

John Woolman And The 20th Century

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR Reginald Reynolds is an English Friend whose public life began in 1930. Having gone to India he was employed by Mahatma Gandhi as his emissary to the Viceroy. Since then he has worked for colonial liberation and better race relations. He revisited India in 1949-50 and in 1953 made an overland “pilgrimage in search of hope” from Cairo to Cape Town. In 1956 he spent the summer lecturing in America and has since visited Japan. His political writings include weekly verse satires in the New Statesman and his non-political books cover an odd range of subjects.

Books in Print

The Wisdom of John Woolman
Cleanliness and Godliness

Beards

Beware of Africans (American title: Cairo to Cape Town: A Pilgrimage in Search of Hope)

My Life and Crimes

[Note to 2006 electronic edition: The books listed above are no longer in print, but most of the titles are available from used booksellers. See www.amazon.com.]

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Foreword

The talk on which this pamphlet is based was an unscripted address given at Mount Holly, New Jersey, in September 1956, and the only original record of it is the tape recording made at the time.

Inevitably it was necessary to make some alterations in the wording when preparing a version suitable for publication. But I have tried, as far as possible, to preserve the original form rather than to re-write the whole lecture in “literary” English. What I said at Mount Holly was the result of a great deal of thought — not only in preparation for this special occasion, but over a period of twelve years. Nevertheless I decided that, when the time came, I would make no special provision except with regard to a few quotations relevant to my main theme. The result, I hoped, would be a spontaneity which could not be achieved by a carefully prepared script. In the continued hope that my judgment was correct I have made a point of adhering to the word (not to be confused with the precise words) given to me on that occasion.

The memory of that day is still vivid. It is (I suppose) not often that a visiting Friend from England stays in the little house devoted to the memory of John Woolman and is shown its treasures by Friends so near to Woolman in spirit. Still rarer — as I well realized at the time — was the special responsibility laid upon me. It was a day to be preserved in

my memory, and I welcome this opportunity of publication for very personal reasons.

Reading through this record of a talk which only found its ultimate form when I was on my feet, I am struck by the extent to which my experiences in America, during the summer which preceded my visit to Mount Holly, provided so many interpretations of the Woolman Way. The work camp, seminar and institutes to which I referred were all conducted under the auspices of the American Friends Service Committee; and, in view of the amount I learned from these experiences, I think it is only fair to acknowledge this fact — at the risk of appearing to put in a plug for the A.F.S.C. The fact that I came to understand more about the application of John Woolman's principles to the problems of our time during a summer spent in John Woolman's country was largely due to the technique (strictly speaking a Socratic technique) developed by many discussion leaders employed by the A.F.S.C. in its work. The startling success of this method, especially with teenagers and college students, showed me very clearly how shallow are the conventional attitudes which people accept as their own "opinions" — and how swift and revolutionary the change can be if you can only persuade people, not to accept your own views but merely to examine what they believe to be theirs with critical integrity.

From words the new concepts which result from such self-examination may pass rapidly into action. This will be seen clearly in the story of the Ohio camp and the Kentucky expedition. It is also implicit in the brief account of the interracial seminar. For it has to be realized that a group of gay and irresponsible students underwent a change through the integration of an experience — something which was made possible by a bold policy of facing an awkward situation with courage and a personal problem with frank self-criticism. John Woolman's own account of his dangerous

security — the fact that every child needs love. (And are we not all children in this respect?) But it occurred to me during that discussion that although this is true (and we know it to be true from our own experience, not merely as a psychological theory) there comes a point in the lives of some men and women when they seem to be able to go on without that emotional security so far as their fellow human beings are concerned. But when I put it to that group of youngsters that there were people who were able to get beyond the need of human love, in the sense that, though completely alone, they could still go on loving others, the only reply I could get from one of them (the others had none) was that such people relied upon their own spiritual reserves. At that point I said — and it was the only reply possible — “In that case I should be lost.”

But I think that every one of us knows what is the real answer. It is the answer that was given in those two readings at the beginning of this address, the words of Habakkuk and the words of Paul. It was the answer that was given by James Nayler, lying at death’s door, robbed, beaten, a lonely man, a failure in all that he had done — at least, an apparent failure. He says of the spirit that had sustained him, “I found it alone, being forsaken, I had fellowship therein with them who dwelt in dens and desolate places of the earth, who through death attained this resurrection and eternal holy life.” And we find the same answer when we return to John Woolman and his well known words:

“And then I said, ‘I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ that liveth in me. And the life I now live in the flesh is by the faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.’ Then the mystery was opened, and I perceived that there was joy in heaven over a sinner who had repented; and that that language, John Woolman is dead, meant no more than the death of my own will.”

journey to meet Papunahung and his tribe was very naturally in my mind at that seminar, because of its relevance; and I felt that the college students proved by their conduct the validity of Woolman’s teaching in our time. But this can only happen so swiftly, as a rule, where some catalyst is used — such as the Socratic questioner — to stimulate a real searching of the heart.

Re-reading my own words today, homeward bound from Tokyo (on one of those rare occasions of prolonged reflection for which long sea voyages seem to have been specially designed) it is the “catalytic” function of the teacher which strikes my mind as the strongest connecting link in all that came to the surface when I spoke at Mount Holly. It has been suggested that I might like to give more space to the development of certain points, such as Woolman’s views on children and the duties of parents or his way of looking at a problem in its wholeness — seeking not the mere amelioration of an evil but its eradication through the discovery of its social and personal roots. I have not felt able to do this for two reasons: because I do not want to repeat here what I wrote in *The Wisdom of John Woolman* and because I myself now place much more emphasis on this “catalytic” function of my own work and less on the didactic. I no longer feel so interested as I once did in expounding theories of conduct. The world has produced a few major prophets — and I count John Woolman among them — who were capable of doing that; but every didactic message has its dangers, irrespective of its merits. I have heard Karl Marx, Mahatma Gandhi and Sigmund Freud quoted with that same stultifying abnegation of intelligence, intuition and even common observation which has been traditionally associated with “Fundamentalism.” So that if I say the letter killeth I use Paul’s words but speak from my own experience — which is to me the only valid use of quotation in matters of value.

Quakerism began as a protest against a dead letter religion. George Fox posed the question: "Christ saith this and the Apostles say this, but what canst thou say?" What could be more Socratic? He throws the onus of answering your question back at you. He invites you to put aside all your second-hand knowledge and give the Holy Spirit a chance to speak for himself. There was nothing new in this. Jesus himself often taught by riddles and questions which only the pure in heart could answer — each question a challenge to conscience. Or he would use a conditional clause in such a way that each hearer must apply it to himself. (He could have said "Not one of you is without sin, therefore none of you should cast a stone." How feeble that sounds, compared with the searching irony of the original words!) Christianity became impoverished by the dead hand of dogma; Quakerism, which was a conscious attempt to revive the spirit of primitive Christianity, has always faced the same risk.

That is why, even with a man like John Woolman, one should be careful to avoid crediting him — even by the most subtle implication — with uniform verbal inspiration. Gandhi, who saw the danger with regard to himself, fought a long, losing battle against a Messianic status which loaded him with an intolerable burden of lazy consciences and did no good whatever (and much harm) to his disciples. I think it was Renan who said something to the effect that when the Devil had tried in vain to destroy the virtue of a great man, as a last resort he sent him disciples.

So I am happy to say that I do not write as a "disciple" of John Woolman or of Mahatma Gandhi or of any of those great teachers who have helped me to understand more about God and Man — and myself. The world will be no better for people who can recite chunks from Woolman's Journal, even if they try to apply them to personal and social problems, unless they have drunk from the spring which

For example, I was once in a tough spot during my travels here, at a seminar in the south. It was a desegregated, interracial group. People living around didn't like us. Among a number of ugly incidents was the burning of fiery crosses outside the place where we were meeting. I had to leave before that thing was over. It was a month's seminar and I had other appointments. So with great reluctance I had to go at the end of a difficult, tense week. Naturally I was very much concerned about that group and begged the director to write and tell me how things developed after I left. One of his letters to me, I think, got to the heart of it. He said something like this: "These fiery crosses are a soul searing experience. How does one get at the mind which makes this appalling distortion of the symbol of the cross?" In our own way, we had followed the Woolman example, once the young people realized what they were really facing. We made no publicity about the thing. Even now you will notice that I haven't named the place. But what we could do to improve relations was limited to the people we knew about. We invited the students who were still in the college where we were holding our seminar. We knew that many of these students were hostile, so we invited the hostile, segregationist students to come and meet us, to speak to us, to put the case for segregation and to discuss it — which I am sure was in the best Woolman tradition and certainly worked very well. But the question of the director still rings in my mind: How do we get at the mind that distorts the symbol of the cross? That was the problem that Woolman set out to answer, and I feel that only by seeking the same sources that Woolman sought can we hope to find the answer to it. And that brings me to my last point, the source of Woolman's inspiration.

Some time ago, again in one of our teenage institutes, where I had been talking, we began discussing a familiar subject, the need of a child for security, for emotional

the long distance phone. She was told very emphatically that she was not to accept the invitation. The girl went to the headmaster and said: "What shall I do?" The headmaster (the same Friend who told me the story) replied: "I'm afraid that you have no choice. You have to obey your father." And the girl said, "But Charlie will be hurt."

I shall never forget the tone in which the former headmaster told me his answer to that. He said: "I told her, 'Charlie is often hurt. Charlie is going to be hurt all through his life. All you can do is to see that you don't hurt him more than you can help. You have got to refuse his invitation. You have got to refuse in language that makes it quite clear that you would have accepted it, so far as you are concerned, but that your father won't let you. That is true, and you can't help it. So long as you know Charlie is being hurt and that you feel it with him, that is the thing that matters.'" I hope I have remembered those words correctly. There is a sequel to that story. The girl came to the headmaster some time later and said: "How old does one have to be before one can disobey one's parents?" And this time he answered: "Well, certainly not while you are in high school."

Some time after I heard that story I was involved in a teenage discussion concerning the relations of the younger generation with the older. And the thing that I came to see quite suddenly out of that discussion, with its fascinating interplay of ideas, was that the time was coming for many people when it isn't only Charlie who is going to be hurt; Daddy is going to be hurt! And it is just as important to have that feeling for an older generation that may be in for a knock as it is to have that feeling for Charlie. This business of trying to feel with and for people when they are holding ideas entirely repulsive to yours is something that Woolman understood; and it is here perhaps, that we have most to learn from him.

was the inspiration of Woolman's life. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God" is not a counsel of "other-worldliness," but a simple suggestion that you may as well get your bearings if you intend to reach the harbor.

Men fear the Kingdom of God more than anything else, though Christians pray regularly for its coming. That was what the Athenians feared, though they had no such name for it when they gave Socrates his last drink. I would rather ask awkward questions myself than provide slick answers. It came to me at Pendle Hill after having seen the turmoil in the minds of adolescents last summer — the rich fertile confusion of young minds shaken from

"The comfortable ways
Of men's consent and praise."

I saw it suddenly as a new beatitude; though for all I know it was new only to myself, but none the less a shattering vision of a new purpose. And I said: "Blessed are the confused, for they may see the light. And beware of those who know all the answers, for they are wrong."

Therefore, if these words of mine, making so many tangents from the central theme of Woolman and his teaching, cause perplexity and discussion; if they seem often paradoxical and even chaotic; if the reader is induced to go even as far as Pontius Pilate and ask, in despair, "What is Truth?" — then, for my part, I shall have done all I hoped to do. I shall have used John Woolman as an effective catalyst. Beyond that point is the Holy Land that lies between every soul and its Creator.

Reginald Reynolds

I.

I should like to begin by reading two short passages from the Bible. The first is from Habakkuk, just a couple of verses, which Woolman himself used, on one occasion at least, as recorded in his writings. "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be on the vines, the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls, Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

The second is another familiar passage which, although I have no record of this fact, I am quite certain must often have spoken to John Woolman's condition: "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

It is a difficult thing for me to say anything fresh to you people today which I have not already said in print about your great American Quaker prophet. I am concluding the happiest summer in my fifty-one years by perhaps the greatest privilege for which I could hope, by being asked to this place at this time to talk of the man who means so much to me. Yet what I am most afraid of is merely saying things that have been said before by myself or by others.

When I compiled a collection of extracts from John Woolman's writings with some comments of my own, it was my contention that the wisdom of John Woolman was still relevant to the problems of the twentieth century. It is my intention today to try to show by examples of present day applications how true that contention was. I want to begin, as I believe John Woolman would have begun himself, at a very personal and intimate level. I want to begin, as John Woolman so often did begin, with the mind of a child.

something powerful. Love like a rock, as the boy said. So often the effect is entirely negative. Many pacifists only stir up a feeling of distrust and repulsion. They have a great deal to learn — and so have we all — from John Woolman.

Take the problem which confronts us all, of our duty to our neighbour. How far does our Christianity stretch? Some time ago, I remember sitting in a missionary's house in central India, a very European house, and all outside was India, people in villages, living quite a different life. I realized that there was no social contact between that missionary and those people outside. As though he had read my thoughts he said: "You know, my problem is that I want to bring Christ to these people, and yet I don't want to be associated with them too closely myself." I admired the frankness with which he had spoken, though I was appalled at what he had confessed. But some time later I happened to be going down on my way from Cairo to Capetown on an overland journey, and I wrote these words in my diary: "These white people here seem to find it difficult to love their black brothers. For me the difficulty is to love my white brother." When I came to ponder what I had written later, I found that I had learned something from that missionary. Because I asked myself; "Reginald Reynolds, do you want to bring Christ to the prejudiced white people — yes, or no?" It was difficult to answer, for maybe I didn't want to associate with them myself. And for this reason, I think, I understand Benjamin Lay better than I understand John Woolman, but I admire John Woolman more than I admire Benjamin Lay.

A friend here told me a story that deeply impressed me — about a girl in one of your Friends' Schools, where there had been desegregation. She wanted to dance with a Negro boy, the best dancer in the school. He had invited her to be his partner at a formal dance, and she thought she had better get her father's consent. So she wrote, and the letter was no sooner received than the father was on

that he is the grandson of the founder of the Bruderhof — so perhaps he had reason to know a few things. But he didn't just speak like a kid who had learned something from somebody else. He got this out of his own experience, and he spoke with tremendous drive and conviction — "Love," he said, "is not soft like water, it is hard like rock, on which the waves of hatred beat in vain." That from a teenager. He knew something about it — much more than most of us. We are only beginning to discover now how this dissemination of spiritual truth really does work.

There are just a few other things that I want to say in conclusion about the relevance of Woolman's teachings to us. I have been plugging this idea of what we do and what we are. Now I want to give you one other Woolman quotation. This relates directly to the position of the conscientious objector in time of war. John Woolman said: "I had fresh opportunity to see and consider the advantage of living in the real substance of religion, where practice doth harmonize with principle. Amongst the officers" (that is, the officers who enrolled men for the military draft) "are men of understanding who have some regard for sincerity where they see it; and, in the execution of their office, when they have men to deal with whom they believe to be uprighthearted, to put them to trouble on account of scruples of conscience is a painful task and likely to be avoided as much as may be easily. But where men profess to be so meek and heavenly-minded, and to have their trust so firmly settled in God, that they cannot join in wars, and yet, by their spirit and conduct in common life, manifest a contrary disposition, their difficulties are great at such a time." I am not going to make any further comment on that, except that I saw it and every one of you must have seen it in the last war. The fact is that we were needing people who could convince others by what they did and what they were, showing that they stood for something —

The incident has been on my mind ever since it occurred in this country quite recently. It concerns a happy afternoon at one of the many institutes I have been attending — a family institute in New England. I went down to a lake with a number of children, with the intention of swimming, and then suddenly thought it would be nice to take a boat out into the lake. I did not discover until I got down to the quay where the boats were moored that I was allowed to take only five including one adult. I had with me six children, and I knew that two of those children would have to be disappointed. I looked at them and wondered — and my eyes fell upon a brother and sister. The girl's age was eleven, and the boy was only nine. I knew that I loved them more than the others. I deliberately said to them, "I'm sorry, I won't be able to take you." And I said that to them because I had confidence that the mutual affection that existed between me and those children was such that they, if any among those children, would be able to understand why I told them they were not coming. They made no complaint.

Afterwards, when I told their mother, I think she was the proudest woman in that camp. I said to her; "I treated them as though they were my own children. Had they been my own children I would have expected them to hold back and let the others go. I gave them the privilege of not going." She said. "You don't know what a privilege it was. You can only measure the privilege by the great desire that they had to go." Those children had learned or were learning that the reward of goodness is not a material reward. The reward of being good is that you are set harder tasks and that people impose upon you and upon your goodness. The reward of goodness is that you are trusted to be even better than you are.

After this happened my mind turned very naturally to what John Woolman had said about children and our

relations with them. These are the passages that I looked up. "Natural affection," he says, "needs a careful examination. Operating upon us in a soft manner, it kindles desires of love and tenderness, and there is danger of taking it for something higher. To me it appears an instinct like that which inferior creatures have. Each of them we see, by the ties of nature, love self best. That which is a part of self they love by the same tie or instinct. In them it in some measure does the office of reason, by which among other things, they watchfully keep and orderly feed their helpless offspring. This natural affection appears to be a branch of self-love, good in the animal race, in us likewise with proper limitations, but otherwise is productive of evil, by exciting desires to promote some by means prejudicial to others."

And then, again, in a document which Woolman almost certainly drafted, although it was issued as an epistle from Pennsylvania and New Jersey Yearly Meeting, we read the following: "Do we feel an affectionate regard to posterity and are we employed to promote their happiness? Do our minds, in things outward, look beyond our own dissolution? And are we contriving for the prosperity of our children after us? Let us then, like wise builders, lay the foundation deep, and by our constant uniform regard to an inward piety and virtue let them see that we really value it." It seemed strange to realize that I had been unconsciously working out one of John Woolman's own very dearly held views in regard to what we owe to the next generation — the conviction that what matters most is not worldly goods or any of the things that people think of first, as a rule, in connection with their children, but the cultivation of qualities of character and of the spirit, real treasure that nobody can take from them. Forced suddenly into the position which I have described, I had found, without thinking about it, what I most wanted for those two children.

any course of action. So I argued, pleading that only by seeking and following the guidance of God can we make right ethical decisions, which will often seem foolish at the time to many people — as Christ appeared to the clever Greeks, according to Paul. . . .

At the back of the hall a man rose to his feet-tall, grey-haired, with the carriage of a soldier. He came in on my side, speaking slowly and deliberately. I knew from the first, and I think everybody in that hall knew, that he was speaking from experience. He had the kind of personality that compels attention. At the end of the meeting I lost him, cornered myself by a woman to whose questions I replied vaguely as I watched that strange man escape. But a few days later I received a long and truly astonishing letter from him. He was the British officer who had given the order to fire at Peshawar, when those two platoons had disobeyed. God through Gandhi had touched the hearts of the wild Pathans. Their courage and the miracle of their non-violence had moved the hearts of the Hindu soldiers. This change in the soldiers, willing to face death rather than kill unarmed men, had deeply affected a British officer, one, at least. For him it had been the beginning of something as dramatic as the conversion of Paul. We do not need to go back to the First Century to find that light on the road to Damascus. It is here. It is all around us. And do you think that this story ends there? I am a witness that it does not, for that story has confirmed and strengthened my own faith. And — like all who know it — I share it gladly, that the chain reaction may reach out even further. What could Gandhi, or the Pathans, or the soldiers know of all this? They acted only on faith.

In another of those teenage groups we were discussing the meaning of love. Some thought they knew what love was. One felt that he didn't. He had seen too many movies. Then one boy said something remarkable; and I might say

between the two communities, the Government had everything to gain from keeping them divided. So a Hindu regiment — the Garhwali Rifles — was brought into Peshawar. And at the first pretext (for there are nearly always some hotheads in any political situation, who will provide such an excuse by heaving a brick or some such futile act of anger) the shooting began. It was then that the Government had its third shock. Two platoons of the Garhwali Rifles refused to fire. Recalling the savage punishment of the Indian rebels in the “Indian Mutiny” of 1857, they said: “We will not fire on our unarmed countrymen — you can blow us from the guns, if you like.”

At their court-martial these men repeated their act of quiet, (passive) defiance. They went down for long sentences, the Government trying to stamp out what they knew to be the most serious political infection since 1857. In my eyes and those of all India they were heroes. When I returned to England I often told their story. But I did not know all of it. I never will. That is the point about chain reactions. However, I did light upon just one more link.

Twenty-two years later I was speaking at a meeting in Brighton. In the discussion which followed we got into deep water on the subject of “judging by results.” I was maintaining that in moral decisions this method is shallow and deceptive. The apparent “success” of Christianity under Constantine the Great was perhaps the most fatal thing that ever happened to the Church. Its apparent “failures,” from the Cross onwards, have proved to be its strength. At each point an incalculable force defeats that worldly wisdom which John Woolman so distrusted. We look back and say that the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church, but the men and women who suffered agony and death for their faith in the early centuries did not do so after a careful calculation of the odds. Divine Wisdom alone can see into the ultimate “results,” in all their endless complexities, of

And if anybody was as happy as their mother, it was myself, when I realized that she had understood what I had done.

This experience illuminated for me one aspect of a parable that had often bothered me, the story of the Prodigal Son. I think I am not the first person who ever worried about that elder brother — the brother for whom nothing was done because he had remained at home and had been a good boy. And it suddenly occurred to me, after that little incident, that it was the elder brother who really let the father down, very badly. The father had trusted that the elder brother would understand his attitude to the younger son. Instead of understanding he was only jealous. He didn’t realize that his reward was to be unrewarded. That was the greatest trust and confidence that the father could show him.

I must pass on from that to yet another instance in which the truths for which John Woolman stood have been illustrated within my own recent experience. There is a passage in Woolman’s Journal in which he describes how “an ancient man of good esteem in the neighborhood” came to his house to get his will written. John Woolman says, “He had young Negroes” (slaves, of course) “and I asked him privately how he purposed to dispose of them. He told me. I then said, ‘I cannot write thy will without breaking my own peace’ and respectfully gave him my reasons for it.” It is one of two incidents that occur in that part of the Journal where John Woolman’s firmness eventually resulted in a man giving up his slaves, or at least directing their freedom in his will. But I want to stop with those words, “I cannot write thy will without breaking my own peace.”

I was, among other places which I visited this summer, at a work camp in Ohio. Shortly before I arrived there the work campers had gone on an expedition into the Kentucky mountains. Before they made that expedition they had, so I heard, a discussion about whether they could use

segregated facilities. They were an all white group, so there was no difficulty about their using them; but it was pointed out by one of them — and, significantly, that one was a girl from North Carolina — it was pointed out by her that they were not an all white group by choice, but by chance. Had there been one single Negro among them, they would not have been able to use segregated facilities. She felt that they should act as though there were colored people with them, even though in fact and by chance there were not. Due to her insistence that group put up with considerable discomfort for the three or four day trip, refusing to use any segregated facilities.

On a later occasion I met a member of that camp who came to one of our teenage institutes, where, in one of the discussions, the word “practical” kept turning up. People are always looking away from what is right to what they call “practical.” That girl recalled the story of how, thanks to the firmness of another girl, a North Carolina lass, they had refused to use segregated facilities in Kentucky, and the comment that she made on what they had done showed to my mind amazing depth and a curious unconscious echo of the very words which I have quoted from the writing of John Woolman. The words that she used, as I remember them, were something like this: “We had to decide which was the practical thing, to spend four days in comfort or to live at peace with ourselves afterwards.” She had seen that it is not “practical” to do a thing if, in fact, it leaves you with an uneasy conscience. But the fact that she used the words, “to live at peace with ourselves,” was what really interested me. That is why I have recalled Woolman’s own objection to doing something against his conscience: “I cannot write thy will without breaking my own peace.”

In our day, as in Woolman’s day, there is always this problem of what is “practical.” If we look deeply into it, if we look at it (as Woolman would say) “in the light of pure

Gandhi. What Gandhi wrote and what he said in his many speeches could have been unimportant, but for what Gandhi was and what he did. And right now you have Vinoba Bhave doing the same thing — practicing the personal approach to the social problem and proving that John Woolman’s methods are by no means out of date, but just as applicable today as they ever were. I believe that all that is happening in the modern world tends to show more and more how important these methods are. What has science shown us more important than the power of the atom, the smallest unit of matter? The smallest spiritual unit, I suppose, is the human soul. It is as dynamic and explosive as the atom. And I believe, what is more, that it can have chain reactions. I don’t only believe that, I know it — I have seen it.

I remember how, when I was in India in 1930, the doctrine of non-violence had an unexpected success among the warlike Pathans of the Indian North-West Frontier, and they began demonstrating in support of Gandhi and the Congress. It was a double shock to the British Government, because these Pathans are all Moslems. According to British propaganda all Moslems should have been against Gandhi, because he was a Hindu. If nobody else believed that, we had at least sold it to ourselves. So the Government had one shock over that and another over the non-violence, because — according to the book — all Pathans should be violent. In the city of Peshawar things reached the point where the Government considered troops necessary to quell the demonstrations: that is the way governments are apt to think, especially colonial governments.

The use of troops was itself planned on a careful political pattern. Had the demonstrators been Hindus, Moslem troops would have been used, on the principle that they were reliable when it was a question of shooting Hindus. On the same principle, Hindu troops would be used against Moslems. If this helped to create some bad feeling

spread. It is the only way in which ideas can spread today if they are going to compete with the power of the press, the radio, television, the movies and all the other powerful media which are, by and large, lined up against truth. When my friends have an idea they often say: "Well, we'll put a pamphlet out," and their pamphlet generally reaches a maximum sale of five to ten thousand. The best thing on these lines that we can do in Britain is to get Peace News out, which sells about 12,000 (including its American sales) per week. Lord Beaverbrook, who stands for everything that I dislike in my country, sells a paper at the rate of four million per day. Four million, and my friends wonder why they are not making progress against Lord Beaverbrook! They think that a weekly circulation of 12,000 is going to compete with a daily circulation of four million. They haven't even begun to understand the problem. They haven't begun to understand that all your literature, Peace News, etc., is secondary to what you are and what you do. But that is the way that geometric progression of truth can really succeed, and it is only when you've got a person interested by other means that a pamphlet or peace movement can be made worthwhile. And this doesn't mean that I'm against the printed word. (I am a writer by trade and, at the moment, a director of Peace News, to which I am a frequent contributor.)

In our time people have worked this way, as Woolman did in the past. It was what he was that made people read his writings. Then and after and since. And I have found this to be true of others many times in my own experience. When I was a boy the man who influenced me most was a schoolmaster. I don't remember his preaching pacifism; but he lived it, and many boys of my generation became pacifists as a result. It is a very impressive thought that one man's life can make such an enormous difference to generations of children. I saw the same thing, on a bigger scale, with

wisdom," it will resolve itself into a question of what can you do and still be at peace with yourself?

II.

Now I want to refer these very personal standards to some of the major problems with which the world is faced today. And again I want to show the parallel between the problems that faced John Woolman and the problems with which we are faced in our day and age. Here are two short extracts from Woolman's writing relating to slavery: "Men taking on them the government of others, may intend to govern reasonably and to make their subjects more happy than they would be otherwise. But, as absolute command belongs only to him who is perfect, where frail men, in their own wills, assume such command, it hath a direct tendency to vitiate their minds and to make them more unfit for government." The other quotation relates to a discussion which John Woolman had with another Friend, who was defending slavery with Biblical quotations. He said of this Friend and another: "I was troubled to perceive the darkness of their imaginations, and in some pressure of spirit said, 'The love of ease and gain are the motives in general of keeping slaves and men are wont to take hold of weak arguments to support a cause which is unreasonable.'"

I have seen so much of both those processes in relation to the subject with which I have been most concerned for the past twenty-five years — the problem of race and especially the problem of white domination as we find it in colonial imperialism. First of all, notice the emphasis upon the people who go out with the right idea described by Woolman — people who think that they can exercise power over others for the good of those other people, and gradually, in spite of their good intentions, are corrupted by the very power which they exercise. Secondly, note the

rationalization, which is described in the second passage, where John Woolman notices that weak arguments are used to maintain an unreasonable cause — in fact the love of ease and gain are at the bottom of it.

If you follow the course of the change of attitude with regard to slaves and slavery, I suggest that you will find four main stages which follow the original crude and quite irrational attitude to slavery, in which there was no attempt to justify it theologically or philosophically. I would define those four phases as follows: 1) “The slave has a soul; therefore, it is our duty to teach the Gospel to the slave.”

2) Having come to that conclusion and having done one’s best to make the slave a Christian, one gets very uneasy about the slave trade — not slavery itself — the slave trade must end. 3) “The institution of slavery must end.” 4) We have been responsible for putting people in a position in which they are poor, illiterate and unable to fend for themselves. We owe something to these people. They have started from nothing, with a background of generations of slavery. “We owe them much more than mere freedom, we owe them all we can give them to help rehabilitate them.” I don’t say that that last program has been developed to this day, but it was present in the minds of many people at the time of the abolition of slavery in this country and in other countries — and it still has motive power.

Now here I find a very interesting parallel, because the history of the attitude of Christians to colonialism is, in my view, passing through four very similar processes. The first, equivalent to the proposition, “The slave has a soul,” was the proposition, “The heathen has a soul.” Hence, we sent missionaries to the colonial countries. Then, just as the people said in the days of slavery, “The slave trade must end,” we find a growing opinion (which is more or less consolidated today) that, whereas we accept the existing colonial systems, we are opposed to their extension — that

when we have an idea that we want to put out to the world, we tend to think almost exclusively in terms of propaganda through the press, the radio and so on. We have almost lost touch with the primitive, and (I would say) essential methods by which great ideas have been spread in the past. To quote Kermit Eby on this subject (as nearly as I can from memory), he said once: “The early Christians didn’t have a printing press, they didn’t have so much as a mimeographing machine. They had no headed notepaper.” Then he said. “You know, the man I always admire is Andrew. When Andrew heard the Good News, he went and fetched his brother Simon. Nobody thinks of doing that nowadays.

They say: ‘First of all we must have some headed notepaper, and then we must issue a pamphlet.’” The personal approach to the social problem means fetching brother Simon. Brother Simon isn’t necessarily a blood brother, but it means that you pass the idea along — the good news to the next person, the person who is next in your life. You don’t necessarily try to pass it on by trying “propaganda” on Simon; but if you can get him to come along and see, and hear, he will know. Very often the best way is not just to talk to people — still less at them! There are a dozen ways of getting at people. Sometimes it may be best just to take them and show them what is going on, or even to do something yourself. But it is most important of all to be something.

The point is this: the one essential thing about the spreading of ideas in the great historic tradition is that they spread by their own dynamic force, and they spread by the mathematical process known as geometric progression. It means that I influence two people, they each influence another two, and those four influence eight — and ideas spread at an alarming pace when that happens. That was precisely the way Christianity spread in the first century. It is the way in which every vital and dynamic idea has

escape. In a mere six months in Africa I noticed to my horror that things which had shocked me profoundly when I first saw them were ceasing to shock me as much. And I said to myself; "What on earth would happen if I stayed here longer — would I become completely insensitive?" I don't believe I would. But I know that I would only retain my sensitivity if I continued to exercise my imagination and to put my soul in their souls' stead, regularly every day and many times each day. Woolman's formula is the only one whereby we can really have a live sense of any problem involving personal and human relationships. Intelligence and knowledge are desirable things, but for this purpose inadequate. In human relationships sensitivity is God's essential gift.

III.

Finally we come to the combining of the personal and the social. I tried to indicate, to begin with, some of the implications of Woolman's personal approach. I have since been discussing social problems in the light of Woolman's teaching. Finally I want to look for a moment at the combination where you draw the personal and social together. It is exactly what Woolman did. I have always described Woolman's method as the personal approach to the social problem.

I met in the course of my travels in this country Professor Kermit Eby, of the University of Chicago. Two things he said interested me especially, because they put into words things that I had long thought and felt, and he expressed them so well. One was the principle of the Church of the Brethren — that it is more important to win the man than to win the argument. That I just leave with you, without comment, as a perfect expression of the Woolman technique. The other was a reminder of the fact that today,

is equivalent to the view that we accept slavery, but we must have no more of the slave trade. So we find, back in the Thirties, for example, that the public conscience was stirred in many parts of the world by Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia. He was only doing what Britain, France, Portugal, Holland, Belgium, Italy itself and other countries had done in the past; but the idea had grown up that, although these things had happened in the past, they must not continue. So there was quite a considerable objection to the extension of colonialism. Then we have the stage (equivalent to the abolition of slavery), a stage we are reaching now, where the abolition of colonialism becomes a real program, considered by a growing number of people as something within our reach, to work for now. We have yet to see the position where, having freed the peoples of the world, we can go forward with programs of rehabilitation, though, even here, a little is being done.

Now where do we, as Friends, fit into such programs? If we look at the story of the abolition of slavery, we find John Woolman the leader of a group of pioneers who were not, to begin with, accepted, either by their fellow countrymen or even by their fellow Friends. It is one of the things about which I always like to remind Friends, that we may be humble, that we may not be carried away by the praise of those who speak too well of us. We should remember that some very fine men were disowned by the Society of Friends before Woolman's time, precisely because they advocated the abolition of slavery too vigorously. The triumph of John Woolman was the triumph, not of the Society, but of a small group of consecrated individuals in bringing about the change from the second stage of development (where most Friends anyway accepted the view that the slave trade must end) to the third stage, in which they felt that slavery itself must go. That was done within the lifetime — and it was a short lifetime — of this one

man. We are met here to honor the power of God through John Woolman. And when I think of that I turn immediately to our time, and I say: "What's going on right now that is in any way parallel to what happened in the eighteenth century?"

Well, within about twenty years of my lifetime, I have seen the whole attitude of the Society of Friends in England change from a mixture of hostility and apathy — I don't know about the attitude here — with regard to India and Gandhi. I saw this happen mainly through the life of one man, although, like John Woolman, Mahatma Gandhi had associates who were worthy followers, and worthy friends in his work. I saw one man by his life convince not only Friends, but many people all over the world, of the truth for which he stood. And when I say convince, I don't mean to say that the world accepted all his teachings. What happened was perhaps more fundamental, because intellectual changes are slow, but the most important thing is that people learn to tolerate and respect and — better still — admire qualities which they find lacking in themselves. When the delegates of the United Nations, for the first time (I suppose) in the history of international organizations of that kind, solemnly adjourned their meeting not for the death of some ruling statesman, but for a private man, who had lived a private life, yet one of public influence and spiritual import, one realized that something tremendous had happened. So, in our time, we see that the pioneer is still able, by his devoted service, to bring attention to things and to change the minds of men and women, even though he may stand at times almost alone or apparently alone.

At the present moment I am watching at some distance and with some uneasiness the reaction to a Friend in England, Eileen Fletcher, who has very courageously exposed the way in which the British government has been treating the people in the concentration camps of Kenya. I have a

Africans. It would only be the liberal-minded person who would even try to make the attempt and would get the snub and the rebuff. The expression that woman used was: "Twice in my life I have known what it is to be on the wrong side of the color bar." And when she said that, I wished with all my heart and soul that every white person living in this world of ours had shared her experience. But, failing that, could they not use their imagination as Woolman used his and try just to feel what it would be like? We think of this thing as a wall, with people on that side and people on this side. There never has been such a wall. The division is not vertical, but horizontal. You are either above that division or below it. And if you are below it you know the meaning of "the wrong side." You are an outcast, no matter what phrases are used to disguise the fact.

The other thing that comes back to my mind whenever I think of this problem of segregation is the story told by a woman missionary. She had served for many years in South Africa and said that when she first went out, at the end of the very first day, she was overwhelmed by the atmosphere of racial intolerance and the horrible attitude of the white people towards the various non-European groups (not only Africans, but what they called "colored," or mixed blood, and the Indians, as well.) It was so horrible, with so much humiliation, so much degradation. There was evidence of it not only in the political atmosphere, but in the social and economic and every other field. At the end of that first day she said to an old missionary who had lived out there for years: "I can't bear it here. I can't stay. It hurts so." And the old missionary said to her: "You needn't worry while it hurts, my dear. It is when it STOPS hurting that you can begin to worry."

That is a saying that I will never, never forget, for it sums up what I know about the growth of insensitivity where people live in evil conditions from which they can't

necessary for us to do, he says, "If we bring this matter home and (as Job proposed to his friends) 'put our soul in their souls' stead'; if we consider ourselves and our children as exposed to the hardships which these people lie under, in supporting an imaginary greatness; did we in such case behold an increase of luxury and superfluity among our oppressors and therewith felt an increase of the weight of our burdens, and expected our posterity to groan under oppression after us, under all this misery; had we none to plead our cause, nor any hope of relief from man, how would our cries ascend to the God of the spirits of all flesh who judges the world in righteousness and in his own time is a refuge for the oppressed." The key line is the line from Job, "put our soul in their souls' stead." I wonder how many of us have even tried to do it in relation to (say) the race problem?

There is in South Africa a phenomenon which I haven't yet discovered here, and you are very fortunate; because (as far as I know) you have nothing like it. You all know what apartheid is — the Afrikaans word for segregation, the word used in South Africa. There is a thing in South Africa sometimes called counter-apartheid. It is the attitude of the black man who says, "All right — you don't want us, and we don't want you." Alan Paton in one of his novels, made one of the Africans say something like this to a white man "My fear is that when you people have learned to love us we will no longer want your love." That is already happening in certain sections of African society. I crashed through that barrier several times, but when I had to do so I was aware of the fact that I was crashing through a barrier.

Once, when I was speaking to a white woman, she told me something about it. She was a liberal, and (of course) it is the liberals who feel this the most; because the illiberal white person wouldn't try to crash this barrier, wouldn't try to get on to speaking terms and an understanding with

feeling that history is repeating itself. At the moment many people, including a great many Friends, are not merely unwilling to back that woman in her courageous work, but are even anxious to be dissociated from her. But in my mind is the hope, amounting almost to knowledge, that the time will come when the Society of Friends will look back with pride to the fact that one of their number did at least take up that question and that she had, at least, some support in the Society. Horace Alexander said to me years ago, when I was knocking the Society about something or other, and I don't remember what: "You read your Quaker history all wrong." (I had, of course, made comparisons with our "glorious past," unfavorable to the present.) "The Society," he said, "never was what you think it was. It was something from which very fine men and women sprang who did very fine work; but from John Woolman to Elizabeth Fry and since, you will find nearly always that they had to proceed almost alone, with very little backing from Friends and sometimes none. It was only later that we accepted them and took credit for what they had done."

The dead weight of the Society lags behind the inspired individual, as all societies do. We must not be discouraged by this. One message of John Woolman for today is just this, that the inspired individuals can ultimately pull the society with them. Sometimes, when I have criticized Friends, people have said to me: "Then why do you remain a Quaker?" And I have a very simple answer. I say: "The Society which was good enough for John Woolman ought to be good enough for me." We are still (and this is my last word of criticism as far as the Society is concerned) in the position, I am afraid, of not being able fully to apply the truth for which we stand — in theory, at least. I have heard more fundamental wisdom uttered in Meetings for Worship and other occasions on which I have met with Friends than I have heard anywhere else. But if even one tenth of that

wisdom were applied in the lives of Friends not only the Society but the whole world might be very different today.

Again I want to come back to a recent experience that somehow or other brought this home to me in a vivid way. It was the end of one of those teenage institutes and we were meeting round a campfire. There had been some hilarious singing and a lot of fun during the evening, and then I was asked to say a few words, trying to pull the thing together, as it was the last night. I tried to summarize some of the things that we ought to have learned from our experience during that week out in Iowa. I had a moment's malaise at the end of the short address which I gave them. I was afraid that the boys and girls might applaud, which was the usual way with them at the end of a speech. I was afraid that they might just break up into a noisy departure, because I was feeling at the moment myself very deeply about them and about the things to which we were committed. Instead of either of those things that I had dreaded, there was a very short silence, and then, softly and quite spontaneously, somebody began to sing "Jacob's Ladder." When they reached the words, "If you love Him, why not serve him" I realized how near they were to the most fundamental of all the problems that face us: If you love Him, why not serve Him? We went on until they reached the verse, "Rise, shine, give God glory." And then again, still quite spontaneously, they got up and through the trees they walked up the hill toward the cabins. It was like one of those Moravian processional hymns, where they leave the church singing. I had heard of it, but never experienced it before. One of the deepest experiences that I have had during this very wonderful time in your country was feeling my hand clasped by other hands that night, as we walked slowly up the hill. Some, I knew, were the hands of Negroes and some were the hands of white boys and girls; and in the darkness I didn't know which was which. It was

wonderfully symbolic. They were all friends, they were all bound to me in a deep and a permanent fellowship — the fellowship of people who had learned that the love of God is inseparable from the service of God. That was something that Woolman taught all his life, and yet something that we still hesitate to work out in practice.

There is just one other word that I have to say on that. So often, as in the days of slavery (when counsels of caution and prudence were always urged against the pioneers) in our day, too, there are always people who can tell us a dozen reasons why we must not move too fast. Those who have not suffered are the first to urge patience. I cannot urge patience to people who have suffered things that I have not suffered. The only patience I understand — and I feel here that once more (at least within my mind, if not in my life and practice) I am near to understanding Woolman — the only patience that I understand is the patience of which Paul speaks when he says, "To run with patience the race that is set before us." This is not the "patience" of the ox, which is not patience at all, but apathy.

The two are often confused. It is the patience of a long distance runner, moving as fast as his legs will carry him, tired, throwing all his reserves of strength and will-power into the race, pressing on, pressing on and yet knowing that it is going to take time; but not lagging, not saying: "Let's take as much time as we can over it — we mustn't hurry." It makes me weary to hear people talk like that. This patience of the long distance runner who runs with patience the race that is set before him, that is the patience that Woolman so well understood: the patience which made a man devote the whole of his short life to certain ends, indefatigable and unsparing of himself.

In order to do that, John Woolman exercised an imaginative capacity which most of us have yet to learn. In one of the passages in which he described what it is