

FAITH
AND
PRACTICE
Book of Discipline

NORTH CAROLINA YEARLY MEETING OF FRIENDS
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Introduction

The Expanding Appreciation of Truth

Human understanding of truth is always subject to growth. This basic principle also underlies the development of the organizations and institutions through which the spirit of Christianity is made operative in life. While fundamental principles are eternal, expressions of truth and methods of Christian activity should develop in harmony with the needs of the times. God, who spoke through the prophets, and supremely in Jesus Christ, still speaks through men and women who have become new Creatures in Christ, being transformed by the renewing of their minds and, therefore, able and willing to receive fresh revelations of truth.

Frequently, however, we see “through a glass, darkly” and may misinterpret or make incorrect applications. Therefore, as the stream of life flows on, bringing new conceptions, insights, and situations, it is necessary to strive constantly for a clearer comprehension of divine truth that will enter vitally into personal experience and become a creative factor for the redemption of human character and the remolding of society on the Christian pattern. “A religion based on truth must be progressive. Truth being so much greater than our conception of it, we should ever be making fresh discoveries.”¹

Origin and Development of the Discipline

The term “discipline” is used by Friends to designate those arrangements which they have instituted for their civil and religious nurture and guidance as a Christian group. For almost a decade following the beginning of the ministry of George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends, his followers were without organization, but as they grew in unity and in numbers there arose responsibilities to

¹ London Yearly Meeting, *Faith and Practice* (1960), 120.

admonish, encourage, and help one another both in spiritual and in temporal affairs. They found it necessary to make certain provisions for the preservation of order in their fellowship and for the care of the poor and those who suffered for conscience sake.

There was also need for the supervision of the exercise of spiritual gifts and of the work of publishing truth. The rules and advices pertaining to such ministrations were finally incorporated in the discipline. The earliest Quaker advice on Christian practice was issued by the famous gathering of Friends at Balby in Yorkshire in 1656, a statement that well described the spirit which should characterize all books of discipline: "Dearly beloved friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form 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 the spirit giveth life."

An important step in the development of the discipline was the drafting by George Fox in 1668 of a body of advices and regulations to which his opponents gave the name of "Canons and Institutions." This served for a long time as the discipline of the Society, although the name was formally disclaimed by Friends in 1675. It formed the basis for the *Discipline of London Yearly Meeting* and for all later books of discipline. As the various yearly meetings were established in America, each prepared and adopted its own book of discipline but there was much similarity because of the common use of material from older editions. These disciplines were revised from time to time as the rules and advices which they contained became inadequate and inappropriate. Thus, as the conscience of Friends became aware of the evils involved in human slavery or in the use of intoxicating drinks, these convictions were expressed in their disciplines.

Adoption of the Uniform Discipline

Many diverse factors during the latter half of the nineteenth century had affected the outlook, activities, and relationships of members of the Society of Friends. As these cross currents were faced in the conferences of yearly meetings held in 1887, 1892, and 1897 sentiment developed for a closer union of the yearly meetings to be accomplished partly by a general representative meeting and partly by

the adoption of a uniform discipline. A committee of two representatives from each of the yearly meetings taking part in the conference of 1897 was appointed to formulate a plan of union and to prepare the proposed discipline. "The Constitution and Discipline for the American Yearly Meeting of Friends," the official name of the new discipline, was adopted by the yearly meetings of New England, Wilmington, Indiana, and Kansas in 1900; California, New York, Western, and Baltimore in 1901; Oregon, North Carolina, and Iowa in 1902; Nebraska, when it was established in 1908. Canadian Yearly Meeting, when received into the Five Years Meeting in 1907, was given the privilege of adapting the Discipline to its own needs.

The Book of *Faith and Practice*

The Uniform Discipline met quite acceptably the needs of the yearly meetings which adopted it. But the revolutionary changes in life and thought experienced in the twentieth century brought to Friends the realization that the statements of faith and practice as set forth by the Discipline should be re-examined and revised that they might more adequately meet the needs of the yearly meetings. This concern found expression in numerous proposals by yearly meetings for amendments to the Discipline. Eventually in 1940, the Executive Committee of the Five Years Meeting recommended to the body that steps be taken for a revision. The Five Years Meeting of 1940 appointed a committee which was instructed to prepare a revised draft of the Discipline for the consideration of the Five Years Meeting and its constituent yearly meetings. The present book of *Faith and Practice* is the work of this committee, with some changes and adaptations made by North Carolina in 1947. Minor corrections were made when a new edition was printed in 1956. A few further changes were made in the 1962 and the 1967 printings. Major changes in the organizational structure of the yearly meeting were included in the 1970 printing. This 2004 edition includes revisions to *Faith and Practice* that were approved by Representative Body between 2001 and 2003.

