NPYM Committee on the Discipline

Questions for Local Friends Groups on the TESTIMONY OF INTEGRITY

Note: The current NPYM Faith & Practice does not contain a section of advices and queries explicitly about integrity or truth. In the revised outline presented at Annual Session 2007, the Committee on the Discipline suggests incorporating under the general heading of INTEGRITY the current advices and queries on Witness and Civic Responsibility from current chapter 6 together with parts of Living In the World from Chapter 5.

This “Questions for Local Friends Groups” document shows what is currently in our book of Faith & Practice about integrity. Page references are to the 1993 edition. For questions to stimulate discussion about this material, see the last section.

From Chapter 5, Our Faith In Practice,” pp. 25-27, where this material was combined with “simplicity and sincerity;” also some quotations brought in from Chapter 4, and two queries from Simplicity which might pertain here.

Integrity, essential to all communication between one and another and between one and God, has always been a basic goal of Friends. Great care should be observed in speech. Factual statements should be as accurate as possible, without exaggeration or omission.

Friends regard the custom of taking oaths as not only contrary to the teachings of Jesus but as implying the existence of a double standard of truth. Thus, on all occasions when special statements are required, it is recommended that Friends take the opportunity to make simple affirmations, thus emphasizing that their statements are only a part of their usual integrity of speech.

Quotations

From p. 25

At the first convincement, when Friends could not put off their hats to people, or say You to a single person, but Thou and Thee; when they could not bow, or use flattering words in salutations, or adopt the fashions and customs of the world, many Friends, that were tradesmen of several sorts, lost their customers at the first; for the people were shy of them, and would not trade with them; so that for a time some Friends could hardly get money enough to buy bread. But afterwards, when people came to have experience of Friends’ honesty and truthfulness, and found that their Yea was yea, and their Nay was nay; that they kept to a word in their dealings, and that they would not cozen and cheat them; but that if they sent a child to their shops for anything, they were as well used as if they had come themselves; the lives and conversations of Friends did preach, and reached to the witness of God in the people.

George Fox, 1653

From p. 19

Conscience follows the judgment, doth not inform it; but this light as it is received, removes the blindness of the judgment, opens the understanding, and rectifies both the judgment and the conscience. The conscience is an excellent thing where it is rightly informed and enlightened; wherefore some of us have fitly compared it to the lantern, and the light of Christ to the candle: a lantern is useful, when a clear candle burns and shines in it, but otherwise of no use. To the light of Christ then in the conscience, and not to man’s natural conscience, it is that we continually commend men.

Robert Barclay, 1676
That which the people called Quakers lay down as a main fundamental in religion is this, that God through Christ hath placed a principle in every man to inform him of his duty, and to enable him to do it; and that those that live up to this principle are the people of God, and those that live in disobedience to it are not God’s people, whatever name they may bear or profession they may make of religion. This is their ancient, first, and standing testimony. With this they began, and this they bore and do bear to the world.

William Penn, 1693

It’s a dangerous thing to lead young Friends much into the observation of outward things, which may be easily done, for they can soon get into an outward garb, to be all alike outwardly, but this will not make them true Christians: it’s the Spirit that gives life. I would be loath to have a hand in these things....

Margaret Fell Fox, 1698

For Friends the most important consideration is not the right action in itself but a right inward state out of which right action will arise. Given the right inward state right action is inevitable. Inward state and outward action are component parts of a single whole.

Howard Brinton, 1943

While seeking to interpret our Christian faith in the language of today, we must remember that there is one worse thing than failure to practice what we profess, and that is to water down our profession to match our practice.

Friends World Conference, 1952

Advices
(There are currently no Advices in the NPYM Faith & Practice specific to the topic of Integrity.)

Queries
From p. 49, currently with queries on Simplicity

Do we keep to a single standard of truth, so that we are free from the use of judicial and other oaths? Are we punctual in keeping promises, prompt in the payment of debts, and just and honorable in all our dealings?

Some questions for discussion around the Testimony of Integrity in NPYM’s Faith & Practice

From NPYM Friends and the Committee on the Discipline

- How do you define “integrity” in the context of Quaker testimonies?
- How does integrity relate to our other testimonies (simplicity, equality, community, peace/harmony)?
- Integrity has some inward aspects. Perhaps more needs to be said on the integration of the inner and outer life (see Josephine Duvenek, Life on Two Levels). Where would you start?
- Refusing to take the judicial oath is one way Friends have expressed the testimony of integrity. What are other ways?
• How does this testimony manifest itself in your daily life as a Quaker? In the life of your worship group or meeting?

• What’s missing from this current material that you find central to Quaker concept of integrity?

• Are there parts of this section that you think would belong better in some other part of NPYM’s Faith & Practice? Parts that you think could be deleted?

• What have you learned from other Friends about integrity? What have they said that has been worth remembering?

• What books, pamphlets, articles, or other resources can you recommend about Friends’ testimony of integrity?

• What can we say to each other about honesty? See Ethical Business Relationships by Lee Thomas Jr.

• Do the topics of leadership and keeping low (humility) merit inclusion as subtopics of the testimony of Integrity?