

# **What Doth The Lord Require Of Thee?**

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Nor has she been an armchair crusader. Thirty years ago she and her family left the tranquil security of Westtown School, where Wilmer Young was Dean of Boys, to live and work with sharecroppers and tenant farmers in the South. There they remained for nineteen years. They now live at Pendle Hill, which they leave from time to time to address Quaker gatherings and to visit their grandchildren.

The present pamphlet — her seventh for Pendle Hill — was given as a two-part address to the Young Friends of North America Conference of 1965 on the theme: “What doth the Lord require of thee?”

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### We must open our hands

The question: "What doth the Lord require of thee?" has one easy answer. It is there in Micah: "... to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God." But the question is prefaced by a statement: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good." So I take it Micah asked the question rhetorically. The best sermon that I ever heard preached on the text from Micah was the speech of a Quaker lawyer who was being installed as the judge of a county court in a large, populous and notoriously corrupt county. The reason it was a good sermon was that this judge saw and candidly faced the fact that there was *no* way for him to fulfil the affirmation he had just made to the State and also follow fully his own personal interpretation of justice, mercy, and humility before God. Yet he hoped he would not forget, he intended not to forget, that this was the Lord's requirement of him.

This is the situation we are all in, even if most of us are not as conspicuously in it as the judge was. (I may say he did not have a second term.) What does it mean for us now, at our moment of history, in our situation, to do justice? to love mercy? Do we see anyone about us of whom we would confidently say: He walks humbly with his God? Do we have any description we could give of what such "humble walking" means?

It seems to me that wherever I go, the theme — in whatever poetical words it may be cast — is basically the single question: *What ails us?* I read also enough books and articles and reports to get the impression that the whole Church is asking itself the same question as Friends ask. What ails us? How do we connect creatively with the crying needs of our time? How do we walk humbly with our God into the future? How do we even get turned around facing the future instead of backing into it with our eyes on the past?

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Since, for Friends, the corporate life of the Meetings is the base from which everything we do together is expected to arise, our questions are often addressed to the inner life of the members and the worship-life of the Meetings they compose. The questions that seem to be uppermost whenever we have conferences to consider the life of our Meetings are: What ails our spiritual life? Why do we so rarely experience the real power of a Meeting gathered under a corporate sense of Presence? Why is our ministry often scanty or thin? — sometimes thinly veiled propaganda, sometimes thinly contrived out of “conned and gathered stuff” (to borrow a phrase of Robert Barclay’s). Why do the outward expressions of our religious life, i.e., our “activities,” our “works,” so often seem to drive and exhaust us rather than to fulfil us? I hardly need warn you that I am not prepared with answers. But I have been meditating for some time on the questions.

I heard someone say — whether quoting Martin Buber or not, I am not sure — that modern man no longer knows the “holy”; he knows only the “spiritual.” He no longer comes up dead against, over against, stopped in his tracks by, overpowered by, that absolute reality, that transcendence, that awesome *thisness*, that utterly confronting and claiming otherness which in all languages is called by a word meaning essentially what we mean by *God*. It is not a word we can define; it is a sound by which we attempt to say the unsayable.

Looking inward, our modern man sees psyche and subconscious, ductless glands, genes, hormones. Looking outward he sees into the spaces opened up to us by the physical sciences, the infinite spaces and the infinitesimal. Where shall he look for the “holy?”

Yet now and then, even now, someone comes into the presence of that which has no *where* but is all *what*, has no past or future but is all *now*: as Dante said, there “where

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centers every *where* and every *when*." The one who comes into that center tries to tell us, but there is no way to tell it; it can only be lived.

Why do so few of us have this experience when the wholeness in ourselves confronts the wholly Other, is wholly confronted and wholly taken up into that wholly Other? Why do we so seldom have the experience of being, as a group, as a Meeting, so met and so claimed?

**2.**

Reading early history, whether of Christianity or of Quaker Christianity, I get the impression that neither the individual nor the corporate experience of being met and claimed was so rare in either of those periods. From John Woolman and the Quaker journalists who lived when he did, I gather that for Quakerism the change had occurred before their time, i.e., before Quakerism's first hundred years were past, and that the 18th century Quakers were already much nearer our condition than they were to that of the earliest Friends.

These Friends of the first generation, under the all but annihilating persecutions that they endured for the first forty years of the Quaker movement, drew people to them as we never have since, and they do not seem to have had to ask what ailed their spiritual life, or why their Meetings were dull or their ministry perfunctory. They did not have to devise schemes for keeping Friends in touch with each other: coffee hours after Meeting, covered dish suppers. Their necessities kept them together: the need to bring food and bedding or nursing care to their prisoners; to care for children left at home alone when parents were imprisoned; to give hospitality to traveling ministers or assistance to their families while they were absent; to mobilize forces to appeal to authorities for relief from injustice; to supply families left without domestic animals,

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working tools, or even a cooking kettle, by rapacious tithe collectors. Whoever had resources had to share them as part of the responsibility for “publishing Truth,” which they thought was their main job. So a Friends Meeting, without any theories of communalism, had in effect something like it. Without any theories of nonviolent resistance, they practiced it. With no peace testimony to be true to, they early saw that their central principle of the inward Christ, that in every man which is of God, would never permit them “to fight and war against any man with outward weapons.”<sup>1</sup> They knew that there was “a life and power that took away the occasion of all wars,” and that it was possible — indeed, it was demanded of them — to “live in the virtue of that life and power.”<sup>2</sup>

And then they began to prosper outwardly. A hundred years later, they were not only wealthy but in some places they were powerful. Pennsylvania is the outstanding example. I sometimes think it ought not to be possible to tell the story of Pennsylvania without tears. John Woolman put into half a sentence the story up to the year of his death: “... in departing from the true Light of Life many, in striving to get treasures have stumbled upon the dark Mountains.”<sup>3</sup> That sentence was to describe not only the second half of the first century of Quakerism, but also the second century and the third, which is ours.

In 1756, Benjamin Franklin could call the Society of Friends “this wealthy and powerful people who have governed our elections and filled almost every seat in the Assembly.”<sup>4</sup> It was no easy position that this wealthy and powerful Assembly of Pennsylvania Quakers found themselves in, for they still had their testimonies. Should they vote money to carry out war against the Indians? Amid a frightened and harried population, they were a minority who trusted peaceful means. And yet they were rich; maybe I should have said, “And besides, they were rich.” In 1756,

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enough Friends withdrew from the Assembly so that the control of the colony was relinquished to others. Pennsylvania ceased to be a Holy Experiment in government.

A year before that, John Woolman had labored under an impression that he ought not himself to pay the taxes levied by the Assembly in order to send so-called “gifts” to the Queen at a time when England was at war. He wrote in his *Journal*: “As scrupling to pay a tax on account of the application hath seldom been heard of heretofore, even amongst men of integrity, who have steadily borne their testimony against outward wars in their time, I may therefore note some things which have occurred to my mind, as I have been inwardly exercised on that account.” And then he goes on to mention how in earlier times, Friends had been held steadfast in their testimonies by the very persecutions used against them, and compares the much more comfortable circumstances of his contemporary Quakers: “Being thus tried with favor and prosperity, this world appeared inviting; our minds have been turned to the improvement of our country, to merchandise and the sciences, among which are many things useful, if followed in pure wisdom; but in our present condition I believe it will not be denied that a carnal mind is gaining upon us. Some of our members, who are in offices of civil government, are, in one case or other, called upon in their respective stations to assist in things relative to the wars; but being in doubt whether to act or to crave to be excused from their office, if they see their brethren united in the payment of a tax to carry on the said wars, may think their case not much different, and so might quench the tender movings of the Holy Spirit in their minds. Thus, by small degrees, we might approach so near to fighting that the distinction would be little else than the name of a peaceable people.”<sup>5</sup>

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We have not now, as they had then, many Quakers in government office, but we have even more involved in businesses and jobs that have a taint of warmaking about them. (Indeed, what business or job has not?) Maybe, as taxpayers, we ought to be more sensitive to the effect our compliance with war taxes may have on the conscience of these Friends — not less when the conscience concerned is in both cases our own.

John Woolman, who was so grieved by destitution, noticed that the poor often prey upon the even poorer. During his journey to the Indians at Wyalusing in 1762, he was much burdened by the wrong done to Indians by white settlers who sold them rum and cheated them by taking their land for little or no payment. He wrote hotly in his *Journal*: "... it is an evil which demands the care of all true lovers of virtue to suppress." But then quickly he reminded himself of the condition of the white settlers themselves. "... the people on the frontiers among whom this evil is too common are often poor, and ... they venture to the outside of a colony in order to live more independently of the wealthy who often set high rents on their land."<sup>6</sup>

Although the evil that first struck him was at a double remove from Philadelphia, it led his thoughts straight back to Philadelphia and the "wealthy and powerful" people who were members of the same religious community as himself. Of them and their responsibility he could not wash his hands. I cannot help thinking of this now when a righteous wrath against white southerners is so common amongst us, and when I remember that both poor white and poor Negro were together neglected and ignored for several decades while whatever wealth the South had was drained off into northern coffers. In those days, the poor white man was left no basis of self-respect except his notion that the Negro was even lower than he. When the textile manufacturers deserted New England and Pennsylvania

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and went south to take advantage of cheap, docile (and unorganized) labor, they denied the Negro the boon of work in the mills — a pitiful boon at that — and thereby they confirmed the poor white in his notion of superiority.

**3.**

Any group, like the Society of Friends, that is composed almost altogether of the fortunate must ask itself as John Woolman did what its own responsibility is toward any form of misfortune that is caused by society's indifference to, even if not exploitation of, certain of its elements. I know that it is now thought to be absurd to suppose that the ease of some people is enjoyed at the cost of hardship for others. Nowadays there is said to be more consumer goods and services than consumers, and consumption is made out to be a duty. But I take it that Friends have never borne their testimonies according to logic or expedience but according to inner compulsion. As long as poverty exists in the midst of plenty, some Friends will feel, as the group of Catholic Workers do, that as Christians they are not entitled to luxury. As long as the populations of some countries in the family of nations live in sore need, some will feel that they cannot accept the standard of their own affluent country, even if it solves its problem of domestic poverty. As long as inequality exists, they cannot feel at ease in a preferred status.

John Woolman said about paying taxes for war: "I believed that there were some upright-hearted men who paid such taxes, yet could not see that their example was a sufficient reason for me to do so...."<sup>7</sup> Just so: the fact that 99% of our fellow Americans accept whatever status they can achieve, and even believe they have an obligation to themselves to do so, will not excuse some persons from an opposite obligation.

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Now what I am coming to is that I think we are, as a religious society, deeply ill at ease in our preferred status. In the beginning, Friends may have drifted imperceptibly into acceptance of it; by now we know all too well that we not only accept it, we guard it, cling to it, promote it. We take it for granted. But we are not at ease in it. We feel how we do indeed, as John Woolman said, “stumble upon the dark mountains.”

It is in this split, this need to maintain ourselves in a sharply felt contradiction, that I find the root of most of the causes of our spiritual decline. For example, on the Saturday of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1965 we had two sessions; in the morning we heard and discussed the report of the “Mission to Mississippi” to rebuild burned churches, and we knew that later in the week we must take up the question of our even greater responsibility to conditions in our own city. In the afternoon we heard the reports of the Friends Schools. I do not think the lunch hour was long enough to camouflage the glaring side by side effect presented by these two reports. Yet if there was discomfort, it was not expressed. Perhaps like me, nobody had the courage to express it in the face of the brave reports we’d heard from the schools.

The schools are the apple of our eye; I love them myself and, indeed, I cannot hide from myself my pride in them. I never attended any but Friends schools, and my husband and children are all graduates of one beloved school. The three men in our family are graduates of three Quaker colleges. Most of our closest friends are busy with Friends schools or colleges and we ourselves were long members of a school community. And yet I wonder .... And year by year I wonder more.

A fundamental contradiction seems to have crept into Quaker education above the elementary level. We stress the better opportunity we have for instilling religious and

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ethical values than public education has. We report projects by which the children in our schools learn of the problems of society, opportunities made for them to glimpse the lot of the deprived one third of our home population, or to work with the mentally ill or the retarded. Our exchange programs make it possible for them to dip into foreign cultures and see the problems of other countries. On the other side, we stress the absolute criterion of academic excellence, the richness of cultural advantages we provide — and think we owe it to our children to provide — and the individual attention that can be given in our schools.

Yet academic excellence as a criterion leads to exclusion of those who will not be able to do the school credit when they get to college, or will not be able to graduate from the school even. A few schools do have programs for the non-academic, but by and large, Friends schools are for the gifted and for those who have been well prepared from kindergarten on. And all of it means cost. Alumni must be urged to keep paying from graduation to the grave for the privilege of having gone to a particular school. At the best we can do from endowments, scholarships can still cover so small a part of the tuition that parents must strain every nerve to pay their utmost. If they had hoped they could devote their lives to some poorly paid service to mankind, they will feel they have to forego it until their children are educated — 12 — 16 — or even 18 years per child. If we are to keep this high cost from being even higher, teachers must work for small salaries and since teachers, like others, have been conditioned by their education to measure success in financial terms or terms of academic advancement, many of them feel they owe it to themselves (or to *their* children) to go where they can do better. (How suspicious I am of that phrase, “owe it to ourselves” — “owe it to our family,” etc. “Owe no man anything but to love one another.”) There is, moreover, a clear anomaly in expecting

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teachers to sacrifice themselves in order to give luxury education to a small group of favored children. Therefore, unless we can risk using young and inexperienced teachers, we must raise salaries. And there can be no skimping on plant or equipment. Twice it was said in our Yearly Meeting that “even simplicity is expensive nowadays.” But simplicity is a word that is subject to interpretation.

Assuming that all this cost *is* necessary for a so-called “good” education, how much does this education have about it that is uniquely Quaker, therefore the specific function of Friends to provide? Is there anything uniquely Quaker, or Quaker at all, about concentrating upon those young people who are most capable of success? Is there anything Quaker about educating for success, while our prophets are crying out that we have lost the track and that every so-called advance, i.e., every success, is taking us farther from human goals? We seem to be asking young people to recognize that everything is wrong with the way the world is going, at the same time that we ask them to see to it that they personally succeed in that world, win themselves a foothold in its distorted structure.

This kind of jam, that students are in even when they are capable of the academic excellence that qualifies them for first-rate schools and college, is one thing a uniquely Quaker education should have something to say to. It should have more to say than it does to the problem of the personable and competent, but limited, youngster who would once have gone into farming or some manual trade or craft or service, but isn’t bright enough for modern technology or the professions. It should have more to say to the kind of young person who in the Middle Ages would have become a “religious,” or in the last century would have gone as a missionary, at home or abroad, because his heart (or her heart) is set on God and service to Him through His creatures.

## 4.

I have taken the example of education because it came uppermost in my mind just now, and also because it is an angle of our dilemma as Friends that affects nearly every one of us, as parents or grandparents or prospective parents, or teachers or school committee members, or students. And it is very much of a type of our general condition. I might have made an example of our attitude toward the material settings we provide for ourselves, whether at home or in our institutions. Or I might have chosen our self-indulgent attitude toward recreations. Has, for example, our practice with regard to travel, whether for teenagers, old people who have retired, or vacationers from the busy middle years, or even persons going on Meeting business, become extravagant? We have been justifying it, when we travel beyond our national borders, on the grounds of international contacts and their values for community of nations and for peace. My question is: how much of this use of our resources is genuinely productive in such values, and how much is self-indulgent? The time needed — the days, hours, and weeks — used to keep travel within reasonable bounds; in the jet age this restraint hardly operates.

Maybe the successful, and all Friends with means, should examine the question of what relation should exist between their spending on themselves and their families and their giving. The system of tithing has never had much approval among Friends; there is a strong argument against any rule of giving that involves percentage of income because it bears unequally and brings hardship on those with small incomes. Responsibility is the measurement we need to use, whether we have much or little. Our attitude to responsibility may immeasurably help or hinder our fellow Quakers in taking up their own burden of responsibility.

Not only the question of how we spend our income, but also the question of how we earn even our living, needs

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examination. This is nothing new for Friends. We recall that one of the functions of the earliest embryonic business meetings of Friends was, besides caring for the poor and the aged and infirm and the imprisoned, to provide employment for those who had lost their jobs because of their faith, or given them up (as the old record says) “by reason of the evil therein.” It is not unknown for jobs to be given up now “by reason of the evil therein,” but perhaps it does not happen as often as it should. The work we do forms us, in character and conscience, just as the way in which we use our income forms us.

In reading those short last essays of John Woolman, which are little treatises on economics, I have been struck by his intuition that wrong roads were being taken by his contemporaries, upon which we their descendants should find our direction almost irreversibly fixed. Unrighteous use of other human beings, unrighteous use of one’s own powers, irresponsible use and waste of land and other natural resources — he touches on them all. It is evident that he was convinced that the spiritual life of men and women is deeply conditioned by their economic life. For Woolman, the means by which a man got his living, and the ways he spent his money, and the ratio of his prosperity to the prosperity of his fellow men, whether it was greater or less, whether they lived next to him or half a world away, were aspects of the religious life. So he pleaded with the wealthy, but he pleaded also against envy and ambition, whether in the successful or the unsuccessful. He believed in labor; probably Gandhi’s ideal of a minimal bread-labor for each of us would have satisfied Woolman’s principle. But it hurt him deeply to see the weak overworked or in want because they could not work, and the strong idle or living upon the labor of others. It hurt him to see the whole life of any person pre-empted by business of any sort, whether this was by necessity in order to obtain a living or

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by choice in order to obtain opulence. He thought that with more leisure, people would grow more. I do not think he ever visualized an economy which would need the contribution of only part of the people who lived on it.

He well knew the connection between wars and economic responsibility and he brought the responsibility straight to the individual, the only place where each of us *is* fully responsible. How often we have quoted his cry and how little we have ever taken it seriously:

Oh! that we who declare against wars, and acknowledge our trust to be in God only, may walk in the Light, and therein examine our foundation and motives in holding great estates: May we look upon our treasures, and the furniture of our houses, and the garments in which we array ourselves, and try whether the seeds of war have any nourishment in these our possessions, or not. Holding treasures in the self pleasing spirit is a strong plant, the fruit whereof ripens fast.<sup>8</sup>

I think if he were writing today, Woolman would change the word “treasures” (though most of us still have a surplus of those, and cling to them) to a more comprehensive word covering worldly attainment of any kind and all privilege based on this.

Finally, one last question: why with all our labor-saving devices and fast transport, are we so short of time? Is it because we are greedy of experience for its own sake? — to see more, go farther, earn more, learn more, than is feasible in one short lifetime? The human soul needs time, needs to take time, unless experience is to become mere accumulation, bearing bad fruit, like any other kind of ambition.

There are many more questions we could ask ourselves about the conduct of our everyday lives.

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Christianity, Quakerism, has to ask these questions, because it is a religion that expresses itself in lives, not in formulations of belief, not even in institutions, however beneficent, unless they are matched by individual lives.

We often smile at the records in early Quaker journals of disasters that came upon persecutors of Friends. They felt justified in preserving such records because they believed these disasters to be judgments of God. So we hear of persons gored by bulls, thrown by horses, paralyzed, etc., after misusing Friends. But there is in that book of old records called *First Publishers of Truth* one statement that goes to the heart of the question of judgment. Friends had been asked to send up from all the Meetings answers to a series of questions about events during the “first publishing of Truth.” One question was: “What judgments upon persecutors?” One Meeting answered: “As to judgments upon persecutors, we have not much to say concerning the same, in regard to their outward man, but hardness of heart and blindness of mind have been clearly seen as a judgment upon them.”<sup>9</sup>

We pay a penalty for any giving in to “hardness of heart and blindness of mind.” The penalty is increased “hardness of heart and blindness of mind.” As I see it, this is the judgment under which the life of our Meetings suffers. It is in striving to close the gap that already exists between our faith and our works, between what we know by religious insight and what we do in our secular lives, that I see the possibility of at once deepening our insight and gathering our scattered forces. So might our lives be integrated, made whole, made holy in the true Ground of our Being.

As a Society of Friends, we may well have reached that moment, of which Buber warns, when we must open our hands or they will petrify.<sup>10</sup>

### **What then of personal success?**

I will clear the way by giving my own answer to this question in as terse a form as possible. Thus: Personal success, in the terms of our contemporary culture, is no longer a legitimate goal for a Friend. Whether it ever was, in the terms of any period, or whether it ever will be, we are not called on to judge or guess. For the present, and in any immediately foreseeable future, personal success and a concerned Quakerism are incompatible. If I say a concerned Quakerism rather than Christianity, it is only that I don't want to seem to point the finger at any other Christians than those I belong to. Don't think I am exhorting young Friends to give up all the goals and ambitions they have and turn their backs on success. I haven't *that* much courage. But I think we ought to recognize that success and what we say we believe do not go together.

Now maybe I ought to put quotation marks around the word "success," to show that I do mean success as the world measures it — i.e., *status* as gauged by treasures laid up on earth, salaries regularly accruing and periodically rising, professional standing, popular acclaim. Of course, though we often forget it, there is another success: the success measured by useful and important work excellently done, whether resulting in recognition or not. And there is still another success: that of having responded to what one knows to have been the authentic call of God, and of having remained faithful to that guidance, whether seeing any results of the work or not. These latter kinds of success are not what I mean when I say that "success" and Quakerism are incompatibles, mutually exclusive. I do not say that the world never applauds these kinds of success. Sometimes it does. But that is beside the point.

Quakerism is incompatible with contemporary culture, which sets so high a value on success, because Quakerism in its own terms is a radical criticism of that culture. It is

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so because Christianity, as far as we derive it from the life and words of Jesus as mediated to us by such records as we have, is itself a criticism of modern culture, as it was also of first century culture. Christianity and Quaker Christianity criticize not merely surface details and customs of our time (though the roots and effects of such surface details and customs may reach deep into character); they are a radical criticism, going to the root of the sickness that presents itself to us as progress and prosperity.

We all dislike being squelched by the accusation that we are “trying to turn the clock back.” I dislike it and I am sure you do. I may say I resent it. That innocent clock that we are accused of trying to turn back in making a radical Christian Quaker criticism of modern culture is, in fact, a fearsome complex of technology that, with one hand, threatens to destroy us, and, with the other, to make something inhuman of us while leaving us alive and surrounded by the artifacts of “progress.”

**2.**

There is always a somewhat specious tendency to personify technology, because it has in some ways the aspect of a great autonomous force with a life of its own, goals of its own, a huge architectonic plan of its own, in which humankind — even all biological life, plant, animal, man — is only one of the building materials to be used. This plan seems to be the rival, increasingly the successful competitor, of what faith has thought of as God’s plan. God’s plan itself has often seemed to men to be threatening and mechanistic and blind. Especially in this century, men have felt themselves to be in a universe that simply does not know them. But there have been enough men, even though at all times comparatively few, who have met God face to face, as Job met Him in the whirlwind — enough of these

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to keep alive among men the proposition that God's plan does take us into consideration, that we are cared about, loved and — in Christ — even suffered for and died for by God. Julian of Norwich saw the whole world, "all that is made," as a little ball the size of a hazelnut lying on the palm of her hand. She saw that it was so small only in comparison with him who made it. She says: "I marveled how it might last, for I thought it might suddenly have fallen to nothingness, it was so little. And I was answered in my understanding: 'It lasts and ever shall last because God loves it.'"<sup>11</sup>

We all enjoy singing the spiritual: "He has the whole world in His hand." Yet most of us are convinced intellectually at least that man now "has the whole world in his hand," has the means to destroy himself and all his kind, and even to destroy the possibility of human life on the planet for a long time to come. We shudder to hear it said that it is even conceivable that our puny activities in space might upset some delicate balance that our scientists do not yet understand and derange our solar system, though actually our minds are too limited to grasp even total destruction upon earth, so it is redundant to try to stretch them to conceive of such boundless destruction.

A friend of mine, a theologian, once hearing some pacifists speaking of the danger of total atomic catastrophe, said: "Don't forget that, whatever happens, God will still be there and he can begin again." I don't find that I doubt this at all; and yet I don't think many of us could care much whether it is true or not. Among large groups of people, we find something very close to indifference about what is going to happen next to mankind. They feel helpless: "Let us eat, drink and be merry ...;" "after us the deluge' ...;" it is no wonder. These two stances: "after us the deluge" and "God could begin again," are both positions of despair, though one calls itself faith and the other is frank cynicism.

That extraordinarily penetrating and devout scientist and Christian, Teilhard de Chardin, observes that the question, "Is life an open road or a blind alley?," a question which a few centuries ago had hardly been formulated, "is today explicitly on the lips of mankind as a whole .... Only a reason, and a valid, important reason, for loving life passionately will cause it to advance further. But where, at the experiential level, are we to find, if not a complete justification, at least the beginnings of a justification of life? Only it would seem, in the consideration of the intrinsic value of the phenomenon of man. Continue to regard man as an accidental outgrowth or sport of nature and you will drive him into a state of disgust or revolt which, if it became general, would mean the definitive stoppage of life on earth."<sup>12</sup>

For those who do not know Teilhard yet, let me say that he was a French Jesuit priest, a paleontologist who worked in China a large part of his life with international teams of scientists, and died in 1955 in New York. Since his death, his very voluminous writings have been coming into print and by degrees into English, so that by now a good deal is available. Teilhard was a passionate Christian who seems not to have entertained the least thought of leaving either the Church or his order, the Society of Jesus, even though he was kept almost in exile by his superiors, and was not permitted to publish his work. He said however that if he did not write, he would be disloyal to Christ.

Technology — let me still personify it for a bit longer — tries to console us for the threat which it holds in one hand, the destruction of all life, with the gift it holds in its other hand and offers as an enhancement of life. Teilhard calls this offered gift a "pitiful millenarianism" distorting "all that is most valid and most noble in our now permanently-awakened expectation of the future appearance of some form of 'ultra-humanity.' An era of

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abundance and euphoria — a Golden Age — is, they suggest, all that evolution could hold in reserve for us. And it is but right that our hearts should sink at the thought of so 'bourgeois' an ideal. In face of this strictly 'pagan' materialism and naturalism, it becomes a pressing duty to remind ourselves once again ... that it is not any question of *well-being*, it is solely a thirst for *greater being* that by psychological necessity can save the thinking world from the *tedium vitae*.<sup>13</sup>

**3.**

I am sure none of us, nor certainly Teilhard, thinks that starvation, sickness, destitution, or unremitting toil are necessary to save man from weariness of life; but this is not to gainsay the fact which he is here pointing out that neither will abundance of goods, flawless economic security, easy mobility, or boundless leisure, save us from it.

After all, man was made in the image of God: i.e., of the Creator, and he is by definition a creator himself, a maker — a poet, an artist, which are both words that mean a "maker." Teilhard, no turner back of clocks, says further: "Whatever we Christians may say ... about any of the ... new theories which attract the modern mind, let us never give the impression of being timid about anything that can bring fresh light and greater breadth to our ideas concerning man and the universe. The world will never be vast enough, nor humanity powerful enough, to be worthy of him who created them and is incarnate in them."<sup>14</sup>

Right, then. Let us not be timid. But let us be critical. The faculty of judgment — criticism — is built into the human mind as well as creativity. Every poet has destroyed some of his attempts; every sculptor has abandoned some designs; every cook has poured some mixtures down the drain. If the producers do not, the consumers must reject some offerings. We have a right and an obligation to say

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“No” to what is discordant, ugly, unwholesome. If we study the records of earth’s evolution, we see that even God Himself abandoned many lines of creation that promised well for a while.

Technology, is not, in fact, an autonomous power; it is under our control; it is one line only of our human creativity for which God has empowered us. We have an obligation, as well as the power, to exercise criticism upon its products, to accept or to reject them. We do not have to implement every discovery, we do not have to use every instrument, we have made. We can junk whatever is inimical to life.

Most of us, I should suppose, are already convinced that we must veto, and with all our strength resist the use, for example, of nuclear power for war. Even some whom knives and guns and “conventional” bombs, or even napalm, could not convince that war is the enemy are pacifists as far as nuclear weaponry goes. I hope that most of us also reject the use of nuclear weapons as threats, mostly now called deterrents. Certainly all who study the matter much become aware how thin and shaky is the line between guns and hydrogen bombs, how feeble and fallible are the barriers dividing bombs used for deterrence and bombs used for what they are designed for: destruction. About this much we may safely be dogmatic: while these devices exist, man is stultified from going ahead to develop his human possibilities. Life itself is dammed up. While the sword hung on a thread over Damocles, I suppose he never thought much about anything but the sword.

Let me quote a couple of percipient paragraphs from an address given by Father Daniel Berrigan at the “Consultation for Leaders of Religion on the Moral and Technical Implications of Peace on Earth.” Father Berrigan calls attention to the fact which stares us all in the face, that: “Technology in military uniform has claimed our laboratories and research centers and universities. Its

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shadow has lain heavily on the nights and days of our political leaders. [We may certainly add that it has lain heavily on the nights and days of our school children, our students, our scholars, and our research scientists.] In the dead calm before the storm, something else occurs. A radical, permeating change in those who must live under it. And changes of this moment always occur without our being conscious of them, through the activity of spirit upon spirit. Breathed long enough, the war atmosphere may be said simply to work a change in the heart of man. The transformation is complete when we come to accept our climate as a normal and coherent attitude toward life and human beings — self-justifying, self-evident, a logic which suits our state of soul and justifies activity carried on according to its norms.

“In such an atmosphere, the order of reality is altered. Our capacity for goodness and truth [is] impaired. And our convictions about who we are, are transformed into illusions expressing only what we once were, or what we wish we could be. We live on in the dream world of the schizoid or the adolescent, our sense of identity victimized by its controlled sources. We hang suspended above a world we can no longer bear to live in.”<sup>15</sup>

**4.**

Let's take it, then, as mandatory that man, merely to remain man, will have to slap down that one of technology's hands in which are held those devices that have no other function than destruction. That much seems clear. Then what about the other hand with its mixed offering of good and ill? Criticism meets a harder task here. This involves not just rejection but selection. Where much is good and serves human ends, how are we to detect the point of diminishing return where the good merges into effects that deaden rather than quicken man's spirit, lower it rather

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than elevate it, reduce his potential rather than increase it? Are we already too much weakened by that “altered order of reality” mentioned by Father Berrigan, to make judgments and choices here?

The other day some of us were talking about some frightening new proposals in air travel. Someone said: “People will refuse to go on those things.” “O no, they won’t,” said another. “They’ll be as glad as we were to change from propeller planes to jets.” Then the first speaker recalled Orwell’s statement in *1984*, that human beings will accept anything provided change comes step by step. “And rightly so,” put in the second speaker. What Orwell was saying was that the critical faculty in men is too weak to warn them and pull them back at the boundary line where expediency, abundance, pleasure, or whatever — especially where *power* — ceases to be a good and becomes sheer evil, dehumanizing humanity: the point where, as Rilke says,

... the pure too little  
incomprehensibly changes, — jerks round  
into the empty too much,  
where the many-digitated sum solves into zero.<sup>16</sup>

The shock to me in the above conversation came when the second speaker said, “And rightly so.” He is a person of great insight, a poet, a person who takes love as the rule of his life. How could such a person even momentarily agree to renounce his faculty of criticism? It simply did not strike him that he was abdicating his humanity at that point. Step by step, we abdicate our humanity, without noticing that we do.

I suppose that, like me, you keep running across the name of the French sociologist, Jacques Ellul. Ellul predicts that by the year 2000 travel to the moon and the habitation of artificial satellites will be established and normal. Synthetic and abundant food, unlimited energy derived from

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the sea and the sun, and the abolition of disease will have removed some of the pressing problems of life as we know it. Knowledge will be accumulated in electronic banks and conveyed directly from the computer to the human brain. The forbidding of human reproduction (and how this is to be accomplished he does not say), and insemination outside the body by sperm and ova from superior types will produce a stable population of uniformly superior beings.<sup>17</sup>

It is said that by about the same time three percent of the people will be enough to produce and distribute all the goods and services needed for the abundant life for one hundred percent of the people. Unless we can change our definition of success, these 3% will be the only successful people on earth. They will be the only necessary people; the rest of us (if we are bright enough to be allowed to exist at all, or being bright enough are still interested in existing) — the rest of us will be supernumeraries; we will be society's rejected but well fed, the "kept" men and women of that society. We will be rudimentary holdovers from an earlier stage of the organism's evolution like the appendix or caudal vertebrae in the human body.

In this welter of good and bad fruits of progress, how is humanity to judge? Bidden and willing to "choose life," how are we to discriminate? It is a question for the individual and for the whole community of men. It is at once a widely political and a deeply religious question.

Even the civil rights revolution, which has given us so nearly the only inspiration of hope in recent time, is flawed by its goals. Its goals are perfectly understandable and natural ones but they are not prophetic ones. Indeed, how could they be? They are limited to equal status and equal opportunity to compete for the prizes of a society where the prizes are likely to fall to dust one after another with each new conquest of technology.

The *Catholic Worker*, in discussing Ellul's book, *The Technological Society*, says: "... he shows how attitudes of mind and habits of thought which are normally considered to relate to the production of material goods have penetrated throughout our society and entered even the sacred citadel of religion .... He reveals the evil to be more widespread and deep-rooted than we had realized. Most radicals consider that our present civilization could be 'taken over' by the revolutionaries as a going concern and that technology itself could be directed by them to good ends .... They consider that technology is not inhuman in itself, but only in the use it has been put to by the state or private capitalism." It seems to me that many pacifists are similarly optimistic in supposing that a peaceful world could be organized over the institutions and by use of the instruments we now have, whereas the elimination of war will certainly require the revision of all institutions and methods to their very roots. There *is* a radical revision of institutions already going on, but it is being done by a technology that is not committed to serving human ends. By Ellul's definition, technique is opposed in its very nature to the religious, the Christian, the Quaker concept of man. "Technique cannot be other than totalitarian," says Ellul, and the *Catholic Worker's* commentator adds: "Technique is the destroyer of social groups, of communities (whatever their kind) and of human relations."<sup>18</sup>

Many of us have been putting our trust in education to protect society from the inroads of dehumanization, but Ellul says that, since the aim of education is to produce happy, well integrated individuals, "this means that despite all the pretentious talk about the aims of education — it is not the child in and for himself who is being educated, but the child in and for society. And that society, moreover, is not an ideal one, with full justice and truth, but society as it is."<sup>19</sup>

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Ellul, in his foreword to the American edition of his book, states the threat and implies the loophole. "If man — if each of us — ," he says, "abdicates his responsibilities with regard to values, if each of us limits himself to leading a trivial existence in a technological civilization, with greater adaptation and success as his sole objective; if we do not even consider the possibility of making a stand against these determinants, then everything will happen as I have described it, and the determinants *will* be changed into inevitabilities."<sup>20</sup>

To this challenge the *Catholic Worker* responds with some suggestions that will seem quaint to anybody committed to our current idealization, idolatry even, of an economy of increasing abundance and rampant consumption. They don't sound quaint to me because I have been saying similarly quaint things in several Pendle Hill pamphlets ever since 1939. I quote the *Catholic Worker*, not myself. "The problem then is to remain in the society but not of it, and we must flourish like weeds in the cracks of the carapace of 'the system.' It seems that we should sustain ourselves both physically and spiritually on technological waste .... We must then ideologically (and not from motives of economy) buy the Ford instead of the Cadillac, the used car instead of the new one, the junked one instead of the used one. Technological waste is of great abundance and variety (food, clothing, houses, land) and can be obtained without a corresponding involvement in the system (i.e., money) for our physical sustenance. But what about our spiritual sustenance? How can this be derived from technological waste? This waste has another and terrible component, the human. The poor, the unemployed and the unemployable are the offscourings of the system, as was also Christ .... It is only by serving them that we shall attain the Kingdom of God."<sup>21</sup>

## 5.

Maybe I would put it a little differently. So long as we have the suffering poor in our society — and let no one suppose we don't have them! one-third of our population in America and a much bigger fraction in the world as a whole — we needn't be at a loss where to begin to resist, to draw the line, to withhold our consent, to refuse to compete.

When society has fed and housed the poor and nursed the sick, and educated the persons of low I.Q. to take a useful place of their own in the economy of man; when the brilliant have been educated for responsibility rather than for personal success; when no persons are standing around rejected and unused while others think themselves entitled to overwork, sometimes priding themselves on being overworked; when war has been renounced and its instruments disassembled (alas! it is no longer so simple as beating swords into ploughshares); when machines are controlled by people and we have outgrown all thought of controlling people by machines — then possibly it will be time enough for Christians and Quaker Christians to consider whether the world offers any positions of power and success compatible with their convictions.

In the meantime, ours may be, as often before in Quaker and Christian history, the humble role of refusal and perhaps of suffering for refusal, “flourishing like weeds in the cracks of the carapace of the system” indeed, as early Christians flourished in the midst of the Roman empire. We cannot refuse to be killed; if this happens, it happens. But we can refuse to kill others and we can clear ourselves as far as possible (and this phrase “as far as possible” needs some concerned and accurate thought) of all activity that prepares for killing them or contributes to it. We can also strive to clear ourselves of all participation that contributes to dehumanization, including our own dehumanization, whether through mechanizing human beings, through rejecting them, or through using them to

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perpetrate violence on each other.

A corollary of the civil rights movement that may in the long run be as far-reaching as the civil rights revolution itself is the recent trend to involvement of privileged young persons in the submerged layers of society. We now find not only SNCC and COFO groups and others at work in the South but little groups of students, or persons who were lately students, living on the verge of want in city districts where they are in the midst of all the problems spawned by poverty. These groups have little, if any, organization. As one writer says of them: "They hate the system of manipulation and authoritarianism more than they dislike the injustices it produces." They want to work where the suffering of poverty is being suffered, not to study it or make plans to cure it from some office. I quote the same author again: "... they believe ... that they must start the poor moving — as the civil rights movement got the Negroes in the South moving — before the 'power structure' will acknowledge their existence."<sup>22</sup>

Of course this approach is not absolutely new though its extent is new. The Catholic Worker movement has for more than thirty years been encouraging such groups of people to live among and with, and to serve, the destitute, to experience in their own flesh the cold and heat, the squalor, the lack of privacy, the deep sense of nonentity that goes with being shabby, penniless, and adrift. The new groups are perhaps more like the French worker-priests of a decade or so ago, who shared the lives of the poorest workers rather than the derelict, in that they seek to find out by participation what the people need and want, and what initiatives they could themselves take in changing their conditions.

A similar approach is made, but with more oversight and training and less risk, by the Peace Corpsmen and the VISA Volunteers of AFSC. From all these groups, a large proportion will probably return eventually to their ordinary

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middle class and intellectual backgrounds; but there will have been a cross fertilization, an exchange of insights, of which it is hard to predict the results. We may be seeing the start of a new bridging of gaps that in our so-called “classless” and “democratic” society have been widening even beyond the gaps in earlier societies, in which class ideologies were more rigid than now but personal contacts across boundaries were more plentiful and closer.

I am reminded not only of the young men who surrounded Francis of Assisi (though our present young people would mostly deny any religious stance toward their work), but also of that Italian aristocrat of the late 15th century, Ettore Vernanza, friend of St. Catherine of Genoa, of whom von Huegel says that it was “... one of the deepest convictions of his life: that only by actually living amongst and with the poor, poor yourself; only by doing the work which the right hand finds to do, with such might and thoroughness that both hands, indeed the whole man, body and soul, are drawn into and are, as it were, coloured by it; that only by such fraternal-paternal sympathetic identification with its object can such service really rise above the dreary perfunctoriness and ghastly optimism of mere officialism, and have the fruitfulness begotten only by life directly touching life.”

**6.**

Why did I say earlier that Quakerism is, by its own terms, a criticism of contemporary culture? I said it not because of any single testimony that Friends have traditionally borne: as against war, for example. I said it because of our central principle to which every witness of Quakerism refers back: that there is in every human being some part that is *of God*, an inward Christ through whom every man has direct access to God and may be directly moved by God; through whom also each man has community

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with every other man.

This is not to deny the possibility of dimming that unique light up to the point of extinguishing it; but it is to affirm that the light is not extinguished, that it remains while life remains, and can be — indeed, in charity must be — appealed to. Even Dante, no Quaker though a passionate Christian with an infinite regard for the human soul, allowed for only very rare cases where a soul had fallen to hell (that means, had gone beyond hope of help) while the body still lived.

Such a doctrine as that of the Inward Light, implying the unlimited responsibility of every soul, and the unlimited responsibility that each soul bears to any other soul, sheds intense illumination on the goals, the methods, the assumptions, the values of our society. It does not let us rest in postures of conformity. I think there never has been a time when it did. Jesus had to die. There was no place to fit him in. Before him stretches a long line of those who could not be fitted in, and after him another long line, down to ourselves. Sometimes we are tempted to doubt whether humanity, not least our own humanity, is worth the martyrdoms offered for its sake. Gerard Manley Hopkins, who must often have doubted that, remembering Jesus, wrote:

Across my foundering deck shone  
A beacon, an eternal beam. Flesh fade, and  
mortal trash  
Fall to the residuary worm; world's wildfire  
leave but ash:

In a flash, at a trumpet crash,  
I am all at once what Christ is, since he was  
what I am, and  
This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch,  
matchwood, immortal diamond

Is immortal diamond.<sup>23</sup>

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It is through cherishing and hoarding the immortal diamond, this image of God, this crest-jewel in God's garment of creation, this mankind who is what Christ is because he was what it is, that we ourselves are "immortal diamond" and become what Christ was.

"Through him who loved us," Paul said, "we are more than conquerors."<sup>24</sup>

### Notes

1. *The Journal of George Fox*, ed. John L. Nickalls (Cambridge, England, 1952), p. 400.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
3. *The Journal of John Woolman*, ed. Amelia Mott Gummere (Philadelphia, 1922), "Last Essays," p. 495.
4. Isaac Sharpless in *Quakers in the American Colonies*, by Rufus M. Jones, Isaac Sharpless, and Amelia Mott Gummere (London, 1911), bk. V, pp. 490-491.
5. *Journal*, American Experience Series Edition (New York, 1961), pp. 75-77.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
8. Gummere, "A Plea for the Poor," p. 149.
9. *First Publishers of Truth* (London, 1907), p. 325.
10. Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man* (Boston, 1955), "The Question to the Single One," p. 46.
11. Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (London, 1927), ch. V, p. 12.
12. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe* (New York, 1965), "Pensées," p. 107.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
15. Quoted in *Fellowship* (May, 1965), 24.
16. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, trans., intr., and commentary J. B. Leishman and Stephen Spender (New York, 1939), "The Fifth Elegy."
17. Robert Hammill in *Fellowship* (March, 1964), 4.
18. Peter Lumsden in *The Catholic Worker* (June, 1965), 4.
19. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York, 1964), quoted in *Manas*, (March 17, 1965), 1.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Lumsden, loc. cit.
22. Andrew Kopkind, *New Republic*, (June 9, 1965), 18.

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23. *Poems of Gerard Manly Hopkins*, ed. W. H. Gardner (New York, 1948), poem no. 72, p. 111.
24. Romans 8:37.