

Friends Peace Testimony in a Time of Terrorism

by Robert Griswold – for an address at Boulder Friends Mtg., Oct. 26, 2002, and slightly revised for an address at Santa Monica Meeting in February, 2003

What faces peacemakers

Following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center *Friends Journal* published an article by Scott Simon raising doubts about the relevance of the Friends peace testimony in the face of terrorism. This article and the responses which followed and other discussions have shown that Friends are not of one mind or of one heart on this testimony. Indeed our peace testimony has even been spoken of as a continuum. In every great crisis we seem to have to discover anew that our commitment to this testimony does not rise to the pure unity we have allowed ourselves to imagine during times when we can avoid putting that testimony to the test. The present crisis is marked by the words "war on terrorism." This essay is written in hope of aiding Friends to think and feel clearly about this crisis and their testimony in the hope that work can lead us to meaningful witness.

The new war and crisis is somewhat different than past wars. This is not a war in the sense that the Civil War or WWII was war. In those times, "war" meant armies facing off. To understand the present "war" it is important to place it in the correct category. That category is the one that contains the "war on crime" and the "war on drugs." The items in this category all reflect a modern American leadership style. In the first step of this style, leaders gain political capital by appointing themselves to champion a crusade against something seen as a general evil infecting the world. In the second step these leaders show that their leadership is valiant by spending vast human and financial resources attacking this problem (usually this means attacking the people thought to be bad as a means of eradicating the evil). These leaders lead this charge even though they have no understanding of the source of the problem and hence, they have no way of knowing whether their actions make the situation better or worse. This is the Don Quixote model of leadership. In this context, it should not surprise us that our President is leading us on a charge against an "Axis of Evil", or that he is unable to articulate any concrete goals or a timeline for this war. The "war on terrorism" represents the apogee of this leadership style – war as perpetual quest. Only if Friends understand that war has become a permanent style of leadership will they be able to appreciate what is now demanded of those who would be peacemakers. The challenge that faces us can only be met by a lived peace testimony that is also perpetual.

In the meantime, this war has little meaning in the daily routines of the majority of citizens (including Quakers) who go about their lives feeling only minor and occasional personal impact (for example, security screening at airports). Friends will not be able to make a substantial witness for peace in this new war if we do not labor to come to a profound understanding of what is going on and come to stand on the true ground of our faith. Without this effort we will be trapped in the general mystification and we will lack the power to show more than a weak and divided face to the world. The world will not be impressed with a weak witness. It is a time to be passionately serious.

Terrorism/counter-terrorism and their guiding ideology

To strengthen our witness we must overcome the mystification caused by the lies of terrorists and counter-terrorists and we can best begin by defining terms. I think the US Army definition of terrorism is a fair one. They say terrorism is "...the calculated use of violence or threat of violence to attain goals that are political, religious or ideological in nature...through intimidation, coercion or instilling fear." Counter-terrorism is action taken against terrorists but is not different than terrorism. Counter-terrorism is violent and intimidating actions taken against those defined as terrorists or their supporters; actions designed to destroy them or get them to cease resisting the goals of the counter-terrorists. These actions employ lethal methods to instill fear and dread in persons or groups identified as having embraced terrorism as a means of achieving their political goals. Moving on to "war on terrorism", this is counter-terrorism raised to the level where the armed forces of a country are mobilized to attack and kill or make prisoners of those who have been labeled terrorists or their supporters. Sometimes this attack is in response to a direct attack by terrorists. Sometimes, as in the long-planned war by the US against Iraq, it is in response to a perceived threat to the attacking country's hegemony. It should be clear from this review that terrorism, counter-terrorism and war on terrorism are really not such different things. The unifying thread that runs through all of these terms is reliance on violence and intimidation. It turns out that counter-terrorism is not

different from terrorism but is only a sub-category under terrorism. Likewise, a war on terrorism turns out to be a sub-category of counter-terrorism.

We need to face the implications of the above review and fully appreciate the power of the ideology at work here. In terms of actions toward others there is no meaningful difference between a terrorist and a counter-terrorist or those involved in a war on terrorism. All are committed to violence and intimidation in dealing with those defined as evil enemies. It should be apparent that this ideology has seduced those of every professed religion into actions of violence and intimidation. Being a nominal follower of Islam, Judaism or Christianity has no bearing on the basic ideology being embraced by terrorists or counter-terrorists. Each of these religions been employed as a tool of the terrorist/counter-terrorist ideology.

There are only two arguable points between terrorists and counter-terrorists that can superficially appear to have merit. The first point is a point of order. In any conflict where violence and intimidation have been used by both sides, it is inevitable that each side will claim to be victims (and thus counter-terrorists) but deny using violence first in hopes of capturing some supposed moral high ground. The behavior (the employment of violence and intimidation against an enemy) is much the same in either case but calling the other side terrorist and the home side counter-terrorist is done to help the home side feel justified in using its terrorist actions. All sides in these conflicts will relish this kind of argument because each knows that in such conflicts they can each point to violent and injurious acts committed by the other and there is no possible hope of reaching an agreement on who was hurt first. All feuds are built on an infinite regress of injuries. Both sides relish their sense that they have received unjust treatment at the hands of the other, which of course, they have. They adore the sense of moral superiority that comes with being a victim. They bask in whatever sympathy they can garner from others for their victim status. Both sides cry for 'justice' (a word they use but has no meaning for them apart from retribution). They need their victimhood to cloak the brutal and murderous acts they intend to commit. (Ignorance is also put to good use here. If I avoid knowing what my side might have done to give offense, then the causes for the other party's action can be kept from limiting my reactive counter-terrorist attack.)

The second arguing point is that counter-terrorists claim moral superiority because their intention is solely violence toward terrorists and not toward innocent parties in the conflict. There is but one meaningful measure of the value of intention and that is the value placed on it by those who are innocent victims and survivors of violence. When one terrorist is killed and thirteen innocent others as well (many women and children) by Israeli counter-terrorist action, the value of that intention is up to the survivors. When American forces bomb an Afghani wedding party the value of the fact that the perpetrators of the action did not intend harm to those people is for the survivors to judge. Good intentions work primarily as sunglasses for counter-terrorists to dim the glare of their inhumane actions. The paving on the road to hell is not there to absolve from responsibility but to make the trip easier.

So the first mystification to overcome is the one that would have us believe that terrorism and counter-terrorism are opposites and hence we need to choose sides between them. Because the behavior of all parties in these conflicts follows the same approach to the perceived enemy, it can be seen that the terrorist and the counter-terrorist belong to the same ideological fraternity and support the same program for the resolution of conflicts between people. The ultimate core belief of both is in identifying a group of people as evil and an enemy and in resolving conflict with those people through violence and intimidation. In the rest of this essay I will use mostly the terms counter-terrorist and counter-terrorism because this is how all of those involved in these conflicts think of themselves. In doing so I am including the terrorist, the counter-terrorist and those engaged in a war on terrorism.

The second lie and mystification

The second lie that the followers of violence and intimidation use to mystify us is the one that states that their ideology works, that is, that conflicts are resolved by following their ideology. This second lie usually comes in three forms. A) The lie that those defined as evil can be fully destroyed by violence. B) The lie that those who are evil can be permanently subjugated by violence. C) The lie that war brings peace. These lies are a critical core piece of the counter-terrorist ideology.

The expressed hope of each side in counter-terrorist conflicts is the same. That hope is for "peace." Of course what they mean by this is the lasting dominance of their "way of life" through the extermination or permanent subjugation of the other side by violent and intimidating means. This hope is nourished by a belief that the side they represent has the superior (or only true) religious faith, that they are the "chosen people", that they are racially superior to those around them, or that their wealth, material or military

possessions prove their superiority. Whichever of these devices is selected for the purpose, the result is always to idealize "us" and demonize "them". Hopes like these are clearly based in the vices of the ego – pride, arrogance, selfishness, hate and lust for power.

History has shown that extermination of enemies is much more difficult than counter-terrorists think. In fact it is not possible to recall a successful historical instance. Did the Nazis exterminate the Jews? They tried. Did the Christians exterminate the Saracens? They probably killed fewer Saracens than they lost themselves in the process of getting to the 'Holy Land.' Have the Hutus exterminated the Tutsis? No. Did the Turks successfully annihilate the Armenians so that now they have nothing to fear from them? No. Honestly answering these questions proves that the extermination of enemies is a nightmare fantasy that can only be given credence by those who have surrendered to an ideological delusion. Genocide is not only to be renounced because it is a heinous moral crime. It is also incredibly stupid because it does not work. And it leaves a lingering moral stink on the descendants of those who attempt it. It's a smell that should be familiar to all Americans who are not Native Americans.

What about the achievement of the permanent subjugation of those being subjected to attack? Unfortunately for those who commit to the counter-terrorist ideology of violence and intimidation, history doesn't offer much hope to those on the 'winning' side for this second goal to work out well either. Oliver Cromwell subdued the Irish 350 years ago and since then no lives have been lost in conflicts between the British and the Irish, right? The Israelis 'won' the 1967 war, and have been living safely since, right? The northern states in the US 'defeated' the southern states in the Civil War and from then on there was no further subjugation of African-Americans in those states, right? The US won the so-called 'Gulf War' just a few years ago and now there is no problem in that area, right? Those who imagine an end to this list deceive themselves. Of course history books are often written by the 'winners' to celebrate their 'victory.' But, those books tend to be written as though nothing much happens after the violence comes to a temporary halt. When a longer view is taken, history reveals that subjugation is never a final resolution of conflict. The unending product of subjugation is a bitter pool of hereditary resentment. The claimed successes of counter-terrorism turn out to be chimerical. The temporary cessation of armed conflict is not peace; it is only an illusion of peace.

The third lie and mystification

Counter-terrorist leaders always pose as dedicated defenders of their people and the culture of their country with no other motivation. They keep the threat of the enemy and the vileness of the enemy at the front of the public view. Behind this screen other things are going on.

If counter-terrorism doesn't work, why do both leaders of nations and leaders of insurgent groups cling so tightly to the methods of intimidation and violence? There is a principle in psychotherapy that should be part of the understanding of the persistence of the counter-terrorist system. In psychotherapy when a seemingly irrational behavior persists in a group, the question has to be raised of who in the group is benefiting from this craziness. Until this point is clarified, no real understanding can be had. This means it is necessary that we identify the benefits accruing to counter-terrorist leaders.

We have to be able to confront the fact that the leaders of terrorist actions and wars on terrorism have more at stake in promoting their ideology than mere self-protection or service to the security of the community from which they come. Keeping the populace focused on an outside threat enables counter-terrorist leaders to do two things that are greatly in their self-interest. First, this allows leaders to hide their incompetence to manage or unwillingness to address the legitimate needs of those they are leading. Second, these leaders can use the threat as a cover to persecute and weaken those in opposition and to reward those on whom they rely for support. In other words, a violent attack is not simply a crisis (and it may even be solicited). An attack is an opportunity for counter-terrorist leaders to expand the boundaries of their control and influence well beyond anything known to these leaders when lacking this excuse. As the conflict escalates (or is made to appear to escalate), the leaders of counter-terrorist actions even become emboldened to undertake or condone extra-legal acts that would normally be viewed as reprehensible by their community. Examples of this range from the recent arrest, detention and isolation of aliens (and citizens) in the US to the brutal torture and execution of opponents or suspected opponents in Argentina a few years past.

Counter-terrorists are greatly invested in having their constituents believe they are being led on the only realistic, hopeful and courageous course of action. They trust that by using the fear instilled in their constituents they can keep leadership and power in their hands. They have a whole agenda of ways they

can use this power to restructure their own society in ways that make dissent less possible. They are confident they can rule as long as their compatriots stay afraid. What the counter-terrorists fear is that those they are leading will find a way that does not depend on violence and intimidation. They marshal their forces and declare war (or jihad) and anyone objecting is labeled a traitor or a collaborator (or a terrorist).

It's not merely that counter-terrorists know of no other way; they are afraid that another way will be found because a nonviolent way will weaken their hold on power by requiring them to have a rational agenda that benefits more than a small segment of their constituents. They are constantly concerned that their constituents will discover the ways in which these leaders are personally profiting, politically and financially from conducting a war or a jihad.

Nothing threatens the established order and control of counter-terrorists more than peace (or even periods of time without active conflict). Peace is a major problem for counter-terrorist leaders. Without a war or a jihad they would have the problem of providing clear evidence that their leadership is of benefit to their constituents. Turning to war vastly reduces that problem. War is a way of mesmerizing people to keep them from concern with the lack of justice and fairness within their own society. Counter-terrorists have a powerful need for enemies. A war on terrorism thrives because it is a means to maintaining political power. The fact that this reality is usually kept covered with a camouflage net of expressions of desire for peace and the pious hope that the enemy will renounce his evil ways does not mean that this motivation isn't present. Rather it means that the leaders of counter-terrorist groups or governments are desperate to keep this motivation hidden from their constituents. Nor does the fact that counter-terrorist leaders honestly deny this motivation detract from the reality of its presence. As the benefit of increased personal power expands the egos of counter-terrorists; the delusion of their ideology easily becomes a self-delusion. Men who beat their wives and children may also believe that they are doing it for the good of those they are beating. That doesn't make it so.

A summary of mysteries and delusions

The proponents of counter-terrorism clearly suffer from delusions. They think they are following a different ideology than their enemy. They aren't. They think that they can achieve their goals through the ideology that guides them. They can't. They believe that they are not motivated by a base desire for power. They are.

History shows where these delusions have led. They have not led to peace. There have only been wars and the maneuvering for position that will enable the next war. What has been called peace has been merely the temporary cessation of armed conflict until various factions build up their resources again. Persuading us that these brief intervals between the more violent episodes is peace is part of what the counter-terrorist delusional system needs to maintain itself. It is part of what Friends need to get out of their minds to be true to their peace testimony. This delusion makes it possible to promote the lie that war produces peace. George Orwell's "doublespeak" is alive and well. The delusional system of the counter-terrorist is a closed delusional system. There is no cure for the delusions of counter-terrorism within that system. The response of Friends has been and must be outside of that system.

Common misunderstandings of the Friends peace testimony

To understand the Friends peace testimony it is useful to first look at ways it is misunderstood. There are three frequent and persistent misunderstandings that can come into play here and these misunderstandings are not only found among those who are not Friends. The first of these is the notion that the tradition (coming out of the history of Friends as followers of Jesus) demands that we seek a peaceful approach to conflict. In other words we are pacifists to remain true to what we were shown was right by our founders and scripture. While we do honor those who have made this tradition, this is not the foundation our testimony rests on. The second misunderstanding is that our testimony comes from a reaction to the horrors of war and a consequent commitment to avoid it. In other words our revulsion at war and violence makes us determined to deny them and assert a hope for some other world where such things as war and violence and suffering don't happen. The third misunderstanding rests on the impression that Friends have considered the matter thoughtfully and decided on the basis of that thinking that the moral thing to do is to not do anything violent or intimidating to anyone. In other words we believe that reason and practicality is on our side in choosing to be a peaceful people and that war and terrorism are bad ideas (which they are). These three are all misunderstandings because they each assume an

authority for personal action that Friends do not hold to be sound. George Fox would say these approaches to a peaceful life were all notional.

There are reasons that the peace testimony of Friends is not based on such notions. What others have said or done in the past may be inspirational but fail as an authority to guide our behavior. Fox looks at this the way courts of today look at hearsay evidence – it won't do. As Fox would say, "What can you say?" (meaning, "What do you own out of your personal experience?"). The emotional reaction of fear and repugnance also fails as a ground for a life of peace. These reactions are the product of our egos and will fail when the ego suffers. Finally, reasoning fails as a ground for peacemaking. Beliefs are thoughts that are formed by the mind and Friends have never trusted thinking by itself. Thus the Friends peace testimony is in this sense not at all about pacifism or being a pacifist.

Pacifism is an "ism", an ideal, an ideology, and a belief system - a creed if you will. To say Friends are suspicious of creeds would be an understatement. Beliefs come out of the head and the reasoning of the head is not the source of the Friends peace testimony. Ideologies are constructed of the reasoning of the ego. They may have a coating of dialectical argument but they are rooted in our fears and lusts and cannot rise above them. As Walter Wink has said, "Every mind is a 'contaminated mind' a mind constructed of a network of suppositions and assumptions." And these suppositions and assumptions are easily changed when the next supposition comes along. Thinking about being nonviolent is never sufficient preparation for the work of peacemaking. What Fox has called "the veiled mind, which darkens any pure discernment" is something that will never lead us to our peace testimony.

Nonviolence embraced as an idea, is simply another ideology to be trapped and used by the ego. Those who think to oppose the counter-terrorist ideology by adopting a pacifist counter-ideology are as susceptible to ego delusions as are people in the ideology being opposed. George Fox called this kind of thing "running out into notions." The ideology of violence and intimidation is too strong to be opposed by a 'peaceful' ideology. Friends who would oppose the counter-terrorist ideology must realize that they are opposing a deeply held belief defended with all the force of a fearful and threatened ego. The only counter to that belief must be a deeper spiritual experience and knowledge. As an ideology, pacifism may be an obstacle Friends need to overcome on the way to their peace testimony. The question isn't, "what do you think about peace?" but rather, "what do you know about peace that you are manifesting in your life?"

Peace from within

The Friends peace testimony is based on the Truth discovered within. This Truth is that beneath the fears and lusts and notions of our lives is a reality that can be trusted as the authority by which we can live and want to live. This is a sacred reality that we have called the Light within, Christ within, the still small voice or God. Invariably this Light shows us that we have been living a life guided by a false authority, our ego. The light shows us a new guide and, by that experience, shows us that there is a divine place in others that can be answered. Friends come to their peace testimony only after a change inside requires them to follow a new authority.

If the resistance of Friends to violence is merely based on a 'peaceful' ideology, that resistance will turn bitter and hateful when those following the counter-terrorist ideology don't quickly change their ways. The only resistance to the counter-terrorist ideology that can hope to change things must be one that begins with a change in the hearts of those who are part of the resistance. This change of heart will necessarily involve a great deal of painful self-examination. We cannot become peacemakers until we have made peace with the suffering we have caused ourselves and others guided by the false authority of our ego. And we have to make peace with the suffering that we will have to endure facing a violent world.

Violence toward others must be renounced in the soul and the heart before nonviolence can be considered in the mind. Only when we have the security of divine love working in our lives can we be free to let go of violence and anger. The Friends peace testimony is based on the knowledge that grows out of a spiritual discipline. It is a spiritual discipline that manifests itself in non-violence and respect and caring toward all people (even those in the throes of a violent and delusional ideology). Without the conviction that lets us out of our condition of bondage to the ego, we will be "resounding gongs and clanging cymbals" without the power of love. There can be no effective action directed toward ending violence unless that action is taken by people who have let go of the violence we all carry inside. Only a spiritual discipline can make a meaningful witness for peace possible. The silent worship of Friends is a discipline that can serve this purpose if we use it to let go of the ego's authority and open ourselves to

what is there when the ego lets go. This is the Light Within and the knowledge of this Light frees us for taking a path of peace.

Those fit for peacemaking are those who have come to a place where terrorists hold no terror. For Friends this means moving into and staying with the Light within. The fact is that all of us, living in a society that embraces violence and intimidation as the means to resolve conflicts, have absorbed that ideology into our egos whether we think we have or not. The peace testimony of Friends is based in a personal experience of Divine Love. This experience makes us aware that our basic condition prior to this experience was no different than that of the counter-terrorist. When we are touched by Divine Love we learn that we have been afraid to not be afraid. Are you afraid to let go of your fear? Being afraid to let go of fear as a motivation is exactly the condition of the counter-terrorist. To have fear as your base motivation is to be unable to love. The peacemaker breaks the cycle of counter-terrorist violence by making a place where it is safe to love and not be afraid of loving. Only when we have come to the place where we are guided by love rather than the fear and anger inside us are we fit to be peacemakers.

Resistance and practice

Only a spiritual conversion and discipline can make us fit to resist the violent forces within and without. And for spiritual discipline we need a spiritual community. Friends must come to understand that they stand in need of this discipline and this community as much as anyone else. Once we have experienced divine love we can begin the path but we still have to practice to know more. As Friends we must not hide from ourselves the extent to which the isolating forces of our culture have worked on our own monthly meeting communities. Are we, as Issac Pennington said, "...heaps of living coals warming each other"? We had better be if we mean to do peacemaking. We Friends cannot practice peace in the world until we have learned to practice peace in our meetings. And the "separate peace" indicated by the 20% attendance at our meetings for business will not serve for this crisis. Peacemaking needs the practice that comes from living in covenant with other Friends. If we cannot stand the stresses of threshing through meeting for business, we should question our preparedness for answering that of God in those who may be even more unpleasant than our fellow Quakers. We learn to serve others in the world by serving other Friends in our meetings. To walk the peace testimony rather than just talk it takes practice. The discipline, the self-discipline, needed to practice the peace testimony is learned at home.

Peacemaking means developing a way of living that is outside the mainstream of the culture that supports violence and terror. Fox recognized this in his distinction between those who he said were "in the Life" and those who were not. Living a new way, based on loving and caring for those around us, is something we have to work at (even after we have been cleared for membership). Friends (and I include myself) need to develop ways of cutting loose from those distractions and dependencies that keep people isolated from each other and unaware of the needs of those around us. Peacemakers must develop models of living and relating to each other that can be an example to those still trapped in the delusional system.

One of the things I have noted about early Friends is that they did not march or demonstrate in loud protest. They were confrontational only in the sense that their lives manifested something different. Friends of today may need to take heed of this fact. Maybe the reason our society isn't upset with us is that our lives don't manifest much that is different. If our lives manifest peace, I have no doubt that we will be a sufficient threat to those who have embraced violence. They will find us. We won't have to join protest marches. Our lives will demonstrate that we do not share the delusion of our leaders. There will be plenty of opportunity to demonstrate the non-violent spiritual basis of resistance because those under the delusion will not easily admit the possibility of living from a different basis than their own ideology. They will use the methods of that ideology against us.

Peacemaking will, without a doubt, involve suffering. Suffering is not an argument either for or against peacemaking. Suffering is the consequence of a world lost in the delusion of violence. This delusion surrounds us so we are not given the choice of suffering or not suffering. Those who think to choose non-violence in hope of escaping pain are certain to be disappointed. Faith in non-violence does not protect from violence any more than faith in violence protects from violence (though those of those of the second faith believe violence does protect, as witnessed by Friend Scott Simon). Our choice is either the endless, meaningless and hopeless suffering brought on by the counter-terrorist delusion or finding the meaningful, world-changing life that comes from living in the Light within. The faith of Friends protects us from becoming a contributor to the cycle of counter-terrorist violence by freeing us from the violence and fear we have inside.

The victorious power of non-violent resistance lies in its knowledge that within the counter-terrorist is an awareness of the deeper truth embodied in the faith of the nonviolent resister. This is what Fox was talking about when he urged Friends to "answer that of God in everyone." In the heart of the counter-terrorist is something that is waiting to be answered. The peacemaker says hello to that. This inward awareness can be answered because it instinctively responds to the caring and love of the peacemaker. This is what gives spiritual non-violence the strength to respond with love. The fact that the non-violent resister's faith may be a faith unto death does not diminish its merits. The cure for the delusion of the counter-terrorist is found in the lived spiritual reality that we are all creatures capable of love and caring and deserving of respect. This is what the Light makes manifest to us if we hold ourselves in it. Love and caring are the reality of what human relations are about and Friends can overcome the counter-terrorist delusion by making that reality manifest in the world.

Robert Griswold – for an address at Boulder Friends Mtg., Oct. 26, 2002, slightly revised Jan. 2003

From Dan Seeger's - The Seed and the Tree

Judgmentalism and Solidarity

A first step for developing a truly nonviolent sensibility is to stop being judgmental.To end judgmentalism is to help realize nonviolent social change.

With Cardinal Arns, we must never sit in judgment of the poor who may react violently to the violence of their oppressors. This part of the "judge not" equation is usually readily accepted by American social-change activists. The more difficult part of the equation is that we must not sit in judgment of their oppressors, either.

During the Second World War many people who are still active in the American Friends Service Committee refused to participate in a violent crusade against an evil deemed paradigmatic of all evil, German and Japanese fascism. This writer was not of age at the time, but I imagine if I had been able to circulate among my older pacifist colleagues back in the early 1940s, I would have found that whether they were in Civilian Public Service Camps or in jail, they were not sitting in judgment of those of their fellow citizens who participated in the military effort. More interesting, I have been led to believe that they did not sit in judgment of the Germans or the Japanese either, and in fact, to the extent that the American Friends Service Committee spoke out during the war years, it was usually to try to counter the crude public stereotypes of the German and Japanese people that were being advanced by the official culture, even as members of the American Friends Service Committee worked valiantly to rescue Jews, and later, to rehabilitate communities devastated by the terrible destruction wrought by both sides in the process of the war. Condemnation has no part in a truly peaceable outlook.

How far do we carry this in the present day? Contemporary social activists, including pacifists, are often willing to heap condemnation on others, not only on prominent individuals in political life, but on whole categories of humanity: the oppressor class, the military industrial complex, the Establishment.

To develop an effective nonviolent witness it is not enough simply to obey the commandment "Thou shalt not kill." The emotion of hatred can in its own way be as deadly as the act of killing. We may pretend to ourselves that it does not matter what our emotions are as long as we act rightly, but when the test comes we always betray ourselves, for our thoughts and emotions control our acts. If our minds are full of hatred and condemnation, this ultimately will be expressed in acts of violence and destruction and murder. We will eventually find that we seem to have no other choice.

The avoidance of judgmentalism, a key to the development of a nonviolent character, involves more than eschewing the condemnation and hatred of others. For passing a sentence on others is not the only form of judgmentalism there is; self-congratulation for having found the truth one tries to live by is judgmentalism in another form. A feeling of pride at having come to understandings which are not yet widely grasped is corrupting; it disables us as instruments of Truth. For how can one take credit for the experiences one has been given, the persons one has encountered, the emotional and intellectual makeup one has inherited and been nurtured into, all of which have led one, finally and at last, to grasp, probably imperfectly, some splinter of the truth which has been proclaimed by sages

since the beginning of human history? Can we be sure that if we were in another's shoes we would not have the same opinions and be behaving exactly the same way that he or she is doing?

The sparks of truth we find in others and in ourselves are occasions for joy and for thanksgiving, but no more than we are to condemn those of less perfect understanding are we to congratulate ourselves or each other for superior wisdom. Such an attitude would be fatal to the fabrication of a truly nonviolent witness. It is always the mark of true prophets that they never take personal credit for the wisdom it is given them to speak; they always have a finely developed sense of appreciation for the element of grace which underlies all achievements of insight.

Guilt is another form of judgmentalism which is equally fatal. It is judgmentalism turned inward on ourselves. Often, social-change advocates who are free in their condemnation of others are also mountains of guilt; consequently, their witness, rather than resulting in a clear minded attempt to help a social-change process, is often warped by subliminally generated programs of expiation which are useless.

It is not necessary to feel guilty for not having been tortured. It is not necessary to feel guilty for having been born an American citizen. It is not even necessary to be morosely preoccupied with one's own past lapses from virtue. As all great spiritual teachers have made clear, one's soul is inevitably colored by what one thinks. Wherever our thoughts dwell, so do we gradually become. Whether we are preoccupied with the condemnation of others or of ourselves, we dwell in baseness. Our spirits will grow coarse, our hearts stubborn, and we will be overcome with gloom. George Fox and the early Friends preached the good news that we can triumph over sin, but we do not achieve this triumph by brooding over the evils we ourselves have done. Rather, we must turn wholly away from evil, not dwell upon it, and do good.

What, then, are we left with as we choose not to criticize others, congratulate ourselves or feel guilt? We are left with an overwhelming feeling of solidarity, to use a contemporary term, or love, to use a scriptural one. It is not solidarity only with union organizers in Brazil, with peace activists in America, with the Red Guards or the Black Panthers, or with whatever other group may have captured a passing fancy. Indeed, we are no longer the narrow-minded person who thinks and says, "This individual is one of us, this one is not. This one is a stranger." Rather, we begin to get a glimmer of the whole of humankind as but one family. We begin to approach the unhesitating and unpremeditated solidarity with all human beings which is an essential ingredient of a truly nonviolent approach.

Such a love of humanity can be very abstract, and it is not real unless it is given concrete expression in the way we behave toward the specific individual human beings whom life brings across our path. To the extent that we can develop genuine human rapport with priests who have joined guerrilla undergrounds, with the directors of multi-national corporations, with people who work with us on a day-in, day-out basis, we give concrete expression to the larger principle of human community.

This sense of love of neighbor, of solidarity with all other human beings, is the basis not only of the teachings of Christ, but also of all other great spiritual teachings. For example, the Hasids expressed and practiced the teaching that love arises naturally and inevitably from the recognition that the same Lord lives in everyone. For them, one loves one's neighbor as oneself because, ultimately, the neighbor was oneself. "He who thrusts away his comrade," says the Besht, "thrusts himself away. He who thrusts away a particle of the unity, it is as if he thrusts away the whole." Marcus Aurelius wrote, "It is humankind's peculiar distinction to love even those who err and go astray. Such a love is born as soon as you realize that they are your brothers and sisters, that they are stumbling in ignorance, and not willfully; that in a short while both of you will be no more; and above all, that you yourself have taken no hurt, in that your own conscience and honor have not been made a jot worse than they were before" (*Meditations*: Chapter 7, verse 22). In the *Bhagavad Gita*, a sacred text of Hinduism, we find the passage: "Who burns with the bliss and suffers the sorrow of every creature within his own heart, making his own each bliss and each sorrow: him I hold the highest of all sages."

Does loving everyone mean assenting to everything they say? Does it relativize our search for Truth?

The Discernment of Truth

Ceasing the practice of condemnation and self-congratulation, and developing a bond of solidarity with all people, does not mean that one fails to discern truth from error, or greater truth from lesser

truth, nor does one cease to act vigorously for the realization of the principles of truth in human society.

To disagree with a person is not to interrupt our solidarity with him or her, to thrust her away, or to judge ourselves better than he is. Once it is clearly established in our awareness that our love for our fellow human beings is not a function of their beliefs and attitudes, it no longer becomes necessary to betray the truth by pretending that the diverse ideas of everyone within some arbitrarily defined "in-group" (sincere advocates of the liberation of the oppressed, for example) are equally valid. While the ideal lived by Jesus Christ of perfect love combined with perfect Truth may be beyond our capacities at a given moment, at least we know the goal for which we must strive.

Dan Seeger, **The Seed and the Tree** Pendle Hill Pamphlet 269 the complete pamphlet can be found at <http://coastsociology.org/silence.htm>