

Taking off My Tie: The Adventures in Fashion of a Quaker/Lawyer

By Scott Holmes

The day after I returned home from the 312th annual meeting of the North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends (Conservative), it was time to dress for work. I am an attorney, and so I reached for my tie. As I reached for it, I felt a pang in the pit of my stomach. I was uneasy putting on my tie. And this spiritual unease made me feel sort of nauseous. Years of being a Quaker, learning our historic testimonies on simplicity and equality, studying our tradition of plain speech and plain dress, experimenting with various forms of plain dress, and recently discussing plain dress with more seasoned Quaker friends at the yearly meeting ... were causing a sort of spiritual allergic reaction to wearing my tie to Court.

This feeling was inarticulable. I could not describe the feeling, or give a good explanation for it. I had no "belief" based on logic or understanding. I had not arrived at a strongly held conviction after long consideration. It was an inner movement of the Spirit, making me feel like I was going to get into trouble if I put on the tie. It was a sense of dread associated with doing something wrong. It had something to do with "simplicity" and "equality," and "privilege."

So... I put on the tie anyway. And went to work.

The next morning, the feeling got stronger. And then the next day, even stronger. And, I knew I was going to have to consider taking off the tie. I planned to request a "clearness committee" from my own monthly meeting (my Quaker religious community). A clearness committee is a group of Friends who convene to listen deeply and spiritually to someone who is trying to discern his or her path. These Friends do not offer advice or guidance, they just ask questions from a Spiritual place that help the person find his or her own truth. These committees also serve to test leadings of the Spirit to make sure they are authentic.

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They could make sure I am not acting from some "bone-headed" idea arising from my own stubborn and egotistical musings. I made a mental note to myself: "Email Joe Graedon, our clerk of meeting, and request a clearness committee to help me figure out what is going on."

After a few more days of dressing for work, the feeling was unbearable. I remembered an old Quaker anecdote about the famous founder of Pennsylvania, William Penn. He was of noble blood, and came to Quakerism as a young adult, which caused quite a stir among his family and the elite. He wore a sword as a part of the style of the day, expected of a young man of his position and rank. He came to his Quaker Friend and mentor, George Fox, and asked him if he should stop wearing the sword. Fox reportedly remarked, "Wear it as long as thou art able." Had I worn a tie, as long as I was able?"

So I took off the tie, and went to Court. I was a little nervous, but no one seemed to notice. And, the judge did not seem to care. She had known me for years. She knew that I care deeply about my clients, that I work hard, and that I am a conscientious person. She didn't bat an eye. I was relieved. Maybe this business of taking off the tie would go unnoticed. I became hopeful that I could get rid of my spiritual nausea without causing a stir. But I was wrong.

The very next day I appeared, without a tie, in Federal Court. I had not appeared before this judge very often, and he did not know me at all. It went something like this:

The Judge said, "Have you been in Federal Court before?"

"Yes," I responded.

"What is the rule of practice for dress in Federal Courts?" he asked.

"The men wear ties"

"Never, in my thirty-six years in Court, have I seen an attorney appear in Court without a tie. Have you appeared in Superior [State] Court without a tie?" he asked showing his increasing frustration.

"No."

"So you have less respect for Federal Court than you do State Court?"

"No, that's not it," I said, struggling for the opportunity to explain the recent change in my dress.

"Are you aware of the rule of Court for dress in Federal Courts?"

"Actually, I couldn't find a rule of Court for dress in Federal Court... Is there a rule?" I replied respectfully.

"I don't know," the judge said, a little less angrily.

"I am actually a Quaker under concern for simplicity and equality, trying to wear plain dress."

"Are you trying to say there is a religious, free exercise...? I mean if you were Jewish I would not make you take off the yarmulke..." he asked in a very skeptical tone.

"Yes, it is like that." I said, relieved that I was going to get an opportunity to explain that I meant no disrespect. "I have been a Quaker for a long time, and I recently attended the 312th annual yearly meeting of Quakers and came under a concern for simplicity and equality in my dress, or 'plain dress.'"

He didn't seem to know what to do with me at that point. He seemed very frustrated, offended, and very skeptical of my claim that the refusal to wear a tie was a religious leading.

So he said, "We will take our lunch recess, and you can decide what you want to wear. And if you want to make some kind of religious explanation, you can do it at that time."

So Court recessed, and I tried to figure out what to do.

The attorneys and United States Marshals in Court looked at me like I was crazy, like I had just jumped off a cliff for no good reason. My client looked at me in disbelief, afraid that my fashion statement was going to hurt his case before the judge. I had a tie in the car, and had to decide whether to put it on. I went back to my car, prayed for clearness, and was not clear to put on the tie.

When I returned after lunch, without a tie, the judge simply said, "You may appear as you are." And we went about

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the hearing as if nothing had happened. I took a deep breath of relief. During the whole encounter, I had felt very clear that I was faithfully following a Spiritual leading and nothing bad could happen.

This began a spiritual adventure that continues to this day. I have been challenged, enriched, ridiculed, demeaned, supported, and blessed by this Spiritual leading. This little work is an account of some of the adventures and lessons that I have learned along the way.

I appeared without incident for many months in State and Federal Courts. I tried cases before juries without a tie, including a highly publicized murder trial. I received a lot of thoughtful comment, criticism, and support from various friends, colleagues, co-workers, and clients. In general, I found that other attorneys were more intrigued or concerned about my lack of a tie than judges. There were times when I appeared for the first time in other counties, and sat "past the bar," and local attorneys would direct me to the public seating -- thinking I was not an attorney. Judges would call me to the bench and ask politely about my dress, and when I told them it was religious expression, they would smile and we would continue court with no problem. I found that by sending a letter or an email to the judge before I appeared was a helpful way to avoid surprise and awkwardness in Court. After several months, I lost track of which judges I had appeared before and which ones I had not. It was all going so well.

Then I appeared before a federal judge who had a real problem with my attire. I had appeared before him before, and thought I had appeared without a tie without an incident. I also greatly respected his fairness, his dedication to following the law, and his own personal story, which involved overcoming discrimination and other obstacles. I was not prepared for what happened, but I felt guided by the Spirit.

After calling my case, he called me to the bench. He told me he was offended by my attire. I tried to explain that I was a Quaker under concern for simplicity and equality. He wasn't

convinced and asked why I would wear an earring as an adornment and not a tie. I started to explain how the earring marked my solidarity with folks of different gender identifications...but it was too much. He said that if I were retained (privately hired), then I could dress however I wanted. But, since I was appointed by the Court, I should dress appropriately. I asked whether there was a dress code that I was not aware of ... specifically for male court-appointed lawyers.

He said he was going to have me removed from the Criminal Justice Act (CJA) panel, so that I could not receive Court appointed cases. This struck quite a blow to me because representing poor folks charged with serious crimes is a central part of my spiritual path. I looked at him in disbelief, and said, "just because of a piece of cloth around my neck?" He said he knew I was a good lawyer, that I was well prepared and cared about my clients, but that I had dressed in a way that offended the Court. He said that if a transgendered male lawyer came in wearing a dress, he would not be allowed to appear. I asked why not. He said, "because those people are not protected." He meant that there have been no Supreme Court cases recognizing gay and transgendered people as a historically persecuted class deserving of extra protections under the Constitution. Unlike race, gender, religion, and national origin, sexual orientation does not receive equal protection.

I asked, "Since when did you have to have Constitutional protection to appear as a lawyer? Once I have fulfilled all of the requirements to appear as an attorney, why should it matter what kind of Constitutional protections exist for me to be who I am?"

He was not persuaded. We finished my hearing, and I felt proud of the calm and spiritually centered way I had reacted. But I was suddenly very very sad to have offended someone I admire. I called a Quaker friend who listened to my story, and listened to me cry. And I felt a little better.

The very next day a very similar thing happened before another Federal Judge I admire. He expressed that he was

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offended. He was not persuaded by my religious explanation. And he said we would take it up later, out of Court. I was scheduled to appear before him a week later, and so I sent him an email detailing my religious conviction and asking for the opportunity to take it up before I appeared before him again. I did not want my own spiritual preference to interfere with the representation of my clients. I did not hear from him. I assumed that everything would be fine, and that he would have given me the opportunity to discuss it with him if there was a problem. I prepared witnesses, and people traveled to be available for the hearing. When I appeared he opened court and said that he was going to continue the case, indefinitely, until I could dress appropriately in Court. He said I could discuss it with him in chambers at the end of the session that day. I was devastated. My client looked at me crestfallen, my witnesses were dismayed. In the hall, I had to explain that I had wasted all of their time because the judge would not let me appear before him without a tie. This was the first time that my spiritual fashion statement had cost my client, and it was awful.

I walked into chambers of the judge at the end of the session. He was very amiable, thoughtful, and respectful. He said he had done some research and felt comfortable requiring a tie, even if I claimed religious beliefs supported my decision not to wear a tie. He talked about a Supreme Court case involving some employees who were fired for testing positive for marijuana and claimed marijuana use was a part of their religious practice. The Constitutional rule for the free exercise of religion is that religious exceptions are not required for "rules of general applicability." This means a rule that applies to everyone – like don't do drugs – does not have to make accommodations for the free exercise of religion.

I paused when it was my turn to respond. I had some silence, and waited for the Spirit to guide me. First, I said, let me say it gives me great pain to have offended you. I have admired you as a judge for as long as I can remember, and it gives me great pain to have caused you offense, personally. Second, I

would have never expected that you would have delayed my client's case because of some choice I made. I asked to address this issue before Court to avoid any negative consequence to my client, and now the witnesses who came out of town for this hearing have no idea when we might hear this matter. My client remains in custody because of my dress, and that pains me tremendously. Finally, with respect to my legal right to dress without a tie: This rule about ties is not a rule of general applicability. It only applies to men. And because gender is a protected class, you have to have substantial reason to discriminate against me on the basis of my gender. Your rule does not require women to wear ties, and there is no substantial reason to discriminate against me on that basis. I also have the right to follow deeply held religious convictions if they do not otherwise impair my ability to do my job. If I were Jewish and wearing a yarmulke, you would not have forced me to remove it. I have a First Amendment right to remove my tie for religious reasons. Finally, the tie obviously has meaning, symbolism. It means something different to you than it means to me, but it means something. Therefore, by forcing me to put one on, you are compelling "speech" and violating my First Amendment right to free speech. For all these reasons, this marijuana/employment case does not apply, and you have no authority to disqualify me from the practice of law because I will not wear a tie. But, let me say this, my duty to my client far outweighs my own personal religious expression. I respectfully ask you to re-schedule this hearing as soon as possible, and I will dress like a clown if that is what it takes to have my client's case heard.

The judge looked at his computer and picked a date in less than a week. I clarified with him that he was directly ordering me to wear a tie when I appeared in his Court, and he agreed that I could wear a tie "under protest." And we parted ways amiably. He suggested that I take the matter up with the Chief Judge in our district. If ordered by the Chief Judge, this judge would allow me to appear without a tie in his Court. This

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opened the possibility that I could use the legal system to enable my leading.

I took a tie with me to Court when the hearing day arrived. I was dreading putting it on, and felt that heavy weight again in my stomach. But, when I arrived, there was another attorney there who had been hired by the family. I was fired. I was overjoyed that I did not have to put on the tie, even as I was disappointed that I was fired because of the whole situation. The combination of joy and pain made me feel I was probably on the right spiritual track.

I began the process of "clearness" through my Quaker meeting and met with a group of friends who questioned my leading and found that it was authentic, sincere, and rooted in our traditions as Quakers. They were going to recommend to our monthly meeting to write a minute of support, bringing my actions under the care of my Quaker meeting. This was a tender, beautiful and thoughtful process of deep listening and testing.

Weeks went by, and I appeared regularly in State Court without a tie, with no incident. I was scheduled to appear before the Chief Judge in the district in four different cases. So, I wrote to him explaining my religious leading and requested that he allow me to appear without a tie.

He wrote back as follows (and sent copies to all the Judges in our district):

Mr. Holmes,

I have received your note and your letter with reference to your intent to appear in my Court on April 8, 2010, without wearing a tie for the reasons you have stated. Your proposed appearance in my Court without a tie will not meet the Court's expectation of professional attire. Please judge yourself accordingly. As far as policy for the Court is concerned, I will be more than happy to take this matter up at our next Bench Conference. If the Court deems it appropriate to invite you to express your views, then you will be notified in advance of the meeting.

And so I would have to choose what to do. I consulted the State Bar, which advised there is no ethical requirement that attorneys wear a tie. They also said that if my religious beliefs conflicted with my ability to effectively represent my clients, I should withdraw as counsel. I consulted with friends and family. My eight year old son, and soccer player, said that if you want to play the game, then you must wear the uniform. If the ref says tuck in your shirt, you tuck in your shirt. Wise words from my little guy. People on my legal team were supportive of whatever decision I chose, but mostly encouraged me to put on a tie. My father berated me for being silly and recklessly putting myself before my family and my client – jeopardizing my livelihood over something stupid. I consulted with Quaker friends who were supportive; however, the report of my clearness committee would not go to the full meeting for several weeks. So technically, my leading was not under the care of my meeting. I could not say I had the full support of my religious community.

As the hearing date approached, I had several options. I could ask the court to allow me to withdraw from the four cases. This would also require me to withdraw from all my cases in that District – and if they persisted in requiring a tie, I could never practice in that District again. I could go to court without a tie and risk being held in contempt of court. This could result in a fine, incarceration, and ethical sanctions – including disbarment. I could appeal to the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals and assert my Constitutional legal claims to require the Court to allow me to appear without a tie. Or, I could suck it up and put on a tie.

I struggled mightily with this choice and prayed for guidance. For practical reasons, appealing to the Fourth Circuit made no sense. But, I also learned, that I could not in good conscience force the judges to change their policy by appealing to the court system. The message of equality implicit in the removal of my tie did not allow me to appeal to the hierarchy of the law for relief; the ends would not justify the means. So I had to decide between quitting, contempt, or putting on a tie.

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A week away from the hearing date, I had to decide what to do. If I was going to withdraw as counsel, I needed to file a motion in a reasonable time to allow the Court to consider it and make arrangements for new counsel and a new hearing date. If I was going to risk contempt, I needed to make some serious plans for my family.

In the early hours of the morning, I learned some things about who I am. I am a Quaker, in a long line and tradition of Quakers who resisted inequality with simplicity. They went to jail for their refusal to take oaths, to remove their hats to nobility, to pay tithes to the established church, and to pray the way they were supposed to pray. From the 1600s, these Quakers fought for women's rights to preach, organize and own property. They fought against slavery and the injustice towards Native Americans. "Speak truth to power," as Quakers often say. I was well within my spiritual tradition to feel led to remove my tie in Court.

I am also a trial lawyer, with a particular calling to represent poor folks. I love to fight for outcasts, for people in big trouble. I love the research, investigation, strategy, performance, drama, tragedy, and the opportunity to be a guide and advocate for people in dire straits. I love to argue, to creatively engage in conflict. To win, to lose, to find ways both outside and inside of the system to improve it.

My Quaker identity and my trial lawyer identity constantly collide. Quakers believe in simplifying life, in removing all things that distract from a life in the Spirit. Habits, entertainment, materialism, greed, all distract us from service in the Spirit. "Live simply, that others may simply live." But there is little if nothing simple about being a trial lawyer; in fact, complication and confusion are a time honored strategy. Quakers believe in nonviolence, both physical and mental. "There is no way to peace, peace is the way." Quakers seek truth in a way that is peaceful, centered, collaborative. The manner of Friends seeking truth is founded in Unity, there is no truth or action unless we all agree. The legal system seeks truth in an

adversarial, competitive manner. As a trial lawyer, I participate in a system supported by institutional violence. And, I am called upon to engage in the psychological violence of cross-examination: to coerce people to admit things against their will in a way that can be demeaning to their Spirit. Quakers believe in integrity: in telling the truth, and making sure one's life is lived in accordance with one's values. "Let your life speak." As a criminal defense attorney, I am often called to try to suppress the truth in order to serve some higher Constitutional value, such as the right to privacy or right to be free from coercive interrogation.

Quakers also have a historic testimony on behalf of equality, for women, minorities, Native Americans, and others who are oppressed. Because there is the light of God in everyone, we are all deserving of equal love and respect – regardless of wealth, station, or birth. There is no one above, no one below: for Quakers, the world is flat. Although the Justice System prides itself on the idea that Lady Justice, with eyes covered, is blind to differences among people, the system is hierarchical and justice is not blind. Justice is often for sale, and those who can afford a lawyer and litigation can seek justice. The rest of us cannot. There is also a hierarchy within the court structure itself: judge, prosecutor, defense attorney, probation officer, bailiff, clerk, plaintiff, defendant, victim, witness, the public -- all have their place, power, and acceptable voice. To participate in court is to participate in a hierarchy where the judge is at the top. In fact, the person of the judge is often called "The Court" itself, interchangeably.

To be a Quaker-lawyer is to feel the continual pull of these tensions. For the most part, this has been a creative tension. Being a lawyer continually keeps my spiritual beliefs fresh and tests my Quaker commitments. Being a Quaker helps me be a different kind of lawyer, listening with compassion and thinking "outside of the box" in ways that are refreshing and humanizing. This is a powerful synergy, until these two parts of myself collide diametrically. I did not know, but I probably should have

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guessed that removing my tie would force me to choose somehow between the two identities.

As I approached the Hearing date, one case weighed heavily upon my mind. One of my clients was facing a high sentencing enhancement for allegedly pointing a gun at a police officer. My client was an illiterate, Mexican, with limited mental abilities. He was shot multiple times when police busted in a trailer to execute a search warrant. They said he raised the gun at them to shoot, while he said he was throwing the gun down. I had my client's testimony and some medical evidence, and I was going up against multiple officers. This is the kind of case God put me on earth to fight, and I was having a hard time considering abandoning my client. After a lot of prayer, and discernment, it became clear to me that my duty was to my client. I was not called to abandon my identity as a trial lawyer; on the contrary, I was called to serve my client. Also, contemplation of the possibility of leaving federal practice or losing my ability to practice altogether made me appreciate how much it means to me to have the privilege to be an attorney. Being a lawyer is a core part of my identity, something I felt was meant to be, and the prospect of giving it up made me realize how much I love serving as an attorney. Once this became clear, it was easy to put my tie on. I sent an email to the chief judges (and copied all the judges) in the District saying the following:

The Honorable Judge.

I appreciate your consideration of my note and letter regarding my wish to appear without a tie. I will respectfully and humbly appear in a tie in your Court, and in all the Courts of the Middle District, with the hope that this Court can eventually accommodate this small measure and call to my conscience. I would greatly appreciate it if you considered my request at your next Bench conference, and will follow the guidelines the Court sets. It is an honor and a privilege to represent indigent persons

accused of crimes in the Middle District, and I look forward to continuing this work in the Courts.

I apologize if the manner of my dress or my handling of this matter has caused offense or disruption to the administration of the Courts. I have meant no disrespect, and have been trying to follow a spiritual leading

I wore a black suit and tie, joyfully. And I won my Hearing. Later in the same day, I appeared before a well-respected judge who is retiring, and he made a special point to thank me for my service in the District. It felt like confirmation that I discerned the right course, and kept within my measure of the Spirit.

Shortly afterwards, my Quaker meeting considered whether to support my leading and bring it within the care of the meeting. I shared my leading with meeting for worship with attention to business in the Fourth Month, Eleventh day of 2010. After messages of concern, questions, and messages of support, the meeting crafted and adopted the following Minute of Support:

Our member and Friend, Curtis Scott Holmes, has been led by religious conviction to remove and stop wearing a tie as an attorney in court. We have tested this leading in the manner of Friends, and support Scott as he continues to discern the development of this sincere leading as consistent with Friends testimonies.

Now, I could describe my leading as a "strong religious preference." Because of this preference, I usually do not wear a tie in Court. However, I wear a tie in Courts which specifically require it, even as I continue to try to gently persuade these Courts to accommodate my religious preference.

Through these experiences, I learned some important lessons about power, privilege and oppression. Our world is profoundly unequal and unfair for many people. Groups with

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privilege enjoy all kinds of economic, social, and cultural benefits at the expense of people who are oppressed and exploited. There are many kinds of privilege and oppression. A person may enjoy privilege in one area, and experience oppression in another area. For example, I am privileged as a result of my race, gender, sexual orientation, economic class, and national citizenship: white, male, heterosexual, middle class, American. I am privileged along every axis of privilege there is. My wife shares most of these privileges, but as a woman she has suffered oppression and inequality as a result of her sex. This journey of removing my tie has given me a personal lesson in privilege and oppression. It has given me a small taste of what it feels like to be unfairly judged based on some silly external appearance. It has given me greater empathy for my brothers and sisters who have suffered a lifetime of being unfairly treated and judged because they are different.

The more I become aware of the operation of privilege and oppression, the more I am burdened and uneasy with my privilege. Privilege forms a seemingly inseparable barrier between me and my less fortunate brothers and sisters. Worse than that, they suffer at my expense. My comfort, freedom, and opportunity are built squarely on the backs of people locked in the cage of poverty and injustice. Furthermore, my economic privilege is driven by the engine of an economy that is poisoning our earth and racing us to the edge of self-destruction. Privilege has a self-centered way of becoming anxious over its own self-protection. I worry more over my 401(k) than the addict who can't get into the homeless shelter for the night. Even as I acquire, accumulate, and protect my privilege, I am traveling farther and farther away from the Spirit, from Jesus who leads us to the poor, the persecuted, and the outcast. God is with those who are connected with our poor and persecuted neighbors, even our enemies. This is why the Gospel repeatedly warns against wealth as the root of evil, because wealth distracts us from our God given purpose: to love and give and share with each other.

This act of removing my tie is an act to show my solidarity with the poor and oppressed. It is an act renouncing a certain amount of my privilege, in the context of a hierarchy supported by privilege and founded on oppression. Perhaps my indigent client is dressed in orange, or cannot afford a tie. Why should I own one? If the women attorneys of the bar struggle to find a "neutral" way to dress in court, why should I not share in their struggle? If transgendered or gay attorneys are forbidden to "appear as they are," why shouldn't I share in their struggle? I have learned that gender and class difference is a performance, and my unwillingness to play my part has caused great discomfort among some in authority.

The judges and attorneys who had the most difficulty with the removal of my tie all shared a military background. A close friend and member of my legal team also served in our military. He helped me understand why my refusal to wear a tie was so offensive. In the military, the chain of command is a matter of life and death. Obedience to orders is paramount. It is therefore important to be able to identify your place in the hierarchy immediately. You can tell by someone's uniform whether you must obey his or her command or give a command. The uniform is a symbol of belonging, and a marker of your role in the unit. And so, appearing out of uniform is dangerous and offensive. I love my brothers and sisters in the military. However, my Quaker Christian faith makes it impossible for me to participate in such a hierarchy for killing. When Jesus disarmed Peter, he disarmed us all. I live in that life and Spirit that has taken away all occasion for violence. We are all children of God, even my enemies. And so, I am devoted to an egalitarian world view that is contrary to the hierarchy of the military. My refusal to wear a tie is a symbol of my vision of equality, and my reluctance to participate in the hierarchy of Court.

It pains me that the judges I admire interpret this act as an offensive act of disobedience, when in fact it is an act demonstrating my aspiration for universal love, for judge, clerk, bailiff, opposing counsel, and my indigent client. During the

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course of my adventures, people outside the Court criticized the judges who were offended as "unreasonable" or "power tripping." But I am the first to come to their defense. These judges have devoted themselves to our legal system, as servants. They have a world view that interprets my leading to wear a tie as offensive, and they see it as their duty to preserve respect for the courts. They do not see that the courts could have greater respect if they could accommodate a Quaker without a tie. They are trying to do their duty as best they can. I love the ideas and aspirations of our legal system, as imperfect and unfair as it often is, and these folks are well meaning, intelligent servants of justice.

I wonder whether there is any power, privilege, or possession that I possess that is not at the expense of another—that is not gained as a result of exploiting another. Isn't all power and privilege built on the backs of the oppressed? Aren't my cheap T-shirts made by the small hands of exploited children? And so, what is the ethical response to being privileged? Is it renunciation of power or the careful use of power in service of the oppressed? Perhaps the answer is somewhere in between. There are some kinds of power and privilege which are so evil, so destructive, such a barrier to human connection, that they must be renounced. Slavery, war, domestic violence, and killing come to mind. And there are other kinds of privilege which must be carefully managed and used in service of the oppressed and in an effort to alter the unjust system of privilege.

But how do I tell the difference? There are some attributes of privilege I cannot change. I am a white, male, heterosexual. I have greatly benefitted from these privileges: they have protected me from poor education, poor health care, prejudiced violence, poor housing, and other terrible consequences of being an ethnic minority, a female, or being gay. In considering the issues raised by taking off my tie, I have learned there are ways I can use my privilege that create a safer space for the oppressed, that alter the system of oppression, and signal my commitment to be an ally/insider. I can participate in

my privilege in a way that alters the system that confers and perpetuates privilege. I have other privileges that are more like talents, gifts, abilities that have been given to me to be used in service of others. There are other privileges that I could renounce, manage or alter. These privileges arise from my class, wealth, my profession as an attorney, my American citizenship. These are privileges that are deeply mired in the exploitation and violence toward others, but they also convey power to help change.

So what do I renounce? What do I manage or balance? How do I avoid deluding myself that I am supposed to have a privilege, when the truth is I am just enjoying the benefits of privilege and am rationalizing my continued participation?

I also learned something of the cultural struggle within Court among competing visions of "respect." The Court represents a hierarchical, privileged, mainstream vision of respect for authority, for our system of justice. Respect is earned in this view of the world by working hard, pulling yourself up, taking care of your family, and succeeding in accumulating wealth and power. There are also folks who are drawn into the criminal justice system who show up in Court with the shirts out, pants down, and dressed in a "disrespectful" way. For these people, who are usually caught up in the culture of the street, "respect" means the ability to inspire fear in others. In a place of poverty, where there is little opportunity to advance – a place of drugs, violence, depression, and not a lot of hope – negative practices arise. To be "disrespected" in the street means that you did not show someone you feared them; and, it usually results in an act of violence. There is a whole economy of "respect" and "disrespect" happening in street culture that has given up on the Court's idea of respect because it does not look like a real possibility. If we can't have it, we don't want it. So my clients literally dress to show their butt in court. When I show up without a tie, I am participating in this cultural struggle for respect, and trying to communicate that I do not belong to either world view. I am trying to say to the judge, we are all equal, we

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are all children of God, and deserve love. I am trying to say to my client, I am not a willing participant in the system that has caused a lot of your suffering. I represent a different kind of respect that is critical of both the hierarchical institutionalized violence of the Court, and the anarchical violence of the Street.

In addition to some lessons about power and privilege, this business with my dress has taught me something about spiritual leading or calling. When I felt that discomfort with the tie, I had no idea I would be called to discuss simplicity and equality in the chambers of a federal judge, or in open Court, or in an email to men in Arizona or Pennsylvania who are struggling with similar issues of identity. I had not worked out my reasons, or thought it through. I heard the call, and I tried to obey as best as I could. A spiritual leading is an irresistible call to obedience that deepens our faith. For me, I did not work out my belief in advance, I just obeyed. It reminds me of Jesus's call to the disciples to drop their nets and follow him. They didn't have a long discussion. They did not seek a clearness committee. They just obeyed. They had no idea what they were getting into, what they would encounter... The path of the Spirit is rich, joyful, deep, unpredictable, tragic, sad, and misunderstood. It looks silly to some and profound to others. It tests the core of who we are, and brings us into communion with a long line of others who have been similarly tested. It is a wonderful gift that I would not ask of anyone. If "fear of the Lord" is the beginning of wisdom, then I've got a good start, because I fear the call. It shakes up what is comfortable and easy. It seems to disrupt security. But the truth for me is that I have found more security in trying to live faithful to this call and become more fully alive in the Spirit. The only true security is in our path to becoming who we are meant to be, and that is inextricably tied to the path of the Spirit.

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I have written this account as a part of this continued leading. This leading is from the Spirit, from my Quaker community, and so I am accountable to both. I write this to share with the 313th annual meeting of Conservative Friends in North Carolina, and for my Durham Friends Meeting. They can see my faithful attempt to follow the leadings of the Spirit, and help test, guide, and teach me as I continue my path. I am not an individual. I am a part of a faith community that has set me on this path, and I am obligated to them, as they are obligated to me, to articulate the path, challenge it, nurture it, and share the path together.

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