

# Can Quakerism Speak To The Times?

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR John H. Hobart was born in England of Quaker parents. He attended the Friends' School at Saffron Walden and later London University. He emigrated to Canada in 1924 and finally settled in Montreal. He helped to organize the Friends' Meeting there and was its clerk until 1947 when he went to Philadelphia to work with the American Friends Service Committee.

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The Worship of God is not a rule of safety: it is an adventure of the spirit, a flight after the unattainable. The death of religion comes with the repression of the high hope of adventure.

Alfred North Whitehead

We recognize that Quakerism today lacks the force, power, and convincement, that carried it through its first century of oppressive and bitter persecution. What happened to the prophetic zeal and world vision of its founders?

The writer believes that a living Quakerism, expressed in modern concepts, can meet the almost universal need for a faith to fit the times.

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Friends have in the first half of this century won for themselves an enviable reputation in practical Christianity, mainly through their relief work abroad in caring for the victims of war. People are impressed by the fact that our concern is for human need, and is expressed without regard to race, color or creed. They are interested in learning more about a faith that is able to demonstrate such dedication; but we are better at doing the job in the right spirit than in explaining our basic philosophy and motivation.

This story is told of a German woman living in Cologne in 1946. Her husband had been killed during the war and she was left with two small children. Their home was a damp basement beneath the ruins of a house. They lacked warm clothing and there was no way to heat the shelter. Both the children and the mother were ill and cruelly hungry. It is no wonder that she was a cynical and embittered woman when the Service Committee Workers found her. They were of the same nationality that she had been taught to hate, the ones who had killed her husband. But these people brought clothing, medicine, and food and above all sympathy and understanding. "Why do you do it?" she asked, and they tried to tell her something of the spirit that had sent them forth. Finally with tears in her eyes she exclaimed: "This is too good to keep to yourselves — Oh, why don't you preach what you practice!"

From its earliest beginnings Quakerism has laid its stress upon experience rather than dogma; and has sought to express itself in life and conduct rather than in words. But there is a present danger in service work that we may be accepting assignments pressed upon us because of our past reputation, rather than waiting for true concerns to arise from our worship and silence together. Our service work involvement may well be outrunning our spiritual resources. Shall the Society restrict its activities or deepen its spiritual life? It may need to do both of these things.

The concept of continuous revelation, the inward immediate manifestation of God's spirit shining in upon and enlightening human understanding, is basic to Friends' beliefs. We know that the early Friends considered their spiritual revelation to be similar to that which illumined the minds of those who wrote the Scriptures, although the Friends did not think that their own experience was of the same intensity. We may believe that God does not now reveal Himself as fully as He once did, or that the quality and intensity of the revelation is solely dependent upon the spiritual receptivity and understanding of man.

Religious literature abounds with the writings of people who believe that they were singled out by God for preferential treatment and had received some rare divine favor that had been denied to their fellows. Their words of thanks are profuse and invariably they are certain of their own unworthiness. We may suspect that, in some instances at least, they must be right in thinking that others were more deserving of the favor they had received.

We may believe that God has reasons that are beyond human comprehension for each particular selection. We make this supposition because we cannot accept the idea that the selection was a matter of whim or caprice, neither do we find congenial the thought that there is nothing more at work than the blind chance of evolutionary theory.

It is not surprising if spiritual pride is the besetting sin of those who feel that they have been specially chosen.

The idea of a chosen person, in this sense, has no more validity than that of a chosen people and is equally fraught with temptation and danger. Every individual has his own particular gifts with which to serve God, and all are necessary. Paul's inspired twelfth chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians should always be read in conjunction with the more widely acclaimed thirteenth chapter.

We believe that grace is universal and that there is something of the nature of God in every man. It may be

seen in that every human being has the capacity for love and friendship. I find it necessary to add my further conviction that any relationship with God that is possible to man is open to all human beings equally, upon the same terms and at all times. This alone conforms to my highest knowledge of what is right and just, and is the only position consistent with such divine intimations as I may already have received. Although this by no means proves my statement correct, it is sufficient reason to show why I must accept it. In the absence of proof we can only maintain integrity by accepting that theory which has most validity in the light of our own experience.

If God does not withhold Himself from man why cannot we turn to Him at will, certain of receiving the spiritual power and inner peace we seek? Some have apparently been able to do so, the saint and the seer, those mystics who have lifted the human race to higher standards by setting for us new goals of ethical conduct. I believe the attainment of this spiritual relationship with God is the greatest good that it is possible for man to realize. It is obviously a high achievement, and it has taken men of marked religious genius to point the way.

In the present state of human knowledge we cannot claim more than that there are conditions, both of the individual and the environment, in which spiritual insights are more likely to occur. We must prepare ourselves with patient diligence if we would hear and understand the voice of God as He speaks to man through history and directly in the human heart.

By means of his sensual perceptions man is related to God through natural laws. We know a great deal about our relationship to natural laws, for this is the realm of science. But we do not understand fully our relationship to God through natural laws because we do not know how they are related to God. But there is open to man a deeper, more personal relationship to God, one that transcends known

natural laws, or is subject to spiritual laws, the existence of which we can only at present surmise. These are not two worlds, but different aspects of the same world. Sometimes by chance, not understanding how, man blindly stumbles upon a linking of these two aspects within his experience; then there occurs what we refer to as a miracle, often it is a miracle of healing.

Quakerism, in belief and practice, is one of those disciplines that have opened up people to deep and meaningful religious experience. The doctrine of the Christ within, or inner light, is the central belief and it must be construed in terms of personal responsibility and freedom of conscience for the individual. There are two statements that suggest where Quakerism in the past placed its emphasis to gain a unique place in the Christian tradition.

The statements are to the effect that Quakerism is a religion of experience and that it is a way of life. The two belong together for experience in this context means verification by proving our religious values in the maelstrom of everyday life.

We know that early Friends, much to the distress of their contemporaries, applied this test of experience to the scriptures. The results, which were manifest in the quality of life they demonstrated, surely justified their method. Personal verification of Biblical truth in individual experience is in itself a valuable religious exercise, for which I believe there is no adequate substitute. It places squarely upon every individual the responsibility to know God — not in any second-hand manner — but experimentally in his own life. In first century Quakerism such verification was common, both as an individual and group experience.

We can say to people, the Bible is our sacred book, therefore, what you read in it you must believe. But what a far greater appeal there is if we say: in this book are to be found truths that we believe are universal and eternal. We

have verified them in our own lives, and we invite you to test them for yourselves.

The verification of all truth is scientific; it is in keeping with the spirit of the age in which we live. While some religious bodies insist upon the unquestioning acceptance of a doctrine or creed, Quakerism, if it be true to its tradition, insists only upon personal verification of its truth. One definition that has much to commend it, is this: Quakerism is a name given to the process of verification of the essential truths of Christianity in the lives of individual men and women.

The words, process and method, like verification of truth, have meaning for the modern mind. Process may be a better word than movement for our day. It makes Quakerism a living and working thing, a way of witness instead of a thing of words; it also lends meaning to the oft-quoted, "Quakerism is a way of life." As has been noted many times, the outstanding fact about George Fox and the early Friends was not only that they proclaimed the inward light, but that they also followed it.

Howard Brinton in his book "Friends for 300 Years,"<sup>1</sup> uses four words to describe the behavior that characterizes the Quaker way of life. They are Community, Harmony, Equality and Simplicity. Spiritual experience, such as the light breaking through in the Meeting for Worship, produces in the individual some sense of divine purpose. We tend to express this purpose in a concern that these four qualities shall prevail, not only in our own lives, but also in the life of the world. The intensity of the worshipping experience usually determines the individual's personal dedication to these values. In this way Howard Brinton traces the origin of Friends' social concerns to the Meeting for Worship. It is my experience that when the service activities of Friends stray far from their roots in the Meeting for Worship there is a corresponding loss of power and effectiveness.

Quakerism began as a movement; its purpose was to propagate a new way of life. To understand this movement one must go back to the seventeenth century, and study it in its original purity at the time of its first flowering; a period that lasted about fifty years. George Fox, the founder of the movement, began his public career in 1647 and soon drew to himself many others who, dissatisfied with the established church of their day, were also seekers after the divine life.

The first Publishers of Truth, as the early Friends called themselves, claimed that their faith was primitive Christianity revived. It seems unlikely that they had an accurate or detailed picture of what were the essential and unique features of primitive Christianity. One may suspect that their claim was partially based upon an abhorrence of ritual, steeple houses, and a hireling ministry: luxuries that first century Christians had not found necessary.

In the year 1696 William Penn published a tract entitled, "Primitive Christianity Revived in the Faith and Practice of the People Called Quakers." The essay confirms the agreement of early Friends with the accepted theological interpretations of their day. William Penn's claim that Quakerism was primitive Christianity revived seems to rest upon the mystical element of personal spiritual experience. He writes:

They (the Quakers) are not bare hearsay or traditional Christians, but fresh and living witnesses: those that have seen with their own eyes, and heard with their own ears, and have handled with their own hands, the Word of life.

One distinguishing feature of primitive Christianity may well have been that it did approximate a priesthood of all believers, and this too was an ideal of early Friends. Also, Christians of the first three centuries would not fight and Friends very soon developed a testimony against war. None

of these resemblances appear to have been imitative, but grew naturally out of their own experience. Primitive Christianity is always revived at the point where Christian values are applied to the contemporary scene. Quakerism, as lived during its first century, was certainly in this respect primitive Christianity revived.

Two main elements of religious force or power, the prophetic and the mystical, seem to have been of almost equal importance in the development and growth of the Quaker movement. It cannot be said that either one was dominant. Left to itself the mystic way tends to gravitate toward negativism, while the prophetic may easily become too positive and aggressive.

The history of the Society of Friends illustrates well the danger of moving to either extreme. The first decline of the Society, the period of Quietism<sup>2</sup>, resulted from a slow but steady drift to the negative pole of mysticism. A reaction was inevitable, and it came with the new burst of Evangelicalism about the middle of the nineteenth century. In many respects it too was a magnificent flowering, but it mistook its genesis and became rooted in the word rather than the spirit, and proved to be a divisive influence among the Children of Light.<sup>3</sup>

It is in the mystical experience that man realizes his direct relationship with God. The term "mystical" is properly applied to any experience through which we are brought to an awareness of God; that is, to an inward and immediate revelation of some aspect of God's presence. It may vary all the way from a simple consciousness of the divine spirit or power, to a sense of deep union with God as the ultimate reality.

Such experience was common to the early Friends, and they believed that similar experience was open to all men everywhere, because there is a seed of the divine in the very nature of man himself.

One rather beautiful testimony to the frequency and power of the inroads of the divine spirit among early Friends is given by Francis Howgill (1618-1668):

The Kingdom of Heaven did gather us and catch us all as in a net . . . and the Lord appeared daily to us, to our astonishment, amazement, and great admiration, insomuch that we often said one unto another, with great joy of heart, Is the Kingdom of God come to be with men?

Along with this deep mystical element early Friends were endowed with a strongly prophetic spirit. They felt a call to witness in the world to the will of God; it became for many their life's work. They also possessed what has been the distinguishing mark of the true prophet in all ages, the ability to speak to their times. In mysticism Quakerism found its insights and its remarkable fortitude; the prophetic strain gave it boundless drive and enthusiasm.

Herrymon Maurer, in a recent book<sup>4</sup> says that the essence of the prophetic message remains basically constant. It says that there is truth and there is faith, and there is involvement of men with one another and with God. Too much religion today is based upon the fact that once there were these things, and it seeks no further. The truly prophetic states what is: it deals with the present, the vital, immediate now.

There is no doubt that the mystic feels himself taught of God and is particularly jealous of any authority other than that of the "Light" in his own soul. The term "inward monitor" was frequently used by early Friends.

That there are vast dangers in this great individual freedom is widely recognized, but the Quaker Meeting for Worship is usually an adequate corrective. There is a valuable discipline in corporate worship that renders us less liable to error and waywardness. The group exercises a

stabilizing influence upon the individual, and in the mutually shared experience the will of God is often more clearly discerned.

Very early in its history events occurred within the Society which raised in the minds of its leaders an important question: To what extent may an individual member of the Society follow what he believes to be the leadings of his own conscience, when it is against the best judgment of the group?

I do not believe that Friends have ever successfully answered this question. I doubt whether they can with any finality.

The events referred to were the notable disaffections of James Nayler and John Perrot.<sup>5</sup> James Nayler's aberration in particular caused a wide public scandal which had an almost disastrous effect upon the young Society during its formative period. This undoubtedly was the reason which made many of its leaders waver in their trust of the inner light of the individual, and place their confidence in the judgment and authority of the majority. Richard Farnsworth in an epistle, written in 1666 probably under the instruction of George Fox, stated: . . . "that if any dispute arises over doctrine or practice within a congregation the dissident minority is to be rejected as having erred from Truth."

Isaac Penington (1616-1679) wisely recommended that all individual spiritual gifts be dedicated to the service of the weakest members of the group. He felt that if everyone keeps to his own measure of light, and thus recognizes his limitations, there can be no disorder, but humble submission of every spirit. Where this submission is lacking it cannot be enforced by any outward rule. There must be an inner discipline and if this be not present, no outward authority will hold. But if the inner discipline is there, then no other authority is necessary. Isaac Penington sums up his recommendations with these words:

The unity being thus kept all will come into one outwardly also at length, as the light grows in everyone and as everyone grows into the light; but this must be patiently waited for from the hand of God, who hath the right way of effecting it and who alone can do it.

Although it may at times be difficult, and require of us the kind of patient waiting that Penington speaks about, still it is possible to coordinate individual concern with the spiritual guidance of the group. This has been the successful practice of the Society of Friends at its best. There have been serious lapses, usually with faults on both sides. Friends have sometimes been quite unready to wait patiently for that unity which alone can come “from the hand of God.” Yet whenever the emphasis has been on external authority and discipline from without, there has been a corresponding weakening in the spiritual life of the Society.

William Penn and Robert Barclay, two Friends of superior position and education, probably influenced George Fox strongly in this matter of discipline. Penn and Barclay saw the issue as between church or group authority and downright anarchy. We can understand the concern of these two men for the good name of the young Society. Both of them had already known many bitter experiences with the extreme individualism of the Ranters, many of whom had joined Friends.

The Ranters were the extremists of the Puritan movement. Their opinions were in many respects logical conclusions to be drawn from the Calvinist doctrine of election. Because, according to this doctrine, deliberate pursuit either of good or evil made no difference to the disposition of one’s soul, they felt no need for concern. They were in complete revolt against authority and, freed from conventional restraints and without experience in inner

discipline, many of them were led by these ideas into moral laxity and license.

Thus it was with intent to protect the growing Quaker movement against charges of infamy caused by the few disorderly walkers that a system was set up largely authoritarian in temper. It imposed serious limitations upon the free growth of the spirit and ultimately delivered the control of the Society into the hands of the elders, many of whom were narrow in outlook and sought to carry out the Discipline to the letter of the law. It took the Society nearly two hundred years to rid itself of the burden of their crippling domination.<sup>6</sup>

There may be some question as to the extent of Robert Barclay's influence upon the form of organization finally adopted by Friends; but there can be no doubt of his responsibility for the formulation of Quaker doctrine.

No attempt was made by Friends of the first early period to formulate their insights and experience and reduce them to a doctrine. This came about twenty-five years later. The time is important, for at this point the Quaker movement began to congeal. The first creative leaders were passing from the scene and a new generation of Friends was arising whose chief zeal would be to preserve the inherited testimonies.

For more than two centuries one book stood as the authoritative exposition of Quaker belief and practice. Its full title is "Apology for the True Christian Divinity." Its author, Robert Barclay, describes it as "an explanation and vindication of the principles and doctrines of the people called Quakers."

Robert Barclay was a young man of rare gifts; a brilliant mind and a beautiful spirit. He was born in 1648 and became a Friend when he was eighteen. His "Apology" was first written in Latin in 1676 when he was twenty-eight; and he died in 1690, in his forty-second year. He was an

exceptionally able scholar and in his "Apology" developed an elaborate and closely reasoned system. It expresses many fine and inspiring thoughts, revealing keen insight and sound judgment, but fails to illumine the unique emphasis in Quakerism. In part this is due to his upbringing and continental education and training, particularly in Calvinist circles, but it is due also to the fact that no theology can give adequate expression to the life of the spirit.

Rufus M. Jones (in his introduction to William C. Braithwaite's "Second Period of Quakerism") expresses the opinion that Barclay's error was in trying to lock up the new truth in the old system. It was similar to putting new wine into old bottles; it held for a time, but finally burst asunder in the next century, when the first major separation occurred in 1827. Although it is questionable to what extent Barclay can be held accountable for the rigidity of mind developed by those who came after him.

Howard Brinton ("Friends for 300 Years") sympathizes with Barclay's position, while rejecting much of his terminology. He says Barclay "evaluated his religion in terms of the thought of his day," and goes on to say . . . "If Quakerism is to remain a vital religion it must come to terms with the thought of each succeeding epoch." The unavoidable truth of this last statement makes it imperative for us to face up to the issue of modernizing Quakerism, and to find a unity of the spirit with reasoned faith and belief that has validity for our own day.

Robert Barclay apparently was not familiar with the writings of the continental mystics nor with the thought of the Cambridge Platonists. But Quakerism has since been enriched by the interpretative insights of the great Christian mystics and of the philosophers, and redefined by men of broad scholarship and deep spiritual commitment. I refer to the work of John Wilhelm Rowntree, Rufus M. Jones, William C. Braithwaite, Edward Grubb, John William

Graham, Jesse H. Holmes, Elbert Russell, Walter C. Woodward and others, who at the close of the nineteenth century were among the leaders of a new liberal movement in Quakerism.

Their work is finished. It has been well done. Today we face a different task.

The Twentieth Century saw a new awakening among Friends, it put new life into old forms and, in this country, found significant expression in two fresh ventures. One was the American Friends Service Committee, formed in 1917, and the other the Wider Quaker Fellowship, which came later, being organized in 1936. Rufus M. Jones was the moving spirit in both of these concerns. They were steps forward.

The growing spiritual sensitivity that marked the turn of the century gained the kind of strength that comes only by channeling it into fields of practical application and usefulness. It is in the very nature of high idealism that it has to be put to work. Rufus Jones in accepting the chairmanship of the newly formed Service Committee made this simple and moving statement:

We have no way of knowing how wide the area of our service will be in the years to come. . . . We have met together a few times and already we are deep in plans for a piece of relief work which will demand sacrificial lives and consecrated hearts. We are, all of us, dedicated to this task to which we have set our hands. There are only a few of us, but I hope we shall be able to keep ourselves free from prejudice while men are torn with bitterness and hate. We must be great in spirit if we are in any way to rectify the results of war.

The record of the Service Committee speaks for itself. We are not concerned here with its widespread services at

home and abroad, but with its influence upon Quakerism. Its effects upon the Society at large have been good. Almost from the beginning it has exerted a unifying and clarifying influence, and this has been one of its major contributions. Where the Society of Friends has been able to forget itself and think in terms of the world's need, it has grown in spiritual strength and stature. We are reminded of the saying of Jesus "For whosoever would save his soul shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his soul for my sake shall find it."

The Wider Quaker Fellowship was organized nearly twenty years later than the Service Committee and serves a different purpose, nevertheless its source can be traced to the same living spring. Recognizing the universal element in Quakerism, it has attempted to foster fellowship among people of goodwill in all faiths. It provides the individual with an opportunity to express unity with the outward concerns of Friends without asking him to surrender his own mode of worship. It has proved a precious association for a large number of people, some of whom have been prominent in the religious life of other communions, and sometimes of other cultures.

These are past achievements. A Quakerism that is concerned only with the preservation of inherited testimonies and the recorded experiences of early Friends, is totally inadequate for the tasks which now confront our Society. Nothing less than the duplication in our own lives of the spiritual experiences out of which their message came will renew our faith. Even when we do write out of a personal encounter with the spirit there is an ever present temptation to use the traditional language that is part of our heritage. To some extent this is due to a genuine affection for the vocabulary of the past because it is full of rich meaning for us. But this unwillingness to find our own words may also indicate a lack of imagination. It is much easier to borrow the old than to create the new. Creative imagination is one

of the qualities we need to develop in our generation if we are to learn how to convey our religious insights in terms of greater clarity to the scientifically conditioned mind of the twentieth century.

Spiritual experience is not something that has physical properties; it cannot be weighed and measured. Perhaps it can only be assessed by the quality of life it produces. Not until we exhibit a quality of life comparable with that of early Friends can we be satisfied that we have achieved a relationship with God comparable with the experience that was theirs.

I do not believe that the present difference is one of kind so much as it is of intensity; the spiritual life in us is weak. Although we are, fortunately, not without Christian witness in current issues, still too many of us are content with the rights and privileges that were dearly won for us in the past, and we do not address ourselves resolutely to the problem of correcting present evils.

Nevertheless, there are signs of life and growth within the Society. Friends were once in the vanguard of the fight against slavery, despite the fact that many Friends were slave owners. Today we occupy a similar position in the battle against racial discrimination, although discrimination still exists in some of our own institutions.

True concerns are the outward evidence of an inward spiritual condition. We should be moved to strive for Christian character and conduct and to sponsor reforms, by an inner compulsion. We must never be guilty of yielding to the pressure of public opinion on any issue once we have taken up a position that is based on our inner conviction of what is right.

Many reasons can be found for helping other less fortunate than ourselves. "Enlightened self-interest" is an expression now in popular use; but loving service to the body, mind, and spirit of man, undertaken because of a

sense of a divine call, has a unique quality. This quality has marked the concerned work of Friends ever since George Fox, as early as 1650, wrote to a Chief Justice (Gervase Bennett):

To take off burdens, to visit them that be in prison, and show mercy, clothe thy own flesh, and deal thy bread to the hungry; these are God's commandments. To relieve the fatherless, and to visit the widows in their affliction, and to keep thyself unspotted of the world; this is pure religion before God.

There are other evidences within the Society of Friends today of earnest spiritual seeking for light, guidance, understanding, wisdom, and growth. I will mention three where there has been sufficient individual concern to form groups and for the search to become corporate, which is part of the genius of the Quaker method. It is interesting that of these three examples one has originated in India, one in England, and one in the United States of America.

The movement that originated in India is known as "The Fellowship of Friends of Truth." It grew out of a conversation between two concerned men, one a Hindu, Mahatma Gandhi; the other an English Quaker, Horace Alexander. I believe it to be a significant movement, seeking, as it does, to draw men together in religious fellowship through the universal aspect of all true religion. Gandhi himself expressed the opinion that it was as natural for a Hindu to grow into a Friend as it is for a Christian to grow into one; although he thought it might take some Christians a long time to recognize this important truth. It is a truth that is implicit in the teaching of George Fox.

Fox believed that there was a principle of God carrying its own assurance within every man, even those who had never heard of the Scriptures or of the historical Christ. He

exhorted his followers to “walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone.”

The statement of the basis of the Fellowship is as follows:

The Fellowship of Friends of Truth is alive to the urgent need in the world today of bringing together people of different faiths in a common endeavor to realize the good life for all through the way of truth and love. It attempts to do this on the basis of respect for all religions; of silent worship; and of united brotherly action on nonviolent lines.

The Fellowship invites people of all faiths to share through this Fellowship the richness of their various religious traditions and experiences in this adventure of the spirit.

Horace Alexander writes:

The basis and goal of this Fellowship of Friends of Truth will be a common striving towards fuller knowledge of the Truth that is God. Members will commit themselves to learn with and from one another of the things that are eternal, through common acts of quiet worship and meditation, and through other forms of communion with God and man.

There is unquestionably a measure of light in this movement represented by “The Fellowship of Friends of Truth.” Any true light that is followed faithfully always leads to greater light.

I suppose the universal spirit of truth, which is the only ground upon which such a Fellowship can be built, has nowhere been stated better than by that quiet and saintly New Jersey Friend, John Woolman (1720-1772). He wrote:

There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath had different names. It is, however, pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion, nor excluded from any, where the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, of what nation soever, they become brethren.

The second group that I would refer to is the "Friends Spiritual Healing Fellowship," which started in England about sixteen years ago.

The very close relationship between our spiritual, mental and physical conditions is being widely realized today and, perhaps for the first time, on a scientific basis. The fact that in former times people often believed that mental and spiritual states could cause physical illness, was too hastily dismissed as mere superstition.

The Friends Spiritual Healing Fellowship makes no extravagant claims. They feel that the ministry of healing should be an integral part of the life and service of a Christian community. The fellowship meets together in prayer, and for study and discussion.

Experience gained in this manner will undoubtedly prove invaluable to them as individuals in promoting the growth and deepening of their own spiritual lives, and may also add to our general knowledge and understanding of the potentialities of the spirit in man.

The third group is "The Friends Conference on Religion and Psychology," which had its origin among interested Friends attending the World Conference of Friends at Swarthmore College, Penna., in 1937. The organization was first called "The Conference on the Nature and Laws of Our Spiritual Life," but was soon afterwards changed to the more manageable "Conference on Religion and Psychology."

The members meet together in an annual conference that is well and widely attended, and they publish a small pamphlet under the title of "Inward Light." They have exchanged visits with the British Guild of Pastoral Psychology and with the Seekers Association of British Friends.

The findings of these three groups have not, to date, been spectacular; but they have contributed significantly to the spiritual development of many individual seekers, and that is where progress must always begin. We first must be conscious of our own need, and moved by the urgent desire for personal spiritual growth.

One of the first evidences of any true spiritual awakening is a concern for others. In this way we soon become involved in working to change conditions that stand in the way of a more abundant life for all peoples. These three examples are evidences of a healthy seeking; sound because they would increase our spiritual knowledge by extending the area of our religious experience. It is, however, important that they remain rooted in the wider aspects of our faith. The peril lurking in such movements is that they may cut themselves off from the main stream of Quaker thought and practice and then degenerate into mere cults.

Besides these new endeavors springing up within the Society of Friends itself we are challenged by certain wider activities of the Christian Church, one of which may yet prove to be the most significant religious movement of our times. I refer specifically to the Ecumenical Movement among the Protestant churches which is continuing to grow and is engaging some of the best minds in Protestantism today.

In it we see many possibilities for good and also some dangers. It could be one of the agencies bringing new life to our Society; alternately it could overwhelm such a small group of people as we represent. Whether we can become the leaven, or would be lost in the mass, depends how strongly the life of the spirit now moves in our midst.

John A. McKay, President of Princeton Theological Seminary, points out in a recent essay that technology has made the world an “ecumenical” organism. In the face of this fact one questions the adequacy of an ecumenic concept that is at present limited to selected communions in organized Protestantism. But perhaps this is where we must begin.

I would have high hopes for a Protestantism that had been able to transcend all its divisions and find unity, not by accommodation, but in rising to a nobler vision through a deeper understanding of light and life and truth.

Certainly the task of Friends in such a movement is to keep this goal before it and to be satisfied with nothing less. It is only when we have first found unity in spirit and purpose that any unity of organization can have meaning.

Let us not seek to break with or destroy our tradition, but rather to fulfill its promise; that was the way of Jesus. The faith that Jesus inherited was too exclusive, he enlarged it; but the church that is built around his name has never quite grasped the inclusiveness of his gospel.

We live in a skeptical age. No development of religious thought will be taken seriously that does not take into account the findings of science and the technological progress of our own century. This has nothing to do with the clash between evolution and fundamentalism. That belongs to a bygone era and any religious body still fighting that battle has no message for the present day.

Modern knowledge, as represented by psychology and physics, has opened the way for immense new insights into the inner and outer world of man. This I believe despite the fact that I find the present interpretative hypothesis of the various psychological “schools,” including the mystical holism of Jung, far from satisfying. Quakerism, however, because it is not chained to an outworn creed or dogma is free to examine this new light with an open mind and,

without fear or superstition, accept that which can add conviction to the religious thought of our time.

In a recent number of "The Friends Quarterly" (July 1953) Ole F. Olden, of Norway, in an essay entitled "A Letter to Quaker Scientists — and Others," has touched upon this aspect of our task.

He points out how even in the Bible the "system of reference" changes with new knowledge and deeper insights. He says that terms like inferiority and inhibitions cannot be introduced in a system which uses sin, sacrifice and grace for its frame of reference. But the experience and conditions, although differently described, may actually be identical.

Because the spiritual and psychological needs of any particular generation are unlikely to be identical with those of preceding generations, it is important that Quakerism preserve its freedom of doctrinal expression. Doctrines are certainly not the essentials of Christian faith, but among its fruits. They have often been among the less desirable fruits. Tolerance toward divergent statements of theological belief should be our goal, rather than to seek unity in any such statements.

It is quite true that in the light of modern knowledge many of the views held by first century Friends are no longer tenable; and they are probably as unessential to Quakerism as are some of the other accretions that have grown around it during the intervening years.

Perhaps we should put to ourselves these questions: What constitutes the central core of Quakerism? And, what is the best way to interpret it to the modern world?

The Society of Friends at the present moment is probably quite unready to give a definitive answer to either of these questions. Are we even sure of the right approach?

The core of Quakerism is to be found in the lives of such men as Fox, Barclay, Penn, Nayler and Woolman, rather than in their writings. The purpose of the early Quaker

movement was to propagate a new way of life and these men demonstrated that way to the full. They are not to be regarded as authorities, but as examples; they are torches from which we who follow may light our own small candles of faith. Our task is not to rewrite their books in modern language, it is to relive their experience and, by so doing, make it our own. Let your lives speak, the words must come out of the life. There are grave perils in trying to modernize Quakerism by any other method.

One present danger is that of making our Quakerism into a comfortable and respectable mode of living, which conforms to the social mores and makes no demands upon the individual beyond those of the accepted standards for good citizenship. Certain sections of the Society have been drifting in this direction for some years. To complete the process we would merely need to drop certain of our quaint, but historically significant, customs, and to give up all pretense to moral leadership in the world. This would be what Professor Whitehead refers to as the death of religion; the rule of safety, and not the worship of God.<sup>7</sup>

The mystical and prophetic strains, that were equally strongly marked in the first period of Quakerism, were both elements of firsthand experience — experience of a kind that these Friends declared to be open to all men. This was the ground of their conviction; there were no birthright members in the seventeenth century. Quakerism was not a notional religion to which people could be brought into agreement by disputation and argument. A person attended the Meeting for Worship and found there the nourishment his soul was seeking; perhaps even found himself in the presence of the living God.

The following quotation from Robert Barclay is typical of this period:

. . . when I came into the silent assemblies of  
God's people, I felt a secret power among them,

which touched my heart; and as I gave way unto it I found the evil weakening in me and the good raised up; and so I became thus knit and united unto them, hungering more and more after the increase of this power and life, whereby I might feel myself perfectly redeemed.

Through this experience one became a changed person: it was manifest in a new way of life. Friends tried to bring others into the life by having them share in this communion with the divine presence. They were not asked to believe any particular notion or idea, but rather led to discover the power within themselves.

Barclay's words are significant: ". . . when I came into the silent assemblies of God's people, I felt a secret power among them, which touched my heart." In other words this was the Meeting for Worship, the silent waiting together until a sense of the divine presence reached all and gathered them into a spiritual fellowship with one another and with God.

The Meeting for Worship is at the very heart of our Quaker faith and the life-blood of the Society. Again and again it has proved to be the right discipline by which the individual may free himself from the usual cares that beset the mind, and allow the light to break in upon his consciousness. Whether it be the first time or the thousandth, it is equally wonderful, equally rewarding and refreshing.

There is no doubt that all of us need more "light." We need to increase our powers of spiritual perception and knowledge and we need greater wisdom in interpreting to others what little light we may already have.

One important aspect of modernization is dependent upon the degree to which we can recapture the vision and prophetic voice of our first century. The modern vision of a people to be gathered must know no boundaries and exclude

no one, all are sons of the house in the family of God. We have achieved in our service work a glimpse of what this could be. Can it become a message with us of messianic proportions? The truths of Quakerism have both Christian and universal implications and it is important not to sacrifice either one of these aspects. The task is surely to enlarge both. Certainly this is necessary if we support the hope that in time they may become one.

The light within is no mere doctrine, it is a universal fact of experience. There is some principle of God, of truth, of goodness, to be found in every human being and it is to this principle that we must speak. There is a tendency among some to stress the universal aspect of Quakerism and to minimize its Christian character. Perhaps they are thinking in terms of a synthesis of the world's leading religions, taking what they feel to be the best from each. Whatever the result of such a process might be, it could scarcely be called Quakerism. I believe that there is nothing in the Christian message, rightly understood, that need exclude anyone. We shall discover that the less Christian we make our Quakerism the less universal in application it will become. Only when we have enlarged our Christian concepts to their fullest extent will we realize the true universal nature of our message.

Many people now reject, as being too anthropomorphic, a concept of God that once satisfied them. God becomes a mirror in which each man sees an image of the ideal self. This image is not God, and the ideal is valuable only to the degree that it is worthy of the best that is in us. What this best may be is surely part of the revelation that was Jesus. It was brought to all men because it is in all men — the gift of spiritual life.

Our physical and mental powers develop and grow stronger with use, neglect them and they begin to atrophy. The same thing appears to hold true with man's spiritual

gifts. Early Friends pictured a seed of God which was to be found in every man. They recognized that it was often dormant, its presence even unsuspected, but they declared it would grow and blossom when awakened and exposed to the "Light," not only the light of direct and immediate revelation, but also the light of history as revealed through the Bible.

No serious-minded person would question the immense debt all Friends owe to the Judaic-Christian tradition from which our movement sprang. Our faith is Christian historically and in practice. Twentieth Century Quakerism must remain so rooted and be nourished by its Christian heritage; at the same time it must be universal in application but thoroughly modern in concept and expression.

We may wonder if it is possible for a religious faith to be Christian, universal and completely modern. Organized Christianity has seldom measured up to these demands. In its main lines of development through the Christian churches it has come to be increasingly a religion centered about the person of Jesus, rather than in his life and teaching. Most churches offer a man-made aspect of Christianity that is essentially based upon opinions about Jesus and early interpretations by others of his purposes and the meaning of his life, to which Jesus' own interpretation of religion, and his way of life, are purely incidental. We may in truth repeat the statement that there has only been one real Christian and he was the historical Jesus. Very few others have even come close to this ideal. St. Francis of Assisi was one of those rare individuals.

The immense variety of sects and denominations in Christendom today reflect different theories about the nature of Jesus himself and not attempts to uncover and practice the religion of Jesus in all its simplicity and purity. The organized church has become a superstructure. Embodied in it are the teachings of Jesus, often obscured and

sometimes grossly distorted. Theological concepts, stated as essential to Christianity and sometimes as Christianity itself, have been a divisive influence among Christian peoples for many hundred years. We can hardly expect them to suddenly become a unifying force in the world.

As we have noted, Quakerism in its beginnings called itself primitive Christianity revived, and the term was correct to the degree that primitive Christianity was closer to the teaching and example of Jesus than was the established church in seventeenth century England. Quakerism was an attempt to recover and to practice the religion that Jesus revealed to his followers.

This attempt to live as Jesus commanded was tied closely with the discovery within themselves of a spiritual power to which, for quite obvious reasons, they often gave the name of "Inward Christ." It is quite true that others, including many outside the Christian tradition, have also discovered this power and have given it different names. Usually when men have found this quality within themselves they considered themselves exceptional — as probably they were — apparently it did not occur to them that this spiritual power was to some degree in everyone, waiting only to be discovered and released.

The genius of the early Friends was that they believed this "inner light" was in every human being. That is to say that the "Inward Christ" was to be found in Turk and Jew, in African and Indian, in the Chinese and the Japanese, in people who may never have heard of Jesus or the Bible. Early Friends believed this and acted accordingly.

Here surely is an evidence of the universal nature of the Christian message of Quakerism. Is it true to the religion that Jesus lived and taught?

Henry J. Cadbury, Hollis Professor of Biblical Literature in Harvard University, published in 1937 a book called "The Peril of Modernizing Jesus." Henry Cadbury's avowed

purpose was to give us the means to obtain a more accurate view of Jesus. The evidence he submits for our consideration, if valid, certainly suggests that the inward Christ and the historical Jesus are not identical. There is the inward Christ: there was the Jesus of history: and they are not interchangeable terms. We need some simple way of thinking about this relationship without obscure terminology or becoming bogged down in Christology. The historical Jesus was the master, the great teacher and example, the inspirer of men: the inward and eternal Christ is the power, the power to know and the power to act; the power that moved in Jesus is the power by which we today may hope to follow in his footsteps.

It is not my intention to try and summarize the teaching of Jesus in a few short paragraphs. I only wish to indicate that it is universally applicable, for it does not depend upon any single culture or tradition for its understanding or acceptance. Jesus' teaching was objective and external. To him the facts of religion and of ethics were self-evident truths that could be verified in nature and in man. It is grounded in the concept of one God, ethical and omnipotent, and Jesus saw that man's relationship to God is based upon conduct rather than belief. Beliefs may be expressed in theological terms, but conduct can only be demonstrated in a way of life. Jesus demonstrated his belief not only in God, but also in man, by his steadfast faith in the human capacity to respond to God's goodness and love.

In the past the Christian countries have offered to the world a westernized Christianity. By imposing our cultural patterns upon it we have rendered it alien to those who were not born into our tradition. Universal Christianity is primitive Christianity revived and presented once more to the nations of the earth in all its simple purity, dignity and truth.

We of the West have never quite risen to a full realization of the universality of Christ's teaching. Still today we are too often without vision, narrow and sectarian in our outlook, placing orthodoxy above honesty, the word above the spirit. Many men of broader ideals are seeking elsewhere for a more satisfying and universal faith. Modern thought demands empirical bases for religion, but we should not expect significant religious experience to emerge from a set of beliefs that first demand the surrender of one's intellectual integrity. We may be sure that the deepest religious experience springs only from the most consistent of beliefs and practices.

The burning question which man asks remains the same, phrase it as we will: What is our human destiny? What is man's future? Or in words that should have greater meaning for all who would be "children of the Light": What are God's purposes as they relate to the future of man?

Should time and destiny appear to annihilate all that we at present value, it is because they are greater than anything we have yet found within ourselves. When all of our thinking is of material possessions and our experience limited to transient sensual pleasures, we carry nothing into the future, because we bear none of the future in us. We have not consciously entered the strong spiritual stream of eternal life.

We are just as much a part of the future as we are of the past, although our connection with the past is more obvious. Our long evolutionary background is reflected in our instincts, the historical past is part of our tradition and culture. Our integrity with the past is sealed within our inheritance; but our integrity with the future is, to an extent, of our own forging.

One of the most important truths that we have to recognize that is fundamental to any understanding of human brotherhood, is the oneness of mankind. Mankind is a single entity, and our human destiny therefore, involves

the whole of mankind equally; the Russian, the Chinaman and African, equally with the European and the American.

The great fault of our human systems is their exclusiveness. Whether racial, political or religious, they all bear this man-made stamp of frailty. Technically man has created one world — spiritually we are still worlds apart. That is why mankind is confounded, and disaster is at our gates.

Nothing less than the discovery of their spiritual bonds can bring the peoples of the world into harmony. The major wars of modern times have been fought between the so-called Christian nations. This is the record of our failure. Only by firmly embracing the message ourselves can we suggest that in Christianity is to be found the ground for a universal faith, spreading peace and brotherhood among men. This is the Quaker interpretation of the Christian gospel.

Dare we say today that the Quaker Way is a Christian Ministry of hope for all peoples, as it was in the days of Fox, of Burrough, Howgill, Nayler and the rest of that valiant band?

In Quakerism, as in life, only a living Society can link the past to the future. We look back at our heritage and, despite all errors and limitations, there is a record of remarkable achievement. We look ahead and spread before us are the challenges presented by this mad, lost, materialistic, yet seeking world. We need to make an affirmation about the faith we now hold; to examine it in the light of our past and to test its validity against the needs of the present. Words are, of course, inadequate, frail things that threaten to betray as from the moment we utter them. Nevertheless we can use them in the hope that some may read them in the spirit that called them forth.

I offer this brief definition experimentally. It is something for everyone to work on until he finds the words that satisfy his own experience and understanding.

Quakerism is a Christlike way of life, growing out of an inward and immediate revelation of the divine spirit. Through it we are led to the belief that every human being has the spiritual capacity to establish for himself a meaningful relationship with God on the basis of spirit to spirit. This is known truly only in the experience. It is a way that is progressively revealed to us as we are faithful to that measure of light we already possess.

I know that my redeemer liveth in me, is a great affirmation of faith. It is to know that man can experience within himself the saving power, and that it is not just human wisdom; it is the divine spirit. Both in the individual and in human society, the good is struggling to be born into the world, and there is no birth without travail. Our way of life remains the only true measure of our faith. Those whom we have shut out from our Christian love can have no understanding of our Christian message.

Let us therefore in all humility rededicate our lives to seeking the enduring and universal truth. May we recapture the world vision of our first century, that our small Society may be servant to all peoples. Only by trying to meet the wider need shall we satisfy the spiritual hunger within ourselves. The figure of Jesus is a beacon of the "eternal light" shining through the dark pages of history. If he be our inspiration then may the "inward light" become a power within us, and shine out from our own lives as we find the way and witness unto the truth.

We need the prophetic answer for our times that we may go forward, confident in our direction, knowing that we have at last placed our hand into the hand of God, and that He is leading us even as He did the men of old.

### Notes

1. *Friends for 300 Years*, published by Harper and Bros. 1952. See Chapter 7, the Meeting Community.
2. Rufus M. Jones says that Quietism ruled within the Society for one hundred years. He puts the period at 1725 to 1825.
3. Resistance to Evangelicalism led to the Wilburite separations, which were the second major separations among Friends occurring in the nineteenth century. See Rufus M. Jones: *The Later Periods of Quakerism: Volume 1: Chapters XII and XIII*.
4. *What Can I Know?* (Harper and Brothers, 1953.)
5. See *The Beginnings of Quakerism*, by William C. Braithwaite, Chapter XI, and his *The Second Period of Quakerism*, Chapter VIII.
6. See *Quaker Social History*, by Arnold Lloyd (Longman, Green and Co., publishers).
7. See the statement by Alfred North Whitehead printed on page 2 of this pamphlet.