

A Theological and Practical Framework for Decolonizing the Quaker Witness

The New Conscientious Objector

A call to decolonize the Quaker peace testimony and move from a "negative" witness against war to a "positive" witness for liberation.

Draft

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Part I: The Fractured Witness: A Critical History of the Quaker Peace Testimony

Section 1: The Fractured Testimony

Quaker history holds a profound paradox. While Friends are celebrated for their courageous "No" to military violence, the community often gave a quiet "Yes" to the systemic violence of settler colonialism and capitalism at home. This "moral blind spot" included active participation in cultural genocide via Indian Boarding Schools and pioneering solitary confinement in prisons.

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) was founded on the revolutionary spiritual premise of an "Inner Light," or "that of God in everyone," which grants each individual direct, unmediated access to the divine.¹ This core doctrine fostered a radical egalitarianism and a commitment to testimonies of peace, integrity, and equality that have historically placed Friends at the vanguard of progressive social movements. From defying state power by refusing to swear oaths or serve in the military, to the pioneering work of John Woolman and Anthony Benezet in turning the Society against the institution of chattel slavery, a thread of Spirit-led conscience has compelled Friends to stand in opposition to the prevailing violences of their time.¹ Yet, this celebrated legacy of prophetic witness is shadowed by a history of profound complicity in the very systems of oppression it professes to oppose, from deriving economic benefits from slave-produced goods to active participation in the settler-colonial project.¹ This report argues that this paradox is not a historical relic but a living spiritual crisis that demands a new and deeper reckoning, calling for an evolution of the Peace Testimony from a simple refusal of outward, military violence to a positive, constructive witness dedicated to the active repair of a world built on systemic, inward violence.¹

The Evolving Conscience: From Refusal to Kill to Rejection of the War Machine

The historical trajectory of the Quaker Peace Testimony is not a static principle but a dynamic, evolving witness animated by a process of "continuing revelation".¹ The moral logic that drove generations of Friends to face military conscription reveals a clear pattern of escalating witness, moving from a refusal of personal participation in killing to a radical rejection of the entire state apparatus of war-making. This historical progression demonstrates that the understanding of what constitutes complicity with violence has progressively deepened and expanded over time, providing the theological and historical precedent for the next logical step in this pattern of revelation: refusing to cooperate with the even larger socio-economic system that undergirds and necessitates state violence.¹

During the American Civil War, the testimony was tested as a personal refusal to kill, even when faced with the moral cause of abolition and the threat of immediate death. The story of Seth Laughlin, a North Carolina Friend forcibly conscripted into the Confederate army, provides a stark example. For refusing all military duty, he endured systematic torture, including being suspended by his thumbs for extended periods. When these torments failed to break his resolve, he was court-martialed for insubordination and sentenced to be shot. As the firing squad prepared, Laughlin asked for a moment to pray, echoing the words of Christ on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Moved by his prayer, the twelve chosen men lowered their guns and resolutely declared they would not shoot such a man. Though his sentence was revoked, he later died in a military hospital, a martyr to his conscience.¹ His witness was a powerful "No" to the singular act of killing.¹

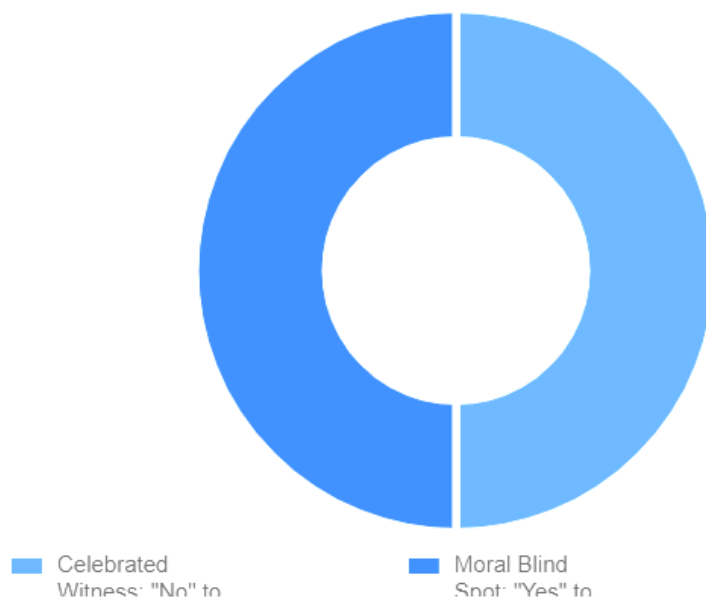
By World War I, the witness had expanded to a refusal to participate in the *institution* of the military itself. The persecution of absolutist conscientious objectors (COs) who refused any form of military cooperation was severe. Merlin Chamness, an Iowa Friend sent to Camp Pike, Arkansas, in 1918, provides a harrowing account. For refusing work orders that he believed aided the "military machine," he was subjected to brutal violence. Guards struck him with fists, rifle stocks, and bayonets. For his continued refusal, Chamness was confined for 36 hours in a dark dungeon on a diet of bread and water. His story exemplifies the physical violence endured by those whose conscience led them to reject not just killing, but any participation in the institution that exists to kill.¹

The experience of World War II and the subsequent peacetime draft saw the witness radicalize further to a refusal to cooperate with the *state apparatus* that enables war-making. While many Friends served in Civilian Public Service (CPS) camps, a growing number came to see the Selective Service System itself as an integral part of the war machine.¹ In 1948, facing the first peacetime draft, Don Laughlin, a teacher at Scattergood Friends School in Iowa, took the step of non-cooperation. In a letter to the U.S. Attorney General, he stated, "Because I

believe the military program of the United States government to be a violation of the laws of God I feel I cannot take any part in such a program, even to the extent of registering".¹ For this refusal to grant legitimacy to the state's system of conscription, he was sentenced to 18 months in federal prison. His witness was a "No" not just to the army, but to the draft board.¹ This radical stance reached its fullest theological expression during the Vietnam War. The 1968 "Epistle to Friends Concerning Military Conscription," signed by Don Laughlin and other prominent Friends, articulated a new standard: "cooperating with the draft, even as a recognized conscientious objector, makes one part of the power which forces our brothers into the military and into war".¹

This historical arc reveals a profound theological pattern: the boundary of what constitutes "participation in war" progressively expands. The moral focus moves from refusing to commit a violent act (Seth Laughlin), to refusing to support the institution that kills (Merlin Chamness), to refusing to legitimize the state system that enables the institution (Don Laughlin). This is not merely a series of historical events but a theological trajectory of "continuing revelation".¹ The initial objection is to a specific, violent *action* (pulling a trigger). This expands to objecting to the *institution* that sanctions the action (the army). Finally, it expands to objecting to the *state system* that enables the institution (conscription). This pattern of moving from symptom to system provides the direct historical and theological precedent for the "New Conscientious Objector's" call to object to the entire socio-economic system of Christian Colonial Capitalist Violence, which is seen as the root cause of war itself.¹

The Fractured Peace Testimony



The Architecture of Benevolent Harm: Quaker Complicity in State Violence

The Paradox of Peace

The traditional peace testimony was too narrow, focusing only on the "symptom" of overt warfare while ignoring the root causes of violence embedded in the state itself. This created a fractured witness, where anti-war activism coexisted with complicity in systems of oppression.

The "New Conscientious Objector" (NewCO) emerges from this contradiction, arguing that a faithful witness must object to the *entire system* that makes war and oppression possible.

The powerful legacy of anti-war witness is shadowed by a deep and troubling paradox: the history of Quaker complicity in the state's colonial projects. An honest accounting of the Society's past reveals that its celebrated testimonies against certain forms of overt violence have existed alongside active participation in other, more insidious forms of systemic harm. This pattern of complicity can be understood through the concept of "benevolent harm," a recurring historical dynamic where Quaker reformers, motivated by a genuine desire to mitigate the most brutal excesses of state violence, partnered with the government to administer what they believed to be more humane policies.¹ However, in adopting the state's tools of assimilation, confinement, and coercion, Quaker "benevolence" ultimately served to legitimize and execute the state's core objectives: the elimination of Indigenous sovereignty and the management of dispossessed populations.¹

The paradox of Quaker complicity is not a simple case of hypocrisy. It is the direct result of a theological framework where "peace" was defined too narrowly as merely the absence of overt warfare. This created a moral blind spot that allowed Friends to view cultural genocide and psychological torture as "peaceful" alternatives to more visible forms of state violence like military campaigns or public floggings. The Quakers involved in these projects genuinely believed they were doing good, mitigating the state's worst excesses.¹ However, by accepting the state's premise—that Indigenous people needed to be "managed" and "criminals" needed to be confined—and only seeking to reform the *method*, they became agents of a more insidious, structural violence. This historical lesson directly informs the New Conscientious Objector's rejection of reformism, arguing that partnering with the colonial state to

"humanize" its violence is a spiritually compromised path that risks perpetuating "benevolent harm".¹

This pattern is starkly evident in the Quaker administration of Indian Boarding Schools. The partnership between the Religious Society of Friends and the U.S. government in this system was born from a theological justification that framed forced assimilation as a "humane and peaceful alternative" to the federal government's ongoing policy of military extermination against Indigenous peoples.¹ This perspective was formalized in 1869 under President Ulysses S. Grant's "Peace Policy," which assigned Quakers and other denominations to manage Indian agencies and schools with the stated purpose "to protect, to Civilize, and to Christianize our Red Brethren".¹ The methods employed constituted a systematic and brutal "Architecture of Assimilation," designed to enact the infamous motto of Captain Richard H. Pratt: "Kill the Indian in him, and save the man".¹ Upon arrival, children's hair was forcibly cut, an act of profound cultural and spiritual violence. Zitkala-Sa, a Lakota woman who attended the Quaker-run White's Manual Labor Institute in Indiana, described the experience as feeling she had "lost [her] spirit".¹ Teachers stripped children of their Indigenous names, assigning them English ones, and the speaking of Native languages was strictly forbidden and met with severe physical punishment. The curriculum prioritized vocational training for servitude—farming for boys, domestic service for girls—reinforcing a racial hierarchy and limiting future opportunities.¹

The Quaker role in creating the modern prison system presents a similar paradox. Seeking a humane alternative to the public floggings, brandings, and capital punishments common in the 18th and 19th centuries, early Friends in Pennsylvania developed a new model of incarceration.¹ First implemented at Eastern State Penitentiary in 1829, the "Pennsylvania System" was built on the theological premise that placing an individual in complete solitary confinement with only a Bible would force them to turn inward, confront their "Inner Light," become "penitent," and achieve spiritual rehabilitation.¹ The failure of this "noble experiment" was swift and catastrophic. Instead of spiritual renewal, the stark isolation and sensory deprivation produced widespread insanity, psychological torture, and suicide.¹ While Quakers like Elizabeth Fry were among the first to critique their own creation, the institutional model had been set loose upon the world.¹ This history connects directly to the modern prison-industrial complex. The 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, while abolishing slavery, included an exception for punishment for a crime, allowing the logic of chattel slavery to be reborn through convict leasing and mass incarceration.¹ The penitentiary, pioneered by Quakers with benevolent intentions, provided the "foundational architecture and philosophy" for this new system of racialized control.¹

The 1843 Abolitionist Schism: A Precedent for Prophetic Division

To understand the contemporary call for a decolonized witness, it is essential to look to the 1843 Abolitionist Schism within Indiana Yearly Meeting, then the largest and most influential body of Friends in the world.¹ The conflict that fractured this community was not over the fundamental morality of slavery—a principle long established in Quaker doctrine—but over the *urgency, methods, and spiritual legitimacy of the opposition*.¹ This historical rupture establishes a powerful precedent for conscience-driven division and frames the contemporary debate not as a disagreement on *whether* colonialism is wrong, but on the nature and pace of a faithful response.¹

The schism pitted the "Main Body" Friends, a leadership primarily concerned with preserving internal harmony, corporate discipline, and a "guarded" separation from the world, against a fervent faction of "Anti-Slavery Friends".¹ The leadership advocated a gradualist approach, believing the Quaker testimony should be advanced through quiet example rather than public agitation. In an 1842 "Epistle of Advice," they explicitly warned members against "joining, or participating in, the excitement and over-active zeal of the anti-slavery societies," fearing that collaboration with non-Quaker "world's people" would dilute Quaker distinctiveness.¹ They refused to allow their meetinghouses to be used for abolitionist meetings, prioritizing institutional order above all else.¹

In stark opposition stood the radical faction that fully embraced the principles of "immediatism," arguing that the moral crisis of slavery demanded urgent and uncompromising action, even at the cost of internal harmony.¹ For them, authority rested not in the institution's discipline, but in the immediate "leading of the Spirit," which they felt compelled them to act.¹ This position was embodied by figures like Charles Osborn, an indefatigable organizer, and Levi Coffin, the master practitioner of direct action. From his home in Newport, Indiana, Coffin and his wife Catharine managed a crucial hub of the Underground Railroad, aiding approximately 2,000 freedom seekers in flagrant defiance of both federal law and the Yearly Meeting's warnings.¹ The conflict escalated as the Yearly Meeting leadership tightened its restrictions, culminating in the expulsion of eight leading abolitionists in September 1842. This disciplinary action, intended to enforce unity, instead served as the final catalyst for separation. Feeling that the official body had abandoned its own testimony, the expelled Friends and their supporters formally organized the Indiana Yearly Meeting of Anti-Slavery Friends in February 1843, attracting approximately 2,000 members.¹

The irreconcilable differences that led to this historic schism reveal a pattern of conflict that resonates with contemporary debates within the Society. By laying out the opposing views, it becomes clear that the historical conflict, like the current one, was about strategy and spiritual authority, not fundamental values. This framework will be explicitly referenced later in the report to argue that the tensions surrounding LANDBACK, Abolition, and the rejection of electoral politics are not new but are a recurrence of this foundational Quaker conflict between institutional order and prophetic conscience.

Point of Contention	Indiana Yearly Meeting (Leadership View)	Anti-Slavery Friends (Radical View)
Collaboration	Maintain separation from "the world's people"; avoid non-Quaker societies to preserve Quaker distinctiveness. ¹	Collaborate with all sincere abolitionists; the moral cause transcends sectarian boundaries. ¹
Political Action	Work through quiet, internal channels and moral example; avoid public "excitement and over-active zeal". ¹	Engage in direct political action and civil disobedience against immoral laws like the Fugitive Slave Act. ¹
Use of Property	Meetinghouses are for the exclusive use of Friends for worship; not for contentious political meetings of outside groups. ¹	Meetinghouses are community assets that must be used for the cause of justice and opened for anti-slavery lectures. ¹
Spiritual Authority	Authority rests in the corporate discipline and unity of the Yearly Meeting; individual leadings are subordinate to institutional order. ¹	Authority rests in the immediate "leading of the Spirit," which supersedes institutional rules when the institution is failing its testimony. ¹

Part II: The Decolonial Diagnosis: Naming the Integrated System of Violence

The historical paradox of a peace-loving people perpetuating colonial violence requires a deeper interrogation of the systems that enable such contradictions. A decolonial analysis posits that modern crises—from accelerating climate change and ecological collapse to profound social inequality and political polarization—are not discrete, isolated issues but rather symptoms of a single, interlocking system of power and violence.² This framework provides a critical lens through which to understand not only historical complicity but also the nature of the contemporary challenges that demand a new form of conscientious objection.

Christian Colonial Capitalist Violence (CCV): A Fused System

Section 2: The Diagnosis — A Fused System of Violence

The NewCO framework diagnoses the problem not as separate issues, but as a single, integrated machine of oppression: **Christian Colonial Capitalist Violence (CCV)**. This entire system is deemed "contrary to the Spirit" because it inherently violates the belief in "that of God in every person."

The Three Pillars of CCV



The central diagnosis is that modern oppression operates through a "fused architecture" identified as "Christian Colonial Capitalist Violence" (CCV).² In this system, religious ideology, a political project of conquest, and an economic engine of extraction are not merely parallel forces but are seamlessly integrated, with each component legitimizing and reinforcing the others.² The remarkable resilience of this system stems precisely from this integration, which ensures that any isolated attempt to reform one component is "destined to fail" because the others remain intact to regenerate the oppressive logic.² To develop a viable strategy for its undoing, one must first conduct a precise diagnosis of this tripartite structure.

The first pillar, **Christian Ideology**, functions as the system's ideological engine, providing the "moral license for conquest".² Its foundational "source code" is the Doctrine of Discovery, a series of 15th-century papal bulls that granted European Christian monarchs divine authority to "invade, search out, capture, vanquish and subdue" any non-Christian peoples and seize their lands.² This doctrine transformed acts of violent theft and genocide into a divinely sanctioned mission. Its enduring power lies in its transmutation from religious edict into secular law. In the landmark 1823 U.S. Supreme Court case *Johnson v. M'Intosh*, the court explicitly cited the doctrine to establish that European nations held an "absolute right" to lands in the "New World," thereby legally nullifying Indigenous title and legitimizing the dispossession of a continent. This precedent remains a cornerstone of U.S. federal Indian law, demonstrating its continuing power to uphold the legitimacy of the colonial state.²

The second pillar, the **Colonial Project**, represents the political project of settler-colonialism, which aims to "permanently replace the original population" of a territory with a new society of settlers.² This project requires the elimination of Indigenous peoples not only through physical violence but also through policies of forced assimilation and "cultural genocide".² The Christian justifications were put directly in service of these state goals. President Grant's "Peace Policy" of 1869, which enlisted Quakers as federal agents, is a prime example of this state-church partnership. While framed in the language of peace, its primary goal was to "pacify Native People and eliminate barriers to the settlement and exploitation of lands west of the Mississippi".²

The third pillar, the **Capitalist Engine**, is the economic driver that fuels the entire system through "White land theft," resource extraction, and the creation of rigid economic hierarchies.² The colonial project of pacification and assimilation was explicitly designed to dissolve tribal structures, break collective land ownership, and open vast territories for white settlement, agriculture, and resource exploitation. This engine functions by dismantling traditional Indigenous economies to foster dependency on the colonial system.²

The Indian Boarding School system is not merely an example of one pillar of violence; it is the quintessential microcosm where all three forces converged with devastating intentionality. This fusion is the key to understanding its profound and lasting harm. The schools were federally mandated and state-funded (Colonial) ², almost exclusively operated by Christian

denominations under a "theology of assimilation" (Christian) ², and explicitly designed to achieve the economic subjugation of Indigenous peoples (Capitalist).² A deeper analysis reveals that the boarding schools were a sophisticated and deliberate form of economic warfare. The curriculum was designed for servitude, with the explicit goal to de-skill Indigenous youth from their own sovereign economies and re-skill them for a life of menial labor within the colonial system. By training boys in rudimentary farming and girls in domestic service, the schools systematically dismantled traditional economic practices and retrained generations for a life "at the bottom of the Euro-American economic ladder".² By analyzing the schools through this tripartite lens, we see that the Christian justification was essential for carrying out the state's political project, which in turn served the ultimate goal of capitalist exploitation. This demonstrates why the diagnosis of a *fused* system is so critical and why the antidote must be equally integrated.

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The Inward Turn: Systemic Blowback and the Weaponization of Suffering

A critical insight of the decolonial framework is that the fused system of Christian Colonial Capitalist Violence, built on a logic of dispossession and perpetual expansion, does not remain externally focused. Eventually, it "turns its logic inward," inflicting a version of its foundational violence on the dominant society it was created to serve.² This process, termed "Systemic Blowback," manifests in three interconnected forms that create a self-perpetuating cycle of social decay, political extremism, and state violence.²

The first manifestation is **Capitalist Blowback**. The system's promise of widespread prosperity to the white working and middle classes has been decisively broken by decades of deindustrialization, wage stagnation, and the prioritization of shareholder profit over community well-being. This economic violence has fueled a profound social crisis of "deaths of despair"—fatalities from suicide, drug, and alcohol poisoning—which surged among non-college-educated white Americans who experienced a collapse in their social and economic prospects.²

The second form is **Christian Blowback**, which emerges as the political ideology of White Christian Nationalism. This ideology functions as a "maladaptive coping mechanism" for the pain caused by capitalist blowback. It misdirects legitimate economic anger and social anxiety away from the systemic failures of capitalism and toward a series of cultural and racial scapegoats, including secularists, immigrants, and people of color. It reframes political opponents as demonic and justifies anti-democratic actions and political violence as part of a holy war to reclaim a mythologized Christian nation.²

The third form is **Colonial Blowback**, which involves the "militarization of American policing".² The tools, tactics, and mentalities of colonial population control, once deployed in foreign wars and on the American frontier, have been brought home to be used against the domestic population. Through federal initiatives like the Department of Defense's 1033 Program, which has transferred over \$7.4 billion in surplus military equipment to local law enforcement agencies since 1997, the line between soldier and police officer has been dangerously blurred.² This influx of military hardware fosters a "warrior" mindset among police, encouraging them to view citizens as potential enemies to be dominated.²

The theory of Systemic Blowback is more than an academic diagnosis; it is a strategic political framework designed to build a broad, multiracial coalition. By offering a structural explanation for widespread pain, it directly counters the divisive, scapegoating logic of Christian Nationalism. The framework creates a causal chain: economic precarity (Capitalist Blowback) creates a population vulnerable to extremist ideologies (Christian Blowback), which are then enforced by a militarized state (Colonial Blowback).² By explicitly connecting the suffering of

disparate groups to a common systemic root, the framework attempts to forge solidarity. It argues to a white worker experiencing a "death of despair" that their pain, while profoundly different in scale and history, originates from the same capitalist logic that drives colonial extraction. This reframes the political landscape from a zero-sum conflict of grievances to a shared interest in dismantling the entire oppressive structure.²

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Part III: The Symmetrical Antidote: A Decolonial Abolitionist Praxis

Section 3: The Symmetrical Antidote — A Positive Witness

Because the violence is fused together, the objection must be a symmetrical, holistic act of dismantling and repair. The NewCO moves from a "negative" witness ("No" to war) to a "positive" witness ("Yes" to liberation), translating core testimonies into active, reparative praxis.

Pillar of Violence	Symmetrical Praxis (Action)	Living Quaker Testimony
Colonial Violence	LANDBACK Return of land & sovereignty	Integrity
Capitalist Violence	Mutual Aid "Solidarity, Not Charity"	Equality
Christian (State) Violence	Abolition Divest/Invest for true safety	Peace

Because the diagnosis reveals a single, fused system of violence, the proposed solution must be an equally integrated and holistic response. The call for a new form of conscientious objection is not merely a call to say "No" to this system, but to actively build its replacement. This decolonial abolitionist praxis is conceived as a "cohesive praxis"—a symmetrical antidote designed to counter each pillar of the oppressive structure.¹ This praxis is grounded in the concept of "prefigurative politics," the revolutionary strategy of building the new world in the shell of the old. It does not wait for a future revolution but begins enacting the desired social relations of a liberated society in the present through the creation of autonomous institutions and practices.²

From a Negative to a Positive Witness: The Call to Repair

This evolution marks a profound shift in the meaning of the core Quaker exhortation to "let your lives speak".¹ For centuries, the Peace Testimony, as expressed through conscientious objection to war, has been a powerful "negative" witness. It has been a courageous and often sacrificial "No" to the state's demand for violence, embodied in the refusal to kill, the refusal to wear a uniform, and the refusal to carry a draft card. The life speaks through its powerful act of non-participation, even at the cost of imprisonment, torture, or death, as the stories of Seth Laughlin, Merlin Chamness, and Don Laughlin attest.¹ It is a witness defined by what one *will not* do.

The emergent testimony against colonial capitalism is being formed as a "positive" witness.¹ It is an active and constructive "Yes" to the difficult, humble, and long-term work of dismantling unjust structures and participating in the repair of historical and ongoing harm. This positive witness requires acknowledging one's own complicity and privileged position as a settler, listening to and centering the leadership of Indigenous and other marginalized communities, and engaging in tangible acts of restitution and world-building like LANDBACK and Mutual Aid.¹ The life speaks not just through what it refuses, but through its constructive participation in the work of justice. It is a shift from a primary focus on maintaining individual innocence ("I will not kill") to embracing corporate responsibility ("We must help repair the harm our system has caused").¹

The Three Pillars of Liberation: A Symmetrical Praxis

Section 4: The Three Pillars of Repair in Detail

This integrated strategy demands that LANDBACK, Mutual Aid, and Abolition work together as one. One cannot exist without the others; you cannot abolish the police without dismantling the colonial property relations they exist to protect.



LANDBACK as Integrity

If integrity means our actions align with our truth, we cannot speak of peace on stolen land. LANDBACK is the only spiritually honest action, demanding the material return of ancestral lands and the restoration of Indigenous sovereignty over culture, language, and ecology.



Mutual Aid as Equality

Capitalism creates hierarchy by denying basic needs. Mutual Aid counters this by building horizontal networks of collective care ("Solidarity, Not Charity") to meet shared needs, making it the living expression of the Testimony of Equality.



Abolition as Peace

This expands the Peace Testimony, arguing that if we oppose international war, we must also oppose the domestic instruments of state violence (police, prisons) that enforce colonial property relations. It means divesting from harm and investing in true community safety.

This "symmetrical antidote" is composed of three interconnected pillars of liberation, each designed to directly mirror and reverse a pillar of the oppressive system.¹ Crucially for a Quaker audience, this entire decolonial praxis can be reframed as the most authentic and rigorous modern expression of the Society's own core testimonies.¹

LANDBACK as the Testimony of Integrity

The praxis of LANDBACK is the direct antidote to colonial violence. It is not a metaphor but a concrete political project demanding the literal, material return of ancestral lands to Indigenous stewardship and the full restoration of Indigenous sovereignty, language, and cultural lifeways.¹ It is the direct and material reversal of colonial violence. This praxis is not merely theoretical; it is being enacted today. A powerful contemporary example is the "Homeland Return" project in California, where the College Park Friends Educational Association (a Quaker organization) worked in partnership with the Nisenan Tribe to successfully transfer 232 acres of ancestral land back to the tribe for elder housing, cultural revitalization, and environmental healing.¹

Theologically, LANDBACK is the necessary expression of the testimony of **Integrity**. After centuries of living on and profiting from stolen land, symbolic apologies and land acknowledgements are insufficient. Integrity demands a reckoning with the material reality of this history. If the testimony requires that one's actions align with one's truth, then speaking of peace while occupying and benefiting from stolen land is a profound spiritual contradiction. The only honest response is to support the material restitution of land and sovereignty, moving beyond words to reparative action.¹

Mutual Aid as the Testimony of Equality

Mutual Aid is the antidote to capitalist violence. Defined by the principle "Solidarity, Not Charity," it is a practice of building horizontal networks of collective care and solidarity to meet community needs outside of the transactional, profit-driven logic of the market.¹ Mutual aid de-commodifies survival by creating a "people's infrastructure" for food, housing, and other necessities, building the trust-based relationships that undermine the vertical hierarchies required for white supremacy.² It directly opposes the transactional, scarcity-based logic of capitalism.²

This praxis is the living expression of the testimony of **Equality**. If there is "that of God in every person," then it is a spiritual violation for some to have their basic needs for food, shelter, and care denied while others have a surplus. Mutual aid is the practical, lived application of this testimony, creating communities of care that dismantle capitalist hierarchies and affirm the sacred worth of every individual in practice, not just in principle.¹

Abolition as the Peace Testimony

Abolition is the antidote to the coercive colonial state. It is a dual strategy of systematically divesting from the state's violent enforcement arms—the police, prisons, and surveillance—while simultaneously investing in community-based systems of safety, healing, and transformative justice that address the root causes of harm.¹ The prison-industrial complex is understood as the modern enforcement arm of the settler-colonial project, making its abolition inseparable from decolonization.¹ This connects to the work of modern Quaker abolitionists, such as the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), which has called for an end to imprisonment for decades and now works for a world without prisons, cages, or policing, recognizing them as the "living legacies of slavery".¹

This pillar is the necessary 21st-century expression of the **Peace Testimony**. The historical evolution of the Peace Testimony shows a continuous expansion of what is understood as "war." The decolonial analysis reveals that the police and prisons are not instruments of public safety but the domestic enforcement arm of the colonial state, perpetuating continuous, low-grade warfare against Indigenous, Black, and other marginalized communities. A consistent Peace Testimony must therefore expand to reject these internal instruments of state violence with the same fervor it rejects international warfare.¹

The following table provides a clear, at-a-glance summary of the report's central argument: that a holistic problem requires a holistic solution. It visually demonstrates the "symmetrical" nature of the praxis, reinforcing the intellectual coherence of the framework and showing that the proposed actions are a carefully constructed, integrated strategy where each component is necessary to counter a specific pillar of oppression.

The Fused System of Violence	The Integrated Liberation Praxis	The Living Quaker Testimony
Colonial Violence (Land Theft, Elimination of Sovereignty)	LANDBACK (Material Return of Land & Sovereignty)	Integrity
Capitalist Violence (Extraction, Hierarchy, Scarcity)	Mutual Aid (Solidarity, Collective Care, Abundance)	Equality
Christian (State) Violence (Coercive Enforcement, Caging)	Abolition (Divestment from Police/Prisons, Investment in Care)	Peace

Part IV: Praxis in Action: A Case Study of Decolonial Repair

The theoretical framework of a decolonial abolitionist praxis finds its concrete expression in the real-world work of activists and communities on the ground. The alliance between Sikowis Nobiss, founder of the Great Plains Action Society (GPAS), and Jeff Kisling, an Iowa Quaker, provides a living, detailed case study of this praxis. Their journey from individual conviction to a powerful partnership, culminating in the development of the GPAS Urban Resilience and Innovation Hub, offers a replicable blueprint for how settler and Indigenous communities can move together from a legacy of harm toward a future of justice and repair.²

The Human Blueprint: Transformative Accomplice-ship

The collaboration between Nobiss and Kisling serves as a compelling model for moving beyond the often-superficial dynamics of passive allyship and toward a more demanding and meaningful practice of "transformative accomplice-ship".² An ally may offer verbal support from a safe distance, but an accomplice actively shares risk, takes direction, and leverages their own position to materially advance the struggle.² The evolution of their relationship demonstrates four key principles that are essential for this deeper form of solidarity.

The first and foundational principle is **Truth & Reckoning**. The entire alliance is built upon Kisling's willingness to engage in an "unflinching introspection and public acknowledgment of his own community's historical complicity in harm".² As a generational Quaker, he has made confronting the "terrible harm" of the Quaker-run Indian Boarding Schools a central part of his work, stating plainly, "Emphatically, it is NOT something in the past! The trauma that we caused reverberates to this day".² This act of confronting a painful past without defensiveness is the necessary first step that creates the moral authority for an authentic relationship.

The second principle is **Centering Indigenous Leadership**. Throughout their collaboration, Kisling meticulously positions himself as an "ally and amplifier," not a leader or spokesperson.² He consistently attends, documents, and promotes GPAS-led events, always crediting Nobiss and her organization as the architects of the movement. His creation of educational resources for non-Natives came at the "explicit request of his Indigenous friends," demonstrating a posture of listening and responding rather than directing.²

The third principle is **Building Personal Relationships Through Shared Struggle**. The alliance demonstrates that abstract political agreements are insufficient for resilient solidarity.

This requires investing in the "slow, patient, and often difficult process of building real personal relationships".² The pivotal moment that forged their bond was the 2018 First Nation-Farmer Climate Unity March. This grueling 94-mile, eight-day trek along the Dakota Access Pipeline route served as a "crucible" for their relationship. The shared hardship of heat, storms, and physical exhaustion created a context of mutual vulnerability and reliance that leveled hierarchies and transformed abstract political alignment into a "profound friendship built on 'embodied trust'".²

The fourth and culminating principle is **Moving from Words to Tangible Action**. The trust forged between Kisling and Nobiss directly enabled a profound act of institutional repair in 2022. Following the discovery of unmarked graves at a residential school in Canada, Nobiss approached the Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) Peace & Social Concerns Committee for support in screening a film about the similar history at her own George Gordon First Nation. The committee responded by donating its *entire budget* of \$1,100 to the cause.² While the monetary sum is modest, the institutional act is radical. A simple donation from a large budget is charity; donating the entire budget of a committee is a symbolic act of institutional self-abnegation and material repair. It signals that this act of Indigenous-led healing is the institution's absolute priority, a reorientation of purpose made possible only by the years of trust-building.³ This case study reveals a clear and replicable causal pathway for decolonial work. It demonstrates that the "soft" work of relational trust-building, forged through shared physical struggle and vulnerability, is the critical and necessary precondition for achieving "hard" material outcomes like financial restitution and institutional change.

The Institutional Blueprint: The GPAS Hub as Indigenous Futurism

The decolonial praxis embodied in the Kisling-Nobiss alliance finds its institutional expression in the Great Plains Action Society (GPAS) Urban Resilience and Innovation Hub in Iowa.² This 1.2-acre project is far more than a community center; it is a physical manifestation of the decolonial abolitionist framework and a "true testament to Indigenous Futurism".² Indigenous Futurism is a cultural and political movement that challenges the colonial narrative of Indigenous peoples as a "vanishing race" by asserting a vibrant, continuous, and forward-looking Indigenous presence, often by weaving ancestral knowledge with visions of a technologically and socially advanced future. The GPAS Hub is a form of applied Indigenous Futurism, an act of "world-building" that translates this vision into architecture, agriculture, and economics.²

The Hub's design is a holistic, integrated ecosystem where each component reflects a core decolonial principle, creating a circular flow of knowledge, resources, and well-being. This stands in stark contrast to the siloed service models of Western planning and instead reflects

an Indigenous worldview of relationality.²

The **Urban Farm** is described as the "heart of the hub" and is the most direct expression of **LANDBACK** and ReMatriation.² It is a living laboratory for "regenerative cultural practices" that champions Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) not as a historical artifact, but as a sophisticated, "future-oriented science" for achieving food sovereignty and climate resilience.²

The **Mutual Aid Coffee Shop** is a radical reimagining of commerce that embodies the principles of **Mutual Aid**. Operating on a "pay-what-you-can" model and featuring a community fund to support other local justice initiatives, it transforms a typically transactional space into a site of solidarity and redistribution. It functions as a living example of a "decolonial economic model" based on care and reciprocity rather than profit.²

The **Healing Justice House** embodies the **Abolitionist** principle of investing in community well-being. It provides a dedicated space for a BIPOC Healing Collective to address the deep, intergenerational wounds of colonization. This work is understood as a foundational "pre-requisite for liberation," cultivating the personal and collective resilience required for the difficult work of dismantling oppressive systems and providing a direct alternative to carceral systems.²

Part V: The Incommensurable Path and the Syncretic Future

The integration of this decolonial abolitionist praxis requires a spiritual and political rupture with the deep-seated assumption that the existing structures of the settler state are permanent and inevitable. The concluding section of this analysis addresses the radical implications of this framework, exploring its rejection of mainstream political solutions and its vision for a new, decolonized Quaker theology that can guide Friends toward a more faithful and liberated future.

The Rejection of Reformism: Incommensurability and the Withdrawal of Consent

The call to action is rooted in the decolonial concept of "incommensurability"—the conviction that the worldview, logic, and structures of settler colonialism cannot be reformed, compromised with, or reconciled with Indigenous sovereignty and lifeways.¹ As scholars Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang assert, "decolonization is not a metaphor"; it is the literal return of land and life.¹ This perspective directly challenges gradualist approaches or attempts to work within existing institutional frameworks to make them more "just." It leads to a radical conclusion that you can't reform one into the other; the system must be dismantled and replaced.¹

This principle leads to a principled rejection of reformism and electoral politics. From this perspective, participation in the colonial state's political processes—even through respected Quaker lobbying organizations—serves only to grant moral legitimacy to an inherently unjust system that was designed to manage a colonial project.¹ The Des Moines Mutual Aid "Points of Unity" states this position bluntly: "We are against participation in electoral politics, because we are for the development of mutual aid as an alternative and widespread institution".¹ This stance is a "conscious and principled withdrawal of consent" from an unjust system.² It directly parallels the theological logic of the 1968 anti-draft epistle, which argued that registering as a CO still legitimized the system of conscription, making one "part of the power which forces our brothers into the military and into war".¹ The focus shifts from attempting to influence the state to building "dual power"—autonomous institutions of community self-governance that exist outside and against the state, with the eventual goal of challenging and replacing it.²

Toward a Theology of Wholeness: Fusing Quakerism, Indigenous Wisdom, and Theologies of Struggle

Section 6: The Foundation — A Syncretic Theology of Wholeness

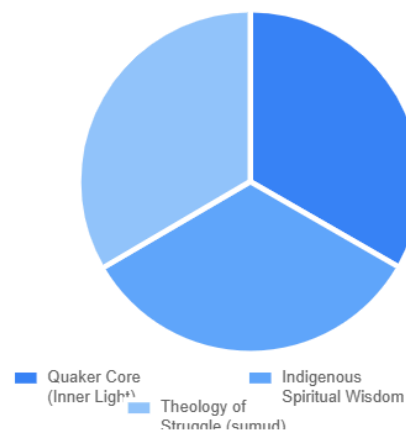
This entire framework culminates in a "syncretic theology"—a blending of distinct spiritual worldviews to create a new, unified, and more comprehensive faith. This theology of repair fuses three key elements to create a faith where "Love" is defined as the active, costly work of decolonization and material restitution.

A Theology of Repair

This new understanding is not a replacement of Quaker faith, but its fulfillment. It integrates:

- **The Quaker Core:** The foundational commitment to the Inner Light and resisting violence as a spiritual crime.
- **Indigenous Spiritual Wisdom:** Concepts like the "Harmony Way," which centers balance, reciprocity, and relationship with the Earth as a sacred relative.
- **Theology of Struggle:** Wisdom from colonized peoples, like the Palestinian concept of *sumud* (steadfastness), which defines peace as the active presence of justice and freedom from poverty.

Components of a Syncretic Theology



The entire New Conscientious Objector framework culminates in an emergent "syncretic theology" that blends distinct spiritual worldviews to create a new, unified, and more comprehensive faith.¹ This is not a dilution of Quakerism but a powerful expression of its core, anti-creedal traditions, revitalized by engagement with Indigenous and other colonized peoples' thought.¹ The synthesis creates a theology of repair by fusing three key spiritual streams.

The first is the **Quaker Core**. It retains the foundational commitment to the Inner Light and the belief that resisting violence is a spiritual crime. It holds onto the willingness to suffer for belief, a principle demonstrated by generations of conscientious objectors.¹

The second is **Indigenous Spiritual Wisdom**. It integrates concepts like **ReMatiation**—"Returning the Sacred to the Mother" by restoring balance, reclaiming traditional practices, and actively working toward Indigenous land stewardship and sovereignty.³ This principle, centered in many Indigenous worldviews, involves restoring a right relationship with the Earth as a mother and a source of life, not as a resource to be owned and extracted. This shifts the focus of Quaker peace from a narrow anti-war stance to a quest for *wholeness* or *shalom*, which integrates spiritual, social, economic, and ecological well-being.¹

The third is **Theology of Struggle**. It incorporates the spiritual wisdom of colonized peoples, such as the Palestinian Quaker concept of *sumud* (steadfastness/resilience), which defines peace not as the mere absence of conflict but as the active presence of justice, freedom from sickness, and the absence of poverty.¹

The culmination of this syncretic theology is a radical reinterpretation of the core Christian and Quaker concept of "Love." Within this framework, Love is no longer an abstract feeling or a call for passive nonviolence. It is redefined as the active, costly, and material work of decolonization, restitution, and repair. If the system of CCV is the ultimate violation of "that of God in every person," then the ultimate expression of love for one's neighbor must be the active dismantling of that system. This theological move transforms the entire praxis from a political program into a spiritual imperative. LANDBACK, Mutual Aid, and Abolition become the essential, non-negotiable practices of a faith that takes seriously the command to love God and neighbor in a colonial context. The New Conscientious Objector, therefore, represents the emergence of a decolonized Quaker faith striving for the liberation of both the oppressed and the oppressor.¹

Resources

InfoGraphic <https://gemini.google.com/share/f74244f3663c>

Quiz <https://gemini.google.com/share/3fb8f05b2910>

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