

Plenary Address

On Meeting with the Other: Peacemaking Lessons from Quaker Work in the Midwest and Middle East

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A recent book by Jean Vanier, founder of the L'Arche communities (intentional Christian communities that live alongside the disabled), and Stanley Hauerwas, salty theologian formerly at Notre Dame – currently at Duke Divinity School, makes the claim that some of our best peace-making lessons come from communities such as L'Arche who work with the disabled, displaying the love, gentleness, and patience that is requisite for true peacemaking. The book *Living Gently in a Violent World* may set some peace activists' teeth on edge, as it lifts up as an example a work that can't "solve" an issue – in this case "disabilities" – but which takes seriously the ancient Hebrew prophets' dictum that a society can be judged by how it treats "the least of these," those who cannot "pay back." Furthermore, Hauerwas cites the example of L'Arche (and we could add The Catholic Worker, Open Door in Atlanta, and other such communities) in saying, "Christianity is true by demonstrating what community would look like if the gospel *were* true."

I'll let you chew on that a bit while I lay out the central thesis of my talk this evening: Quaker work among the original inhabitants of this land during the early 1800s – right here in Indiana and Ohio – illustrates that thought, that long, slow, gentle, and loving work with "the other," while by some definitions "unsuccessful," nonetheless verifies a larger truth. And that current Quaker work in the Middle East continues in the same vein (perhaps "vain!").

I am sure I am not revealing any startling new information when I say that relations between Euro-Americans and "Native Americans" have been marked by difficulty, to say the least. While the encounter of the Pilgrims with Indians in the early 1600s is recalled in rather romantic terms, there is a reason why signs along the Mass. Turnpike not that many decades ago rather whimsically portrayed Pilgrim hats with an arrow sticking through! By the end of the 17th century, despite images of early settlers and natives sitting down for their Butterball turkeys, oyster stuffing, pumpkin pie, and football game between the Washington Redskins and New England Patriots, King Philip's War, the Pequot War, and limited success on the part of the Puritans in converting and "civilizing" the Indians led to a less-than-sentimental relationship. Already in the early years of the 1700s, Solomon Stoddard, a Puritan leader and grandfather of the great theologian Jonathan Edwards, called for "Indians to be hunted by dogs as they do wild animals."

Many religious individuals and organizations were complicit in extinguishing Indian claims to their lands. Recent histories have even made the claim that our approach to Native Americans was nothing short of genocidal ethnic cleansing. One of the exceptions to the generally tragic record of Christendom's response to Indian culture, however, is the response of Friends. While Christians in New England were busily either fighting the Indians or gathering a handful into "praying towns" like Stockbridge and Natick, Friends and Indians in Pennsylvania enjoyed 75 years of nearly unbroken peace between the birth of the Quaker colony in the 1680s and Friends' abdicating political control in 1756. Now, I don't want to over-romanticize our story, either. Such recent books as *With Good Intentions* and *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship* display the less-than-Garden of Eden record of Friends in relating to Indians and others of color.

But there was a difference between Quakers and most other Christians. Friends operated out of an understanding of truth and a common storehouse of mental images of how Friends respond to crisis and to "the other." I won't give an exhaustive review of early Quaker history and theology, but out of their origins as a left-wing Puritan group emphasizing a revival of original Christianity and "perfection," Friends emphasized that all persons are enlightened by a divine "inward" light. They

shared a belief that the Hebrew prophet Isaiah's vision of a "peaceable kingdom" is possible on earth. They owned an English Revolution radicalism that stressed egalitarianism, and they practiced a restorationist Christianity that raised the example of the Sermon on the Mount and its teaching of peace, love, and humility to normative status.

Part of our iconography as Friends is the image of William Penn and his treaty with the Indians, first Benjamin West's and later Edward Hicks' immortalizing in art Penn's belief "...that we may always live together as neighbors and friends; else what would the great G-d do to us who hath made us not to devour and destroy one another, but to live soberly and kindly together in the world."

In Hicks' famous "peaceable kingdoms," he portrays Isaiah's prophecy of the wolf, lion, lamb, and little child dwelling together in peace – while in the background is a little gaggle of Quakers and Indians obviously getting along famously. It is Hicks' way of saying, in the famous words of the late Kenneth Boulding, "If it exists (whites and Indians living in harmony)...it's possible!" Doyle Penrose's painting of "None Shall Make Them Afraid" plays a similar role for us.

We also have as part of our "oral iconography" the stories of Quakers on the frontier "leaving the latchstring out" and of John Woolman's famous journey in 1763, at the height of the Seven Years' War, to visit Indians in the village of Wyalusing, Pennsylvania, because, "Love was the first motion."

This commitment to living peaceably with "the other" became part of the Quaker ethos and informed the relationships of Friends in the Midwest who engaged in a rather remarkable response to the natives in this region, and it is to that story that I will now turn.

I have found that very few today are aware of Friends' work among the Indians of Indiana and Ohio in the first third of the 19th century. Many volumes have been written about Penn and the Indians of the Eastern woodlands, and much ink has been spilled over Ulysses S. Grant's "Quaker Policy" and Friends' activity as Indian agents in the Great Plains. But most are unaware that from 1804 to 1833 Quakers undertook a remarkable work among the Miami, Pottawatomie, Delaware, and Shawnee nations here.

Sporadic contact between Quakers and Indians in the Old Northwest began as early as 1773 with the visit of Philadelphia Friends into Ohio. Four North Carolina Quakers undertook a similar trip into Ohio territory in 1775, reporting that even that early they noted that forced migration from their Eastern homes had disturbed the Indians' traditional economic and religious activities.

In 1795, Baltimore YM established an Indian Committee, minutes indicating that its formation was in response to the kindness Indians had shown early white settlers and with the desire to promote their welfare. Individual Quaker contact with the Indians in this region accelerated as the Treaty of Greene Ville opened up the area to white settlement, and Friends filtering in from North Carolina noted the pacific relations Indians had with "the children of Onas (an Indian name for William Penn)," the "broadbrims." Even during the War of 1812, while many other settlers fortified their homes or depended on the security of blockhouses, most Quakers depended on their friendly relationships as their security. It must be noted, however, that as things heated up in Indiana, a few Friends did find it "convenient" to visit relatives in the Buckeye State!

The institutional response of Baltimore Yearly Meeting to Indian concerns was to recognize that treaties and settlement were diminishing traditional hunting grounds, and they sought opportunity to introduce traditional agricultural practices. With the visit in Baltimore of the remarkable Miami chief Meshekinnoquah (Little Turtle), on his way back to Indiana from a trip to Congress to plea for interdiction in the devastating liquor trade, the decision was made to increase efforts in introducing a more settled lifestyle among the Indians. Little Turtle, who had reluctantly joined in the confederacy that was defeated by General "Mad" Anthony Wayne at the Battle of Fallen Timbers, knew that Indians' options were few; Tecumseh and the Prophet continued their resistance, but it was doomed; some wanted to maintain a semi-nomadic lifestyle, but game was already fast disappearing.

Little Turtle sought a "Middle Path." He believed that by adopting certain economic principles and practices of the whites, the Indians could survive as a people on their ever-decreasing tribal lands

(kind of like Detroit's automakers today adopting new strategies in the hope of surviving in a shrinking market!). He told the Baltimore Friends that he trusted Quakers to give them the instruction needed without "messing" too much with other aspects of their life.

In response, BYM sent several hundred dollars' worth of agricultural equipment to the Indians along the upper reaches of the Wabash River, and in 1804 established an agricultural mission near Huntington, Indiana. The Baltimore Friends who journeyed to Fort Wayne to meet with the Indians in establishing the outpost encouraged them to expand on the skills they already possessed in growing crops and raising animals and shared how their own ancestors in Europe had similarly exchanged hunting for farming and had prospered.

The contents of the speeches make it clear that Friends had no expressed intent to evangelize the Indians. No mention of religion was made, except for expressions of thanks to the Great Spirit for giving the Indians lands so ideal for farming.

In this, though, these Friends displayed a typical lack of understanding by whites of Indian culture. They stated explicitly that it would be necessary for the men to work the fields, rather than the women. They interpreted the traditional division of labor among the Indians as inferior to the "stronger" men's work in the fields and women's domestic arts, as practiced by Europeans. Quaker historian of Native Americans Steve Warren makes a strong case for Friends' and others' critical misinterpretation of Indian culture.

The contributions of Friends, however, were deeply appreciated by their Indian hosts. The success of the agricultural mission in its first year was remarkable: 23 hogs averaging 214 pounds; 400 bushel of corn, and turnips, parsnips, pumpkins, beans, cucumbers, watermelons, and potatoes. The mission, known as "Dennis' Fields" for the first farmer, Philip Dennis, stationed there, was downriver from Huntington, Indiana, ancestral home of former Vice President Dan Quayle. I have joked before that, given such proximity, the potatoes probably grew not only with several "eyes" but an extra "e," too! (if any of you are old enough to recall the VP's deficiencies in spelling!).

Quaker work along the Wabash continued with mixed results until closed by the War of 1812. Reports of the Baltimore Committee noted that their attempts at changing the culture were not altogether successful, but the Shawnees of Wapakoneta, Ohio (only 35 miles south of Bluffton) invited Friends to resume their work there after the war was over. With the encouragement of their ancient chief, Black Hoof, the Shawnees embraced the Quaker blueprint of providing saw and grist mills, farming equipment, and instruction – so long as the Indians demonstrated industriousness and a willingness to settle on individual farm plots. And unlike the Indiana mission, the Wapakoneta station was also to have a school.

By boarding Indian children at a Quaker school off the reservation, an Ohio Friend reasoned, habits not yet fully developed could be reformed and the young people directed in the proper path – again, with the intention of teaching the boys agriculture and the girls domestic arts.

Although we are all aware of the sorry history of Indian boarding schools – including those run by Friends in the East, South, and Great Plains – Chief Black Hoof appears to have been pleased with the Quaker plans. He noted that it was clear the children could not continue to live as their parents had (the Shawnees were then living on a five-square mile reservation!), and he was confident that Friends would deal with the children tenderly and respectfully.

Black Hoof even asked the Quakers to attend to spiritual encouragement, too, noting that some of the Shawnees had become dissipated. He trusted the Quakers to respect Shawnee religious custom, however, and pointed out the similarities he perceived between the religious traditions of Indians and Friends:

"We consider the Society of Friends as our real Friends. We know that the manner of worshiping the Great Spirit is to us more agreeable than that of any other people. Their religion, in truth, is very near our own religion, for they, like us, when met together on occasions for devotion, speak to the people without so much singing and praying!"

And Friends heeded the advice. Students were not required to attend Quaker worship; the only meeting for worship at the station was held in the Superintendent's home, with only family members and other Friends in attendance.

The school was never well attended and was open only off and on through the 1820s. The mills and fields, however, under Indian supervision, were very successful. The farm land was so verdant and bountiful, in fact, it attracted the attention of envious white settlers who lobbied for Indian removal so that they could lay claim to the rich lands.

In 1830, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act, and subsequently President Andrew Jackson faced down the Supreme Court over removing the Cherokees from Georgia. By 1833 the last of the Wapakoneta Shawnees had left Ohio on their own trail of tears to Missouri.

Although he died several years before the Shawnees' removal, Black Hoop anticipated it. To a friendly Indian agent, John Johnston (himself married to a Quaker), he said with resignation, "We will go anywhere you please, if you will afterwards let us alone, but we know from past experience you will keep driving us until we reach the sea on the other side of the mountains, and then we must jump off."

How are we to assess this chapter of Quaker history? Was the Quaker work with Indians here "successful?"

By our own modern standards, we may have some problems with our forebears' response to the natives. They seemed to value white cultural values above those of the Indians; they displayed a tendency toward "civilizing" the Indians as preparatory for more far-reaching, wholesale change of Indian religion. But we must also recognize that the Indians themselves sought Quaker assistance; that non-adaptation in some way was not a viable option; that Indian culture was not static – it was bound to change in some way, even as our own Quaker culture has morphed over the years! (Our plain dress is now blue jeans and "talk back" Tees.) Black Hoop himself noted that Quaker culture was already changing in the 1820s, and he wasn't sure what to make of it. He noted that many Quakers were using the "war" language and "war" dress of non-Quakers (that is, adopting the same speech and dress styles of those with whom the Indians had less pacific relations), and he wondered if they would soon begin adopting their attitudes toward the natives.

Indeed, we could wish for a more "postmodern" interaction of those earlier Friends with the Indians, but do compare their attitude with some of their contemporaries:

While Quakers were beginning their work with the Indians in the Old Northwest, William Henry Harrison, territorial governor, was saying,

Is one of the fairest portions of the globe to remain...the haunt of a few wretched savages, when it seems destined by the Creator to support a large population and to be the seat of civilization?

In similar vein, a history of Hardin County, Ohio – a county adjacent to the one in which Bluffton is located – in the 1870s states,

In the place of the Indian trace [the white citizens of Ohio] have laid down railroads; where stood the wigwam, they have built cities; they have dugged down mountains, bridged rivers, and extorted from the bowels of the earth gold, silver, iron, copper, tin, and coal. The hunting grounds of the passed away race are annually covered with crops.... It was a part of the inevitable that the red man should depart and the white man take his place. No thoughtful person would prefer a country covered with forests and ranged by a few savages to a great State covered with cities, towns, and well-cultivated farms.

Elsewhere in Christendom, there had been more "successful" projects. Puritans established some 14 "praying towns" for Indians. Dartmouth was established as a school for Native Americans. Yet all that remained – even within a few years – was an isolated Stockbridge Nation (in Wisconsin!) and a

college athletic team's nickname – itself now changed from the Redmen. When King Philip's War in New England showed the Indians in the 1670s to still be resistant to assimilation, even "Christian Indians" were murdered.

Initial "success" with the Indians in New England was more impressive by some standards than the Quakers' less intrusive efforts in Indiana and Ohio; the final New England response to "the Indian problem" was "effective": whole Indian nations went into extinction.

And, of course, the legacy of such "success" is considerable bitterness, animosity, and marginalization.

If measured by some modern criteria of effectiveness and success, European civilization was successful in its encounter with the Native American. In contrast, one could apply those warped standards and say that Quakers in Indiana and Ohio were ineffective, unsuccessful. Their mission on the Wabash disappeared after a few short years; the agricultural projects in Ohio did not prevent Shawnee removal and, in fact, may have hastened their demise by inviting the envy of encroaching white settlers.

Yet Friends may well have enjoyed the only "success" that really matters. With the exception of some fairly forgivable sins, these Friends were essentially right. Their views on and relation to the Native Americans are pointed to today as examples of how European/Indian contact should have proceeded – not unlike the way Quaker opposition to the Iraq War was vilified in the press in 2003 (remember Michael Kelly's calling us traitors?), only to have turned out to be "right."

A few years ago I attended a Ford Foundation program at Rutgers University that seeks to train U.S. history teachers in conflict resolution through role play. I was there as an author of a role play on Penn and the Indians in treaty negotiations in the 1680s.

That situation was being contrasted with a role play of negotiations between Puritans and Indians in the 1670s before King Philip's War. The high school teachers present, none of whom were Friends, were astonished at the Quaker attitude and noted that even though the Puritans "won" in their battle with the Indians, it came at a huge cost, while the Quakers' "weakness" in treating the Indians on equal terms led to 75 years of peace. Two participants came up to me afterwards and asked about attending Quaker meeting!

If we are to draw a lesson from those early Friends' witness among the Indians of the Midwest, it may be this: final judgment of success and effectiveness may not be ours to see. Perhaps we are called to live by a different definition of effectiveness in our relation with "the other" than the world operates by.

On one of our annual Guilford College/FUM work/study trips to Israel and Palestine, we met with Jonathan Kuttab, a noted Palestinian human rights lawyer, Ramallah Friends Schools parent, and trustee. He gently chided us about some Quakers' hesitancy in standing up for Palestinian rights, lest they lose the ability to be effective in moving among the different parties in the conflict.

"Stop trying to be pragmatic and practical," he said. "Stand rather as a moral authority and do the right thing."

On another trip, we heard the then-deputy speaker of the Knesset, Naomi Chazan, say, "The tragedy of the conflict is that there are two narratives by the two peoples, both true, and they don't meet."

Friends among the Indians of Indiana and Ohio in the early 1800s tried to navigate those same difficult shoals. They were, indeed, hoping to be effective in alleviating the Indians' suffering, but in the larger scheme of things, they were holding firm to principle, to recognizing them as children of G-d, as equally possessed of an inward light and life.

And they sought to tell the Indians' narrative – constantly memorializing Congress on Indians concerns – even though that narrative didn't mesh with the European one we heard earlier in the history of Hardin County and the sentiments of Andrew Jackson and William Henry Harrison.

Friends today in the Middle East are attempting a similarly difficult task – one not guaranteed to be “successful.” And time does not permit me in this talk to speak of the profound similarities between the fate of the American Indians and what is happening to the Palestinians today. Even a casual look at the loss of Palestinian lands since 1948 and their isolation on smaller and smaller tracts of land will remind one of how Indians were reduced to reservations.

Friends have been in the Middle East since 1869, when Quakers began a school in the Palestinian town of Ramallah, initially focusing on the education of girls under the Ottoman Turkish Empire. Today there are 1100 students in the schools, the overwhelming majority Muslim, with an International Baccalaureate and Quakerly curriculum that emphasizes human equality, nonviolent reconciliation, and global awareness.

In the 1960s, the American Friends Service Committee published a groundbreaking work, *Search for Peace in the Middle East*, authored primarily by Landrum Bolling and calling for a two-state solution and mutual recognition by the parties in conflict. Although roundly condemned at the time, it is now the basis for even U.S. policy in the region – although the window of opportunity for such a “solution” is rapidly closing.

Recent Quaker delegations have traveled to the Middle East to meet with all parties to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, listening carefully to all sides; they have gone to Iraq, initially to seek a way to prevent the war – and later to participate in peacemaking efforts, Tom Fox losing his life in that ministry; and most recently to Iran as part of a broader peacemaking effort organized by the Mennonites (with props to our host, Bluffton University!).

The annual work/study trips that my wife and I lead to Israel and Palestine seek to continue this tradition of bearing witness and providing a ministry of accompaniment to those doing the hard work of peacemaking on the ground. Over the years, we have found that our most profound contributions have simply been to listen deeply to all – and to convey what we hear not only to people back in the States but also to those on the other side of increasingly impregnable barriers of separation and stereotyping as “the enemy,” “the terrorist,” “the occupier,” “the other.”

In just one small example of the power of deep listening and (with apologies to the detractors of Supreme Court Justice nominee Sonia Sotomayor) *empathy*, I relate an experience we had in the summer of 2001, a summer of intense violence following the outbreak of the Second Intifada – or Palestinian “uprising.” A teacher at the Friends Boys School accompanied us to the margins of Ramallah/El-Bireh to see the damage done to homes and businesses by an incursion overnight. As we viewed the burned-out and blasted private homes and stores in that residential neighborhood, a woman we later learned was named Nadia, 27 years old, married and the mother of three children under the age of 5, came screaming out of her bullet-riddled home.

“You call *us* the terrorists! Last night we were all huddled on the floor of our bedroom, fearing death as machine gun bullets ricocheted around our room for half an hour! When we survived and began cleaning up the damage, we recognized that the bullets and equipment responsible were American-made. And you call *us* the terrorists! I hope all Americans burn in hell!”

Nadia screamed at us over and over, repeating the same phrases. All we could do was take it in, express what sympathies we could, and leave for another appointment deeply shaken. As we contemplated what to do, we determined that, having heard that each American man, woman, and child gives, on average, \$25 in tax money to buy military equipment that perpetuates the conflict, we could at least each donate that much to help rebuild Nadia’s home. We put together our donations and had it sent to her family, hoping it wouldn’t be viewed as blood money.

On our last night in Ramallah, we were at the teacher’s home who had taken us to see the damage and learned that Nadia wanted to come over to see us with her family. Soon she arrived with her lovely children and husband, and we chatted amicably, Nadia apologizing for “venting” to us, and we assuring her that we understood. After a few minutes, she paused in the conversation and asked, “Are Quakers Christians?” I responded that the answer would take far longer than we had that evening, but

that, in short, the answer is “yes,” given the Middle Eastern understanding of what constitutes “Christian” – and my upbringing as an FUM Quaker!

“I thought so,” Nadia responded, and reached into a bag and began handing us all souvenirs from the Holy Land with Christian symbols. “I didn’t want to offend, but I wanted to thank you in this small way for your help and sympathy.”

A covered, devout Muslim woman, whose family was very nearly killed by American-made military equipment, handing American Christians Jerusalem crosses, Bethlehem olive wood key chains. We were profoundly moved.

The next year, when my wife happened to encounter Nadia and her family again on a stroll through Ramallah, they engaged in a spirited conversation about how to raise children not to hate “the enemy,” to see “the other” as a fellow human being, when so much around us conveys a different message. It was clear that Nadia was not what has broadly been depicted as the stereotypical Muslim woman who delights in seeing her children grow up to be suicide bombers – as we have heard over and over again from acquaintances and in the media. Nor have we ever encountered such a mother. They, as do Israeli mothers, yearn for their children to grow up in peace, with hope for a brighter future.

As Vanier and Hauerwas say: the true peacemakers may well be those who demonstrate the truth of our principles by being communities that live as if the gospel were true. As Friends, may we continue to demonstrate the truth of what we have experienced as the core of our religious faith by living in community with “the other,” listening deeply, empathizing with our common human condition, answering “that of G-d” in the other, and loving profoundly.