

In working for peaceable means to peaceable ends, Friends have historically sought alternatives to violence. But this does not imply disengagement from the world or doormat passivity. Jesus' clear call to love our enemies has the potential to change the world and to make society more just and stable. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers," and Friends have sought to take His word to heart.