

WIDER QUAKER FELLOWSHIP, AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

LETTER 136

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Dear Friends,

Well, the holiday season is coming to an end – I do hope that you enjoyed at least some part and preferably all of it. Now that things are returning to “normal”, it feels good to come back to the familiar routine with a feeling of refreshment.

Last November I attended a workshop in which we were asked to select the Quaker testimony that we felt was most important and to speak about it. Several of us chose “Integrity”, partly because of our personal experience and partly because of the knowledge that many of our spiritual ancestors were known for straight dealing in an age when deviousness and corruption were all too common. At the workshop, personal experience tended to predominate.

Since then I’ve felt the need to explore the basis for Quaker association with integrity and to see how other Friends have regarded it. I’m using this Letter to share my findings with you.

Yours in Friendship,

Ruth Gadgil.

Integrity

The *New Zealand Oxford Dictionary* defines integrity as “moral uprightness; honesty; wholeness; soundness.”

The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* refers to an unbroken and uncorrupted state; soundness of moral principle; and sincerity.

There is no doubt that Quakers have always subscribed to the notion of moral uprightness and honesty.

In 1694 George Fox wrote

“In fairs also, and in markets, I was made [by God] to declare against their deceitful merchandise and cheating and cozening, warning all to deal justly, to speak the truth, to let their ‘yea’ be ‘yea’ and their ‘nay’ be ‘nay’”.

Journal of George Fox (1694).

John Woolman understood that this was not an easy way to follow :

To conform a little to a wrong way strengthens the hands of such who carry wrong customs to their utmost extent; and the more a person appears to be virtuous and heavenly-minded, the more powerfully does his conformity operate in favour of evil-doers... what language is sufficient to set forth the strength of those obligations we are under to beware lest by our example we lead others wrong?

John Woolman, 1763: Britain Yearly Meeting *Quaker Faith and Practice* 1995: 20 47.

In 1721 a Yorkshire butcher who had become a convinced Quaker, reported in his own idiom the difficulties that he had experienced when converting to the new faith:

“I remember when I first met with my Guide [God]. He led me to a very large [place] where I was to speak the truth from my heart – and before I used to swear and lie too for gain. ‘Nay, then’ said I to my Guide, ‘I mun leave Thee here: if Thou leads me up that lane, I can never follow: I’se be ruined of this butchering trade, if I mun’t lie for a gain.’ Here I left my Guide, and was filled with sorrow, and went back to the Weeping Cross: and I said, if I could find my good Guide again, I’ll follow Him, lead me whither He will. So here I found my Guide again, and began to follow Him up this lane and tell the truth from my heart. I had been nought but beggary and poverty before; and now I began to thrive at my trade, and got to the end of this lane, though with some difficulty. ... my wife cried ‘We’se all be ruined: what, is thee ganging stark mad to follow t’silly Quakers? Here I struggled and cried, and begged of my Guide to stay and take my pace: and presently my wife was convinced.”

Luke Cock, 1721: Britain Yearly Meeting *Quaker Faith and Practice* 1995: 20.22.

In the nineteenth century, Quakers featured largely in the industrial revolution.

It is a story of initiative and inventiveness, of integrity and good human relations, shown in a multitude of ways. Some of its success comes from the exclusion from the universities; some from plain honesty, which is in the long run good business. ... In consequence there are Quaker names established in the industrial and commercial world: Barclay, Lloyd, Fry, Rowntree, Cadbury...

Harold Loukes, 1960: *The Discovery of Quakerism*. Quaker Home Service, London.

Integrity is a condition in which a person’s response to a total situation can be trusted ... This condition of trust is different from the recognition that he will always be kind or always tell the truth. The integrity of some Dutch Friends I have met showed itself during the war in their willingness to tell lies to save their Jewish friends from the Gestapo or from starvation.

Kenneth C. Barnes, 1972: Britain Yearly Meeting *Quaker Faith and Practice* 1995: 20.44.

To list the attributes of Christian quality would be to repeat much of the Sermon on the Mount. They can be summed up as personal integrity combined with compassion.

1903: Britain Yearly Meeting *Quaker Faith and Practice* 1995: 21 48.

Honesty and integrity, and therefore acceptance of the natural processes of life, illness, disability, dying and death without denial. Not exclusive to Quakers, but integral to our being, is an honesty within ourselves and to those around us. It should not be a brutal honesty, but tempered with tact and tenderness.

Helen Kingston, 2001: *Quaker Faith and Practice in Aotearoa/New Zealand* 2003: 6.24.

*To stand up and be counted just thirty years ago
 Was required of every person – whether soldier or C.O.
 You couldn't dodge the issue – the Government saw to that –
 So you ended up in prison or became a Desert Rat
 But to stand up and be counted in 1969
 Needs a different kind of courage – and I would that it were mine –
 For it means to stick our necks out when as long as you lie low
 All your mates at work will take it you support the status quo.*

Norman Bennett, 1969: *Quaker Faith and Practice in Aotearoa/New Zealand 2003*: 7.27.

Integrity, of course, is not just a matter of being truthful. It's showing that you can be trusted – keeping your word, showing up on time, and always being there for the people you love. Time, effort and constant attention to detail are needed if this sort of reliability is to be established and maintained. Trust can be misplaced. It is easily lost through carelessness and mistakes.

Human society is based on trust. We are reliant on the quality of our food and water supplies, and on general compliance with established laws. In developed countries we have come to take these things for granted – any reduction in the integrity of the people who contribute to them can cause great suffering. Personal integrity is an essential part of active love for our neighbour, whoever that may be.

William Penn, an early Quaker, said “True godliness don't [sic] turn men out of the world but enables them to live better in it and excites their endeavours to mend it ...”. Quakers believe that, as we grow in awareness of God's will for our lives, we begin to translate our experience of the holy into active life. Hence, we have always emphasised integrity in personal conduct and service in the betterment of the world and its people as an integral part of our spiritual life.

The Quakers and Business Group: *Good Business Ethics at Work (2000)*

We have a testimony to integrity, which includes honesty and plain speaking. Be utterly scrupulous both in personal relationships and in dealings with businesses and government departments or other public bodies. Do not be afraid to speak the truth as you discern it, with firmness and respect. Taking oaths sets a double standard of truth; ask to affirm instead.

Advices and Queries, 2013.

The Wider Quaker Fellowship is an association of persons of diverse backgrounds who wish to have ties with the Religious Society of Friends without necessarily being in its membership, or who, through isolation, illness or some other circumstance are unable to attend a Monthly Meeting.

Any person who finds the fundamental Quaker testimonies and the Quaker way of life, with its emphasis on sincerity and simplicity, compatible with his or her philosophy of life is welcome to join the Fellowship. A request to the Clerk will ensure enrolment as a member.