



“Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself ...”¹

My Testimonies

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My title is from Whitman, of course. (As this choice suggests, I suspect Friends will find more of Whitman than Woolman in my remarks today, for better or for worse.) In this lecture I was asked to share my spiritual path, after the manner of Friends. I hope to do so with integrity and clarity, in ways that are not so much about myself as about the spiritual experiences that have shaped my life. I remain a bit uncomfortable doing this: I am not an exemplary and consistent Friend, as will be clear in my remarks today, and not just because of an ecologically unsustainable lifestyle, inconstant spiritual awareness, and some doubts about Friends’ practices. Still, I trust that Spirit can speak through unsteady channels.

From the beginning, Friends have spoken of the Light. Thomas Kelly’s emphasis on the Light Within has often captured my spirit, and encouraged me toward integrity and simplicity. In his words, “Let us explore together the secret of a deeper devotion, a more subterranean sanctuary of the soul, where the Light Within never fades, but burns, a perpetual Flame, where

¹ Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*, Stanza 51.

the wells of living water of divine revelation rise up continuously, day by day and hour by hour, steady and transfiguring.”² Awareness of George Fox’s Inward Light has been equally important and difficult for me—turning toward the Light shows us the condition of our hearts, illuminating the hidden corners. Alan Kolp states that, “The process of moving from the ocean of darkness and death to the ocean of light and love passes necessarily through humility and brokenness of heart.”³ Openness to the Inward Light may be particularly difficult for nontheist Friends like myself, with no supreme creator to inspire awe and humility. I hope, however, that in sharing my lived testimonies and their roots, both the Inner and Inward manifestations of the Light, however each understands that, are evident.

A few words about my origins. I spent my first eleven years in a small town in Minnesota, and the next ten in St. Paul and Minneapolis. I was deeply Catholic and seem to have expected to enter the priesthood from birth. (I think my grandmother had something to do with that.) I did in fact enter the Catholic seminary as a freshman in high school, remaining officially in the seminary through college (although my last year and a half I actually spent at the University of Minnesota). I believe I lived with some awareness of the Light throughout those years ... And was often disappointed in the limited response to the Sacred in the Catholic community around me. (We Friends also of course often fail to live with full awareness of the Sacred.) Perhaps like others here, my awareness that something was personally and collectively missing led me to wander, geographically and spiritually. This wandering (searching would be too intentional a term) is what I will share this morning.

I am going to organize my remarks around what I am calling for today “my testimonies”—six commitments that I have imperfectly carried through many changes and contradictions in my life. Certainly all of Friend’s collective testimonies are important to me. The testimonies were a significant factor in drawing me finally toward the Religious Society of Friends just over a decade ago (thirty years after my first Meeting for Worship). The six testimonies I will speak this morning emerged powerfully from my own experiences; not all will speak to everyone here. I offer them with the hope that they will perhaps be useful to some. Rupert Ross, writing about indigenous justice practices, suggested that certain messages be treated like driftwood.⁴ Should a piece of driftwood appear beautiful to someone, that person is welcome to it; if not, it is best left behind for someone else who may find it compatible.

² Thomas R. Kelly, 1941. *A Testament of Devotion*. New York, HarperCollins, p. 5.

³ Alan Kolp, 2007. *Fresh Winds of the Spirit* (2nd. ed.). Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, p. 19.

⁴ Rupert Ross (2006). *Returning to the Teachings*. Toronto: Penguin Canada.

The discussion that follows will be somewhat, but only somewhat, chronological, as it will sometimes be clearer to establish connections and contradictions across time. I will close my discussion of each of the following six testimonies with a brief period of stillness.

A Testimony of Compassion

The theme of this year's sessions is Compassion. As may well have already been pointed out several times in the last few days, the origins of the word compassion mean to *suffer with*. Life offers us each many opportunities to *suffer with*. Early experiences of bullying when I moved to the Twin Cities at age eleven moved me down the path to compassion; I had the social skills to make good friends (including formidable ones), so my personal experiences of bullying were limited. They were significant enough, however, to prepare me to *suffer with* others I saw facing much more serious pain and humiliation in similar experiences. Bullying was present even in the seminary; some connections to the dominance hierarchies of the Church may have been involved. As will be clear later, in those early experiences lay the roots of later testimonies for me.

As did many here, I came of age in the era of Civil Rights, the Vietnam War, and multiple liberation movements. The most serious trouble I got into was for illegally bringing a station wagon onto the seminary campus to transport a dozen of us to a Minneapolis rally organized by Father Groppi, a major figure in the Civil Rights movement in Milwaukee. The social gospel was reflected in many of the priests on faculty in the minor (high school) seminary, offering role models that helped shape my life. It was not just a question of the demands of social justice, important as that was. Sudden exposure to the painful suffering of communities of color, of the Vietnamese, of our troops in the war, of those in poverty, left little room to avoid *suffering with* for a privileged youth in a sensitizing environment. I was exposed to a world of structural injustice, and that became mine; I can take no personal credit for that, but was and am deeply grateful for that exposure.

Beginning shortly thereafter, extensive experiences with Native cultures continuing throughout the past 40 years helped me understand the integrity and integration of all life. I lived and worked in dozens of Native communities in Alaska over a total of eight years, and studied with Native students in graduate school. I have been partnered with a Native woman—and therefore with an extended Native community—for fifteen years. I have come to understand experientially that we are all woven into a single web. But if this is true, and we see that some are suffering, that suffering must be understood as genuinely our own. *Suffering with* then becomes a matter of living out the reality of our solidarity, and not an act of charity.

Given that awareness, one unavoidably recognizes how our own comfortable privilege contributes to that suffering. My years of work in social work practice, in community development, and in teaching attention to the impact of oppression, domination, and violence on the poor and dispossessed have reinforced that message often enough that it could not be denied. For example, I lived and worked for about three years with a teenage Yup'ik girl I met when she was 14. She grew up immersed in a world of addiction and sexual abuse in a tiny village in Alaska—a village in which even Catholic priests were often involved in the abuse. The resources available to help her were so small, the damage she had experienced so great—and the comparison to my own advantages so obvious. Despite projecting a tough image, she was a vulnerable child hungry for affection and doubtful of any future ... easy to *suffer with* once one saw the realities. But given such awareness, a testimony of compassion calls for much more, and this is where it becomes difficult, certainly for me.

The Testimony of Zeal

Immediately after graduation from college I lived what was probably the most formative experience of my life—5 years as a Jesuit Volunteer. I applied to the Jesuit Volunteer Corps as a possible option for alternative service to the draft while applying for conscientious objector status. Ultimately (as happened to a number of others here) the draft board finessed the issue by giving me a 1-H classification, meaning I would not be called. But by then I had been “ruined for life” (a JVC mantra).

My first year as a Volunteer ('71-'72), I was placed at the Good Shepherd Home in Spokane, Washington. The Good Shepherd nuns, founded by Sr. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier, then and now take a fourth vow beyond poverty, chastity and obedience—a vow of Zeal, lending a special dynamism to the commitment to “search out the wounded, those left behind by the world.” The order had a history demonstrating that such a personal mission can be actualized—and Zeal became a difficult but compelling testimony for me.

Zeal simplifies life. It is easy, I have learned (again, experientially!), to fill one's personal and Quaker time with generally useful activities—but Thomas Kelly's admonition regarding the simplification of life raises important queries for me more powerfully every day: Is this activity among the very few that I am truly called to do at this time? Is this activity essential to *suffering with* and supporting those in greatest need, and building the Blessed Community? Or may it be a distraction, or even an excuse to avoid the most important work in favor of the routine? Difficult questions that I struggle with every day ...

Through the teen young women at the Home of the Good Shepherd I came to know the lives of abused, neglected, and street-involved young people, who often had lived their short

lives being trafficked for sex work, involved in the drug trade, or hurt and abused within the circle of the home. They were easy for a young man of 21 years to engage, and often surprisingly resilient and open to growth. Thus began over 40 years of opportunities to *suffer with* and support.

A testimony of Zeal was challenged the following year when my Volunteer placement was in bush Alaska. I was to staff a group home for mostly Yup'ik teens away from their small villages on the Bering Coast and Kuskokwim River to attend high school in the tundra town of Bethel. Our students would come to us struggling with abuse, addictions, criminal involvement, and disabilities... Our students were those who could not manage o the usual dormitory and boarding home arrangements.

The day I arrived in Bethel, I was taken to see the group home—but all there was to see were pilings set in the permafrost and a mountain of building materials. The materials arrived on the barge much later than planned (common in Alaska), and the construction crew the Jesuits had arranged were gone before the materials arrived. So, we spend a year building, often outdoors, working through a winter on the tundra, living in a dozen places while we did so. ... We simply had to “take it on faith” that success was possible. We did in fact lose three of the five Volunteers we began with over this period. But needed resources and people appeared at crucial moments, way opened, and a year late, so did the group home.

This was a formative spiritual opportunity to live out a commitment to service, and for me deepened what I understood at the time as my relationship with God in a traditional Catholic sense. During this time, Brother Lawrence’s “practice of the presence of God” became central to my spiritual life. I had left the seminary, but certainly not the Church. Jesuit Volunteers were treated much like clergy ... I should note that there have been no allegations of abuse by Jesuit Volunteers in Alaska, as compared to those against over three dozen clergy, many of whom I knew personally. Hierarchy and oppression are often tightly linked ...

There has been for me no other experience like the full-time, spiritually-driven Volunteer experience that I lived for 5 years, which is why I strongly encourage each of us to support the emerging development of Quaker Voluntary Service. (It was, incidentally, as a Volunteer that I experienced my first Meetings for Worship, which we learned about from a novel!) Beyond their individual challenges, our young people struggled in so many ways with the clash of cultures in which they were immersed. As a result of grade school experiences requiring English, most did not speak their Native languages well, but also spoke only limited English. They could not communicate in depth with their elders, nor with the mostly White teachers and professionals they dealt with, leaving them without words for many of their experiences. There was love and

suffering present in every moment, I think, in the experience of integrating service and spirituality.

From my Volunteer experiences, I moved into my Master's in Social Work program which included extensive preparation in the science of behavior analysis, followed by years of work in addictions, marriage and family counseling, developmental disabilities, youth services, community development and mental health practice, first in Salt Lake City where I learned a great deal from the Mormons, then back to Alaska, and on to New York City. My spiritual understandings shifted dramatically during these years, but the importance of Mary Euphrasia's vow of Zeal was never forgotten, however imperfectly lived. Without knowing it, I found myself continually reflecting on the traditional Quaker queries, "Was thee faithful? Did thee yield?" ... "Was thee faithful? Did thee yield?"

A Testimony of Sacredness

And now I move even closer to the core. There really never has been a period of my life when I could not experience the world and all of life as Sacred, although sustaining that awareness continually has never been easy, and certainly there have been dry periods. For my first 30 years, my Catholic understanding worked for me. But the more years I spent *suffering with*, intimately exposed to the pain, hurt, and violence in which so many spend their lives—and the realities of loving, caring, and beauty—the less my experience proved consistent with traditional religious belief and practices. "Heaven" and "Hell" were present right here, right now (and I suspect only right here, right now). Pressure ...

It is all Sacred ... *It is all Sacred*. For me it is this not a question of theological "notions" to use Fox's term, nor of social construction as some Quaker nontheists assert. Rather, this knowledge for me is experiential, it is "experimental." Each of us is Sacred. When we fail to see the Sacred in anyone, we risk creating damage. Those who I've known who have committed heinous crimes, who have seriously damaged others, who take what by natural right belongs to others—they too are Sacred beings, terribly damaged by life. I think about Martha, a girl I first met in Alaska when she was 15, and whom I remained in contact with later when she lived on the streets of Anchorage and was ultimately jailed for murder ... When I knew Martha, she wanted nothing so much as to have some kind of family, and asked me to treat her as a little sister. She signed her occasional notes "Sis." I think about John, a 40-something Salt Lake City man who had lived with addiction for 30-something of those 40-something years, almost constantly mired in suicidal thought and hopelessness. He was often avoided and feared, as violence was his escape. Martha and John, both now gone, were Sacred beings, and I knew them to be. At the same time (yes, the Inward Light), I am aware of how often I distance myself from

those who distance themselves from everyone—and thereby from the Sacred. *Suffering with*, however, inescapably leads to the Sacred.

During my 30s and 40s, while I was engaged in applications of behavior analytic science in social work settings, then in completing my doctorate and moving into academia, I don't think I ever completely lost the sense of the Sacred in people, in nature, in all. My experiences with the mainstream Catholic Church, however, left me with considerable doubt about the ability of collectives to sustain a sense of the Sacred, and seemed to offer at best limited support for the call to *suffer with*. The words were there, but the Spirit often not. During those years, I did not see myself as religious in any conventional sense and belonged to no religious community.

In contrast, my experiences with Native cultures ultimately convinced me experientially of the power in approaching the Sacred together. Opportunities to witness practices and ceremonies with which my spouse is intimately involved on the pueblo over the past decade and a half rekindled my faith in the power of the collective practice of the Sacred, even as I came to know the struggles and weaknesses of many of the individuals involved. That power offers balance for managing those struggles. On July 14th, this year and every year, after 4 days of preparation, at least 500 Pueblo people will dance in the sun all day in one hundred degree temperatures at Cochiti Pueblo, taking limited breaks for rest and hydration. And at least as many of us will sit in the sun all day, supporting by watching. It is not difficult to achieve a profound spiritual experience at Cochiti, where all participate as a form of prayer for “the people” and the world.

I do think that it is extraordinarily hard to maintain such collective practice among those of us so deeply immersed in an individualistic, materialistic, and capitalistic society, which is true of most contemporary Friends. But Friends have long known experimentally that all is Sacred, that we can live in the ocean of Light and love. I believe it is our special charism and obligation to honor the Sacred collectively. This brought me to Friends.

A Testimony of Religious Naturalism

Einstein stated, “I do not believe in a personal God and I have never denied this but have expressed it clearly. If something is in me which can be called religious then it is the unbounded admiration for the structure of the world so far as our science can reveal it.”⁵ There have been

⁵ Helen Dukas (1981). *Albert Einstein the Human Side*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 43. And further: “I cannot conceive of a God who rewards and punishes his creatures, or has a will of the type of which we are conscious in ourselves. An individual who should survive his physical death is also beyond my comprehension, nor do I wish it otherwise ... Enough for me the mystery of the eternity of life, and the inkling of the marvellous structure of reality, together with the single-hearted endeavour to comprehend a portion, be it never so tiny, of the reason that manifests itself in nature.” Albert Einstein (1949). *The World as I See It*. New York: Philosophical Library.

many scientists among Friends; many have integrated their science with their faith. In my experience, science can help one to see and understand why and how the world and people can be beautiful, and why and how we can be so fragile.

A substantial community of “religious naturalists” has emerged over the past two decades, including many scientists. This community has been inspired by world-class biologist Ursula Goodenough’s near mystical book, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*,⁶ among others. Goodenough’s book presents a nature- and science-based approach to cosmology and morality (“How things are” and “Which things matter”). Religious naturalism provides tools for understanding life, beauty, death, emotion, awareness, and yes, the Sacred. More than this however, religious naturalism also honors the experiential, the religious impulse present all around the world. The integration of science, Spirit and compassion has become increasingly core to my worldview as I have come to dismiss any division between the natural and the Sacred. Religious naturalism speaks to me.

I have for many years been committed to bringing the natural science of behavior to social issues, both in practice and research. I have also been extensively involved in the Association for Behavior Analysis: International, a scientific organization, and edit the journal sponsored by Behaviorists for Social Responsibility. The science of behavior within a religious naturalism perspective helps clarify how and why people do what they do, and thereby can assist in achieving compassion. The evidence is overwhelming that people seldom freely choose addiction, aggression, or victimization. Damage from life limits choices. That recognition leaves space for me to see the Light in all, even those whose actions create further harm. When I still find myself blaming victims and judging the acts of others unkindly I recognize that to some extent reflects my own damage.

As discussed next, I believe that science can contribute to action for peace and justice. And perhaps surprisingly, religious naturalism leads almost inexorably to a Covenant with Mystery, the final testimony I will share—contradictory though this may sound. But at this moment, I am reflecting on Einstein’s “structure of the world”; this too is Sacred.

A Testimony of Peace and Justice

The Peace Testimony emerges from the awareness of Sacredness, as Friends from Margaret Fell to the present have recognized. Most here have no doubt heard and probably used Pope Paul VI’s admonition, “If you want peace, work for justice.” The two certainly have certainly been deeply interlocked for me. It is no secret among those present here that personal,

⁶ Ursula Goodenough (1998). *The Sacred Depths of Nature*. New York: Oxford.

collective and structural violence are core contemporary issues. Over 200 million persons died in the last century as the result of collective violence alone.

For the past two decades I have felt powerfully led to act, not just to be “peaceful” or to suppress violence, but rather to construct cultures of peace and peace-making, drawing on what I know of the science of behavioral systems analysis. I once believed it was enough to live with a peaceful spirit; I now believe that *suffering with* demands action to construct a world where justice and peace become possible. I believe science has something unique to contribute to such work, and that this work must be grounded in recognition of the Sacred. I am going to share with you three examples, all of which are imperfect but I think promising ...

By the mid-1990s, the rates of street violence (most involving youth), and of violence and bullying in schools had escalated to disturbing heights across much of the US (and it takes a lot to disturb us in what has long been a very violent culture). I experienced the suffering of the persons and communities affected in my work and research everyday. (I had by this time completed my doctorate and was on faculty at Columbia University in New York, where these problems were severe.) There were a significant number of behavioral and social scientists around the country working on these issues, but with a group of mostly advanced graduate students, I felt obligated—morally and spiritually—to bring the emerging science of behavioral systems analysis to the issue. Our analyses and research suggested that it would be possible and valuable to identify a small set of core practices that, if embedded in schools, organizations, and communities, would increase rates of prosocial behavior and decrease rates of emotional and physical violence, bullying, and exclusion. Young people and adult allies could construct a culture of honest recognition, genuine respect, shared power, and intentional peacemaking by adopting practices consistent with a large body of basic and applied research. From this hypothesis emerged the PEACE POWER strategy, which is not a curriculum, not a “program,” but rather in the words of one high school principal, a collective “way of life” shaped using what existing science offered. PEACE POWER also draws in important ways on indigenous practices from around the world that have demonstrated the power to address problems with which we have largely failed. My spouse, Dr. Christine Lowery, has made major contributions here.

We produced a book,⁷ a freely available online toolkit,⁸ and offered to provide consultation anywhere we were asked to go. As of the present, the PEACE POWER strategy has been used in at least 12 US states (primarily in schools), as the central framework for a Toronto

⁷ Mattaini, M. A., with the PEACE POWER Working Group (2001). *PEACE POWER for Adolescents: Strategies for a Culture of Nonviolence*. Washington, DC: NASW Press.

⁸ www.peacepower.info

program working with homeless and street-involved youth, and in a national literacy and youth development program crossing Canadian provinces through Frontier College. We have also responded to requests to provide training and consultation around the model in both Brazil and Colombia. The first time I was asked to speak and consult in Bogota was a somewhat dangerous time; the expensive hotel where we were housed had just been rebuilt after being bombed, and the US State Department warned of a high risk for kidnapping. But can a Friend refuse to assist in efforts to build peace because there is some risk? The second time we traveled to Colombia, it was to support efforts to construct a new way of policing to help construct peaceful communities in what were regarded as the most dangerous parts of Medellin. This was a tricky trip; we were invited by the Colombian National Police, a group with a long history of involvement in corruption and oppression. The invitation seemed genuine, however, and upon reflection we realized after all that none of us have clean hands, and we moved forward. Christine suggested that I go first as a Quaker, and only second as a scientist; excellent advice. We were of course well cared for and perfectly safe both times; the size of our police escort in Medellin was a bit embarrassing and certainly limiting. I will say a bit more about this trip in a minute. We also hope to have an opportunity to travel to Mexico next year.

One of the most profound gifts I have received from Native cultures is experience of the power of Circles, the second example I want to discuss in terms of a testimony of peace and justice. Circle processes, increasingly used in work related to restorative justice, community building, collective decision-making, community reintegration of offenders, prevention programming and other crucial areas, have been nearly universally present in indigenous cultures worldwide. Circle processes nearly always have involved the spiritual as well as the practical. (There is considerable concern among Native people, however, that Western adaptations commonly lack this grounding and risk becoming rote exercises embedded in a mechanistic and materialistic society—a form of cultural appropriation and distortion.)

I have in the last decade felt called to experience and teach circle processes widely. They have been integrated into the PEACE POWER strategy, and are being extensively used by my students and former students. There are particularly strong projects currently underway in high schools in Little Village and Englewood in Chicago, two neighborhoods most affected by violence. A circle I facilitated on the Medellin trip two years ago brought together young men with a long history of involvement in the drug trade, the National Police, academics, NGO staff and community leaders—groups that often have lived in serious conflict and sometimes violent opposition. By the end of that circle, community members were offering routes into work for gang members, police cadets were engaging gang-involved youth as peers, and academics were honestly listening to “uneducated” community members. This was not my doing; it is in the

process that the power lies. I merely needed to provide structure and to clear obstacles. This is work from the ground up, organically constructing cultures of respect and peacemaking that inevitably challenge the cultures of violence surrounding them. Circle processes have important commonalities with Quaker discernment processes—but their Native roots offer a different richness, and there is much we could learn from each other.

The third and final example I want to share here is one that I have felt drawn to engage for a long time, in fact going back to the days of the Vietnam War, but for many years laid aside as too daunting (a decision I regret). Finally, after 9/11, I began in collaboration with a number of others to explore what science had to offer in exploring the potential for—yes, forceful—nonviolent action to challenge collective and structural violence. The primary goal in this work was not to support nonviolent action out of a spiritual stance (many others have done that beautifully), but rather to explore how such action could most effectively produce change. What variables have led to success or failure, and most importantly, how? These questions are somewhat different than those explored in much of peace studies, although not entirely. The historical record indicates that successful campaigns of civil resistance do not require a shared moral commitment, though it can certainly help. Such campaigns did, however, often share common features. While my involvement in this work was based on my awareness of Sacredness, in this work we are asking empirical questions.

Over the past 2 years, my colleague and now friend Erica Chenoweth of the University of Denver, along with Maria Stephan of the State Department, has published some amazing research that I simply must share with you.⁹ Looking at hundreds of cases over the last century, they found that nonviolent resistance to oppression, even in the most repressively violent cases, has proven twice as successful as violent campaigns in producing freedom and democracy. In cases where nonviolent campaigns apparently failed, the chances of a democratic outcome five years later were twice as high as in apparently successful violent campaigns—violence truly does spawn further violence. And there is much more, all of it arguing for the power of nonviolent action. Those active in nonviolent struggle have long said similar things, but actual data clearly have a different power, especially from researchers who expected the opposite results. (Erica says she entered the study as a “guns and bombs scholar.”)

Erica and Ms. Stephan described the outcomes, but their results left many of the dynamics of success undetermined. For example, they found that high levels of participation were important—but their data do not explain exactly why, or why such participation sometimes

⁹ Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan (2011). *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*. New York: Columbia.

emerges, and sometimes doesn't. Theorists of nonviolent resistance have offered many lessons from practice and rules of thumb drawn from experience, but the limits and dynamics can only be guessed from those data. I have therefore committed much of the past four years to an analysis of the behavioral systems dynamics underlying effective nonviolent struggle, beginning with an open mind as to what the limits of such action may be in challenging violent oppression.

The resulting book¹⁰ will be published in the spring by Athabasca University Press out of Edmonton, both in hard copy and in open access on the Web. Some of the material is quite new, including new analytic models and a stronger emphasis on the primacy of Gandhi's *constructive programme* than in most previous work. Those of you who have been around for a long time may be interested to know that Barbara Deming's very radical work is proving particularly consistent with contemporary science.

I expect and hope that this work will be at least somewhat controversial. Some will argue that effective nonviolent resistance involves the exercise of power (which is true), and therefore should be regarded as coercive and of questionable morality. But opponents did not willingly bow to the Civil Rights Movement simply out of moral persuasion, nor has any dictator in recorded history. Effective nonviolent resistance always involves the exercise of power; the moral questions here are complex and subtle. Some will be put off by the emphasis on science rather than moral values to explore resistance movements. Others will likely challenge us for using the "wrong" science ... but this is fine. Asking crucial questions from multiple perspectives, including a scientific stance, opens new dialogues, and this is how knowledge grows.

Why am I doing this? I think perhaps the Sacred finally overwhelmed me. Continually observing violence and failures to prevent or disrupt injustice that could have been avoided became too much to ignore. Watching the endless news of collective and structural violence, and recognizing our most intimate connection with those who suffer finally brought me to a new place of *suffering with* that could not be denied. I am therefore building connections with people like Erica Chenoweth, hoping that the perspective of a Quaker behavioral scientist might bring something different and useful to the table as I continue on this path ... Staying current with the expanding work in nonviolent struggle for justice, by the way, is an area in which Twitter is proving particularly helpful, and I encourage folks to inquire about this later.¹¹ I believe some of the emerging work could also be useful for the ongoing work of AFSC and FCNL. There are

¹⁰ Mattaini, M. A. (in press). *The Science of Satyagraha: Strategic Nonviolent Power*. Edmonton, Alberta: Athabasca University Press.

¹¹ See, for example, @EricaChenoweth; @wagingnv; and @MarkMattaini on Twitter.

many ways those present here today could contribute to peace and justice work—our challenge I believe is to take the difficult steps were to which we are called...

A Covenant with Mystery

A missionary to an indigenous community once attempted to teach a Native community how difficult it is to understand spiritual realities. A community elder, however, offered to explain it for him. Challenged to do so, and the elder simply responded, “It is a Mystery.”¹² On a similar tack, Einstein stated that “A knowledge of the existence of something we cannot penetrate, of the manifestations of the profoundest reason and the most radiant beauty, which are only accessible to our reason in their most elementary forms—it is this knowledge and this emotion that constitute the truly religious attitude.”¹³

Mystical writings often intimate that Mystery can be experienced, but never captured. In her presentation of religious naturalism, Ursula Goodenough states that, “To assign attributes to Mystery is to disenchant it, to take away its luminance.” Her willing response to questions of why “there is anything at all,” and “why the universe seems so strange,” therefore, is what she termed “a covenant with Mystery.”¹⁴

A covenant with Mystery accepts that words and images, however useful, must also be limiting. I find I can often “walk in beauty” and “walk in the Light,” particularly in service or in the back country, if I am paying attention. But I cannot explain beauty or the Light without diminishing them. Mystery often bubbles up in stillness or collective worship, if I leave space for it. At my best I experience life as an honestly sensuous dance of beauty and suffering, as touching the Sacred in the most intimate way, but I cannot define that dance (very Whitman, no?). What we mean by “there is that of God in everyone” is deeply mysterious, yet real and profound. Sacredness is everywhere, yet is Mystery. Suffering is Mystery. *Suffering with* is Mystery. Peace and justice emerge from Mystery. For me today, living in the Light can only be living in Mystery.

What I would say about all of this tomorrow ... that too is Mystery! Thank you, Friends.

¹² Rupert Ross (1992). *Dancing with a Ghost*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

¹³ Albert Einstein, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ Goodenough, *op. cit.*