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OREGON YEARLY MEETING AND THE PEACE TESTIMONY, PART II: RELATIONSHIP WITH THE AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE, 1938–1954

CHERICE BOCK

Reflecting its twin heritage in the nineteenth century holiness movement and Quakerism, Oregon Yearly Meeting (OYM) grappled with its identity as it weathered the tumultuous years surrounding World War II (WWII).¹ In Part I of this article, I presented findings from interviews and archival research regarding OYM men’s draft choices in these decades, as well as the emphasis placed on the Quaker peace testimony by the yearly meeting.² I concluded that OYM held a strong and relatively integrated understanding of themselves as both Quakers and evangelicals throughout this time period, consistently displaying evangelism, social action, and conscientious objection to war as major portions of their collective ministry. They enacted an “American neo-evangelical Quakerism,” at times appearing more similar to other fundamentalist evangelicals, and at others reflecting a stronger affinity with Friends.³

This article will describe the relationship between OYM and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) during and following WWII. While working on a broader project regarding OYM and the peace testimony, mainly represented in the interviews and archival data forming Part I of this article, the yearly meeting’s relationship to the AFSC emerged as an important and interesting theme in my archival research.⁴ This relationship was an important indicator of the ways in which OYM was variously expressing its Quaker and evangelical identities, and it also shows changes in the AFSC’s identity during WWII and the Cold War era.

The changing relationship between the yearly meeting and the AFSC can help illustrate the form of evangelical Quakerism being practiced at each historical moment: when the relationship with the AFSC was strong, OYM was tending toward an expression of Quakerism in which Jesus' call to social action was considered important and universal, while a more fundamentalist approach to evangelicalism was employed in years when OYM distanced itself from the AFSC, focusing instead on the peace that comes from faith in Jesus. However, the AFSC's own changing self-understandings and partnerships also impacted the relationship between the organizations, as it swung between honoring its historical roots as a radically prophetic outgrowth of the Quaker spiritual imperative to live in a way that takes away the occasion for wars, and its tendency to ally itself with leftist political causes that may not always line up with an evangelical interpretation of the gospel message, particularly the Communist Party.

Origins of Oregon Yearly Meeting and the American Friends Service Committee

OYM formed in 1893 and participated in Five-Years Meeting from 1902–1926, then joined with others to form the Association of Evangelical Friends in 1947. Friends in the United States felt a concern to aid those displaced and injured in World War I, and formed the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) in 1917.

OYM partnered with the AFSC for a while, though the relationship was often strained. In 1938 it left the AFSC, continuing to partner with AFSC projects during WWII. In 1954, OYM reiterated it could not work with the AFSC because it feared the AFSC was overly influenced or even infiltrated by Communists, and OYM felt the AFSC overemphasized aid programs to the exclusion of the spiritual work of evangelism.⁵

While OYM members expressed commitment to the peace testimony as an aspect of their faith, different individuals and time periods reflected different ways of interpreting Christ's call to peace. This influenced the partnerships they were willing to make with other groups. Some OYM members expressed that the

work of peace was only possible through the transformed lives of self-professed Christians, and so partnership with the AFSC would lead toward a false peace based not on Jesus but on secular humanism. Reconciliation with Jesus is seen as fundamental to other forms of peace and reconciliation, and therefore, any group not focused on evangelism and salvation misses the point, in this line of thinking. On the other hand, Friends approaching peace work from a social gospel perspective emphasized people's basic needs must be met in order for them to be able to think about spiritual matters such as salvation. Doing the work of meeting people's basic needs can be done by anyone, in this view, and can orient society toward being able to embrace a peaceable kingdom, since access to resources such as food and water is not being threatened.

OYM and the AFSC Cooperate to Administer Civilian Conservation Corps Camps

WWII was the first American war in which men could register as conscientious objectors and do alternate service.⁶ During WWII, one could serve as a conscientious objector (CO) or non-combatant if one “by reason of religious training and belief, is conscientiously opposed to participation in war in any form.”⁷ Only officially mandated organizations could operate Civilian Public Service camps where drafted men could do their alternate service, mainly hosted by peace churches. These organizations included the AFSC as well as Mennonite Central Committee and the Brethren Service Committee. This system proved difficult to fund and organize, so during the Korean War, the Universal Military Training and Service Act of 1951 allowed for drafted men to do “civilian work contributing to the maintenance of the national health, safety, or interest.”⁸

In 1938, OYM severed ties with the AFSC, citing the following problems: the AFSC was setting up regional and local committees regardless of the wishes of local Friends, it brings together Hicksite and Evangelical Friends without regard for the importance of theological differences, the AFSC does not do any work relating to spiritual salvation, which OYM finds of “primary importance,” and

OYM thinks the AFSC has “questionable political connections.”⁹ Therefore, the Minute concludes that Friends men could just as easily be considered a CO through building a relationship with more suitable organizations.

While OYM and the AFSC were not officially affiliated, the organizations continued to work together during WWII to administer Civilian Public Service (CPS) camps, since these were some of the limited opportunities available where Quaker men could perform alternate service. The AFSC also continued to send speakers and hosted gatherings in OYM meetinghouses. Some OYM individuals worked for the AFSC as employees and volunteers both at home and abroad. The difficulty of these groups working together can be summed up in a 1929 letter from Wilbur K. Thomas to Levi T. Pennington. Thomas stated that in wartime, Friends have much in common, but he questions what holds them together in peacetime, and what their collective witness is to the world.¹⁰

Since the AFSC was one of the only organizations Friends could work with to do alternate service in WWII, they did continue to work together to create and administer CPS camps and help ameliorate the conditions in Japanese resettlement camps.¹¹ The AFSC had a West Coast office. OYM had a Northwest Friends Service Committee that served as an intermediary between OYM and the AFSC. Communication between the AFSC offices in the Northwest and the central office in Philadelphia were difficult, resources were scarce, and the work was large. Friends in CPS camps sometimes did not feel their work was meaningful, and they encountered food shortages—one CPS flyer encouraged Friends to support their COs by growing their own food and donating it to the camps.¹² OYM helped administer camps in Cascade Locks near Larch Mountain in the Oregon Columbia Gorge, Medicine Lake, WA, and Elkton, OR.¹³ In 1946, both OYM and the AFSC decided to discontinue support of CPS camps because they did not want to encourage universal conscription, particularly during peacetime.¹⁴

Friends and the AFSC Clash over Evangelism and Communism

Even while the groups cooperated, however, discontent with the AFSC continued. OYM had a difficult time raising enough money to support its COs financially, partially because Friends felt their young men were being exposed to problematic ideas, stating they will “thus be supporting camps in which communism, atheism, and other unchristian movements are present.”¹⁵ During the post-WWII years, OYM encouraged its members to contribute to relief work through groups such as the National Association of Evangelicals, Save the Children Foundation, Navy Relief, and the Brethren Committee rather than the AFSC.¹⁶ Also during the late 1940s, OYM changed from having a Department of Peace to having a Board of Service, which primarily organized relief efforts relating to food and clothing at the local, national, and world scales, although it was also tasked with aiding conscientious objectors. OYM also had a subcommittee on the Board of Public Relations that focused on peace education. In 1945, OYM joined the National Association of Evangelicals,¹⁷ and in 1947, the Association of Evangelical Friends began to form.¹⁸ OYM was choosing to align itself with other evangelicals while distancing itself from Friends who did not specifically profess Christ.

At the same time, AFSC representatives toured through the Northwest, hosting gatherings for peace education and draft counsel, including Peace Caravans. Two prominent names in OYM during this time, Levi T. Pennington and Dean Gregory, continued to support the humanitarian work of the AFSC personally, as can be noted from their correspondence and activities. Many other Friends maintained ties with those in Pacific Yearly Meeting and the AFSC with whom they had worked during the war.¹⁹

Reiterating their 1938 separation, OYM minuted again in 1954 that they felt it necessary to break all ties with the AFSC, including hosting gatherings at OYM meetinghouses. Stating they believed OYM was in line with the message and tenor of the evangelism of George Fox and other early Friends, they praised

the AFSC's relief work but voiced concerns over its refusing to use the name of Jesus or ground the peace testimony in scripture. Moreover, "The Friends Service Committee has repeatedly expressed as their basis for their peace philosophy the universal goodness of [hu]man, or, as they often state, 'that of God in every [one]'; which, to us, is contrary to the teaching of Romans the first chapter and other Scriptures." Importantly, OYM was concerned others would think they were like the AFSC if they continued to associate with them.²⁰

McCarthyism was heating up during this time as well, and concern about the influence of communism was a cultural phenomenon that impacted OYM. In the OYM Minutes of 1953, Earl Geil, superintendent of the Department of Peace (under the Board of Public Relations) discussed the "conditioning process" that had been underway since 1938, "trying to accustom our young men to the idea of killing." At the same time, he cautioned against using "communist tactics in dealing with those whose loyalty is questioned."²¹ By 1955, OYM Friends were concerned enough about the anti-communist fervor in the country to minute their conscientious opposition to swearing loyalty oaths to the government, though they were willing to disclaim "affiliation with any organization of subversive nature against the United States government or any other government."²² While OYM members disagreed with swearing loyalty oaths, they were certainly against the spread of communist ideas, and they mentioned the connection they saw between communism and the AFSC in several extant records.²³

A prime example is a typed 49-page document entitled, "For a Better American Friends Service Committee," and labeled by hand, "Confidential Copy, left in Dean Gregory's file," which lays out concerns about the AFSC from of a number of prominent members of the various branches of Friends.²⁴ They say they are "pro and not anti-American Friends Service Committee," but they "profoundly believe that both insufficiently informed persons and persons of ideals alien to those of the Society of Friends are influencing Service Committee policies and activities in the wrong direction."²⁵ Having brought their concerns to the AFSC several

times, they again voice concerns regarding AFSC's leftist and communist literature and speakers. In initial meetings, AFSC staff seemed surprised to hear this, but then in a summary of a 1957 gathering, the AFSC stated of their literature, "The selection might be expected to cover a wide variety of views but the political emphasis would in all probability continue to be from the center to the liberal, non-communist left."²⁶ The authors of this document were shocked to hear the AFSC would intentionally engage in partisan political activity. Names of AFSC speakers are listed, including: Alger Hiss, one of the first government officials indicted due to Communist Party affiliation, Frederick L. Schuman, who openly campaigned for the Communist Party and lectured at a Communist Party training school, William Howard Hinton, who we might now say was "radicalized" into communism as he journeyed through China and Russia, eventually becoming a leader in the Communist Party, and others. They also list problematic literature distributed at AFSC events, either presenting a generally Marxist viewpoint or specifically written by or about Communist Party leaders and ideals. They express concern that, due to the AFSC, others including an editor of *LOOK*, see "the whole Quaker movement...is a large transmission belt for the Party line ideas."²⁷

While it may be tempting to look back on OYM's concerns about communism as part of the national witch-hunt, the plot thickens when we consider a notarized letter from Marion Miller, an undercover FBI agent posing as a Communist Party member from about 1950–1955.²⁸ The letter is dated October 24, 1961, and Miller claimed Communists were infiltrating the AFSC intentionally and getting communist literature spread through them to groups that might not otherwise give communism a hearing. Miller said she had made this known to the AFSC and offered to help them find people to speak who had less left-leaning views.²⁹

As can be seen from these examples, OYM was concerned with the lack of spiritual grounding they perceived in the AFSC (and the embarrassment this brought OYM when other evangelicals associated them), as well as in AFSC's increasingly partisan political advocacy. At the same time, it is important to point out OYM did not seem to recognize the partisan nature of their own perspective.

In the same document, “For a Better American Friends Service Committee,” the authors note:

Many of the signers of this document believe that the continual extension of the power and function of government will lead to the authoritarian state. We believe there should be less government, not more, and that following the line proclaimed so widely in Service Committee institutes will lead to the loss of our liberty, our self-government, our economic prosperity and directly to some form of authoritarian government little better than slavery.³⁰

One might ask whether these dissenters would have complained had the AFSC been propagating this political perspective.

OYM and the AFSC Attempt to Reconcile

Although OYM was concerned with the lack of spiritual basis and emphasis in the AFSC, it is clear from communication between the AFSC and members of OYM that the AFSC was attempting to address OYM’s concerns. In response to notification of OYM’s 1954 Minute finally severing even the informal ties between the organizations, Dean Gregory, general superintendent of OYM, received a letter from Lewis M. Hoskins, executive secretary of the AFSC. Hoskins, a member of OYM, understood the controversy well, and yet he provided leadership in the AFSC during the entirety of the 1950s. Hoskins wrote of his discernment with other AFSC personnel:

We have sought to formulate again our objectives and purposes. We want to witness to the power of the love of God and His Truth in our daily lives and in our projects of Christian service. Only as we follow faithfully Christ’s injunction to love God, and our neighbors, can we convey to others what we have experienced of Christ’s message in our own lives. We believe our workers have been able to communicate at this spiritual level as they have become involved with people in meeting elemental needs. Invariably needs of the spirit emerge alongside physical

ones. We purpose to bring people to a recognition of such needs and lead them to find the Way, the Truth and the Life....

We feel we are evangelical in the broad and deep sense of the word. Our formulation may appear more indirect or diffuse than you would like. I am convinced that our own experience justifies this approach for us by the standard of effectiveness: that of souls wakened.³¹

Hoskins goes on to share a Minute created by the AFSC representative council in January 1955, which describes the make-up of the AFSC and its position as an independent body, not representing any groups of Friends. This Minute acknowledges primary responsibility to God with a goal of giving “expression to the love of God in service.”³² During these years, however, OYM chose to partner with staunchly evangelical groups with a stronger focus on spiritual salvation, and reduced its collaborations in areas of peace and social concern.

Implications for Current and Future Friends

The fraught relationship between OYM and the AFSC represents questions common within the history of Quakerism, including the centrality of Jesus and the Bible, how to speak truth to power with individual and communal conviction and humility, and how to partner with others on topics upon which we agree while also retaining our Quaker identity and calling. These questions are again of relevance as many of our yearly meetings in the United States have experienced divisions in the last decade, and as our culture struggles to deal with a major partisan divide.

This research makes clear that individuals in OYM and the AFSC attempted to live their Quaker calling faithfully, particularly the testimony of peace and loving God through loving neighbors and enemies. This testimony ties together Friends from each generation and branch of the Quaker family, and yet it is difficult for us to practice amongst ourselves.

Looking back on the 1940 and '50s, we can see each group aligned itself with a cultural and political perspective, and in many ways, each group acted in ways that were fundamentalist regarding both left and right political ideologies. Friends have long called their leaders to account based on conscience, regardless of the political system, but by staying outside partisan divides. In the 1940s and '50s, fears regarding the political situation were well founded, but were these fears and the responses of each group based on the teachings of the Inward Light? OYM chose to address its fears by isolating itself and attempting to remain pure from the taint of those who did not emphasize Jesus, arguably downplaying its Quaker distinctiveness, while the AFSC attempted to create a coalition of like-minded individuals and groups who agreed regarding some aspects of the peace testimony, but in so doing, it ran the danger of reducing its Quakerism to a political platform. One can recognize a similar situation among Friends today.

Is there hope for the Society of Friends, or will we continue to replay this experience in each new cultural and political climate? While I do not have an answer to this, I did find hope in the words of Dwight W. Michener in the document "For a Better American Friends Service Committee." He described shifts in the AFSC, particularly in its center of emphasis. At first, the AFSC began doing service work, "humbly and well...to those in need," living their faith in a way that drew Friends together in common work, and that attracted others to the Quaker way. The AFSC shifted toward "influencing thought" rather than "demonstrating our faith by service," and in this way, Friends were drawn apart and the public only saw Quaker in-fighting.³³ A strength Friends exhibit across history is our ability to step out in faithfulness, living lives of courage and integrity as individuals and small groups, and shining Light in others' consciences as a result. May we continue to seek the Light together, enacting our common callings with joy, conviction, and abundant love; may we live out our peace testimony first amongst ourselves.

Endnotes

- 1 Oregon Yearly Meeting changed its name to Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends Church (NWYM), effective in 1971 (Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends Minutes, 1970, Minutes 4, 87, 109, George Fox University (GFU) archives, Newberg, OR. All OYM/NWYM Minutes can be accessed at http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/nwym_minutes). NWYM divided in 2018, one group retaining the name and another selecting the name Sierra-Cascades Yearly Meeting of Friends.
- 2 Cherice Bock, “Oregon Yearly Meeting and the Peace Testimony, Part I: Navigating Evangelicalism and Quakerism, 1938–1954,” *Quaker Religious Thought* no. 133 (September 2019): 22–31. I dedicate both articles to my co-researcher and grandfather, Ralph Beebe (1932–2019). We conducted this research for our project War & Conscientious Objection in Oregon/Northwest Yearly Meeting, 1940–1975.
- 3 Timothy James Burdick, *Neo-Evangelical Identity within American Religious Society of Friends (Quakers): Oregon Yearly Meeting, 1919–1947*, PhD dissertation (Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham, 2013), 101.
- 4 Many thanks to Rachel Thomas and the GFU archives for help with the Quaker collections.
- 5 Dean Gregory, letter to the AFSC on behalf of OYM, August 24, 1954, Levi T. Pennington Collection, AFSC Folder, GFU archives.
- 6 Albert N. Keim, *The CPS Story: An Illustrated History of Civilian Public Service* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1990), 9–10. In WWI, men had to first go to military camps to prove they were COs, and during the Civil War they could pay a fine or find a replacement and not serve.
- 7 Selective Training and Service Act of 1940, §304.5(g), p. 270, retrieved from <http://cdn.loc.gov/service/ll/uscode/uscode1940-00505/uscode1940-005050a003/uscode1940-005050a003.pdf>.
- 8 Universal Military Training and Service Act of 1951, ¶58, 127(j), p. 29, retrieved from <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/002028470>.
- 9 OYM Minutes, 1938, Minute 105, p. 43.
- 10 Wilbur K. Thomas, letter to Levi T. Pennington, August 20, 1929, Levi T. Pennington Papers, Box 29, Folder: AFSC – 1929, ’37, ’41 and ’42, GFU archives.
- 11 Levi T. Pennington Papers, Box 29, GFU archives.
- 12 C. Reed Cary, letter to Levi T. Pennington, August 13, 1942, Levi T. Pennington Papers, Box 29, Folder: AFSC – 1929, ’37, ’41 and ’42, GFU archives. Esther B. Rhoads, letter to Levi T. Pennington, August 18, 1942,

- Levi T. Pennington Papers, Box 29, Folder: AFSC – 1929, ’37, ’41 and ’42, GFU archives. “Civilian Public Service Friends Newsletter,” No. 7, January 17, 1943, Levi T. Pennington Papers, Box 29, Folder: AFSC – 1943. “The Friends Civilian Public Service Camps flyer,” no date, Levi T. Pennington Papers, Box 29, Folder: AFSC – 1943, GFU archives.
- 13 OYM Minutes, 1943, Minute 48, p. 26. The Cascade Locks camp was hosted by the Brethren, CPS #21, and ran from 1941–1946, with 579 total workers. The AFSC administered the Elkton camp, CPS #59, which ran from 1942–1946, with 327 workers. Medicine Lake camp, CPS #144, was a state hospital operated by Mennonite Central Committee and had 31 workers from 1945–1946 (Civilian Public Service Story website, Mennonite Central Committee, 2015, retrieved from <http://civilianpublicservice.org/>).
 - 14 OYM Minutes, 1945, Minute 29, p. 11. OYM Minutes, 1946, p. 50.
 - 15 OYM Minutes, 1943, Minute 48, p. 26.
 - 16 OYM Minutes, 1946, Minute 82, p. 50.
 - 17 OYM Minutes, 1945, Minute 71, p. 29.
 - 18 Burdick, 291–293.
 - 19 Among other roles, Pennington served as president of Pacific College, and Gregory was general superintendent of OYM. See especially: Levi T. Pennington, letter to Dean Gregory, April 12, 1964, and Dean Gregory, letter to Levi T. Pennington, April 17, 1964, Dean and Fred Gregory Collection, AFSC Folder, GFU archives, in which Gregory states, “As far as I personally am concerned I feel that the American Friends Service Committee has rendered a fine humanitarian service and continues to do so,” but he does not appreciate that it purports to speak for all Friends but says things that are antithetical to the beliefs of OYM.
 - 20 OYM Minutes 1954, Minute 14, pp. 6–7, quote on p. 7. Presumably they are referring to Romans 1:28: “And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done” (NRSV).
 - 21 OYM Minutes, 1953, Minute 65, p. 31.
 - 22 OYM Minutes, 1955, Minute 75, p. 47.
 - 23 While the 1954 OYM Minutes do not specifically cite communism as a reason they cannot affiliate with the AFSC, the comment about young men encountering communist ideas in CPS camps mentioned above in the 1943 Minutes, as well as correspondence in the Dean and Fred Gregory Collection, show that concern about communist influences persisted across decades.

- 24 “For a Better American Friends Service Committee,” no author, no date, Dean and Fred Gregory Collection, AFSC Folder, GFU archives. The latest date referenced in the paper is December 1959. It is unclear who wrote this document or how widely it was circulated, although a response is extant in the Arthur Roberts collection saying there were 105 signers (Howard E. Kershner, “To the 105 Signers of ‘For a Better American Friends Service Committee and about 50 other interested Friends,” no date, Arthur O. Roberts Collection, GFU archives). Individual statements from Friends who had worked for or closely with the AFSC were included from: E. Merrill Root (Earlham College), Dwight W. Michener (Southeastern Yearly Meeting), J. Kennedy Sinclair (New York Yearly Meeting), and C. Marshall Taylor (Philadelphia Yearly Meeting).
- 25 “For a Better American Friends Service Committee,” 1, 2.
- 26 “For a Better American Friends Service Committee,” 4.
- 27 “For a Better American Friends Service Committee,” 34.
- 28 While the FBI never publicly claimed her as an agent, she did testify before the Western section of the House Committee on Un-American Activities about her role, and she is largely believed to have been telling the truth. She said she had the opportunity to volunteer as a secretary for a communist cell where she made copies of documents and handed them over to the FBI. *Hearings 1960*, United States 86th Congress, House Committee on Un-American Activities (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1960), 1291. *Appendix to the Journal of the Senate, vol. 2*, Legislature of the State of California, 1959 regular session reports, January 5–June 19, 214.
- 29 Marion Miller, “To whom it may concern,” notarized letter, October 24, 1961, Arthur O. Roberts Collection, GFU archives.
- 30 “For a Better American Friends Service Committee,” 11–12.
- 31 Lewis M. Hoskins, letter to Dean Gregory, June 30, 1955, Dean and Fred Gregory Collection, AFSC Folder, GFU archives.
- 32 Hoskins, letter to Gregory, June 30, 1955.
- 33 “For a Better American Friends Service Committee,” 38.