

"For I know the plans I have for you,"  
declares the LORD, "plans to prosper  
you and not to harm you, plans to  
give you hope and a future."

Jeremiah 29:11

2008 Triennial Sessions in High Point, North Carolina  
Betty Carter Peace Lecture:

# Renewing the Quaker Testimony on Peace

By Landrum Bolling

**I**n 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 lifestyle 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 commit-

ted 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-17th century.

Yet over the centuries other religious communities have taken up the cause of peace and the struggle against war. I have been impressed in 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.

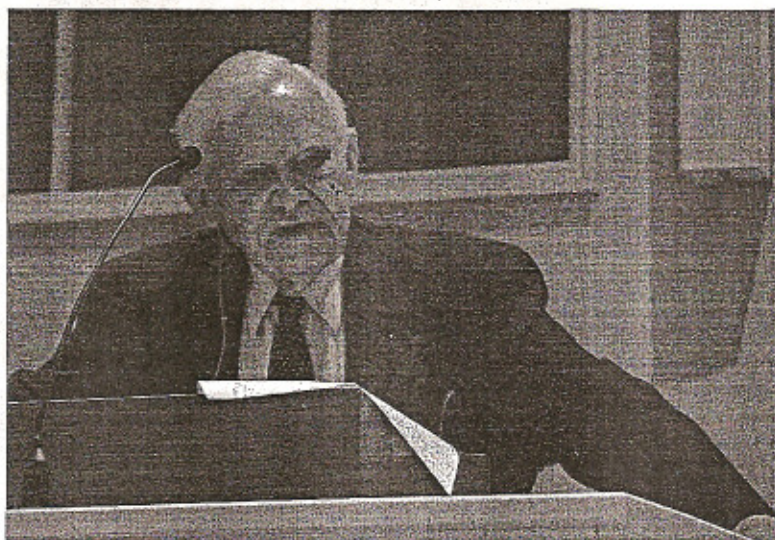
These reflections lead us around to an examination of the growing, increasingly global reach of the secular, humanistic political-economic analyses of war and peace and the intellectual, academic study of what has come to be called conflict management and conflict resolution. Such labeling is in no way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

*This is an abbreviated version of the Betty Carter Peace Lecture delivered by Landrum Bolling to the 2008 Triennial. Bolling provided an advanced printed summation of the lecture which can be read in its entirety online at: [www.fum.org](http://www.fum.org). Bolling, to the delight of his audience, spoke from the heart in North Carolina, regaling the audience with tale after tale of his experiences with peacemakers all over the world. The extent of the profoundness of his lecture cannot be captured in this summation.*



*Landrum Bolling at High Point Friends Meeting*

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.

Landrum Bolling served as president of Earlham College from 1958-73, then as president and chairman of the board of Lilly Endowment. He has been awarded honorary degrees by more than 15 U.S. and foreign colleges and universities. 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's home remains in Richmond, Indiana, where he continues to be a member of Clear Creek Meeting.