(The following is an approximate recapitulation of the talk given to the representatives from the Church of the Brethren, the Mennonites and the Religious Society of Friends at the New Call to Peacemaking Workshop held at Pendle Hill on the weekend of October 10 and 11, 1992.)

I know that some months ago when I was speaking with Janet Shepherd I did agree to serve as a resource person for this Saturday morning workshop portion of your weekend retreat. I actually cannot remember what I promised Janet I would offer to you. However, when the time came about a week ago for me to begin giving attention to this assignment, I was quite stunned to see the billing I was given: to explore the history of our three peace churches, identify the common themes, and define their relevance to the current historical situation!

I know that each of you are peace activists, and that in the course of your work you probably find yourself to be in a position similar to the one in which I now find myself. That is, you find yourself expected to address a topic about which you know nothing to an audience which is comprised of experts. I can scarcely claim to be knowledgeable about the history of the Religious Society of Friends. I know very little about that of the Church of the Brethren or the Mennonites. I have, however, given some thought to this matter, and will try to plunge ahead. Even if I only stimulate your impulses to correct the information and analysis that I offer, it will at least get us into a dialogue about the assigned topic, which indeed is a vital one.

Historians usually lump our three faith communities into a category called the "Radical Reformation." Our three communities are not apt to be alone with each other only in this category, but rather usually find ourselves lumped with a rather wide variety of assorted expressions of spiritual ferment, some with laudable qualities and others which are merely regrettable. Some Friends like not to be considered an off-shoot of Protestantism, but rather like to think of themselves as a third kind of Christianity which is neither Protestant nor Catholic. This thinking usually stems from the idea that the Reformation as a general movement tended to place ultimate authority in the words of scripture, whereas Catholic Christianity located authority in the Church magisterium. A religious community like Friends, where authority is understood to rest in the gathered community's connectedness to the Holy Spirit is seen as neither Protestant nor Catholic.

Nevertheless, the general sense that our three faith communities represent a radical kind of reformation of the Church would seem not unreasonable in terms of general historical analysis. Our forbearers all had it in common that they attempted to strike even more deeply at the foundation of the old religious and social order, than did what might be called the "established Reformation." In this sense, each of our peace churches started out as radical movements.

Each of our churches, or spiritual communities, have been vexed in their life

and evolution by a continuation of the same radicalization process which initially distinguished us from the more established Reformation. Each of our movements suffered internal assaults from a radical wing, which found our own mainstream, itself deemed dangerously radical by the larger society, as not radical enough. Friends had to cope with people among them who were known as Ranters and from whom they eventually had clearly to distinguish themselves. Quakers also had to endure the fall-out of the James Nayler incident, when a prominent Friend rode into the city of Bristol on a donkey while his followers spread garments and palm leaves before him and sang "Alleluias," in imitation of Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem. This act scandalized England, caused a lengthy debate in Parliament, and greatly roiled the relationship of the Friends' movement with the authorities and with Friends' neighbors. On the continent, the Anabaptist movement suffered from similar excesses, the best known of which is the so-called Munster Rebellion, where people followed the free movement in the Spirit in many bizarre directions, including in the direction of sexual libertinism, a turn of events which convinced almost everyone in Europe that the Anabaptist movement was comprised of dangerous lunatics.

The result of all these trends is that the history of our respective peace churches presents to an outsider a kind of bewildering and meandering narrative, one often characterized by tumult, conflict and schism in spite of our designation as "peace" churches. At one time or another, and at times even simultaneously, each of our movements have exhibited such a broad range of the spectrum of Christian thought and experience that it is scarcely possible to say anything about the faith the group holds to without immediately adding the qualification that some people in the group hold or have held to an opposite view.

Nevertheless, it is possible, at least on a few points, to hazard some delineation of common themes among these religious groups, whose roots stem from the Netherlands and Germany in the sixteenth century, and England in the seventeenth century.

① The idea of rediscovering true Christianity, and of reliving the sort of faith practiced in the original apostolic age characterized all these movements in their early days. All sought to revive primitive Christianity.

② Each of these movements sought an authenticity of spirit and feeling which a formalized, bureaucratized, politically established, creedally defined and academically oriented Church seemed to lack. These radical reformers saw that everywhere baptized people were talking grandly, as far as theological concepts were concerned, but were not behaving or even feeling in a truly Christian way. The churches were full of baptized and educated people who did not know Jesus personally, who did not have any deep experience of faith.

④ The attempt to banish the false and artificial from religious life took the form,

in one tradition, of the abolition of the distinction between trained and educated clergy on the one hand, and the laity on the other. It is sometimes said that Quakers abolish the clergy; it would be more precise, however, to say that they abolished the laity. Learnedness and elitism as such was banished in favor of a true and authentic and vital ministry of all believers.

(3) In the other tradition, the issue of baptism became a focus for renewal. Infant baptism was seen as both unscriptural and artificial. Only an adult person, in response to a genuine movement of the transforming Spirit, could undertake to be baptized in a meaningful way. Through adult baptism the church was to be comprised only of committed believers. Anabaptists scandalized the Christian world by declining to baptize infants and by rebaptizing adults whom other Christians had baptized in their infancy.

Each of our faith traditions began in a time when the separation of church and state, as we know it today, was inconceivable. It followed that any change of significance in spiritual perspective had, perforce, a political dimension. A change of faith was not simply a private matter. Indeed, it was the unholy alliance between religion and a political and social order which was, in many respects, oppressive and corrupted, which was itself the issue for these radical reformers. So the spiritual movements we now know as the peace churches became, in one way or another, a world apart, with distinct customs, dress, in-group processes of discipline, and a separate culture. Disobedience to various established and official laws and customs were part of this--partly out a desire to be true to the gospel and partly out of an impulse at disaffiliation from what was seen as a corrupted mainstream. Refusal to take oaths, to defer to princes and potentates, and to bear arms are aspects of our forebears' challenge to the existing order.

In each of our faith traditions the idea of defining the community by means of creedal or dogmatic statements was eschewed. Faith, true faith, was revealed every day by the Holy Spirit, revealed to those disposed to listen, and it could not be pinned down in a set of creedal propositions. In this non-creedalism, again a reaction to the dogmatic tests often used to induce political conformity, some groups emphasized the significance of the workings of the Holy Spirit, some groups emphasized the discernment of the gathered community for authority, and some regarded the Bible, in traditional Protestant fashion, as the locus of authority. Some Anabaptist groups, much like St. Francis of Assisi several centuries earlier, simply said that the gospels themselves were the most adequate expression of their faith.

As I mentioned earlier, this attempt to live and to experience authentic Christianity, unencumbered by creeds and guided either by the Holy Spirit or by the gospels, was inadequate for maintaining a center, a cohesive group. Eventually our respective faith communities, microscopic as they are in the grand scheme of things, came to embrace the entire spectrum of Christian culture within themselves. In

Quakerism for example, one finds everything from evangelical and fundamentalist faith experiences to others which closely resemble Unitarianism and even ethical culture!

One way of viewing some of this diversity is to see it in terms of what might be called a radicalist/accomodationist split. On the one hand, our faith communities have been challenged and divided by people who found the common practice among our co-religionists as insufficiently separate and apart from the world, who wanted to carry the practice to ever greater levels of perfection, or excess, depending on one's point of view. On the other hand, there were also always accomodationist impulses, people who saw many of the distinctives which grew up within our faith traditions as merely idiosyncratic, or obscurantist, or unnecessarily remote from the common experience of our neighbors to whom we should reach out. In the Mennonite tradition, serious splits occurred when large segments of the faith community sought to achieve conventional higher education and to lay down the wearing of the plain garb. In the Quaker experience, serious trouble occurred when young Friends sought to become involved in the heightened spiritual fervor of the revivalist movement, scandalizing their sedate and silent elders. Thus the Quaker movement had somehow come full circle, having begun in a search for authentic religious feeling, and ultimately coming to regard such feeling, or at least the particular manifestation the revival movement offered, as being somewhat vulgar. Today in the Religious Society of Friends, although an absolute schism has not occurred, there does exist roughly two camps, each of which regards the other as having unduly accommodated to the ways of the world. Unprogrammed Friends, that is Friends oriented to the practice of silent worship, are apt to regard evangelical Friends who hire ministers and sing hymns, and for whom the social testimonies do not figure largely in their faith experience, as having succumbed to every day religion-as-usual, having abandoned the distinctive character of Quakerism for a Constantinian-type accommodationism. The Evangelical wing, on the other hand, regards the unprogrammed Friends as having abandoned faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior in favor of accommodating to a modern secular or philosophical world view, while clinging to a form--silent worship--which is only of secondary importance.

What does all this mean for us today? What does it mean particularly in terms of making the peace testimony relevant to the contemporary scene?

One thing that comes to mind is that as one reads about and reflects upon the experience of our faith communities in earlier eras of their existences, the peace testimony occurred without a great deal to back it up in the way of rationalization and justification. Our spiritual ancestors were completely confident that the way of peace was an imperative unambiguously laid upon us by scriptural teaching, not withstanding the opposite view held by the rest of the Christian church. But beyond this, they did not seem to feel the need for a great deal of hypothesizing about what would happen if enemies showed up on the doorstep, how values and truth would be

preserved, or how the nation state would be secured. Rather, the peace testimony seemed to be one thread among many through which the spiritual community established its disaffiliation from business as usual in the mainstream culture: we adopted uncommon dress, we refused to take oaths, we refused to hold public office, we refused to pay tax, we refused to serve in the army. The peace testimony was simply one aspect of a long list of "effects" in the political and social arena of a new perspective on Christianity.

Today as things have evolved, our respective faith communities more and more resemble the mainstream Reformed and Catholic churches, a kind of religion-as-usual with the peace testimony grafted on. True, the mainstream to which we are conformed is much different than the mainstream from which our forbearers rebelled. A softening of religious differences, a movement of cultural attention away from spiritual questions generally, and the separation of church and state have created a much different scene. (Issues of family life and the state--that is, issues of abortion, and homosexuality--are rekindling some of the old contentious spirit of religion in the public arena). It will be useful to try to examine some of the pitfalls of this situation--when the peace testimony seems to stand as an isolated defining characteristic for a way of life otherwise much like any other. Ironically, it seems to force us to seek to justify the peace testimony in secular, rather than religious terms, a turn of events with many pitfalls.

(Note to Dan: At this point, sources of violence in the world of the immediate future should be noted. One is an economic root to violence. With the decline of communism and the triumph of capitalism, it is likely that extremes of poverty and wealth will become exacerbated, and the sendero luminoso, rather than representing an anomalous left-over Marxism, will become the rule rather than the exception in the future. In connection with the expected revival of ideology, material should be borrowed from the speeches to Baltimore and New England Yearly Meetings for development of our testimony against creedalism, and its modern counterpart, ideology. The second source of the conflict in the modern world in the decades ahead clearly will be cultural. Many of the world's "hot spots" stem from ethnic conflict. There is sometimes an economic element to these conflicts, where one ethnic group has more money and therefore power, and oppresses the other, but the main point is that, contrary to Marxist belief, many of these conflicts are not essentially economic but are essentially cultural. Can people of radically different cultures co-exist when these cultures interpenetrate the same geographical territory? People of many different cultures came to the United States, but they came voluntarily, and often aspired to melt themselves into the white Anglo-Saxon normative culture. The American experience did aspire to turn many people into one, *e pluribus unim*. People in the Balkans with neighbors of a different culture and sharply etched memories of past atrocities are not at all in the same place psychologically as are American immigrants. The issue which should be explored, but which none of my existing essays contains material about, is whether the experience of the peace

churches in maintaining, or failing to maintain, a cultural identity while surrounded by something antithetical to it, is the basis for a testimony on the possibility of peace in the coming era.)