

Quaker Testimonies (as set forth by many in the U.S.) – Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, Stewardship/Harmony with Nature (SPICES)

Which drew me more to Friends – Quaker testimonies, the experience of connecting to the Spirit in worship, or something else?

The testimonies are important because they are _____.

When I first encountered Friends, which ones had an especially deep resonance and why? Which testimony is hardest for me?

If testimonies have become central to our definition of what it means to be a Friend, have we moved the center of our religious community from the divine to ourselves, from the work of God in creation to our own efforts?

Some History of Quaker Testimonies

To find the origin of the SPICES, you have to go back to 1943. In that year, Howard Brinton published a booklet entitled *A Guide to Quaker Practice*. Brinton had mined the Quaker literature from the 17th to the 20th centuries to extract a summary of our faith and practice in 22 pages. It's really quite a remarkable little book and is still in print nearly 70 years later. If you haven't read it, you should. One of the sections is titled "Social Testimonies." In it, Brinton describes a process by which Friends over time have come to realize the social implications of our religious positions and acted on those insights. He writes, "At the price of oversimplification let us outline the Quaker social doctrines under four heads—community, harmony, equality, and simplicity. Obviously in such a classification there is much overlapping." What I never realized, despite reading this pamphlet several times, was that this was the first listing of what have become known as the Quaker Testimonies. For that insight, I have to give credit to Anthony Manusos, a California Quaker who is working on a biography of Brinton. Anthony posted it on October 6, 2009 in his blog, LA Quaker.

[E]arly Friends used the word "testimony" to mean a number of different things:

- the overall message and witness of Quakers
- a vocal ministry
- inward evidence, as in Barclay's Proposition 4: "this inward testimony or seed of God"
- a Friend's sense of being led to recurring ministry
- a Friend's career in ministry, taken as a whole

By the 1700s, “testimonies of denial” meant minutes of disownment that would be read out in meeting for business when a “disorderly walker” could not see clear to offer a “testimony of acknowledgement” of his waywardness. And British Friends to this day use “testimonies” to mean memorial minutes: for example, “A Testimony to the Grace of God in the Life of Simon Pure.”

In the larger society of the seventeenth century, “testimony” (in addition to its common forensic meaning in courtrooms) was a synonym for the Scriptures as a whole, and the royal committee for King James I’s Authorized Version Bible also used the word “testimony” to denote stone tablets Moses brought down off Mount Sinai, later stored in the tabernacle’s ark of the testimony.

Friends did occasionally extend “testimony” to include actions or behaviors that characterized members of the Religious Society of Friends. As early as 1696, William Penn listed nine “testimonies peculiar to us,” among which are Friends refusal to pay tithes, swear oaths, or observe holy days; their opposition to “war among Christians”; and their adoption of plainness of speech and apparel.

William Penn’s “testimonies peculiar to us” eventually turned into prescriptive advices and queries. Thus, up until the middle of the twentieth century, issues of the *Book of Discipline* of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (both Hicksite and Orthodox) admonish members against swearing oaths and the “superstitious observance of days,” and direct them to adhere to plainness, simplicity, and “our ancient testimony against all war.”

About the only meaning early Friends didn’t have for “testimony” was that of modern Friends, i.e., one of four, five, or six categories into which God’s work through Friends can be sorted.

A testimony is something we are called or led to – not something we choose to do on our own. It arises from a relationship with God. . . . A testimony flows from, and is an expression of, love - God’s love and our love.

Thousands of early Friends endured fines, prisons, the confiscation of their estates, not for SPICES but for what they called “true worship,” i.e., for an authentic religious experience.

(Above primarily from *Friends Journal* article by Eric Moon, “Categorically Not the Testimonies”; *Friends Journal* article by Michael D. Levi, “Reviving Our Testimonies”; and “Origin of the SPICES” by Paul Buckley’s address to South Central Yearly Meeting in 2012)