

The "I's" Have It

Life and Action
In
The Religious Society of Friends

NCYM Faith and Practice

- The "I's" are two words that have a great deal to do with Quaker life and action.
- Incarnation
- Integrity

Incarnate/incarnation

- Incarnate – to give bodily, especially human form to
- Incarnate or incarnation comes from the same root word as "carnal" which means flesh. Therefore, to incarnate something is to enclose it in flesh, to give it a body or physical form.

The Incarnation

- We refer to Jesus as "God incarnate", as John says:
- The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.
- John 1:14

Living incarnationally

- Because Christ lives in us, we become the incarnation of his indwelling presence.
- I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.
- Galatians 2:20

Walk the Talk

- There's also another way in which we "incarnate" our faith. When we act on our beliefs, when we put into outward practice our inward beliefs, we are giving them visible expression or incarnating them.
- Jesus told his followers to "let your line shine before men that they might see your good works."

Faith Without Works

- James told the early church that “faith without works is dead.”
- Or as Donald Miller author of *Blue Like Jazz* said, “what I believe is not what I say, what I believe is what I do.”
- Incarnation is translating the believing into doing.

Integrity

- The other “I” is integrity. A little later we will talk about this concept as one of the normative Quaker testimonies, but it is more than that, it is also the foundation upon which all our life and action is built.
- We may think of a term like honesty or truthfulness as a synonym for integrity, but it actually means much more than that.

An integrated life

- Integrity comes from the same word as integrated or integral.
- Integrate – to bring together or incorporate into a unified, harmonious, or interrelated whole or system
- Integral –composed of parts that together constitute a whole
- So integrity really means “walking the talk”

Normative Testimonies

- Most of what is included in the Life and Action section of our Faith and Practice can be summed up in the 5 testimonies usually associated with Quakers:
 - Simplicity
 - Peace
 - Integrity
 - Community
 - Equality

New Testament Christianity Revived

- One fact of Quaker history emerges, early Friends invented no new doctrines; they merely rediscovered the basic, elemental teachings of Jesus. Every single testimony which they proclaimed and practiced had been in the teachings of Jesus all the while.
- Seth Hinshaw

The Kingdoms of this world are now become . .

Early Friends looked forward with great eagerness to the scene in Revelation 21 in which Christ comes to live among his people in a new heaven and a new earth that has been prepared and made ready to be ruled by Him. They saw themselves as partners, co-laborers with Christ in bringing about this new heaven and earth- a place where God's kingdom has come and his will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

The Kingdom of our God

- In the early chapters of the gospel of Matthew (5-7), Jesus begins his public ministry picking up the message John the Baptist had been proclaiming, “Change your life, God’s kingdom is here” (The Message) or in more traditional language “Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” In his first recorded message, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus lays out what has come to be known as “the Kingdom Manifesto”, the lifestyle and values of this new kingdom.

The Kingdom of God is at hand

- Since Quakers understood the kingdom of God to be a present reality, and one they were helping extend, they believed the kingdom values as taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount were not just about how life would be lived someday when the kingdom was fully come, but were meant to be an INTEGRAL part of the life of every believer.

Children of Light

- Quakers fully embraced the words of Jesus in the name they gave themselves, the Children of Light
- *You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. . . . In the same way, let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*
- This “letting your light shine before men” involved a witness to the Living Christ in all of life, not just in words spoken to share the good news of the kingdom, but in deeds and actions as well.

How many testimonies were there?

Although we talk about “testimonies” today, the early Quakers had only one testimony- a radical obedience to the Light of Christ that affected every part of their lives. As was noted, Fox felt that the church had been in a state of apostasy since the time of Constantine (c 329 AD), and refocusing on these “kingdom values” was a major part of reviving and restoring New Testament Christianity. We use the acronym SPICE to refer to some of the ways this testimony of obedience to Jesus was lived out. All of these components –simplicity, peace, integrity, and equality were grounded in the Sermon on the Mount.

Simplicity

- To early Quakers, simple living was what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 6: 32, 33
- *So do not worry saying, what shall we eat or what shall we drink, or what shall we wear? For the pagans run after all these things and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and these things will be given to you as well.*
- Or as Fox put it, Friends should “free themselves from luxurious, self-indulgent ways of living” and seek a depth and purity of life consistent with “the Light within.”

The Parable of the Sower and the Seed

- In this parable, Jesus said that the seed that fell among the weeds and was choked out was like people who let the pursuit of possessions and wealth and the “cares of this world” keep them from producing a harvest for the kingdom.
- Early Friends were very concerned that they not become over extended in their business pursuits or unduly occupied with the things of this world.

Queries on Simple Living (pg 54)

- Do you observe simplicity and moderation in your manner of living? Do you give proper attention to the rules of health? Are you careful to avoid all places of amusement that are inconsistent with Christian character? Do you practice total abstinence from tobacco, narcotics, and alcoholic beverages?
- Do you avoid such undue expansion of your business responsibilities as to endanger your personal integrity? Are you truthful and honest in your business transactions, punctual in fulfilling your promises, and prompt in the payment of your debts?

The Peace Testimony

- There is strong evidence both in the writings and actions of the early church that the entire Christian movement was pacifist in nature until the time of Constantine, giving literal and radical obedience to the words of Jesus:
- *But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also . . . Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.*
- This was extended beyond the individual's response to society as well from Jesus' words to Pilate, "my kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."

Friends' Historic Peace Testimony

- We utterly deny all outward wars and strife, and fighting with outward weapons, for any end or under any pretense whatsoever . . . And we certainly know and testify to the whole world that the Spirit of Christ, which leads us into all truth, will never move us to fight and war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the kingdom of Christ nor for the kingdoms of this world
George Fox, 1660
- We condemn war as the greatest violation of the sacredness of human life and reaffirm our faith that all war is absolutely contrary to the plain precepts of Christ, and the whole spirit of His Gospel. We hold that no argument of necessity or policy, however urgent or peculiar, can avail to release individuals or nations from obedience to the teachings of Him who said, "Love your enemies." It is our purpose to live in that spirit that takes away the occasion for war and to suffer violence, if necessary, as did our Lord, but never return evil for evil.
North Carolina Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice

That Life and Power

- But I told them I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion for all wars
George Fox
- He who has brought us to Himself has not prescribed for man precepts which are incapable of being carried into practice, or of which the practice is to be postponed until all shall be persuaded to act upon them. We cannot doubt that they are incumbent now, and that we have in the prophetic Scriptures the distinct intimation of their direct application not only to individuals, but to nations also (Isaiah 2:4, Micah 4:1). When nations conform their laws to this divine teaching, wars must necessarily cease.
Richmond Declaration of Faith, 1887

Peace and justice

- Quakers also became concerned with addressing the causes of war and have tried throughout their history to work for both social and economic justice believing there can be no real peace without fairness and justice for all.

Queries on Peace (pg 54-55)

- Do you consistently practice the Christian principles of love and goodwill toward all men? Do you work actively for peace and for the removal of the causes of war? Do you observe the testimony of Friends against military training and service? Do you endeavor to make clear to all whom you can influence that war is inconsistent with the spirit and teaching of Jesus?
- Are you concerned that our economic system shall so function as to sustain and enrich the life of all? Are you giving positive service to society in the promotion of peaceful methods of adjustment in all cases of social and industrial conflict? Do you as workers, employers, producers, consumers, and investors endeavor to cultivate goodwill and mutual understanding in your economic relationships? Do you intelligently exercise all your constitutional privileges and thus seek to promote Christian influence locally, nationally and internationally?

Quaker Integrity

- As was noted, to the early Quakers this was the most important testimony of all. When God gave the ten commandments to the children of Israel, they were told “do not take the Lord’s name in vain.” Although this command has often been associated with swearing, the original meaning was much deeper and more comprehensive, about not living up to the name of being God’s people. Fox made a strong distinction between “professors” and “possessors”, those who claimed to know Jesus and those whose lives bore out that claim.

Do not swear

- Jesus carried this a step further in the Sermon on the Mount when he told his followers :
- Again you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’ But I tell you, do not swear at all, either by heaven for it is God’s throne, or by the earth for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem for it is the city of the Great King.

Let Your Yes be Yes

- And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your Yes be Yes, and your No be No; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.
- Matthew 5: 33-35
- Early Friends were perplexed by a society that required them to swear on the same book in which Jesus told them not to swear at all by anything.

Living It Out

- In addition to refusing to swear oaths in court, the testimony for integrity also led Friends to be scrupulous in truth telling. Integrity meant telling the truth all the time so there was no need on any occasion to swear to tell the truth.
- It also led Friends to set fixed prices on their goods and services, rather than changing the price depending on who was buying.
- It also led Friends to some very particular testimonies in seeking to have their “walk match their talk.” For example, not only could a person opposed to slavery not own slaves, but they could not with integrity purchase goods or services produced by slave labor.

Community

- Friends put a strong emphasis on living in community with God, and with one another. Fox used the phrase “coming to know each other in that which is eternal” to describe what happens in community. Along with Scripture, the gathered community was the place where individual leadings were weighed and tested (remember the three legged stool).

Checks and Balances

- Friends lived under the authority of their local meeting community. In the early days, people could not move or marry or even travel without the approval of the community. Quakers like John Woolman would not even publish their writing without first getting the approval of the local meeting.

Reconciliation

- Friends were also very conscious of their responsibility to maintain community by reconciling their differences and living in harmony with one another.
- *Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift.*
- Matthew 5:23-24

Queries on Community

- Do you love one another as becomes the followers of Christ? Are you careful of the reputation of others? When differences arise, do you make earnest effort to end them speedily?
- Do you seek the conversion and spiritual development of your young people? Do you endeavor to instruct them in the principles and practices of Friends? Do you strive to create a community life that will promote their mental and physical well-being?

Equality

- Just as Peter learned that God was “no respecter of persons”, early Friends understood that the Light of Christ was present in each and every person, so all were equal. In the early days, they refused to take off their hats or bow or use formal language as an honor to those whom society saw as “higher class,” but treated everyone the same regardless of rank or social position.

The Spiritual Capacity of All People

- Early Friends recognized the spiritual capacity of all people and were among the first to allow women to take an equal part in the ministry.
- Quakers were also insistent on the spiritual capacity of all men including Native Americans and enslaved Africans.
- Do you know why 18th century Quakers all dressed in “Quaker gray” ?
-

James 2:1-4

- My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing the fine clothes and say, “here's a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “you stand there,” or “sit on the floor by my feet,” have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Unto the least of these

- In another message, Jesus took equality even further by saying that if “you did it unto the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.” So Quakers understood when they were serving others, particularly those who were less fortunate, they were performing service to Christ himself. And since Christ is the true Light “that lights every man” all were equally children of God.

There is no difference

- Elizabeth Frye in speaking of her work among those incarcerated at Newgate prison said:
- Much depends on the spirit in which the visitor enters her work. She must not say in her heart I am better than thee, but must constantly keep in mind that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”

A Query on Equality

- Does your attitude toward people of other races indicate your belief in their right to equal opportunity? Do you believe in the spiritual capacity of men of all races and do you recognize their equality in the sight of God? Are you aware of your responsibility as a Christian to help in the elimination of racial discrimination and prejudice?

Quaker Life and Action

- To labor for the perfect redemption from the spirit of oppression is the great business of the whole family of Jesus Christ in this world
- John Woolman
- In proper balance with personal evangelism, there must be dedicated service –wherever there is any form of human need “thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” means that we commit ourselves to being instruments of His love and compassion in achieving this end
- Seth Hinshaw