



2008 Triennial Sessions

July 9–13, 2008
High Point, North Carolina, USA

Renewing the Quaker Testimony on Peace

Betty Carter Peace Lecture
Thursday, July 10, 2008

By Landrum Bolling

The 2008 Betty Carter Peace Lectureship is distinct from previous lectures. By special request from the Friends United Meeting program committee, and through the generosity of Earlham College, the lecture will be held during the Friends United Meeting Triennial sessions in High Point, North Carolina. Wayne Carter will be present to introduce Landrum Bolling as the 2008 Betty Carter Peace lecturer.

June 17, 2008

The Betty Carter Peace Lectureship was established by Wayne and Betsy Carter (parents) and Philman Bickel (husband), as an annual lecture exploring the religious and social dimensions of creating community, national and international peace in a world beset with violence, injustice, oppression and suffering. As a living memorial to Elizabeth Lynn Carter Bickel (10-15-57 to 12-28-84), those establishing this lectureship seek to bring outstanding persons of Christian faith, scholarship and experience, who are noteworthy for their investigation into the role that moral vision, religious tradition, theology and a life of spiritual sensitivity bring to questions of peace, human relations and human need in our time. The Christian dimension of these concerns for peace can be presented in ways that are fresh and new. The lecture, to be held each spring, shall be widely publicized in order to bring together the surrounding community in the same linking of faith with these critical concerns for peace as Betty Carter Bickel attempted in her own life.

Highly regarded for her competency and professionalism as a news reporter, Betty Carter, as she was known professionally, was much appreciated and greatly respected by the entire community for her integrity and perceptiveness in gathering and reporting the news, for her warmth of spirit and for her conscientious, insightful, supportive participation in community affairs. The meeting of persons' needs, the effective functioning of community organizations and the peaceful resolution of conflict situations were of high priority to her, as she actively sought Christ's guidance and Divine illumination in all areas of life.

Nominations for the Betty Carter Peace Lectureship should be made to the Lectureship Committee no later than the early fall. The committee shall be comprised of the Director of Peace and Global Studies of Earlham College, a faculty member from the Religion department of the college and the dean of the Earlham School of Religion. To the extent that their time and geographic locale permit, a member of the Carter-Bickel family will join the committee in its selection of a lecturer.

April 17, 1985

Renewing the Quaker Testimony on Peace

By Landrum Bolling

In the rush of our daily lives, in the midst of the turmoil and the seemingly endless conflicts around us, we need periods of purposeful reflection. At times, that reflection will lead us to confront the eternal existential questions: Who are we? Where are we going? What are our basic values and purposes? What are our ultimate goals? What are our most important daily interests and responsibilities? What are the real guidelines, spoken or unspoken, by which we live?

This is true for institutions, associations, communities — even corporate businesses and Quaker meetings. Individually and collectively, at times, we need to make a probing evaluation of our work, our life style and our human relationships, and question how they reflect, how they relate to, or do not relate to, our professed beliefs and assumptions. Clearly, we hope that our core beliefs do shape our patterns of behavior and do define and energize our involvement in the programs of social action to which we give our energies and support. We may not fully agree, but we remember that classic pronouncement: “The unexamined life is not worth living.”

Self examination at a very deep level need not be morbid or escapist or narcissistic. To question what we do or say or think or believe about even the most important things in our lives is not to deny or repudiate our inner selves or our shared commitments. As human beings, we know that we constantly fall short of our potential — and of our own self-expectations. We regret things we have done and things we have left undone. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, as scripture taught us long ago. But knowing and accepting these realities, we are not to submerge ourselves in self-flagellating guilt, or escapist excuses or defeatist apologies.

Instead, we should see ourselves challenged to re-examine our attitudes, our behavior, our work habits—and to ask ourselves about how deeply we understand and are committed to the ideals and beliefs we profess. Perhaps, even, we may find ourselves led to re-examine, in the light of changing circumstances, how we define and how we may best carry out our core beliefs. Most importantly, we are called to search for new and better ways, strategies, processes and procedures by which to work more effectively toward achieving the highest purposes that inspire us.

It is with this background of questioning reflections, that I approach our topic, “Renewing the Quaker Testimony on Peace.”

Let me begin by confessing that I have a certain amount of discomfort in using the term “Quaker Testimony on Peace.” I also am not totally comfortable categorizing Friends, Mennonites and the Church of the Brethren as “the historic peace churches.”

To be sure, I share what we might, I suppose, call our humble Quakerly pride in the record of our community’s long history of opposition to war. We are still inspired by the example of George Fox and other early Friends who refused to participate in or bless any side in the violent conflicts that raged in Britain in the mid-seventeenth century.

Yet over the centuries other religious communities have taken up the cause of peace and the struggle against war. I have been impressed within recent years at how vigorously and devotedly certain significant segments of the Roman Catholic Church have come to the forefront of the peace movement. One of the most committed pacifists I have ever met is an American member of the Russian Orthodox Church.

We are joined, I think we must say, in a broad ecumenical Witness for Peace.

The doctrine of nonviolent resistance to war and to other manifestations of hatred, oppression and violence, has been taken up by both evangelical and mainstream Christians, by Jews and by Muslims. It is widely supported by Buddhists and Hindus. Gandhi, we remember, was a devout, practicing Hindu.

It is abundantly evident that there is today a broad ecumenical, interfaith testimony against war, rooted in diverse approaches to the spiritual life. Indeed, we might say there is an over-arching Spiritual Peace Witness, shared by religious believers of many faiths around the world. That reality must make us a bit more modest about claims we may make in regard to a Quaker Peace Witness.

These reflections lead us around to an examination of the growing, increasingly global reach of the secular, humanistic political-economic analyses of war and peace and the intellectual, academic study of what has come to be called conflict management and conflict resolution. Such labeling is in no way intended to set up these endeavors as being

perhaps incompatible with what I am calling a Spiritual Witness. We all have much to learn from the scholars and trainers, now widely scattered over the earth, who are focusing on the practical issues of negotiation principles and techniques. Individual Friends and Quaker institutions are actively engaged in some of these initiatives.

However, we believe as members of the Religious Society of Friends that the spiritual insights and leadings of early Quakers, and the testimonies in word and deed of their heirs down to today need to be re-examined, renewed and reaffirmed.

The Christian communities have been shockingly divided for many centuries over issues of doctrine, hierarchical administration, church polity, liturgy and human relationships. Questions related to political affairs and the economy have been as contentious among Christians as in all the rest of society. Christians as individuals and their institutions have been caught up in evils of discrimination and oppression, violence and war. Some of the worst wars in human history have been religious wars, some of them pitting some Christians against other Christians.

Nevertheless, despite all the failings of organized Christianity, the messages conveyed by the words and deeds of Jesus, though often muffled, have not been lost. They are as fresh, as timely and as relevant as they have ever been. The teachings of Jesus on human conflict, violence, forgiveness, reconciliation and peace have been, are and will remain the basis of the Quaker Peace Testimony.

We know the main points. They ring out loud and clear above all the noises of divisive argument, the cries of anger and hatred, the screams of fear and pain, the shouts of battle.

- *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*
- *Love thy neighbor as thyself.*
- *Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you and pray for them that despitefully use you.*
- *Recompense no man evil for evil.*
- *As much as lieth within you, live peaceably with all men.*
- *If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink.*
- *Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.*

These are the admonitions of Jesus — some of them — as recorded by the writers of the Gospels. They are as radical today as they were when he uttered them. They are as relevant today as they were when George Fox endeavored to make them foundational elements of the Christian movement he initiated.

What went wrong? Why has the Christian movement which has spread so widely over the world not lived up to, not carried out those teachings of Jesus on war and peace?

Some historians say that, to a very large extent Christians of the first two centuries did in fact try to live by the pacifist vision. Christians refused again and again to serve in the Roman legions. They made it clear that their religion directed them into peaceful pursuits and away from military engagements. Then in the early part of the fourth century the Emperor Constantine became a Christian and soon, by imperial decree, made a vast number of other people nominal Christians as well. Marrying Christianity to an all-powerful, military-controlled empire was not an effective way of instilling a new morality, a new ethic, a new world view that advocated loving ones enemies and doing good to those who do evil.

In any case, the cultures of empires and kingdoms and republics, of democratic or authoritarian societies, have tended toward a dependence on armed might, encouraged by widely shared fears and hostilities toward the others — people different from ourselves.

Through the ages, mankind has lurched from one period of instability to another, from one form of national or ethnic or religious rivalry to another — intermittently, from one war, great or small, to another. Alliances, security pacts, confederations, treaties of good will and peaceful intentions, the League of Nations, the United Nations, NATO — all these are symbols of the international desire to find a way to put an end to war — or, more honestly, to gain what many, if not most, nations today seem to value above everything else. That is called Security.

Even the United States of America, the one remaining Super Power, spending more money for military purposes than all the rest of the world combined, holding in readiness enough atomic weapons to blow up the entire globe, this Super Power is now fighting the longest war of its entire history because its democratically elected government decided, so it said, that American security was under dire and immediate threat.

Meanwhile, the State of Israel, overwhelmingly victorious in a six day war fought 40 years ago, is still engaged in violent conflict with Arab adversaries, including four million Palestinians under a harsh military occupation. The Israeli people clearly want peace but their government fears that the terms of peace proposed by the Arabs would jeopardize Israel's national security. Security concerns trump everything else.

Also, meanwhile, in the chaotic Democratic Republic of the Congo there continues a long-worsening conflict that, though largely ignored by the world, has probably killed, wounded, raped, driven from their homes more victims than have been harmed in all the wars fought since the end of World War II.

These are “situations on the ground” as we meet in this quiet, peaceful, comfortable setting to contemplate the Quaker Peace Testimony.

Where are we going? What can we do?

We could spend many days pondering these questions. And we could so easily conclude that we have no answers. In immediately practical political terms, we don't. Nor do the Political, Diplomatic, Security expert elite. They don't know, either.

But I am convinced that by going back to our spiritual roots — broadening and updating our understanding of the witness Jesus made so long ago, recommitting ourselves to an unceasing search for insight and wisdom — in time, we can make an immense contribution to fulfilling the mission, the weight of which presses upon all of us.

We must begin, I believe, with serious work upon ourselves.

- We should use our best efforts to gain a clear, honest, comprehensive understanding of the real conflict-torn world of which we are a part. There is no substitute for knowing the facts and facing the truth, however unpleasant.
- We should guard ourselves against the sinister temptation to obsess on the difficulties, the dangers, the horrors of the conflicts that beset us—and we should resist the insidious pleasures of criticizing the leaders who we consider to be responsible for the mess we are in. The acceptance of the role of moral superiority is not the right preparation for constructive contribution to the building of a peaceful world.
- We should devote more time to prayer and meditation, daily, so that we are able to draw on the springs of spiritual creativity, not drown in the well of intellectual negativity.
- We should seek out every opportunity to engage in constructive dialogue with all types of people who are affected by or concerned about the turmoil and conflicts of our day. We can learn from all kinds of people — and must.

We must set forth a fresh vision of what a peaceful world would be like — and credible suggestions of how to build support to get there. These are among the key declarations we must make in our renewed affirmation of a Quaker Testimony for Peace:

- All wars must end. The survival of the human race demands that we stop organized, state approved killing.
- We are all children of the same God. He loves us all. His command to us is to love one another.
- To love one another we must know one another, respect one another, accept one another, communicate with one another. No one should be excluded from the circle.
- Disputes, disagreements, conflicts must be addressed with openness, patience and forgiveness — and in the conviction that reconciliation is the ultimately reachable goal.

Biography



Landrum Bolling served as president of Earlham College from 1958-73, then as president and chairman of the board of Lilly Endowment. In 1982 he became research professor at the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service. He has been awarded honorary degrees by more than 15 U.S. and foreign colleges and universities.

Landrum is currently director-at-large of Mercy Corps International, a nonprofit voluntary organization that exists to alleviate suffering, poverty and oppression by helping build secure, productive and just communities.

Now, well into his 90s, Landrum is still working, traveling and speaking, helping unite disparate peoples into peaceful relationships founded on mutual respect and equal justice. Landrum's faith-based efforts have taken him to many parts of our conflicted world, including Bosnia, Sarajevo, Kosovo and throughout the Middle East. He is widely recognized as one of this era's effective ambassadors for peace.

Landrum Bolling's home remains in Richmond, Indiana, where he continues to be a member of Clear Creek Meeting.



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