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QUAKERS ASSAIL NIXON WAR STAND

Philadelphia Friends Reject References to Heritage

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PHILADELPHIA, April 7 — The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, long the country's leading Quaker organization, rebuked President Nixon today for coupling references to his Quaker heritage with a defense of his Administration's war policy in southeast Asia.

Charles K. Brown 3d, clerk of the 291-year-old Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, released a copy of a letter sent to the President at the conclusion of the meeting's annual session on Saturday.

It noted that, in an interview with C. L. Sulzberger of The New York Times on March 9, Mr. Nixon had labeled himself a "deeply committed pacifist" because of his Quakerism and had simultaneously defended his commitment to a strong military posture abroad.

"This is not our understanding of the Quaker peace testimony," the letter said. "In 1660 Friends wrote to King Charles of England: 'We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fighting with outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretense whatsoever; this is our testimony to the whole world.'"

The letter pointed out that the current faith and practice of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and many other Quakers throughout the world states. "If we are true to our faith, we can have no part in war."

"No official body of the Religious Society of Friends has ever repudiated this position," the letter stated.

The letter said that Quakers here realized that their pacifism was a minority view in the United States that the official leader of the armed forces would have difficulty following, but urged the President to make no "further distortion" of the Friends' "historic and deeply felt conviction."

Quakerism consists of autonomous regional annual gatherings called yearly meetings. The largest in the United States is the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, started by William Penn in 1681. It takes in parts of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland and has a membership of 16,300.

In one of three references to his Quakerism and pacifism in the interview, Mr. Nixon had told Mr. Sulzberger: "I rate myself as a deeply committed pacifist, perhaps because of my Quaker heritage from my mother."

Practices Weakened

Religious leaders have called Mr. Nixon a "birthright Quaker" rather than a practicing Quaker.

He is a member of the East Whittier Meeting, near Los Angeles, where he attended Sunday school. California Quakerism bears more resemblance to orthodox American Protestantism than to the pacifistic Quakerism of the Philadelphia area and England, where it was founded by George Fox in the mid-17th century.

When Quakers moved west from the East Coast in the 19th century, they often set up churches open to all Protestants in a new town. The exposure to other religious strains weakened traditional Quaker practices, and the forceful clerical leadership of most Protestant denominations became the mode in western Quakerism.

Mr. Nixon has never become a worshiper at the Washington Friends Meeting in the capital as was Herbert Hoover, the only other Quaker President. Mr. Nixon has attended Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian and interdenominational services in his adult years.

The traditionally pacifistic Friends are now in a minority even within the society. Some 80 per cent of the 120,000 Quakers in the United States today, particularly in the West, are not pacifistic. The California Yearly Meeting has stopped contributing to the Philadelphia-based American Friends Service Committee, the pacifistic service organization that won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947 and has been a leading force in antiwar activities.

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From story on press conference 1 Jun 71, filed Nix Ad:

Mr. Nixon deflected a question about his response to those who regard massive bombings in Vietnam as a war crime. He noted his Quaker heritage and consequent distaste for war. This, he said, would apply also to activities in Vietnam, if they were carried on in a vacuum.

But they are not in a vacuum, the President said, for American involvement in Vietnam is important both to self-determination for Vietnam and to discouraging aggression elsewhere.