

Community And Worship

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Introduction

Several years ago when the Florida authorities asked the man who tried to assassinate President Roosevelt whether he belonged to a church, he replied, "No, no, I belong to nothing. I belong only to myself, and I suffer."

These pitiful words express the pain in the hearts of a vast number of modern men and women: they belong only to themselves, and they suffer. Often enough they are nominal members of a church, a family, or some other organization; yet they have never experienced genuine participation in a religious community which, by dispossessing them of themselves, could free them to belong to life.

Where can these people find a community of men and women and children, of all ages and of many different callings, who are under active treatment by a spirit that is releasing them from themselves, and how can they come into direct contact both with the releasing Agent Himself and with the health-giving atmosphere of such a company?

The kind of religious communion that rests content with gathering people for public worship once a week and for an occasional public lecture or social affair might seem sufficient in periods when society is closely knit and when it is easy, as Gerald Heard has suggested, to "mistake comfort for civilization"; but today, when the currents of secular life have weakened the natural bonds and when world events threaten to dissolve them still further, something more elemental becomes imperative if we are to be strong enough to live in our time without succumbing to its daemonic forces.

Where, then, can seeking men and women find a community in which meditation, worship, religious education of children, common undertakings and adventurous experiments, common festivals, and spiritual

therapy are all going on, not as part of an expensive organized professional program, but as part of the informal natural life of a close religious fellowship?

Let us examine at random a few of the significant groups that both in our own day and in the past have responded to the common yearning for such an intimate spiritual community.

Types Of Community

Therapeutic Groups Because the church has not adequately supplied this need for intimate fellowship, psychotherapists today are seeking to meet it by setting up institutions in which teachers of gymnastics and of techniques for relaxation, spiritual directors, and handicraft teachers, together with those who are suffering from nervous tensions, all lodge and work and play and study together as an organic interdependent community. For the limited clientele who can afford such an experience, results are being accomplished which surpass anything that has been achieved by the use of private therapy. It is as though in this island community, long overdue readjustments of patterns of living can be undertaken and new standards of value formed, in a way that is impossible when the metallic attractions of a chaotic outer life deflect the needle of the inward compass.

The limited scope of this exclusive community is all too soon revealed, however, when the participant recovers and returns to his former routine of life. He has been given no adequate philosophy to take with him, and his deepest hunger has been neither recognized nor fed.

Gerald Heard has been sensitive to this need for centers of close community life. Perhaps the most valuable sections of his recent book, *Pain, Sex, and Time* are devoted to describing the community that will heal the "fissured,

distracted, contemporary man.” Heard puts forward the proposal for self-supporting communities including in their program individual and corporate meditation, manual work, and group therapy. Each of these communities would be built around and inspired by a master or masters who have themselves found the way to inner health and who have developed inner maturity, so that there is released through them an unmistakable and almost irresistible spiritual power. These men or women would act as spiritual guides for the other members, who would come there for help in removing “the kinks and strangulations” in their inner lives and in recovering their spiritual health in order to return to the world again. “They would be the modern and progressive form of Franciscan tertiaries.”

There must be, however, no concealing of the fact that Gerald Heard expects his real results from the masters or “primaries” or “doctors.” “When we consider the enormous influence which has always been exercised by men who had no power but their terrible integrity — how Herod feared the Baptist, how Ivan the Terrible dreaded the fakir monk who day by day denounced him in the Red Square of Moscow, how Cromwell was disturbed by Fox, how the Caliph listened to Francis — there can be no historical doubt that the dictator type, the daemonic man, is if anything more vulnerable to the charges of the fearless mystic than is the average sensual man. . . . This neo-doctor having no property and no executive power, would be the incarnate conscience of mankind, the inspired actual sanction of conduct which can lead humanity out of its impasse.”

There is a flavor of Hinduism and of Zen Buddhism about both the character and the objective of Heard’s proposals that will put off most of his critical readers, yet there are many elements in his proposals that point the way to the fellowship, to the spiritually integrated community which we need.

The Monastic Community In the monastic life of an order such as the Benedictines, where manual labor, intellectual studies, and devotional exercises supply the needs of body, mind, and spirit, there is a fertile organic community. Here, with the life of the spirit at the center, some of the freest human beings in history were nurtured and kept in a creative balance. Benedict and Bernard of Clairvaux are only two of a great company. Under the auspices of the Benedictine fellowship a thousand years of western civilization and learning were held together. The only successful attempt in the West to approach the ideal of “To each according to his need, from each according to his ability” was here carried out.

Yet the exclusive nature of this community, its unwillingness to embrace the family and its consequent reliance upon the outside world for novices, limit the scope of its usefulness, Its rigid medievalism, moreover, precludes the possibility of its becoming the pattern of the new religious community that we need.

The Third Order of the Franciscans In 1220 Francis of Assisi was preaching up and down Italy. Wherever he went, he stirred a new sense of repentance and a longing to respond to the love of God, not only in the young and the unmarried, but also in many who carried the responsibilities of a family and of earning a livelihood. These cried out for a rule of life wherein they too might give their all to God. In response to this demand Francis of Assisi set up the Brothers and Sisters of Penance, commonly known as the Third Order of Franciscans, in contrast to the first order of Friars Minor, who were monks, and the second order of Poor Claires, who were nuns. The Third Order was a lay society of men and women who lived a normal life in the world, took all the responsibilities of self-support, vocation, marriage, bearing and rearing of children, and yet resolved

to live a life especially near to God and in fervent response to His love.

Entry into the Third Order came only after the seeker had at great pains sought to make restitution for any wrongs he had consciously committed. The novitiate lasted for a year. The members of the order wore cheap clothing undyed and without ornamentation. They ate only two meals a day, except when at heavy manual labor. They spent so little time and money on themselves, that they had a surplus to pour into the Lord's work and they gave lavishly of both to those who seemed to be in the greatest need: to the sick, to prisoners, to the poor, to the bringing in of a neighbor's harvest, to the burial of the dead, to the work of peace-making.

They refused to bear arms, to take oaths, or to submit disputes to secular tribunals. They bound themselves to a program of simple prayers at several points in the day. They went to confess their sins more often than was customary, and once a month they had a special meeting in the local church, where common concerns were discussed, where a special address was given by a visiting Franciscan or by the local clergy, and where the group frankly gave each other mutual help on the matter of grave personal faults.

This Third Order spread like good news throughout Italy and to every part of the continent, and it was a significant spiritual, social, and even economic force in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Third Order Franciscans in every walk of life were an important leaven in the life of their times, until they relaxed their original zeal and became stiffly organized as an auxiliary church fraternity.

The Ashram Movement A good deal of interest has been aroused in the West by Gandhi's ashram at Sabarmati. Here is a community where a group of men and women have quickened their lives at all points for a non-violent approach

to national social problems. This interest in Gandhi's ashram has attracted attention to the whole Ashram movement.

"The ashram," writes Stanley Jones, "really in India springs from the ancient forest schools, where a guru, or teacher, would go aside with his chelas, or disciples, and in corporate spiritual quest would search for God through philosophical thought and spiritual exercises." But this school is not to be confused with a monastery and there is no standard type of ashram. They belong to a native Indian pattern that "began in the forest, but many ashrams were and are in the heart of cities. It is the national soul of India expressing itself in religion, the central characteristic of which would be simplicity of life and an intense spiritual quest."

In his recent book *Along the Indian Road*, E. Stanley Jones describes an experiment that he and his colleagues have made with a Christian ashram in India. Their free corporate life is an attempt to combine the Indian spirit, "an inner poise, a spiritual sensitiveness, a love of simplicity, an emphasis on the gentler virtues, a spirit of devotion, an ascetic tinge," with the development of men of Christ-force. It is a corporate spiritual life, a shared economic life, with an equal distribution of all the chores, including scavenging, and a life of fellowship extending to the renunciation of secret criticism and a vow of complete frankness with one another. This has meant the development of willingness to receive gladly the suggestions even of the weakest. A draft of a sharp public reply to an unjust attack was submitted by Stanley Jones to the group. They considered it prayerfully and returned it to him with three words written in the margin: "Not sufficiently redemptive."

One day a week in the ashram is given to silence. Each member of the ashram has his own work to do outside the community. Life in the ashram is a corporate discipline

and a strengthening fellowship which contributes to the members' growth in Kristagraha — Christ-force.

The Society Of Friends

The life of the religious community is an answer to the "good news" itself which invites men to enter into such an inward fellowship. The early Christian community knew vividly what it was "to be all with one accord in one place," to experience the visitation of the Spirit together, to be branches of a common vine, members of a common body, to partake of common meals together, to look forward to dwelling together in a Father's house of many mansions. To respond to the good news meant to join God's family here and now in some little local Christian fellowship that touched every side of their lives.

This fellowship is both prepared for by the Spirit and is itself a condition of preparation for the deepest working of the Spirit. When the members of a fellowship know one another, care for one another, visit one another in their homes, consult one another, hold one another up in the silence and feel responsibility before God for one another, then when they meet together for worship they are truly open as a corporate group for the deepest working of the Spirit.

Now by its unique genius the Society of Friends is designed to be exactly such a fellowship; a lay-body of those in whom the indwelling Christ is at work effecting revolutionary changes. Its form of worship and its method of arriving at corporate decisions in matters of business are generally conceded to operate best within groups that are made up of fewer than a hundred persons. The lay-character of its ministry enables these small units to survive without being forced to gather large numbers in order to collect enough financial resources for the support of a professional minister and his staff.

Few Friends' meetings today, however, can claim to offer this ideal type of fellowship. Some people would even be bold enough to suggest that this fellowship does not exist because so many within the Society of Friends are not really sure that they want the Christian revolution to take place within them and within their world. An Indian jailer stamped a copy of the New Testament which a prisoner had requested, *Not Dangerous*. The Society of Friends and the Christian Church as a whole in its present condition of softness would be stamped *Not Dangerous* by the rival national, racial, and class religions that have sprung up in our day. What many of us want could best be described as "The Christian Revolution, Ltd.," and the limitations we would place upon it resemble those the Irish town fathers placed upon the plans for a new jail. First it must be built on the site of the old jail. Second, it must be built out of the materials of the old jail. Third, the old jail must be kept in use until the new jail was completed.

As for those who are awake to the swift moving revolutions that are sweeping the world today and for whom the danger of the Christian revolution both within and without is no barrier — where will they find a religious community in which worship is the culminating act of this broader vital fellowship?

Those who move about among Friends' groups today report that out of the college and university centers, out of the work camps, out of foreign service projects, out of the ranks of professional people, and, though more tentatively, out of the ranks of those who work with their hands, "there is a people waiting to be gathered." Men and women are presenting themselves to the Society of Friends and are asking: "Within your ranks can we find an intimate fellowship of those who have set themselves to bring about the Christian Revolution, people who are 'incorrigible Christians'? Is there in your company a place for us to be

renewed and transformed by this inward power that a few of your number have seemed to find, or are you simply another formal, respectable, non-intrusive religious group?"

The answer to this question cannot be an abstract or ideal answer. It must be honestly given in the concrete terms of a local meeting which these friends might come into or which they might form if there were none in that community. In spite of our magnificent service organizations and our educational experiments in centers like Pendle Hill, the Society of Friends must still live or die by the character and quality of its local meetings. They are its base. All else is built on them. Are our local meetings "intimate fellowships of those who are about the Christian Revolution"? How can we make our unique fitness for such a fellowship into a reality in our local meetings? How can we begin where we are and move toward this end?

There are at least three simple concrete steps which local meetings may take that will greatly assist the cultivation of this fellowship within our ranks. All of them presuppose regular participation in the meeting for worship. They also presuppose the meeting's power to build these steps.

The Ministry of Hospitality The revival of Christian hospitality in which the members of the meeting partake of food with one another is essential. Visitors to the meeting and new members are especially grateful for this open hand of friendship. The increasingly elaborate meals which many consider it necessary to set before guests have made this hospitality difficult for persons in moderate circumstances, but a return to simplicity would help in bringing about the revival of this precious sacrament.

The Ministry of Visiting Members of the meeting should visit one another in the spirit of that fellowship which they have felt in the meeting for worship. There is no more

convincing way of showing affectionate concern than by visiting others in this spirit. In religious bodies where this visiting is done by professional workers the lay members lose a precious privilege that might be theirs, for the visitor nearly always receives more than he gives. There is nothing more rewarding than this visiting, nothing that shows more clearly where inner need is, where opportunity lies, where the meeting could help or be helped. It is no accident that in religious bodies which employ a pastor, the man who visits and knows his group can hold them together by this tie far more effectively than by the brilliance of his spoken word. In our Society visiting is a ministry in which many should share. It should not be restricted to any official body in the meeting. It cannot be neglected if inner fellowship is to flourish.

Any group within the Society of Friends who have ever tried to establish a new meeting or to revive a dying one know that the first essential is to visit, and the second essential is to visit, and the third essential is to continue visiting. These visits help to draw the meeting for worship into a basic fellowship that can yield to the Spirit. If the members of the meeting know of difficulties that one or another in their midst may be facing, they can literally draw on the bank of God's healing power for that member. This responsibility before God for others can scarcely be fulfilled without continual visiting.

The Ministry of Small Fellowship Groups It is not easy to describe the place of little friendship groups within the meeting, for they are scarcely organized groups at all, and the least hint of formally "promoting" them would almost destroy their genius. Out of this hospitality and this visiting, however, there may quite naturally grow up a desire on the part of several members to gather in one another's homes, perhaps for a meal and for a quiet evening of conversation about their deepest concerns. These little fellowship groups

often begin with five or six persons and may never grow to be larger than eight or ten. They must not be a burden, but should come to pass only when members of a meeting feel a desire to have fellowship on common concerns further than is possible in the meeting for worship.

Teresa of Avila wrote in her *Life* of her longing for such a group. "I should be very glad, that as in these days men meet together to conspire against the Divine Majesty, and to propagate their wickedness and heresies, so we five who at present love each other in Christ should also endeavor sometimes to meet together, for the purpose of undeceiving each other, for conferring on the means of reforming ourselves, and of giving God the greatest pleasure. For no one knows himself so well as they know who see us, provided they truly love us and are anxious for our advancement." (Translation by J. Dalton, p. 153.)

My wife and I have been members of several such little fellowships over the past six years. Their membership has changed, they have not all been connected with the local meeting, but they have been to us of inestimable value. A few friends have dined together perhaps once a month and have then spent the evening talking, at first a little hesitantly but later with increasing freedom, of those things which the life we are trying to live is feeding on, or being sharpened by, or being eaten away by. One or another has often taken to such a group, decisions on matters of vocation and of plans for the future upon which they have objectively given their judgment. We have built natural and enduring and really inward fellowship out of these occasions that have also been gay, joyous times together.

For the past two years a group made up largely of Quaker women who carry heavy domestic and social responsibilities have felt themselves drawn to meet together regularly in Philadelphia during the week for an unhurried period of silent meditation and mutual exchange

on the life of devotion. In times like these when world events, for those who bear a testimony against war, threaten to isolate them still more from the community at large, this kind of small fellowship group may become no longer an elective but a necessity.

Several of these fellowship groups have included periodic times of withdrawal to some quiet place where they could spend one or two or three days largely in silence, where they could “balance the budget,” recover their sense of direction, be inwardly refreshed by the “larger leisure” in God’s presence that such an opportunity affords, and return to their ordinary lives with a sense of gratitude. The facilities of Pendle Hill offer opportunities for such periods of refreshment. Some fellowship groups may welcome this suggestion as a part of each year’s cycle.

In Denmark, in Finland, in Norway, and in many communities in this country where Friends’ meetings were not yet existent or were in their early stages, I have seen small fellowship groups gathering each fortnight in one another’s homes to study the Friends’ approach to personal and social problems, or to sing, to read, to listen to music, or to sit in silence together and to strengthen one another in the life in God which they sought. These groups have been the source and the indispensable auxiliary of the meetings for worship. It is exactly such groups that are keeping German Friends spiritually able to bear life today.

In these groups larger surfaces of our lives are opened to each other and to God than could be opened in any other way. The groups will vary in character and in their immediate concerns. Some have undertaken common work projects, such as the renovation of a meetinghouse shed, the clearing up of the grounds, or the construction of some needed improvement for the community. The eighteenth century French Protestant pastor, John Frederick Oberlin, used to work with his parishioners one Saturday in each

month constructing roads in the parish and ending the day by sharing the Lord's supper together.

Meetings for worship in Quaker work camps where the group have been at manual labor together seem to take on a fresh reality, for they bring to the worship a fellowship already partly built through common work. I know of a group of shut-ins who have banded into a "fellowship of those who care" and who practice intercessory prayer at noon each day. A fellowship group may form the nucleus for deputational work to help to quicken into life some expiring meeting, or it may be the agent of sustaining the civil liberties of some group in the community who cannot itself protest the wrongs done it.

In Stavanger, Norway, such a group concerned itself for the life of the inmates of the city jail, taking flowers for each cell, holding weekly musical services, visiting the families of the prisoners. A fellowship group may work out the curriculum of an adequate First-day School program and undertake to furnish teachers from its number, or it may set itself to study psychotherapy, or to try out some experiments in Franciscan simplicity, or it may concern itself especially with the meeting for worship or with the cultivation of the personal devotional lives of its members.

In a large meeting when two or three members have come to an inward experience and commitment to a new life, or when some person is passing through a great and crushing sorrow, or when a man and wife are losing a faith that was once vivid and are growing indifferent for lack of intimate and regular touch with others who now believe as deeply as they once did, or when anyone for any reason needs a personal touch that goes beyond that of the meeting for worship, would it not mean, much to have little intimate and congenial fellowship cells within the meeting into which these people could be readily invited?

This idea is not new. The appearance of these little inner lay fellowship groups within the church in many different centuries speaks for their essential function. The Third Order of Franciscans, the Beguines, the Friends of God, the Brethren of the Common Life, the Valiant Sixty in the early Society of Friends, the Wesleyan Class Meetings, the conventicle groups within the German Pietist Churches, the nineteenth century missionary fellowship groups, the Bibel Forscher groups in Germany, who, I am told, have already furnished thirty-five martyrs to the cause of conscientious objection in Germany since September first, 1939: all these reveal the capacity for this intimate and more intense side of Christian fellowship appearing within the churches as cells that nourish the Christian body and recall it to its true stature. The Society of Friends offers a peculiarly hospitable auspice for the return of this movement today.

Worship As The Source And Culmination Of This Religious Community

When a local meeting is engaged in building this kind of religious community, the meeting for worship becomes its culminating experience. Here in the corporate silence people who live in the world and face all of its problems gather each week both to work and to let God work. Let there be no mistake about either of these aspects of worship, for both are present.

The Group Gathers To Work There is genuine work to be done by us as we seat ourselves in the meeting for worship. Whether we enter into the pool of silence or whether we remain idly on the shore as mere spectators depends very largely upon our performance or our shirking of this work.

There is the work of stilling the body in order to get it out of the way. There is the stilling of the surface

distractions of the mind that keep it darting after this and after that, instead of opening itself to the Inward Guide. No one can expect to do this all at once. An English girl, who has since become a writer, described to me her first meeting for worship at Old Jordans Meeting: "Using the silence was a good deal like walking a tightrope. I would take a few steps and then fall off. Then I would get back on again for a way, and then fall off again. But while I was on, it was wonderful."

Such outward distractions as noises or words can readily enough be woven directly into a prayer. The noise of an insistent auto siren may call up in us the prayer: "Oh, that I might be warned by an even louder siren of the dangers that continually beset my torpid and careless soul," and then be ignored. Distractions of the mind are more troublesome, but most of them can best be treated by making no attempt to resist them, by acknowledging their presence and sinking to a depth that is beneath them. Half a mile under the ocean there is calm, no matter what the agitation may be on the surface.

Even more helpful in meeting these distractions is the work of guiding the mind into areas that are natural to the prayer of quiet.

There is confession. In the silence, under the gaze of God, there comes a wave of consciousness of the betrayals, the broken resolves, the harsh words, the sins of postponement, the self-centered coldness that has walled us from the loving God and from our fellows. In the confessional of silent prayer I may unlock the secret chamber of my hidden thoughts that trouble me in the night when I lie down to sleep, and in this secret confessional in the presence of God there may come a work and a victory whose intensity defies description. Donn Byrne's words in *Destiny Bay* might be repeated of many a Quaker meeting: "There were great battles fought in great fields, but there

was never a harder one than that between myself and myself in that little room.”

A man came to a pastor, time after time, and promised that he would never drink again. At last the pledge was taken in a final form, and yet once again in the late evening the man appeared and said he must be allowed to have a drink or he would die. The pastor quietly told him to go home and die, and went on with his work. The next morning the man came with a new confidence in his face and said, “I died last night.” The facing of hidden fears in the silent confessional, the dying to fear, letting God have His way, is part of our work there.

In the silent confessional, we ought to work through to a knowledge of what we most deeply want. If prayer is the soul’s deepest desire, then we must find out what that desire actually is. Upon deeper scrutiny, what we thought we longed for most of all may prove to be something very different. How often a sufferer may pray that God relieve him of sleeplessness, when what he really wants is to face and settle the ugly conflict over a guilty act that must be set right before he can be at peace again. The sleeplessness is to the mind what pain is to the body, a precious message of alarm that there is something wrong needing immediate attention. It would be almost tragic if it stopped before he had got at the root of it.

A girl in one of the work camps said at the end of the summer that she had come to the work camp bent on transforming that underprivileged community into a cell of the new social order she was alive to spread. Now that the summer was over, she continued, she wanted to confess to the group that she had discovered that neither she nor most of the campers she knew had enough self-discipline to begin to live in a new social order, let alone to share it with others. In the work of the silent confessional there take place just such discoveries as to what we most deeply long for and what we truly need.

There is another work-room in the house of prayer. It is the place of intercessory prayer, prayer for others. Someone has called it "unselfishness in prayer." There we may work for those in our religious fellowship with an intensity that knows no limits, for in intercessory prayer we can hold up the needs of others and the longings we have for them as in no other way. Isaac Pennington's words on intercessory prayer speak to our condition today: "Are they in a snare? Are they overtaken by a fault? Yea, are they in a measure blinded and hardened so that they can neither see nor feel as to this particular? Retire, sit awhile, and travail for them. Feel how life will arise in any of you and how mercy will reach towards them and how living words from the tender sense may be reached forth to their hearts deeply by the hand of the Lord for their good." (Letter lxxi.)

Here too we may work with the grain of God by holding up the sufferings of the world, by holding up specific situations and letting God identify us with them and increase our responsibility for them. A much loved workman was being feted in Reading, Pennsylvania, not long ago by a group of his fellows on some anniversary. After the speeches that lauded him, they called on him to speak. He got up and said, "My friends, after all this I would be the happiest man in the world tonight if I could forget the ten million of our fellows who are unemployed." By the work of intercession we refuse exemption, we are cut off from forgetting, and we become God's conscripts for the work of the alleviation of suffering. By the work of intercession, too, we cooperate with God's healing forces even when we may be denied other access to the situation.

Finally, there is in our work in prayer, a work that is as gay, as joyous, and as much prized as a silent walk with one we love. That is the time of silent fellowship with God when we confess nothing, desire nothing, intercede for nothing, but simply enjoy Him in thankfulness for so

matchless a Lover, in thankfulness simply for God Himself. Thomas Story wrote of this part of our work upon the occasion of his first visit to a Friends' meeting, "Yet my concern was much rather to know whether they were a people gathered under a sense of the enjoyment of God," and he recorded that he was glad to stay.

Let God Work All through this work of ours in guiding the deeper reaches of our consciousness in meditation and intercession and adoration, there is likely to come an increasing consciousness that God is at hand, and the longing that not only our work but God's work shall be wrought in each worshiper and in the worshiping group. It is good to work. It is still better that our work should lead up to letting God work. It is good to pray. It is still better to be prayed *into*. "Be silent that the Lord who gave thee language may speak, for as He fashioned a door and lock, He has also made the key."

Often the very strenuousness and the wilfulness of our own prayers may hide God's work from us. So in the meeting for worship we must learn both our own work, and the openness to let God work. A Swedish woman writer wanted God to tell her what the next stage in her career was to be, and at length with a surge of abandonment that broke through all of her reserves she seemed to feel God saying, "How could you expect me to speak when you have kept me gagged for so long?"

When we let God work in worship we may be brought to see things in new perspectives. The late Dick Sheppard, an English Christian apostle of peace, told how he felt an illness coming on and was terrified at the prospect, for he had every hour of his time for weeks ahead booked with important appointments. That night he dreamed that a messenger approached the Lord God and said, "Dick Sheppard is about to be ill." And the Lord wrung his hands in horror and said, "Oh, whatever shall I do? Dick Sheppard

is about to be ill." The absurdity of the dream lingered with him, and he awoke in the morning smiling at himself and at his indispensability complex, and quite at peace within. When we let God work in worship the fevered cries of "I have work to do, God cannot let me die" are revealed for what they are. John Woolman in his *Journal* speaks of having been "brought low" in the silence. That is letting God work. When we let God work, we are often led step by step to learn what surrender means. To a strenuous soul who is sweeping the ocean back with a broom it may mean to stand still and let the waves break over him, to discover that when he yields to life all is not lost.

Nowhere may this make itself more evident than in the use of time. There will be no lessening of urgency, rather a heightening of it, for "today is the only measure of time remaining." Yet there may come with surrender to God's working an abundant sense of leisure. There may be found, as Natalie Victor so eloquently expresses it, "Twenty-four hours in which to do the one thing needful, instead of ten or twelve in which to do a dozen.... There will be time to place ourselves at the disposal of anyone in real need: no time to waste at the street corner. There will be time to play with the children, no time to be devising schemes for our own amusement. There will be time to read widely, deeply, generously; no time to waste on trivialities. . . . There will be time to pray long and passionately for the coming of the Kingdom: no time to question its present security or its ultimate triumph." (*Surrender*, p. 21, Morehouse, 1930.)

This sense of quiet, simplified urgency is no passivism. A glance at the history of the Society of Friends will make that clear. Things that must be done are laid upon worshiping individuals and occasionally upon worshiping groups. Unless a man build a bridge the river remains unspanned. As an old colored woman in the coal area in Herrin, Illinois, remarked about the Quaker feeding, "De

Lord doan rain down food, but He sure does work through His people.” Work done under such concern is no longer an outside philanthropy; it becomes an intimate relationship. H. G. Wood has expressed it well: “The humanitarianism of Friends rests on their religious experience and convictions, on their awareness of God’s guidance, on their consciousness of the presence of the living Christ.”

We may let God work when we listen to some word that is spoken in the meeting for worship, a word or a verse of Scripture that has come from some person who has been brought below the level of opinion and into the gathered life of the worshiping group and who has allowed what he had to say to be hammered out and shaped in that molten center. Or we may let God work by surrendering to this word, and rising and speaking it ourselves, if it should be laid upon us to do so. How often several others have come up after such a meeting and told us that our words had interpreted for them a similar experience that had come out of the gathered center of this meeting.

We may let God work when we yield to the reknitting of the worshiping community itself as the members are drawn nearer to the center and to each other. The community that has no such common experience to gather it into an inward fellowship as children of a single loving Father, has not yet experienced the deepest fellowship of all.

It is here in the meeting for worship, then, that all of the preparative experiences of the religious community culminate. The common meals, the visiting, the groups for study, for meditation, for counseling, for common projects: all these things have prepared the soil for this religious fellowship. The meeting for worship when it gathers in the silence is no longer merely a respectable outward association. It is soil that has been ploughed and harrowed and disked by these common experiences. It has been made open for the planting of the seed.