

Promise of Deliverance

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*Look to me, you who press after deliverance
You who seek the Lord!
Look to the rock from which you were hewn,
And the quarry from which you were dug.*

Isaiah 51:1, American Translation

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Promise Of Deliverance

The Promise of Deliverance is the assurance that there is a power, available to humanity, by which disaster can be abolished forever. Do not be deceived. There is no promise that we shall not be in great danger. There is no promise that we shall be delivered from the fury of present warfare; nor from the consequences of deep-seated and widespread evils inherent in even the best of our institutions; nor from this or that calamity. Great numbers of the world's family are born into starvation, disease, homelessness and hopelessness. There is no promise that our particular loved ones, our homes, our careers, our hard-earned security, our healthy bodies, our political and economic freedom, or our lives, will be spared. Millions who are as good as we are, who possessed as much as we possess, have lost everything in our time.

There is no promise that western civilization can be delivered from the fate of prior, perhaps greater civilizations. There is no reliable foretelling that our worst fears will not come true. But this Promise of Deliverance does not play upon fear. There is enough fear already in the world and in our hearts. We are stricken with the disease, fear, which grips us in paralyzing fascination. Our foreign and domestic policies are filled with fear. Our personal lives reflect it. Our churches, for the most part, evade it by neglecting the urgent relevance of their fearless gospel. The message of deliverance drives away fear. It is basically opposed to despair. It is the very opposite to an announcement that man is abandoned to doom. That God is real and that God acts for man's deliverance is the Promise.

Deliver Us From The Present?

Whether we read the daily paper or look deep into our own incredible personality, we see humanity, not advancing in triumphant progress toward a golden age, but trembling on the brink of disaster. We do not need to argue this issue intensively today. Each day's headlines and our crowded hospitals for the mentally sick add to the gloom. Time is running out. We no longer feel an easy confidence that we can leave our deliverance to technological progress, or to chance, or until later in life, or to history. We are worried. Has man already sown the seed of his complete destruction? We even question whether mankind, if spared, can in the long-run devise workable social forms that will provide for life, liberty, security and the pursuit of happiness.

We are apprehensive that unless we re-discover a focus for our lives, a point that is outside the flux of this temporal storm, there really is not much meaning to our struggles. We yearn for deliverance from meaninglessness. But we have no time to dwell on ultimates; we are confronted with the problem of survival. God takes too long. He has all eternity. We have so little time. We dare not experiment with eternity. We must muddle along in time, in which we have so little confidence.

War must be avoided at all costs. Yet we find ourselves deeply dependent upon traditions and habits that make wars. In this present moment we are all that we have inherited of evil from the past, and there seems no way to break with it. We must act now in support of American foreign policy, even though inwardly we cry out against its steady and relentless drive toward war. But we find no alternative. "This is a better choice than to let the communist tyranny sweep over us." Even we pacifists who oppose the foreign policy faithfully step by step, day by day, with letters to congressmen and the President, give insufficient evidence

of resistance or of a power in our lives that can transform the roots of war in our society. “Deliver us from the present” is our prayer. Yet the Promise is that we can be delivered from anxiety about our past failures, and from fear of future disillusionment. Such deliverance will convince us that the present is the real world. We are the eternal point of continuity between the past that has fashioned us, and the future that is to be. The present could hold all we could ever wish for, and more. God is completely present!

We have an intuitive feeling that this is the true meaning and end of life and that in some vague and mysterious way it is the point of all of life, but that the realization of eternity will come only the other side of the grave. Our relationship to it, we have usually assumed, will be in the nature of reward or punishment forever, in accordance with the way we played the game or chose sides before death.

The possibility that man can experience eternity now—that eternity means always including this moment rather than forever and ever, starting with death, is more than we have really dared to hope.

Deliver Us From Christianity?

Christianity’s doctrines and divisions, remnants of once vital religion, leave modern man cold. Deliver us, he says, from a religion that places its faith above its faithful. In so doing, religion has become something to be saved instead of something to save. Christianity institutionalized has spoiled the world for the gospel. The churches stand more in their own way than do the godless hordes.

To the majority of the world’s family, the materialistic element of western culture marks the failure of Christianity, so closely have the churches identified their gospel with the progress of applied science. The Promise in Christ,

whose namesake is Christianity, is more relevant for our day, if possible, than for any other time, but the limitation of the message of deliverance to fixed creeds and formal procedures diminishes its power to persuade men who are endowed with spiritual freedom. Light is urgently needed now. To those who have found the source of light, the meaning of its symbols becomes clear, and the names by which these symbols are called have little importance. It is a time for the faithful to lead the way around the walls of creed which hide the Light. The Promise is always for those who feel in greatest need of deliverance. Let the churches feel their own need, and their hardened lifeless forms will become vital. Deliver us from a Christianity that does not feel the living and Inward Christ at its center. The Promise of Deliverance is the power of a living church fired with a living faith that man can know God!

Deliver Us From Evil?

The sufferings of life attest the reality of evil. We cannot deny the appalling extent of suffering which springs from the power of evil. Evil exploits the suffering which it creates in order to gain still greater power. We are not assured that this evil can be contained and transformed through gifts, however generous, or goodwill, however sincere. There is even reason to question whether the evils that give rise to starvation and the evils that spring from starvation can be overcome by persons who keep for themselves the privilege of being overfed.

We have underestimated the power for evil in ourselves as well as in others—evil being the assertion of self-interest without regard to the whole. To be engrossed in self-improvement, self-preservation, self-indulgence and self-despair is the pattern of our time. Each of us puts

himself in God's place in the center of the universe. In doing this we become separated from God and from each other. This separation is the basic evil. We attempt to transfer our attention to the welfare of others. The more we try, the more we concentrate upon ourselves. If we sometimes succeed in self-improvement, or if we think we are succeeding and secretly congratulate ourselves, this is the worst kind of self-centeredness. When we fail time after time, the result is discouragement and moral paralysis. Must we harden our hearts to the suffering of others and settle down to lives of desperation? Left to my own sense of self-righteousness, I can never forgive myself. Deliverance is the supreme need.

The good hinders deliverance as surely as does the evil. Good and evil are so intermixed in human character and human activity that they cannot be separated into categories of thought or action. They must be lived through, by individuals experimentally and painfully from moment to moment in accordance with their free and creative will. Insistence on kinds of evil to be avoided and kinds of good to be achieved was the sin of the Pharisees whom Jesus condemned. Such legalism misinterprets man's free spirit. It overlooks the necessity for moral action in each particular instance to originate within.

Man's freedom to create good and evil has long been misunderstood to imply a universal law of good, and man a free agent to choose whether or not he will follow it. According to this doctrine man is saved if he chooses the good and lives up to the law. He is condemned if he chooses not to follow the law. This concept destroys the meaning of freedom.

We have a deep conviction that God has planted in every one the seed of power to transform evil into good. We translate this belief into action on the assumption that a contagion of good might set in to regenerate the world. We

are devoted to overcoming evil with good. But only in the sacrifice of good itself is there the power to transform evil. Sacrifice does not mean to give up in the sense of scrapping what we have. It means to be willing to give what we have, with no thought of protecting or preserving it for its own sake. When a good means or end becomes something to be followed and protected for its own sake, something that stands in the way of the emergence of new light and creative activity, that good has become powerless to overcome evil and to conquer the source of evil.

In that case, our very concept of the source of morality stands in the way of deliverance. The habit of thinking about man's imperfection in legalistic terms is so fixed that our morality has become negative and uncreative. It is the destiny of man, not only to be created but to be creative; not only to be delivered but to deliver. Moral acts are always creative and original. No amount of external pressure can convict a man inwardly if he believes that his action is moral.

How quickly we legalize God, so set are we upon capturing and imprisoning life as we know it now, or as we wish it to be. God is life, creative, emerging, active life, sufficient for each instance and instant, but not to be captured for more than this moment; not to be bound by categories of man's making. It is not to laws we construct about God that we are to look for guidance, but to God. The only life truly guided and truly free is the life of constant prayer, the life continuously seeking for God's guidance.

Through man's humanitarian efforts, God has performed miracles when devotion has been centered on the source from which activity springs and not on the ends toward which it is directed. The great tragedy of much relief and rehabilitation work today results from the fact that we have too little faith in our source of power. Even after power

to change the world has been demonstrated time and again before our eyes we hold back.

For example, few groups of people have had as great an opportunity in the present generation to witness the power of God at work among and through men as have the Quakers. Why can we not as a Society of Friends forsake all else in order to be used powerfully to save the world? We are not available to be used freely to transform evil because so much of our effort is directed toward preconceived solutions of problems. Good works are directed toward projected returns. Educational efforts imply a gamble for predicted and prescribed results. Techniques that become ends in themselves contain little redemptive quality of their own and stand in the way of transforming the roots of evil. Pacifism as an educational technique for stopping war is impotent to eradicate the roots of war in man. As an end in itself it is powerless to bring peace though, as a way of life, true pacifism might remove all occasion for war.

We profess patience and devotion to the source from which activity springs rather than preoccupation with ends, and yet anxiety is reflected in our descriptive literature, in decisions made by our committees, in appeals made by our fund raisers. This anxiety, so strongly denied, so deeply hidden, which we falsify even to ourselves and to God, stands in the way of our God-given freedom to create with Him the Kingdom of Righteousness.

Anxiety about our man-made kingdom of plenty stands in the way of deliverance. We American Christians are largely a people of comfortable means and tastes. Our material needs have been so bountifully provided that there is little more of physical well-being that we could ask even of the Garden of Eden. There is the temptation for some of us to think of our responsibility for spreading the Kingdom of God throughout the world as primarily a matter of sharing

our own plenty, sharing our technological experience, rather than experimenting radically to discover the way to develop widely the means to provide for all. What a fearful thing it is to assume that we can stumble onto a way to share the special privileges we hold without taking the risk of losing them ourselves.

We are filled with fear because we are afraid of losing something we think we cannot get along without. The more we increase the number of objects that claim such devotion, the greater is our fear for their loss and the more helpless we feel to do anything to save any of them. The protection of prized possessions, material or spiritual, always seems to mean the loss of others. We cannot give allegiance to the forces that promise protection of our property, privileges, traditions and dreams because we no longer have confidence in their ability to protect. We are ashamed to expect God to protect them. We are convinced today that the nation cannot protect us from suffering or save our lives. We have looked hopefully toward the United Nations for the power to preserve things for us as they are. This means that what would be saved for some nations cannot be had by others. But we know already that a combination of competitive higher loyalties is powerless to save us. We look everywhere but to God, because we do not want to pay the price God asks for deliverance.

The Promise of Deliverance is not for us unless we deeply and urgently feel the need of deliverance. I know of no way by which we can give our possessions to save mankind and still control them for our own purposes. We are not expected to throw money away. But we must be prepared to lose every penny rather than to compromise what we believe about God. This we know. Yet there are many hidden falsehoods which arise to justify privilege and elude detection. Some of these are even regarded as virtues.

Deliver Us From Man?

The storms that roll around in the heads of theologians from one age to the next, throw shadows as they pass over, but they do not actually change the deep, intuitive certainty which simple people feel about being organically identified with their universe. You and I have survived some low estimates of the worth of modern man. However, we need not labor the fact that something seems to be deeply wrong with humanity today. If we are aware at all of the brutality and degradation of life that exists in the world and in ourselves, we shall not pass lightly over the judgments of some profound thinkers who are ready to return us to a doctrine of man's depravity as complete as that of Luther or Calvin. Such pessimism is not surprising, especially when it is seen as a reaction to the insistent optimism of the nineteenth century.

Neither attitude satisfies the compulsion man feels to become God-like. Pessimist and optimist alike feel that improvement is not a matter of individual, free responsibility. The pessimist is bogged down by a fatalistic sense of guilt; the optimist feeling at the mercy of his heredity and environment, depends upon improved techniques of eugenics, medicine, social organization and psychosomatics. If life is going along rather successfully, neither estimate of man's worth is taken seriously. But in time of imminent crisis, after our attempt to be like God in our own image has failed, the sense of frustration and guilt becomes overwhelming. "Deliver us from evil, ego-centered, meaningless man." This is our cry.

We are in the midst of a world full of men who feel doomed to wrong-doing and wrong-suffering. Some live in comparative safety and comfort, many others suffer acutely. Their hearts are filled with such complete discouragement about man, that God seems to be shut out.

Karl Barth and other crisis theologians gain a wide hearing because their explanations appear plausible to people who have experienced or inflicted so much evil. Barth writes with assurance “that there is no continuity between the activity of God and our own activity. There are no blood vessels through which the life of God overflows into our life.” He speaks of us as “poor little men, in our low estate, in this our condition inwardly and outwardly, we who, as long as we are man, living in time and in this world, have stood, are standing and will stand in infinite opposition to what God is.”

It is not surprising that there should now be a revival of emphasis on the concept of the Fall of Man in an attempt to make our present plight comprehensible. Attention is being focused among Christians on the age-old apology for the dualism of good and evil. Marxians as well as Christians view man’s plight as a falling away from the Golden Age of the primitive.

In contrast to Barth, Nicolas Berdyaev’s interpretation of the Christian doctrine of the Fall of Man is positive and creative. “If man is a fallen creature and if he fell in virtue of freedom inherent in him from the first, it shows that he is a lofty being, a free spirit. Awareness of original sin both humbles and exalts man. Man fell from a height and he can rise to it again. In the consciousness of original sin there is nothing humiliating to man as there is in believing that he has his origin in mud and is essentially a nonentity. The myth of the Fall is a myth of man’s greatness.”

Whatever is believed about the ultimate explanations of good and evil, man experiences both as real. But he finds himself powerless either to create the good or to deal effectively with the evil. Man has ranged in our time from an illusion of omnipotence to a feeling of his own helplessness in dealing with his chaotic situation. He feels that he has been abandoned to his own resources, and is

in terror at being left alone. He longs for deliverance from human tragedy. He longs for a return to the blissful state of the unconsciousness of pre-birth. He longs for power to overcome his evil situation. He longs for the transcendent and external God to come near, to fill man with his Presence, to reassure man that he belongs to God.

The Promise Is A New Man

There is no promise that man will be delivered from his human status, because to be human is his high and creative destiny. He neither can nor ought to be returned to a state of primitive bliss, the Golden age from which he feels he has fallen and in which he could rely entirely upon his instincts—a puppet in the hands of a static god, without freedom, without responsibility, without consciousness even of his blissful state. Such a fate would be a return to meaninglessness. Human life, as it is, is the creation and expression of God. Man is not abandoned to his own resources. God still directs his life and destiny. There is the Promise that man can be delivered just as he is, frailties, suffering and all, into a certainty now of his oneness with God, and therefore with the universe, with other men and with eternity. That is satisfying beyond all primitive paradises or future utopias. A new man can rise up from the old. He will no longer roam the world looking in vain for some one or some plan to save him from loneliness, insecurity, hardness and fear, because he will have found that the secret of the new man is always present within himself as a gift from God.

We need to be entirely clear that the creation of the new man is the painful though joyful task of all of us. It is not delegated to the few who are known as saints, the numbered mystics, the towering prophets, the appointed apostles, the learned historians, the brilliant scientists,

the wise philosophers, the trained theologians, the inspired evangelists, the doctors of mind, body or society or the gifted statesmen. God's activity does not rely in any exclusive way on these master craftsmen of the race. Mankind's destiny is not held in the balance by Christians, Hindus, Mohammedans or Hebrews, by Catholics, Protestants, Eastern Orthodox or Quakers, by the liberals, orthodox, neo-orthodox or neoThomists. A new humanity will not be ushered in through the United Nations, World Government, World Council or International Council of Churches, democracy, the industrial revolution, technocracy, mass-production, better distribution, capitalism, cooperatives, socialism, labor unions, communism, psychotherapy, psychosomatics or dianoetics. The regenerated man will not come through anthologizing the highest expressions of the great religions, or through adoption of a common language, or by the restoration of man and society to any of the greatest stages of the past. The new humanity is not to be confused with special community or monastic experiments. It is made up simply and immediately of all the faithful—the faithful found within and without all these forms.

There is no special saintly, mystical or prophetic type. In retrospect we see the saints, mystics and prophets towering out of reach above the rest of us. But they never regarded themselves as an elect group at the top of a hierarchy of mankind. What they discovered as true for themselves they believed to be equally true and available to all men who love the truth. One of the clearest impressions we have of Jesus is that He believed that the secret of His inward unity with God was kept from other men only until they wanted it above all else. Then, they could discover it first-hand.

The truth is as near to you and to me as to any others, and the fullness of its power to transform life awaits our acceptance of it. "To get at the core of God at His greatest,"

wrote Meister Eckhart, “one must first get into the core of himself at his least, for no one can know God who has not first known himself. Go to the depths of the soul, the secret place of the Most High, to the roots, to the heights; for all that God can do is focused there.”

The Promise is a new humanity made up of you and me and others who will believe and follow. Believe, not in the usual sense of holding to a system of articulated thoughts or formal laws, but believe in terms of the reality of our own individual experiences of truth.

We can listen to the doctrines of the ages, to the experiences of others, but we can learn little from them about the Promise of God held in our own nature, if we have not already become aware of experiencing, even in the most fragmentary way, something of what we are being told. In the words of William Penn: “It is not opinion, or speculation, or notions of what is true: or assent to, or the subscription of articles or propositions, though never so soundly worded, that makes a man a true believer or a true Christian. But it is a conformity of mind and practice to the will of God, in all holiness of conversation, according to the dictates of the divine principle of light and life in the soul, which denotes a person truly a child of God.” To know man as a new man is to know him as undivided and indivisible, which is the true meaning of individual.

Spiritual And Material

Life is one. There is an invisible spiritual aspect and a visible material aspect of the same life. This life includes the whole world and all there is in it. Each aspect has its peculiar function: but the spiritual and the material are inextricably one. Each is to be known in and through the other. The material is infused with the spiritual. The spiritual is intrinsic to the material. In this scientific age

we have tended to think that we could understand the world through the material aspect alone, but this one-sided approach to the real world may well prove disastrous. Many are alienated from the attempt to know the spiritual because to them it seems to be relegated to a world other than, separate from, the one in which we appear to live. Mysticism, the word used to describe the apprehension of the spiritual, is regarded by ordinary men and women as occult, abnormal and unavailable even if they wanted it. But mysticism is the key to the whole. It is the recognition that there is a point of convergence of the material and spiritual qualities of man and the world.

Anyone who wants more than anything else to experience the Presence of God can find the way. Disciplines, good works, asceticism, may be helpful in removing obstructions, but must not be confused with the experience itself. The search for God is not easy. It requires more than patient exercises. Prayer as the performance of steps prescribed by another, however successful they may have been for him, is often disappointing. Prayer that dwells with satisfaction upon what I think I know already about God will not bring God nearer. Prayer that arises as a cry for help when the bottom drops out of the world I have constructed, opens the way to God. Prayer that stems from difficulties and despairs too great to be borne alone, too painful to be understood as for my own welfare, will be answered. Prayer as the persistent groping within for light with confidence that it is there to be found, brings renewed awareness of God's Presence. Prayer without words, or form or thought or activity—prayer, as the opening of one's whole personality to receive God, as the flower opens its petals to receive the sun, contains the meaning and mystery of waiting upon God.

An ancient Egyptian wise man, some three thousand years ago, knew the secret: "O Amon, thou sweet Well for

him that thirsteth in the desert: it is closed to him who speaketh, but it is open to him who is silent. When he who is silent cometh, lo, he findeth the Well.”

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that rarely if ever does specific guidance for behavior come in the moments of the experience of the Presence of God. Rather it is the experience of a quality of being, an exultation of belonging, an intensifying of certainty, a renewal of strength to work out the plan conceived before or after by imagination, reason, compassion or direct knowledge of need. The experience of God does not give a person an infallible plan for action, it gives rather a power and justification for action.

With the experience of the Presence of God comes a certainty that He is more than His manifestation in us. As we grow in awareness, we learn to expect to find God in every created person and thing. We see the new man already in every man. We are neither afraid nor interested in accusations of pantheism because we feel the underlying unity of all in God. God is forever beyond our comprehension. We can only respond in wonder and gratitude to the unshakable conviction that He is real.

That of God within each of us is felt from one person to another without being articulated. It is beyond words and therefore requires a life as its symbol. Jesus of Nazareth, he who lived fully the life of man and the life of God in history, is such a symbol called the Christ. He becomes for each of us the Living Christ when God Within becomes not a doctrine but a Living Presence.

The discovery that the Light within, the inward intuition of God, and the spirit of Jesus the Christ, are one, is the most momentous of life's experiences. Man depends for guidance neither upon intermittent inward glimpses of his meaning, nor upon historical authority alone. "Happiness," wrote Pascal, "is neither without us nor within us. It is in God, both without us and within us." The Living

Christ is the common ground of God and man. Here is the Field that includes both man and God.

Jesus of Nazareth, a man, infused with God, actually lived in history. In this supreme life, not in some abstract principle, but in a human being the truth of man's high identity was made known in a way capable of communicating the ineffable.

Truly, the Christ has existed from the beginning. He has always existed in the center of man as the seed, the germ, the life. Our intuition of the truth, and the Christ as manifested in the life and death of Jesus, have a common identity which manifests "the things most interior and essential to man's nature."

Of supreme importance to the deliverance of any man who has heard of Jesus is the dissolving of obstructions to the Inner Light which keep him from recognizing God in Jesus, the Christ. Without such recognition, no amount of rational or ecclesiastical authority can win from man, inward acceptance of Christ as his Deliverer.

Once Jesus, the Christ, has won a deep intuitive response within us, it is inevitable that we project our formless mystical apprehension of God into the form of the person of Jesus, as known from the records and traditions about Him. As far as we are then able to differentiate, Christ is the direct light of God within us. Christ lives in us! We become with our whole being the faculty through which we recognize God, whether in Jesus Christ, or in others or within ourselves.

The central challenge that confronts the Church today is the reunion, not just in external organization or forms of worship, but in the bonds of clear thought and living experience of the historic and the inward Christ. This is as crucial today as it was when George Fox went about England sharing his contagious experience. "Now," said he, "the Lord has opened to me by His invisible power how that

every man was enlightened by the divine Light of Christ; and I saw it shine through all.”

The power of the Church to convince man about Christ is usually thought to depend primarily upon the power of its professional ministry. In a Friends meeting, this should be in reverse. A powerful and creative ministry is the product of a meeting that expects God to speak to it as God spoke to Jesus. Remove from the meeting the expectancy and certainty with which Friends come together in the Presence of God to receive strength and guidance, and its natural ministry will disappear. Better a priesthood trained in the administration of outward sacraments to recall us to the inward experience of God, than a Friends meeting that, having lost its experience of communion with Christ, has lost its power to minister.

The Promise Is A New Loyalty

There is no higher loyalty than this: to be faithful to that of God unfolding in every man. “What is Man that Thou art mindful of Him?” The most precious possession we have been given is our individuality. If the uniqueness of each personality was lost, the loss would be absolute. It is this distinctiveness of each of us, which gives meaning to the fact that God is creating us. God is seeking to express Himself in the infinite variety of human personalities. The tenacious urge in each to keep this originality intact stems from the fact that God desires each person as an original interpretation of Himself. God is acting in each person to perfect an original masterpiece!

At first it seems preposterous that each of us is intended as an original masterpiece, loss of which would be felt eternally by the whole universe. But deep in our hearts we know, however vaguely, that all our struggles and pain, all our successes and joys, the very perseverance

to live, arise from the instinct to preserve this distinctness of personality at whatever cost.

“The universal is ever seeking its consummation in the unique,” wrote Rabindranath Tagore, “and the desire we have to keep our uniqueness intact is really the desire of the universe acting in us. It is our joy of the infinite in us that gives us our joy in ourselves.”

This loyalty is the secret key to open the way to joy in all experience of pain and heartbreak, of success or failure, of doubt or assurance. Loyalty unites us in singleness of purpose. Loyalty gives power, willingness, patience and longsuffering to achieve the goal of our loyalty. But divided loyalty is a threat to all our hopes. We use the word secular to describe that aspect of our lives which is not brought directly under the part we assign to God. Much of the time secular describes people’s lives between Sundays, or between times of prayer, when it is assumed that lesser loyalties than God must necessarily claim us. This attitude is second in deadliness only to claiming complete loyalty to God while serving lesser loyalties.

Each of us feels the pressure to spend the major portion of his days working for self-security, or for the exclusive welfare of his family. At times we are aware of extending the boundaries of our loyalty to include the community and the nation. We are being urged to extend our loyalty to one half of the world or to the other half, depending on the side of the iron curtain facing us. But the concept of “one world” that caught our imagination will never quite leave us. Whenever a greater loyalty breaks through into man’s consciousness, then he can no longer be content with an old restricted allegiance. Until we have found a new unity within and without, commensurate with the outreach of our knowledge, our lives will be disorganized, and our hearts torn with conflict. The joy will be gone. We cannot go back to lesser loyalties.

We attempt to set up temporary and artificial goals that are unattainable because they are unreal. If we suffer the illusion of attaining them, they fall short of our hopes. Competing loyalties arise and separate us within and without from any dependable center of reference. We cannot attain any of them. We want to be kind, and we are cruel. We want excitement, and we are bored. We want health, but choose sickness. We want the love of others, and we repel them. We admire courage, but we are filled with fear. We want to serve others, instead we demand service. We seek peace and do violence. We want freedom, and wall ourselves in. We seek to be humble, but are proud and self-righteous. We want to be world citizens, though we cannot even fulfill local responsibility. We want to act, but we are paralyzed. We seek joy but we are filled with sorrow. We want to live, but we choose death. We want to deliver others, but for ourselves we find no promise of deliverance.

We look everywhere for a loyalty that will again claim our full and joyful obedience; everywhere, except within ourselves.

The Secret Is Available

In the quiet depths of our innermost nature, if we know how to find it, is the dwelling place of a loyalty for which we would joyfully die. Men in all ages have sought and have found it. The secret is available to persons of all stations and all degrees of knowledge. It has been placed within us as a "practicable principle." "God has made mankind universally sensible in degrees sufficient for their various circumstances and allotments in life." These are words of Job Scott, and Frederick Tritton aptly advises that "The only key that opens all doors is no piece of magic; it is just faithful perseverance in cultivating that of God within you, until you know that it is no mere principle but a personal presence."

This is good news! Deep down in our hearts we all have had moments when we unconsciously realized that “man contains the whole riddle of the universe and the solution to it.” As children, we take for granted our sense of belonging inseparably with all life, and that all life is part of us. We kick the stones because they hurt our stubbed toes. We speak sympathetically to the broken stem of a weed. We naturally take to our hearts, the bird with a broken wing. We feel the pulse of the universe within us.

When we are older and gain more knowledge about some segments of life, we lose this sense of the whole of things, and shape the whole to fit the pattern of the little we know about some of its fragments. We, now and then, catch a glimpse of the deeper meaning that underlies the complex limitations of our specialized knowledge, and quickly fit this fleeting knowledge of God into our existing categories.

Many of us live as if we had no expectation of finding God ourselves. We say to ourselves and to others that we do seek everywhere but without success. Some run excitedly to each new fad, or technique that claims results. Others sit impatiently at the feet of the new teacher who seems to have found something for himself. We flit about devoting ourselves momentarily but ecstatically to this promise or that of guaranteed satisfaction, thinking each time that now we shall know enough—this is the beginning of my new life—now I have at last discovered that this is all there is to it. We try so hard to impress one another with startling statements about what we think God is or is not, that we seem to expect God to use startling techniques for impressing us with His Presence. It is this very search for God in the unusual and specially made situation that tends to lead us farther astray. Because others report feeling the Presence more readily when in the mountains, we think how unfortunate it is that we cannot go to the mountains.

Because some have found God in the slums, or in doing relief work among hungry people abroad, we fret because we must remain at home to carry family responsibilities. Because others experience God in a monastery, or in a life of celibacy, we resign ourselves to our preference for marriage and children over union with God. Because others write beautiful poetry and ecstatic tracts about God in their lives, we bemoan our prosaic existence. Because we do not find God where others seem to find Him we strive to content ourselves with lives of patient resignation.

Because others find God through the creeds and sacraments of formal religion, we either dutifully conform and pretend to know God, satisfied that we can do no more, or we give up, and denounce the Church and God with it.

“Be still, and know that I am God.” God is nearer than our thoughts about Him. God is the Knower of our thoughts. How can we know the Knower except by being aware of His Presence? God is the spirit in our lives, always present, always inseparable, always acting within and through us. The immediate and constant Presence of God must be our certain expectation. But our apprehension of His Presence is often unexpected, it breaks through in moments when we are open to it.

Deliverance comes without any pressure from God. It comes in simple, ordinary ways of everyday life in order that it may be available all the time to all who want it. But this is not all there is to it! The Promise of Deliverance appears in history, not once, but over and over again in the lives of real men. In one man it appears above all others. Of Him it was said that “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Jesus was God’s masterpiece. God’s expectation is that we should be like Him.

The Promise that is so very important to us today is the fact that Jesus lived, that the life of God in a man can

blossom in fullness in this world, and that we have some record of the ethical and spiritual implications of such a life! This is the Promise called Christ, always to be found in the heart of man where God has planted it. When the immensity and intensity of this Promise at last breaks through to us, our joy is unbounded and the Christ becomes the crowning loyalty of our lives. We search eagerly to learn as much as can be known of the Christ in Jesus—what this led him to say and to do and to be—what others have said about Him. We look for this “God in man” in every man with whom we have contact and about whom there are records from the past. But always, we recognize the Christ that we find outwardly because we first recognize the Christ within ourselves.

The Promise Is A New Community

There is evidence that man has always felt the need to be identified with other men in his effort to avert disaster and in his search for God. The two are seldom separated. This seems to have been true even before the beginnings of recorded history.

The Old Testament is the story of family and community life in which individuals find both protection and fulfillment. Here is the free spirit of God in man suffering and breaking through into creative activity which renews the life of the whole community. Through the power of a liberated spirit, a new community arises out of the deadness and fears of the old! Yet, side by side with these positive elements there is also the record of the accumulation and hardening of the law.

The Promise of the power of God, available to man, by which fear can be overcome and disaster averted, is contained within each of us. This seed of the Kingdom of God is a gift from God to persons. But it is no promise of

lonely invulnerability. It is the promise of a power that can bind individuals together in a way that preserves both peace and the freedom of personality. This is the promise of the Cross. Jesus' execution meant far more to His disciples than a painful reminder of their own daily crucifixion of the Christ within themselves. Although Jesus had died before their very eyes so that none could doubt it; although they could no longer turn to Him in the flesh for answers to their questions about what was right and what was wrong; although they felt that all the Light had gone from them forever; although that which they thought was their only contact with God, was gone; they discovered to their amazement that He was still with them in their hearts, so intensely that they were drawn together in a bond of unity which they had never experienced while He was alive. Now he was truly and indestructibly alive among them. When He lived with them in the flesh, they felt separated from Him and from each other by the gulf which lay between their craving for finite goals, and His loyalty to infinite truth. They felt separated from one another by the competition among themselves as to who was most in His favor.

Because He had, with His perfection and power and love for them, suffered death in loyalty to the ultimate truth in each of them, rather than resist death to help them sustain their lesser loyalties, they were able to realize for the first time their own essential unity and harmony with Him and with one another.

They had known and loved the outward Christ. Now they knew also that Christ was living within them. The beloved community of believers was for them, in fact, the body of the Living Christ.

Others soon joined the first apostles, then others and still others. A miracle had indeed raised Christ from the dead. They were drawn together, not just to share their memories of Him, not just to comfort one another, but with

the certain expectation that wherever two or three were gathered together in His name, His living presence would be felt.

This group experience was no mere pooling of their separate experience of the Christ within. Something more than the highest insight of any one of them, or of all in combination, was available. They expected the Living Christ to be among them and to speak and live through them. Membership in this community of the Living Christ was essential for the individual believer. There could be no purely private salvation, and the blessed community is simply and finally God's way of giving Himself for the deliverance and perfecting of the individual.

Our lack of experience of community prevents our acceptance of the Kingdom of God as a present fact. We seem to place more confidence in the bureaucratic method than in the long-suffering community method for delivering mankind from hunger, enslavement, fear and war. This is because, for the most part, we ourselves do not live in whole communities. We sleep in one suburb, worship in another, send our children to school in another and commute to work in the city. Community as an organic saving experience of birth and death, of worship and work, education, service and play, has little real significance for us.

Recognizing this, some have sought ready-made communities, or have tried to draw together into one geographical location groups of individuals and families who have a common concern to experiment with full community living. But for the most part, Christians have rationalized the disintegration of their communal ties as being unavoidable, have even accepted it as a broadening and enriching opportunity to be of wider service to the larger community.

This kind of self-deception cannot go unchecked for long. Christendom must be made up of live, visible

communities held together, not by dogma, creed or ritual, nor by ecclesiastical organization, but by a framework so simple and so flexible as to allow the ordinary affairs and common failings of its members to be brought freely and continuously into the living Presence of God. It is not this freedom, however, not just a beautiful idea that has held the Church together. It is an actual tangible experience of the love and care of God through one another, in close-knit communities, that has preserved both freedom and unity. Salvation for an individual or for the whole of mankind appears possible in proportion to the fullness of this experience of community among living, visible people.

Germ Cell Of The New Society

What has happened to the excitement once felt by Christians that in their churches was the seed, the germ cell of the new society, the Kingdom of God? Early Christians experienced a power and a freedom which knew no fear and which prepared them to meet suffering and death with joy. They were filled with the power that transformed an empire and set the tone for the world for nearly two thousand years.

The early Quakers are an example of the rediscovery of this source of unity and power. They realized it so strongly that their influence has been felt for three centuries. That this power can be liberated again and again to create new men and a new society is the world's hope for deliverance from doom.

Do there exist now, visible nuclear communities, held together by an experience of unity so fundamental that the new society is emerging through them? Is an embryonic social organism possible? Can a community be so broadly and simply organized as to leave room for the free creative spirit of individual members? Can this community at the

same time, bind its participants together from within with the power to transform that which would divide, circumscribe or destroy their unity?

Could a community of individuals become so filled with the sense of belonging now to the Kingdom of God that they would suffer even their beloved community to be sacrificed in order to spread the promise of the Kingdom for everyone?

These are grave questions for Christians. If our answer is negative, indecisive, or indifferent, we deny our birthright, our high destiny and the Promise of Deliverance. If our response is positive, the transformation required at once for most of us will be excruciating. We must detach ourselves from much that we hold to be dearest. We must become as new men! We must be born again! The Kingdom of God as a present fact is always for human society a "catastrophe and last judgment." But it is more than that! The Promise is the assurance that there is a way to change suffering into joy: to transmute fear into creative action; to turn disaster into the Kingdom of God.

The Promise includes still more! If our response is positive, we shall be shown the way and shall be given the power to follow it and to endure the suffering along the way.

The Promise is even more! All men who respond affirmatively, whatever the cost, to the light as they receive it, shall know what God is like. Once we grasp, even dimly, what God is like, we are filled with joy! Knowledge of the self-giving of a living, suffering, loving God, is the supreme experience. "The gift of the Spirit (the Light of God within) is God's supreme gift to man. It is the gift of Himself. And, just as man can give no greater gift, whether to God or to his fellow man, than himself, so neither can God." This giving of oneself is what is meant by the Cross. It is all that is meant because it is enough.

Early Christians were drawn together by something deeper than the most profound speculative thought about

freedom and the Kingdom of God. They were united in the creative experience of the Kingdom present among them. They were called to become members of the spiritual body of Christ with Christ as head. The Church was a visible Christ-ruled community. Once we grasp, even dimly, what this is, we can be satisfied with nothing less. Nothing less than this, in a fuller, simpler way than I am able to describe here is required today if Christianity is to have life to give for the deliverance of others.

When we examine even the full measure of strength of Christians today, in the Light of the Kingdom of God, we find only a “poor, desolate, helpless people that are broken off from their own confidence and trust.” The need for communion of all life is felt deeply among us. The worldwide contacts of so many have brought an increased awareness of the real body of humanity as one. This awareness must be translated into firsthand experience of the body of humanity. The Friends meeting, more than any other communion I know, can fulfill the need of the ordinary person for bringing his whole life into an act of sharing God with others.

Without the aid of specialists, men can come together with all their blindness and limitations and suffering into a consciousness of the Presence of God. In the strong and loving light of this Presence, minds become sensitive and relax their self-defenses. Within this atmosphere of unity, fears and self-love are dissolved. The solvent is called forgiveness. This is always a personal matter. Confession is directly between a person and God.

Salvation, healing and wholeness, is the seed which God has planted in each person. The only help needed and the only help we can give one another is the removal of obstacles that restrict this renewing process. Salvation is always in process and must be an everyday sacrament. Worship and prayer are an inseparable part of our ordinary

moments and activities. Salvation is never complete or final. It brings with it no guarantee of infallibility, but it does bring the glorious freedom to experiment radically and creatively.

The Promise Of Deliverance

This, then, is the Promise of Deliverance. All who recognize the need can become as new men, reborn from within, strengthened by membership in a blessed community, filled with the Presence and Power of God. We can begin at once to help create the Kingdom—to translate love into political and social relations. We do not have to commence our training all over again, or to expect new talents, or to go to a new place to begin, or to wait for a more opportune time. We do not all have to be farmers, or in foreign service, or in the ministry to serve God. We do not have to live in the city or out of it. We are to begin with what we already are, where we are. As we follow the Light each step of the way, new opportunities will open, new sacrifices will be asked, but as we respond, new power to live experimentally will be given. Always God is giving Himself without stint to help us accept our weaknesses, to overcome our doubts, to start over again and again. We may never be called upon to leave the normal paths of daily vocation or we may be led into daring new experiments in community living and world rehabilitation. Wherever we are, power equal to the measure of our need is available to enable us to follow as we are led.

Each time we have been renewed from within, we are filled with the power to use freely and creatively the talents and training we already have. These gifts no longer stand in the way as possessions whose loss we fear. Now all our gifts, including the gift of life itself can be given fearlessly, joyously and confidently. All can be offered at this moment and in each circumstance to transform wrong-fear,

wrongdoing and wrong-suffering so that together we may be liberated to help create God's Kingdom.

The Promise of Deliverance is the promise in Christ, of God in man, loving, living, suffering and giving Himself to win each person and mankind from disaster forever.