

Queries on the War on Terrorism

[This piece is a true group effort that started with a request by Bill Lovett that we make a statement on the "War on Terrorism." We met after a Meeting for Worship for the purpose of drafting such a statement. Mark Konig suggested that we write it in the traditional Quaker form of queries: a call for each person to look inward to discern the truth. Each person wrote one or more queries. I served as editor. After a few rounds of input and editing we circulated this list to all the local churches and eventually published it in the Pastor's column of the Visalia Times Delta.]

We as a nation have been confronted with a crisis that is as much spiritual as political. If religious teachings are to be more than a collection of pious platitudes they must apply when the terror is real and emotions run high. At times like these we need to draw together with our neighbors, to pause and reflect on our core values, and to strive for alignment between our beliefs and our actions.

We of the Visalia Friends Meeting have met together in worship to reflect on the horrific acts of September 11 and our individual and national responses to them. Out of that meeting emerged a list of queries, a traditional Quaker form of sharing. It is the tradition of the Religious Society of Friends not to preach, but rather to call each other to look within and encounter for ourselves God who dwells within. Queries are a means to that end. We hope that through these queries you and your faith community will join with us in dialogue and a mutual deepening of our respective faiths.

Q: How can we as a nation respond to violence and oppression without becoming violent and oppressive?

Q: How can we learn to live at peace with the world when we are, and always will be, vulnerable to terrorism?

Q: Do I really believe we should love our enemies and respond to evil with good? Do these teachings apply even when the injury is great? Do they apply now? Do they apply even if the violence escalates?

Q: Am I careful to make clear distinctions in my thinking and my speech to avoid needless escalation of the violence? Do I distinguish between crimes by individuals and acts of war by nations? Do I distinguish between the inhabitants of a country and the government that rules over them and possibly oppresses them?

Q: When I consider the costs of war, do I take into consideration the human cost on both sides of the conflict, or only the cost of American lives? Do I include among the costs

the loss of life and livelihood due to the resultant hunger, deprivation, disease, and economic destruction as well as the direct loss of life in combat?

Q: To what extent is support of my country right and proper? Are there limits to that support? Do I acknowledge that my country, as any country, is a human institution capable of using its power for either good or evil? Do I expect my country to respect the rights of other nations and to work for world peace in cooperation with the United Nations, the World Court, and other institutions promoting international law?

Q: Am I willing to refrain from retribution to break the cycle of violence, where each new incident becomes the justification for an act of revenge?

Q: Have I sought to understand the roots of fear and hatred of the United States expressed in many parts of the world? Do I try to see my country and its actions through the eyes of those who are most critical of us? Where those criticisms may be valid, am I willing to commit myself to work for change?

Q: When someone mentions "terrorists" do I automatically think of a particular ethnic or religious group? Do I allow the actions of extremists to color my attitude toward entire ethnic or religious groups? How can I show compassion for people from other backgrounds living in my community who are themselves terrorized by the backlash to recent events?

[These queries are also posted on <http://www.quaker.org/visalia>]