

Saints For This Age

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR A. J. Muste, now in his seventies, has devoted his life to the causes that stem from a religious faith — peace action, racial equality, political and economic justice. When he spoke at Philadelphia Yearly Meeting over a year ago on “Springs of Religious Living in Our Age,” Friends knew that he was speaking of the religious faith that has sustained a lifetime of action. The present pamphlet contains the essence of that speech, plus autobiographical segments which first appeared in A. J. Muste’s autobiography several years ago in *Liberation* magazine. A. J. Muste is a member of the Society of Friends and a long-time staff member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. His previous Pendle Hill pamphlets have been *World Task of Pacifism* (#13), *War is the Enemy* (#15) and *Of Holy Disobedience!* (#64). A book dealing with Christian pacifism in the atomic age, *Not by Might*, was published by Harpers in 1947.

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To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints.

Romans 1:7

SPEND a good deal of time these days among those who are regarded as unbelievers, and my thoughts constantly shuttle back and forth between the conviction that many of these are the true believers, and the wish that I might be able to give them an account of the faith that is in me, and which in some sense they do not have, in language which is comprehensible to them. For many of us also, religion, or the living of the religious life, is a problem in this age. So beside us who say, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief," stand those others whose heart's cry, if it could be uttered, might be, "Lord, I do not believe; help me to recognize that nevertheless I do believe."

To put it another way: our age is an age of crisis, and in the final analysis the crisis is religious. It has to do with ultimates, with what it is to be human, with the presuppositions by which men live, with the nature of the resources upon which we draw in extremity, the quality of life men seek, the values which they embrace, the drums by which they march, the commands they dare not disobey. It is essential that we should think about these things.

During the past week, my mind has repeatedly turned to those words of the Apostle Paul, who opened his *Letter to the Romans*: "To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints." This salutation tells us three things about the people to whom Paul addressed his Epistle. They were in

Rome, not in heaven or the desert of the Sahara; they were beloved of God; they were called to be saints. They lived in Rome, a big city, a metropolis, the center of government and in considerable measure of culture. Most early Christians were city-dwellers, as we are. In that Mediterranean world geographical and cultural boundaries which once had tended to isolate city-states and kingdoms from each other had been wiped out. This was partly because roads had been built, ship routes developed, communication speeded up; partly because the common Hellenistic culture had spread; partly because the Roman Republic and the Empire which had recently succeeded it had established its rule and a relative peace throughout that world.

In the old sense, the tribes or families, the city-states or villages constituting close communities in which men were born, lived, and died, no longer existed. People were in motion. They were sucked into the cities, especially into great Rome — slaves, merchants, adventurers, sophisticates, evangelists, intellectuals. Concurrently, the tribal and local or regional religions which had related their devotees to a realm beyond the immediately tangible and visible had lost their power and relevance. An assortment of philosophies which intrigued or even fed the mind but did not nourish the heart was offered. Materially, life was easier in that era of an expanding economy. But people were now individuals, on their own, rootless, fragmented. They were individuals, but not persons. The sensitive ones among them who could not live on the surface of life, nor find satisfaction in intellectual cynicism, nor in the moral heroism of the Stoics, experienced spiritual agonies in the search of release from guilt, escape from the bleak prison of the self, release from the terror of death: that is, the nightmare of the meaninglessness of a life which consisted of the passage of time, of working to keep alive, and of distractions. They suffered agonies in the search for identity and salvation.

It is important to add that the operative religion, to which all were expected to adhere, was the religion of the Emperor, or of the State. It was a prudential, and hence a spurious, religion, which was quite content with outward observance, but very suspicious of dissent, intolerant of divided allegiance, even on the part of people who lived the most exemplary and useful and inoffensive lives. Christians and Jews had a God who claimed a higher allegiance than Caesar; they had an experience which they regarded as richer than citizenship in the Empire. Consequently they were regarded as atheists, godless. The State cult had to be enforced and at the same time it had to demand unquestioning obedience, because something had to hold things together in a world where there were individuals but where natural and traditional communities had been dissolved and new ones not yet delivered from the womb of time, not yet revealed by the Creator. Meanwhile the steady tramp of Rome's soldiers was heard in every road of that ancient world.

IN ADDRESSING the Christians living in that city in those days Paul could use the term "beloved of God" and be sure they would recognize its applicability to themselves. Let me try to state very briefly and sketchily some things in Christian experience to which that phrase points.

To begin with, these people were not first saints and then and therefore beloved of God. In a way it was just the opposite. It was because they were not saints, because they had looked steadily and deeply enough into themselves to realize that they were not saints, that there was some subtle corruption within, an ultimate inability to lift oneself to true virtue and pure, understanding love by one's own bootstraps, that in the moment of ultimate despair and self-abasement they had found — not the abyss, not eternal darkness, not the Enemy of the Soul, but God, pure grace, possibility. The

experience was mediated to them by the figure on the Cross. No doubt they cried out in much the same language as the medieval hymn writer:

O sacred head, now wounded,
With thorns thine only crown
Mine, mine was the transgression
And Thine the deadly pain.

I suppose the experience is somewhat analogous to what takes place in psychoanalysis: when the Self has been confronted, when the hidden has been brought to the surface, the perhaps paradoxical result is not horror and paralysis — they come when the hidden has not yet been faced — but release and a new birth.

Secondly, there was ecstasy for these uprooted and inwardly torn individuals in the realization that they were “beloved,” but it was not the essentially sentimental feeling that sometimes passes for religious experience, of being a father’s favorite child. It was not the feeling “God loves me, though everybody else hates me” which really means that I hate everybody else — individuals were saved but not as *individuals*. They were baptized into the church, that is, they were saved by finding that a true community existed, a community of love, and by finding themselves a part of it. “By this we *know* that we have passed from death into life, because we love the brethren.” There is no such thing as being forgiven but unforgiving. On the other hand, people who do not have the experience of being forgiven, that is, have not been able to accept themselves, cannot be forgiving either, cannot accept others for what they are.

In the third place, then, the crucial development was the emergence of a Christian community, a fellowship, a family which embraced mankind, all men.

The State sensed a threat in this fellowship which meant more to its members than the civic order and their citizenship

in that. It sensed a threat in a fellowship which was somehow set apart from “the world,” though its members were in their external behavior good citizens, law-abiding. To understand the real situation it is necessary to look at it from the other side, from *within* the church. The fact that to its members this “Society of Friends” was profoundly satisfying, real and permanent “the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it” — meant that “the world” in which they existed was seen by them as deeply lacking, as unreal, impermanent, bound to pass away. Augustine in a later century was to say of the seemingly powerful and indestructible “world,” the civic order: “The kingdoms of the world seem able to dominate and destroy everything; but they are themselves dominated and destroyed by their own lust for power.” He might have said: by their own will to exist as they are, to arrogate to themselves a substantiality which never belongs to what is, but only to what may be.

The practical result of their feeling of the unreality and inadequacy of “the world” was that the early Christians had broken loose from it, from its allurements but even more, since it is not too uncommon for men to resist superficial allurements, from its rewards, its threats, its standards, and its version of what constitutes security. They knew in their bones that all this was perishing, “there shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be torn down.” Consequently, their faces were turned toward the future, a future already present in some profound sense; to the *new* kingdom, of which Christ was king, the *new* society in which all were His brothers and hence each other’s. They were not merely, like their uprooted contemporaries, in movement; they were in movement toward a goal.

THE CONCEPT of history as movement towards a goal is deeply imbedded in the thinking of western man. Its source is primarily Hebraic. Abraham is not only the progenitor of

Israel but “the father of many peoples.” He stands at the beginning of both profane and sacred history because in obedience to divine command he left the city of his ancestors. Unquestionably, this represents a great turning point in man’s history. It is in one sense the greatest revolution of all, since it is the father of revolutions and of the revolutionary concept of history as the expression of God at work. History and the daily life of man are, therefore, real and not illusory. If God is to be found at all, He must be found here. Men become co-workers, co-creators, and they are in movement towards a goal.

There had, of course, been nomadic wanderings before Abraham. But they were essentially movements of a geographical character. The tribe moved as a tribe and fought as a tribe, for the immediate purpose of obtaining forage for the flocks. When men settled down, cultivated land, and built cities, they conceived of their society as having been founded by the gods of the place or by divine ancestors. The pattern of life was fixed, as if in the nature of things. The individual could hardly conceive of himself or be conceived of by others as having an existence outside this pattern. His destiny and duty were to remain in the city of his birth so that his sons after him could inherit this same fixed and sacred pattern.

But with Abraham the divine command becomes radically different. What makes a man the true servant of the Most High is that he does not remain in the place of his birth. It has its sacredness and importance, but as a point of departure. Through Abraham man in the Hebraic tradition came to know that his destiny and his God are not ties which bind and confine him. They are ahead of him and are drawing him outward and onward. The crucial thing about men, or societies, is not where they came from but where they are going.

What is of even more significance about Abraham than the fact that he emigrated from Ur of the Chaldees is that

there was no city, no society or community for him to move into. Had his journey been simply a geographical one, to another Ur with another name, it would have constituted no part of the source of dynamic western civilization.

The fact is that Abraham “went out, not knowing whither he went.” He was a fool and a gambler. But he was not a little fool; rather he was a big one, whose foolishness consisted in taking on a Herculean task. He gambled for stakes of such a nature that the gambling itself became the pattern of human history. It created western society and is still its life blood and its reason for existence.

Abraham went out looking for a city which existed — and yet had to be brought into existence. It was the perfect and holy city — which had to be built and whose “builder and maker is God.” Precisely because it was God who built the city, it could be built only by Abraham’s faith and labor.

The creative movement in history is not from any city-which-is to another city-which-is. The reality is not what men tend to call the real. Insofar as it is fixed and has a fixating or binding effect on men or societies, it is already becoming unreal and insubstantial. What matters is the movement from the unreal, because unrealized, city-which-is to the city-which-is-to-be, which is more real because the potentiality of realization and completion remains.

THE EXPERIENCE of having broken loose, of being through with an illusory reality and related instead to the real, was indicated for, and habitually expressed by, the first Christians in the concept of the Second Coming of Christ. This is a concept about which there has been enormous controversy. It is certain that the early Christian response to the idea was not that of certain groups who become convinced that Christ is going to return on a certain date and hour and who leave ordinary work and ties to wait on some hilltop to greet Him. Nothing is made clear more

repeatedly in the New Testament than that the Second Coming would be a surprise. "Of the day and the hour no man knoweth."

What the concept meant to the early Christians in life, as distinct from dogma or verbal formulation, was that to them Christ whom the world deemed foolish, weak, defeated, dead, was in fact the wisdom of God, the power of God. He was alive, here, and always about to come in power and glory. The divine was always about to break into history.

There was continuity, it is true, but there was also discontinuity. The past did not simply grind out the future through the sieve of the present. The reality was the *new age*, the new fellowship of love. Consequently, Change and Possibility were the operative concepts with which they worked.

As we look back and reflect on these things, we do so, of course, from our own standing ground in the perspective of the whole history of the Church, of the western world, the vast stream which issued from those tiny, hidden springs in Rome. The early Christians could not look from this perspective.

We know also that what came about in many respects did not resemble their dreams. It never does. Corruption was mingled with the glory. It always is. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that these believers "in Rome, beloved of God," this fellowship, represents a great movement in history, in the dialogue between God and man, in the unfolding of the divine-human society.

THE THIRD IDEA in Paul's salutation, "called to be saints," did not mean that they were all or always extremely virtuous, ascetic, saintly in the usual sense of the word. Paul's *Letter to the Corinthians* suggests that there was quite a variety of saints, not all saintly.

What is clear, for one thing, is that they got a great kick out of being saints, that is, Christians. Joy was an outstanding characteristic of them. On the face of it, you cannot command Christians to be joyous, as if it were a duty. But the Apostle could perpetuate the paradox and shout: “*Rejoice*, and again I say, *Rejoice*.” It was simply inconceivable that the experience of fellowship with one another and with Christ should not produce effervescence. Personally, I always have a certain suspicion of alleged saintliness which lacks this tone of buoyancy and effervescence.

Saintliness expressed itself in *experimentation*, growing out of and demanded by the experience of love and of release, of having cut loose. Experimentation took place in relation to violence: the early Christians did not serve in Caesar’s armies — “Our Lord is disarming, Peter disarmed every soldier.” It took place in economic life, in a religious communism of consumption, though not of production. Such experimentation seemed to follow naturally from their altered view of the nature of history.

RELIGIOUS PEOPLE in such a time see apocalyptic visions and embrace an apocalyptic view of history. I surmise that some form of apocalypticism is a conscious or unconscious part of the mentality of those who are drawn into intentional communities, whether they are religious or not. In our own day, many people are attracted to the Jehovah’s Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists. They are growing. I think it must be granted that as dissenters from the prevailing culture they are pretty effective. There is no question that their members find an intense and deeply satisfying fellowship in their movement. It is also true that in these denominations there are standards regarding the use of income, and a degree of economic sharing which one does not find in the more respectable churches. But these people

do not live in communities of the kind we usually associate with that term. They live much more in the mainstream of urban or rural life, and mingle more constantly with people than communitarians generally do.

The same thing may be said of the early Christians, and it will certainly not be contended that they were not effective or that they did not achieve *koinonia* of a remarkable kind, even though they did not live in some Middle Eastern or Italian Rifton or Primavera settlement, but rather in a second — or third — century equivalent of London, Paris, or New York. “See how these Christians love one another,” their neighbors used to remark. In the field of social relationships, perhaps the most amazing thing about these men and women, who also lived in an age of deep cleavages in society, is that they could say, not as a mere form of words, not as an ideal perhaps partially achieved, but as a fact of their life: “In Christ Jesus” — here in this fellowship of love — “there is neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman.” It is about as if in a Baptist Church in the Deep South whites and Negroes worshipped together — as of course they should — and if attacked for that by the heathen were to shout joyously together: “In Christ Jesus there is neither black nor white, neither North nor South.”

LET ME NOW try to relate some of the facts about the condition and the response of the “saints in Rome” to our own condition and response, being mindful of the danger in pressing historical analogies in a mechanical fashion.

It is obvious that there are indeed many resemblances. Even the members of the so-called Historic Peace Churches are today largely city-dwellers. The world is becoming urbanized in the Twentieth Century.

Old boundaries are being wiped out. The reality at this point is to some extent obscured, for one thing, by the deep

East-West cleavage and also by the intense upsurge of nationalism. But the East-West conflict is itself the result of One World coming into being, and evidence that any important development is now a global one. The eruption of nationalism takes place in the larger and dominant context of worldwide communication, industrialization, and nuclear technology.

It is a world in which the old faiths are no longer dominant factors. This is true both in the sense that religious institutions are not decisive in fashioning culture or shaping national policy, and in the sense that religious practices do not, for the most part, deeply satisfy church-goers.

Human beings are physically in motion again. Psychologically and spiritually they are rootless. Old traditions and ties have been loosened, new ones not yet formed. It may be said that individuals are emancipated *from* many things, but they are not *persons*, and hence free for living. As the common phrase goes, they are fragmented and alienated. Political discussion and action tends toward taking opinion polls. Life, like much diplomacy, becomes an elaborate minuet performed by puppets.

Another contributing factor is the threat of nuclear annihilation. Those of us who are engaged in "peace work" may feel frustrated because we do not seem to be able to penetrate a thick crust of indifference and to make the mass of citizens aware of the threat. But a closer look makes it clear that this element which shuts out the future, which places the survival of mankind in jeopardy, is having a subtle, corrosive effect in many fields and in the depths of the human spirit.

One more thing has to be noted, namely that in our time as in Rome of the first Christian centuries, the operative religion, the one in which men actually believe or to which in any case they submit, is that of the State. It is a prudential religion. And as is always the case where there is not a deep

inner religion, external enforcement tends to prevail and increase. You have to have the effects of loyalty in human society; if, therefore, human beings are not loyal, you have to force them to be. This phenomenon exists both in the communist and in the noncommunist world, though in different forms and perhaps in somewhat different degrees.

After all this it is no surprise that we can add that the tramp of soldiers is heard on every road of our world as in the ancient Roman one, or, since soldiers tend perhaps to become obsolete, that the missiles and other machines of war multiply, and in this case too, on both sides of the so-called "Iron Curtain." We are indeed in Rome.

In some sense also we know ourselves to be "beloved of God." We belong to the Society of Friends, a community of love, a family of persons. Insofar as we are not just another "denomination," we know also that the salvation of our age is in our keeping; that is, that it lies in the divine-human society which is "rooted and grounded in love." This is the unity which alone can make one world out of "one world," and not one nightmare, one hell, one burned-out cinder.

We know also and in a way we respond to the fact that we have a mission, we are "called to be saints."

Yet we have not, let me put it, experienced Pentecost. The Spirit has not invaded the houses where we meet. We are not on fire. How then wait for the Spirit? How open the door?

FIRST LET US recall what we said about the spiritual agony of the early Christians, the confrontation of a person with his own corruption, weakness, alone-ness; and the finding God, love, truth, precisely at that moment of genuine despair. Do we perhaps sometimes tend to obscure this aspect, this spring of religious living by our focusing exclusively on the idea that men are "naturally good," there is "that of God" in every man? I do not mean to deny the truth to which such

phrases point, but we always have our “treasure in earthen vessels,” do we not? In fixing our eyes on one aspect of truth we inevitably shut out or blur another.

It was surely by the hard road of spiritual agony that men like George Fox and James Naylor arrived at clarity, power and serenity. I am suggesting that we shall achieve confidence and power only in the degree that we do not deceive ourselves about ourselves. This experience of self-examination and repentance is not something which takes place once and for all. It is a state rather than an event.

This is an experience I came to understand when in 1915 as a young pastor I had to face — not academically but existentially, — the question of whether I could reconcile what I had been preaching out of the Gospels, and passages like 1 Corinthians 13 from the Epistles, with participation in the war which had already begun in Europe and in which it was clear the United States would eventually become involved. The problem, as it presented itself to me, was simply one for the Christian conscience. It was a problem which I could not evade because I had been brought up to take religion, specifically the Biblical teaching and Gospel ethic, seriously, and to abhor the sham which enables a person to preach what he does not try desperately to practice. Moreover, my upbringing had given me a definite attitude regarding the struggle which goes on perpetually in the human spirit and in society as to whether the Gospel demand shall be adjusted to the outward circumstances or the recalcitrant reality shall be made to conform to the high ethical demand. I did not believe that there is a pat rule which one can find in a proof text and apply to a complicated situation, thereby achieving perfection. I had received too solid a dose of Calvinism not to have a strong conviction about human frailty and corruption. It was this that had made me aware, long before Freud was more than a name to me, that when a man is sure that he is honest, he deceives

himself; when he imagines himself to be pure, he is impure; and when we bask in the glow of the feeling that we love, the fact is that in subtle ways we hate.

In each psychological “moment” of our lives, in each moment of decision it is necessary for us to know this. It is in the moment when we know how foolish we can be that we begin to be wise. It is when we are aware of our impurity that we are pure. It is when we are aware in what subtle ways hate can express itself that we learn to love.

It is salutary, I suggest, that we who are Quakers apply this test to our social activities. We think that in our practice of silence, in avoiding ballots and decision by majority, in depending on “the sense of the meeting” we have a way of overcoming the artificiality, the evasions, the power plays, the rivalries of conventional “political” behavior and struggle. In a measure we do. But it would be fatal to feel complacent and self-satisfied at this point. Evasion, indirection, the play of ambition, the thirst for power, are not absent from our quarterly and yearly meetings, our committee work, the staffs of service committees, and so on. It will help to nourish a religious life in our midst if we think of such insights as are represented in the “sense of the meeting” concept, not as ripened fruit we have produced, but as seed which has been providentially planted within us, which has by no means come to full growth and for which we often furnish dry or even sour soil.

BUT THIS does not alter the nature of the demand the Gospel places upon us. The poet who does not agonize to translate the vision he sees truly and exactly into his poem is not a poet. The man who does not passionately strive to be honest, pure and loving is not a man. The temptation to pride and self-righteousness is real and pervasive, but the temptation to adapt the Gospel demand to circumstances and to abandon the hard effort to mold one’s own life and the world according to that imperious demand is no less subtle and pervasive.

G. K. Chesterton, in a beautiful passage in the volume *Alarums and Discussions*, has stated his version of this law of life:

Bows are beautiful when they bend only because they try to remain rigid, and sword blades can curl like silver only because they are certain to spring straight again. . . . The foil may curve in the lunge, but there is nothing beautiful about beginning the battle with a crooked foil. So the strict aim, the strong doctrine, may give a little in the actual fight with facts; but that is no reason for beginning with a weak doctrine or a twisted aim . . . Do not try to bend, any more than trees try to bend. Try to grow straight, and life will bend you.

We cannot extricate ourselves from the human condition, which means both that we do not lose the capacity for self-deception and hence the need for self-examination; and that we fail, like the Apostle, to do the good that we would. But we can be safely grateful that it is, nevertheless, the good that we will, and that we, too, can do all things in Christ who strengtheneth us.

IN THE NEXT place, as a true religious life depends on facing ourselves, probing deeply into ourselves, it also depends upon and is nourished by facing our world, our age. We are called to be Saints “in Rome.” One thing this implies is that we must face the evil in other men and in the various social patterns which constitute “the world.”

Consider Eichmann and his trial in Israel. There are men who perpetrate monstrous evil. There are regimes which permit or even breed monstrous evil. Men habitually deal with such situations as if they themselves were good and therefore entitled to sit in judgment and to cast these

criminals into hell or blast these regimes off the face of the earth, and to all such the Gospel says: "Have you seen that monster in yourself?"

But there is also a perverse way of using that admonition into which we sometimes fall. Subconsciously we argue that after all we are not so bad, not "that bad," and accordingly he is not so bad, this regime is not so bad either. But this really means that we have not yet faced the hater and killer in ourselves. And it will be in the degree that we are sensitive in this area and do not equate love with sentimentality, and childlikeness with childishness, and reconciliation with glossing over and suppressing reality, that our faith in "that of God" in men will be pure and hence efficacious.

The same kind of counsel applies to our dealing with the "realities of power and the power struggle" in the world. Ultimately, as Augustine declared in the passage we have already quoted, the power structure is not permanent, not real. It is the house built on sand. Yet in its way the Roman Empire was real enough. So is the United States, the Soviet Union, the H-bomb, the Polaris missile, the arms race. We have to function in relation to such realities and as Martin Buber said in a profound utterance: "It is difficult, terribly difficult, to drive the plowshare of the normative principle into the hard soil of political reality."

We and some of our fellow-Christians are continually at cross-purposes, it seems to me, because they tend to say: "There is no normative principle, or at any rate it doesn't apply here; the realm of power is autonomous, it develops according to its own laws." We, on the other hand, tend to fall into sentimentalism. We don't realize that the soil is hard, that it is "terribly difficult" and complicated to make love operative in politics. To a very considerable extent, I surmise the answer to the question whether we can have in our day a Christianity which "speaks to power" author-

itatively and yet in love depends on whether we can resist our respective temptations and come together to agonize our way to a common program.

Another thing I have in mind when I refer to realistically facing our world is something quite different, on which I have really no light to throw. Yet it is something we must at least be aware of. I refer to science, both physical and social-psychological, the runaway technology, the “wisdom” of our age. These things represent a great danger — apart from the threat of nuclear annihilation. The inner life of man may be neglected, starved, fragmented, shattered under these pressures. It has even been suggested that man may be threatened with a new Fall, now that he seems to be fathoming the secrets of the universe.

We tend to regard these developments as simply Evil or completely mysterious, or to ignore them. But if we do try to evade and escape from the findings and the challenge of the new knowledge, it means that we are afraid, we have not yet experienced the love which casteth out fear. Being afraid and evasive, we shall also be ineffective and futile in trying to bring to the Greeks of our age a wisdom — a “foolishness” — which is indeed wiser than their own.

MY LAST and, I feel, most important observation relates to what I had in mind when I spoke of the early Christians as having “broken loose.” They understood that for all its size, seeming stability and power, the “world,” the “age,” in which they lived was ephemeral, weak, doomed. It was not built on sound foundations. They had, therefore, turned their backs on it in the sense that they were not placing their bets on it, did not give it their ultimate allegiance, were not intimidated by what it could do to them, and did not seek satisfaction and security within its structure, under its standards. They were loose — not tied to “business as usual.”

I wrote at the beginning of this essay of my present experience among those who are considered “unbelievers.” Some of my fellow-Christians are unable to understand why so much of my life has been spent among such persons and groups, and more particularly why, at one period, I counted myself among them. Perhaps it is in this area of “looseness” that one can find the key to this experience . . . it was on the Left — and here the Communists of the period cannot be excluded — that one found people who were truly “religious” in the sense that they were virtually completely committed, they were betting their lives on the cause they embraced. Often they gave up ordinary comforts, security, life itself, with a burning devotion, which few Christians display toward the Christ whom they profess as Lord and incarnation of God. Later I was to mourn the wastage of so much youthful devotion, and its corruption among Communists and others, which I had witnessed from the inside. Yet the beauty and attractive power of commitment to that which we profess to believe remains — and it plays a considerable part in the contemporary world struggle.

Besides, the Left had the vision, the dream, of a classless and warless world, as the hackneyed phrase goes. This also was a strong factor in making me feel that here, in a sense, was the true church. Here was the fellowship drawn together and drawn forward by the Judaeo-Christian prophetic vision of a “new earth in which righteousness dwelleth.” The now generally despised Christian liberals had had this vision. As neo-orthodoxy took over, that vision was scorned as naive and utopian. The “Kingdom” was something to be realized “beyond history.” And again, the Communists are those who are today able to convince vast multitudes that they do cherish the ancient dream of brotherhood realized on earth and have the determination to make it come true. This is a measure of the fall of what is called the Free World. The liberal Christians were never, in my opinion,

wrong in cherishing the vision. Their mistake, and in a sense, their crime, was not to see that it was revolutionary in character and demanded revolutionary living and action of those who claimed to be its votaries.

The other aspect of the experience of the early Christians was that they *did* feel the reality, the authority, of the fellowship which they had found. It had the keys to the future. They lived in *this* world and by its power. Perforce, therefore, they were *experimentalists*, seeking to live out the implications of the love they had experienced, of that “love of God and not of self” to which they were joyously committed.

This quality of looseness from the world-that-is, of experimentation, creativeness, characterizes all the great periods of religious history. This is certainly true of Early Quakerism. It is from this same spring that our religious life will have to be nourished.

THERE IS no doubt that our world is doomed. I do not mean by this that I think nuclear war and resultant nuclear annihilation are inevitable. It would be even more risky, I think, to assert that they will not happen. But I am not here making a political judgment or calculation. In a much profounder sense, the world we have known is passing. The uncovering of nuclear secrets, other developments we might mention, make this certain. Mankind *has* to find the way into a radically new world. Mankind has to become a “new humanity” or perish.

If we are true at such a juncture to the seed of love which is in us, that light of faith which neither inner nor outer storms have put out, then we shall be loose and experimental. We shall set less and less store by the world’s gifts of money, success, respectability, comfort. Most of all, we shall then truly live *in* the Society of Friends, the fellowship of love, shall truly believe that the divine-human society is real, is the future. We shall be aware that we

stand at the end of an era, but much more basically that we stand before a new beginning.

It is surely in this context very significant how many Friends experienced a refreshing, a nourishing of the inner life of the Spirit when recently a thousand of them “cut loose” and “experimented,” standing in silent vigil around the Pentagon.

By grace, if we continue in this way we shall daily love more deeply. Daily, in the freedom of the Spirit, we shall build in our homes, neighborhoods, cities, the city that is to be, whose builder and maker is God.

We shall do it not because we are wise, strong, politically astute, but because the Spirit dwells in our hearts and the Lord is coming, will reveal himself. His kingdom is ever at hand.

For us all is as yet unbegun; but where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty and possibility.

All this was movingly stated some ten years ago by an American poet, Muriel Rukeyser, who did not come at the matter primarily from a Christian approach. In a volume entitled *The Life of Poetry* she said: “Now again we see that all is unbegun. The only danger is in not going far enough. If we go deep enough, we reach the common life, the shared experience of man, the world of possibility. If we do not go deep enough, if we live and write half-way, there are obscurity, vulgarity, the slang of fashion, and several kinds of death.” Let us mark the dangers if we do not go far enough: “obscurity,” confusion as to our goals; “vulgarity,” the resort to clever and evil means to achieve our ends; “the slang of fashion,” such as succumbing to the ways of “Madison Avenue.” For us, too, no doubt “several kinds of death” will be available if we do not realize how clean the break must be, how loose of the “world” we must be, how thoroughly experimental, how profoundly convinced of possibility — if, that is to say, we do not go far enough.