

**Jesus, Jefferson,
And The
Tasks Of Friends**

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR Newton Garver was born in Buffalo in 1928. He burned his draft card in San Francisco in 1947, while living among Friends. A year later, when a student at Swarthmore College, he refused to register for the new military draft and was sentenced to a year and a day in federal prison. In 1956 he joined Ithaca Monthly Meeting, and has been a member of Buffalo Meeting for the past twenty-two years. During that time he clerked both the Peace and Social Action Program of New York Yearly Meeting and the Oakwood School Board. Since 1961 he has taught philosophy at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

The main theme of the present essay has matured over many years partly through Quaker activities (especially in collaboration with Ross Flanagan), partly in Quaker ministry and university lectures. Two companion attempts at clarifying our faith are "What Violence Is" (*The Nation*, June 1968) and "To Build a Just Society?" (*Friends Journal*, February 1983). The original version of this essay was a lecture given at Oakwood School on April 17, 1982, under the joint auspices of Purchase Quarter and Representative Meeting of New York Yearly Meeting. Comments and encouragement of many Friends led to its present form.

I

My topic is the work of Friends in the world. My theme is that this work must be in the world but not of the world. Let me elaborate a bit. Friends are concerned to realize the kingdom of heaven of which Jesus spoke. We hold that that kingdom is in the world — maybe not entirely within this world, but assuredly there are and can be bits of it in the world, and it is those bits we mean to make manifest through our work. The kingdom is a special sort of community of souls. It differs from a worldly community in that within it there are no conflicting interests at all. That is why I am inclined to speak of souls rather than persons: as persons we all carry a great baggage of material interests that must be left at the door when we enter the kingdom.

One must either suffer or work in order to enter this kingdom, or so it has seemed from what I have read or experienced. This work or suffering must take place as part of a relationship to other persons, and in a certain special spirit; so that although the work is in the world it is not of the world. One might argue about some details in each case, but I take it that the principal activity of such groups as the American Friends Service Committee, A Quaker Action Group, Friends Committee on National Legislation, and the Quaker United Nations Organization is in the world but not of it. Politics and economics, on the other hand, clearly belong to the worldly realm. This does not mean that such activities are evil, nor that we should avoid them at all costs: only that it is not the kind of work that will bring one into the kingdom of God.

In order to know what our tasks are, therefore, it is essential that we distinguish clearly between politics and religion. How can one explain and communicate this vital distinction? That is the query I have often put to myself, both in order to become clearer in my own mind about the

nature of my commitments as a Friend, and also to better understand occasions when I have suddenly felt estranged from Friends with whom I had recently been in close community. I want to share with you how my thinking about Jesus and about Jefferson has helped toward an answer to this query, and what I see this all to imply about the tasks which lie before us as Friends in the darkness in which we find ourselves.

II

Let us first consider Jesus. I must admit that there is much that I do not understand about his life. But I am also deeply impressed by some things which I understand only dimly; that is perhaps enough — at any rate it is as much as I can offer. I want to invite you to consider both Jesus' entrance on his career (Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13) and his final message to the disciples just before the drama of his death (Matthew 25:31-40). Here is the first passage from Matthew, as in the *New English Bible*:

Jesus was then led away by the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted by the devil.

For forty days and nights he fasted, and at the end of them he was famished. The tempter approached him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "Scripture says, 'Man cannot live on bread alone; he lives on every word that God utters.' "

The devil then took him to the Holy City and set him on the parapet of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down; for Scripture says, 'He will put his angels in charge of you, and they will support you in their arms,

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for fear you should strike your foot against a stone.’ ”
Jesus answered. ‘Scripture says again, ‘You are not to put the Lord your God to the test.’ ”

Once again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their glory. “All these,” he said, “I will give you if you will only fall down and do me homage.” But Jesus said, “You shall do homage to the Lord your God and worship him alone.”

Then the devil left him; and angels appeared and waited on him.

This ordeal prepared Jesus for his career. He had already been baptized by John, but baptism was not enough. The way was opened for Jesus by his purification in the wilderness, partly through fasting and partly through his rejection of the temptations. The implication seems to be that, if we would follow him, we must overcome similar temptations. Let us then consider more closely these three temptations.

It might be thought that the reason Jesus had to reject the offers made to him is that they were made by the devil — or by the “tempter,” as some scholars translate it. From this point of view it does not matter so much *what* is offered and rejected, as by *whom* the offers were made. I have trouble understanding this view, because it presupposes that I already know who the tempter is. I don’t. So far as I can see, the only way for me to recognize the tempter is by the temptations he or she sets before me. I therefore ask you to view this episode in a contrary way. I want you to consider that it does not matter by *whom* Jesus is tempted, and that he must overcome the temptations just because of *what* is offered to him.

The first temptation was the power to turn stone into bread; with this power Jesus would have been able to prevent

hunger and starvation. The second temptation was the power to avoid bodily injury; with this power he would have been able to prevent the woes which stem from human frailty and mortality — at least for himself, and perhaps for others too. The third temptation was ultimate political power, with which Jesus would have been able to prevent all oppression, all injustice, and all war. If we forget that these powers were offered by the devil, there is no reason to suppose that Jesus could not have used them to benefit mankind. Even if we keep in mind that these were the devil's powers to bestow, it is not clear why they cannot be used beneficially; certainly I find myself, as I suspect you do too, constantly tempted to take hold of similar powers for constructive purposes. In the sweeping form in which they are offered to Jesus, they constitute the power to completely alter the conditions of human existence. Large portions of our lives are devoted to coping with needs and wants and normal human limitations, and even the gentlest and sweetest of our activities must take such conditions into account. It is, indeed, these very conditions of human existence which make the teachings of Jesus relevant in every time and place. To eliminate hunger, injury, oppression, injustice, and war would take away all the major forms of human misery to which Jesus ministered and to which he called on us to minister as his followers.

Overcome want — overcome injury and death — overcome injustice and brutality! Since these are the sources of nearly all human misery, it is not easy to resist such temptations. I do not fully understand how rejecting these temptations opens the way, but I accept that it does; and I find that deeply moving.

The other passage from the gospel of Matthew is also one which I find that I have to accept with less than a full understanding. It contains the last message of Jesus to his disciples prior to his arrest and crucifixion. Here is the passage, again from the *New English Bible*. Jesus is speaking:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, he will sit in state on his throne, with all the nations gathered before him. He will separate men into two groups, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right hand, "You have my Father's blessing; come, enter and possess the kingdom that has been ready for you since the world was made. For when I was hungry, you gave me food; when thirsty, you gave me drink; when I was a stranger you took me into your home, when naked you clothed me; when I was ill you came to my help, when in prison you visited me." Then the righteous will reply, "Lord, when was it that we saw you and fed you, or thirsty and gave you drink, a stranger and took you home, or naked and clothed you? When did we see you ill or in prison and come to visit you?" And the king will answer, "I tell you this: anything you did for one of my brothers here, however humble, you did for me." (Matthew 25:31-40).

The identification of the Son of Man with the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned takes my breath away. I suppose one can begin to get something of the idea by saying that there is something of God in every person, and that it is really our response to the weak and the poor and the miserable, not to the rich and the powerful, that determines our fate. But the identification of the Son of Man with the humblest of human sufferers remains puzzling. Is it that suffering itself is something divine? Certainly it is easier to touch the soul of a person in some sort of agony or distress than that of one who is hale and hearty and full of worldly success. Yet suffering is not a desirable state, and the

identification remains partial: it is only those who serve, not those who just suffer, who are said to “enter and possess the kingdom.” And there are other puzzles too. The more I think about this passage the more difficult it seems. For one thing there doesn’t seem to be any room for provisos — for focusing on the “deserving” poor or the “unjustly” imprisoned. So here the mere fact of human misery and suffering overrides all the notions about justice and merit we normally live by. Then too, perhaps paradoxically, the message seems profoundly subversive of all organized religion (including Quakerism), since it implies that in the final summation the simple fact of having given aid and comfort to one sufferer will override any questions about creed and belief or about faithfulness and religious practice.

I am unable to shake these thoughts down into a coherent picture. On the one hand it seems nothing but a mental shuffling to deny that this final message has these radical implications. On the other hand I cannot see how I can possibly avoid considerations of justice and merit in my daily life, nor am I prepared to urge Friends to abandon the book of discipline as irrelevant to salvation. But I remain deeply moved by the simplicity and straightforwardness of the message, and this insistence on loving service to those in need seems one of the keys to the enduring power of the gospel. I have found the truth of this message confirmed by a depth of loving fellowship that, in my experience, flourishes uniquely and a bit mysteriously in workcamps, service projects, and other Quaker activities. Without fully understanding, I accept that such service is the primary requirement for walking in the steps of Jesus.

If each of these passages is puzzling in itself, they are all the more so when considered together. This is for the simple reason that the sufferings of those we are called on to serve are the result of precisely those brute facts which the tempter proposed to give Jesus the power to eradicate:

human need, human frailty, and institutional oppression. It must occur to everyone to ask why Jesus did not simply accept the power to overcome the sources of these human miseries so that there would be no more want, no more sickness or death, no more murderous or oppressive institutions. Surely the best way to address human ills is to eliminate their source rather than to attend to their symptoms. And yet this seemingly simple and sensible question must be brushed aside: the way opens by refusing to attack the sources of human suffering, and the way is followed by loving attention to the sufferers.

While a complete explanation escapes me, it does seem clear that one cannot even make a beginning at understanding what urgent duties follow from these passages without acknowledging some sort of sharp cleavage between religious and worldly affairs. We need not agree about the exact nature of the distinction (we can work that out as we go along), only that there is such a distinction about whose nature and application we must labor. We might say that service to others, when they are in need and when we are not remunerated, establishes a relation between souls; whereas attacking the sources of misery changes the world without touching souls. We might then say that it is the integrity of the soul and its relations with other souls that belongs to God, and that the skills to change the world in which we live — politics, economics, law, engineering, medicine, social work, education and so on — are among what belongs to Caesar and should be rendered to Caesar. But these thoughts raise further questions, and therefore they are only tentative beginnings, not final answers to the deep dilemma posed by the juxtaposition of these two passages from the gospel. All that seems clear is that there must be these two domains, because Jesus turns from the one and insists on the other. To deny that religion and politics lie in separate domains therefore seems to involve a denial

of the example of Jesus.

III

I want now to turn to Jefferson. I am no more an expert on Jefferson than on Jesus, but I have found some of his life and thoughts pertinent to the theme I am developing. The circumstances of the life of Jefferson are so different in so many ways from those of the life of Jesus that we do not often think of the two men together. In particular Jefferson was aristocratic rather than humble, he was honored rather than reviled in his lifetime, and he was primarily a political rather than a religious figure. Or so it seems. Garry Wills has recently written a book on Jefferson, *Inventing America*, in which he argues that Jefferson was more an intellectual than a politician, in spite of his having been both governor of Virginia and president of the United States. There are ways in which Jefferson's ideas limit the domain of politics, and it is this that I wish to explore. It is not Jefferson's politics which make him an interesting figure for Friends to study, but rather the reluctance of his participation in politics and his sense of the superior significance of things outside politics.

Jefferson is best known as author of the Declaration of Independence — rightly so, since it is one of his proudest achievements. In its day the Declaration was used as a political instrument, and it may therefore be overlooked that the document itself does not establish or legitimize any government: it only argues that the continued government of the American colonies by England lacks legitimacy. It might be thought that a limitation on the powers of government is just as much a political matter as the government itself; but this would be too hasty a conclusion. Limitations on the powers of government have never been directly responsible, as governments have been, for wars,

slavery, and oppression; and they are not directly responsible, either, for food stamps, social security, or national parks. Limitations are therefore quite distinct from powers, and promoting the one is entirely different from promoting the other. It is not part of the ordinary activity of politicians to limit the powers which they are seeking to win. Jefferson, however, played a far more active role in articulating common ideas about the limitations on the just powers of government than he did in either fighting the War of Independence or exercising powers of government. During the war he served as governor of Virginia, and Wills remarks that, "The title he glorified least in was that of colonel, and few thought he was very good at wearing it."¹ After independence was achieved, he again played a role, although a less prominent one, in limiting the powers of the new government, by promoting the Bill of Rights, both in the constitution of Virginia and as the first ten amendments to the Constitution of the United States.

It is well known that Jefferson wished his epitaph to mention just three of his achievements: the Declaration of Independence, the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom, and the founding of the University of Virginia. The list conspicuously omits his service as governor and as president. The omission is consistent with other information about Jefferson. Garry Wills reports that he sometimes dismayed citizens when he was governor by taking no action in what they thought was a crisis, because he saw that the essential forces were already at work to determine the result: "He exasperated others by seeing inevitability where they saw only crisis, by a long-range vision that treated day-to-day struggles as already settled in their outcome."² In 1777 he tried to persuade David Rittenhouse, a scholarly delegate from Philadelphia to the Congress, to resign from Pennsylvania political activity (then engaged in the throes of the Revolution), on the ground that he should not let

politics distract him from his scientific work.³ All these facts point to Jefferson's keen sense that there are things of more importance than politics. At the same time it should also be noted that his presidency was remarkable for the Louisiana Purchase, as well as for a studied neglect of pomp, finery and uniforms, ceremony, and military strength. All of which leads me to suggest that Jefferson might well be ranked with Hoover as a president most deserving of further attention from Friends.

I want to give closer consideration to a passage from a letter which Jefferson wrote to Madison on January 30, 1787, about the armed insurrection in western Massachusetts known as Shays's Rebellion:

I am impatient to learn your sentiments on the late troubles in the Eastern States. So far as I have yet seen, they do not appear to threaten serious consequences. Those states have suffered by the stoppage of the channels of their commerce, which have not yet found other issue. This must render money scarce and make the people uneasy. This uneasiness has produced acts absolutely unjustifiable; but I hope they will produce no severities from their governments. A consciousness of those in power that their administration of public affairs has been honest may perhaps produce too great a degree of indignation; and those characters wherein fear predominates over hope may apprehend too much from these instances of irregularity. They may conclude too hastily that nature has formed man insusceptible of any other government than that of force, a conclusion which is not founded in truth, nor experience.⁴

There can be no question that the general tenor of this

remark stands firmly in the tradition of limiting government rather than promoting it. Three points stand out in particular. One is Jefferson's rigorous judgment that the armed insurrection was "absolutely unjustifiable." It is clearly not the case, given what he said in the Declaration of Independence, that Jefferson would never see rebellion as justified, but he comes down unequivocally in this case. It should be noted, however, how very little follows from the fact that the acts in question were "absolutely unjustifiable." It does not follow that the government would be justified in using every necessary means to suppress the rebellion and punish the rebels, for the second remarkable feature of this statement is its equally stern refusal to condone severe government action in response to the rebellion. Nor does his refusal to condone the acts of rebellion imply that he thought that no good could come of them. A little later in the same letter he writes: "I hold it that a little rebellion now and then is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical." Presumably these salutary effects can occur even though the rebellious acts themselves are absolutely unjustifiable; the subsequent occurrence of beneficial effects will not serve as a justification for what is absolutely unjustifiable. The point, perhaps, is that government ought to generally do nothing in times of "crisis," holding to a patient and hopeful view about long-term outcomes.

This leads into the third remarkable point in the passage, that we humans, especially those in government, must take care not to allow fear to predominate over hope, a point which is profound, widely applicable, and (like anything profound) a bit puzzling. The first thing to say about the hope which Jefferson urges on us is that it must be distinguished from a certain sort of optimism. The words "hope" and "optimism" are synonyms, and they often mean the same thing; so the distinction I need to make will sound

a bit artificial. But there is an important distinction as I now propose to use the words, in that hope connotes that things in general will work out all right, without the hope necessarily involving any particular expectations of just what will happen or just how things will work out. Optimism, on the other hand, is hope made specific: it is the belief that some specific program will lead to some specific result or that some particular outcome will occur. Perhaps an other way to put the difference is that hope is the confidence that things can work out somehow or other, and optimism the confidence that things will work out as planned. A third difference is that scientific and technological expertise is relevant to optimism (whether a dam built in such a way will hold or collapse), but not to hope. In the case of a storm one does not have the expectation of any particular beneficial effects, but the expectation (if one is hopeful) that somehow or other the damage done by the storm will be compensated by long term benefits. What Jefferson must have in mind is not optimism that this or that program will work out, but rather hope that things will work out somehow or other.

The importance of this distinction can be brought out by considering the awkward and implausible results of confusing them, as William James did in his famous essay *The Will to Believe*. The theme of that essay, as of his *Pragmatism and Religion* and *The Sentiment of Rationality*, is that we all have a duty to be optimistic. He uses the example of a person who must jump over a chasm in order to get down out of the mountains. James says that the person ought to believe that he can jump the chasm, because then there is a better chance that he actually will succeed when he tries; that is, his belief will tend to be "self confirming," as it has become fashionable to say, and it is better to have optimism than pessimism confirmed in the course of subsequent events. I suspect that this would work well enough with a six-foot chasm; but in the case of a 30-foot

chasm we would have a case of hope misapplied. Contrary to James, a sensible person would hold that, in the case of the 30-foot chasm, one has a duty not to suppose that one can succeed in jumping it. The problem with being optimistic about specific programs is that it suppresses both realism and creativity.

It suppresses realism because it tends to push aside as not consequential or not weighty every realistic assessment which suggests that the outcome may well be catastrophic. Examples abound. One recent one is Reaganomics, introduced with great confidence, and bound to succeed, so we were told, because of the Jamesian effect of the confidence and optimism which it would generate among businessmen and consumers who believed that it would succeed. One can hardly think of a better example of an occasion when proponents of a plan had a clear-cut duty to be less optimistic than they were. Another example is the case of prison reform, in which Quakers have been prominent and in which the early Quakers were rather successful. The success of early efforts at prison reform in eliminating such disgraces as overcrowding and malnutrition might be thought to justify optimism about prison reform. But since a side effect of the reforms has been to greatly strengthen prisons as institutions, their overall effect on prisoners has become even more dehumanizing, making them into a new class of institutional clients.⁵

Optimism suppresses creativity because the redoubled energy it contributes to the project at hand detracts from the search for alternative solutions. Consider the case of the stranded hiker. James says that he will have a better chance of jumping the chasm he must cross if he believes that he can. He overlooks the fact that he got into the bind by believing that he "must" jump. Why "must"? How can all alternatives be ruled out in advance? The explanation is psychological rather than rational: the hiker had already

adopted a plan for overcoming his difficulties, and he fortified his decision not only with his optimism but also with the rejection of any search for alternatives. One wishes today that the early prison reformers had considered alternatives to solitary cells before pushing forward so vigorously and successfully with the efforts. The reformer's optimism discourages creativity by supposing that all the factors are known, and that through controlling them we can control the future. Jefferson's hope, on the other hand, like that of the New Testament, is that the future will work out even though we lack knowledge of its detail, let alone the ability to control it.

With this distinction in hand, let us ask what hope can be based on. Its source can hardly be a realistic assessment of human plans and projects, for history is full of ironies and failures with respect to these. Nor can a foundation for hope be found, as James might have it, in the perceived necessities of a concrete situation. It is based instead on a certain view of human nature. Here is how Jefferson puts it:

Man was destined for society. His morality, therefore, was to be formed to this object. He was endowed with a sense of right and wrong, merely relative to this. This sense is as much a part of his nature as the sense of hearing, seeing, feeling; it is the true foundation of morality.... The moral sense, or conscience, is as much a part of man as his arm or leg.... It may be strengthened by exercise, as may any particular limb of the body.... State a moral case to a ploughman and a professor. The former will decide it as well and often better than the latter because he has not been led astray by artificial rules (Papers, ed. Julian P. Boyd [Princeton, 1955] XII:15).

The hope which should predominate over fear is based,

then, on a faith in human nature. The view of human nature is not one that emerges from natural science, and Wills spends much of his book arguing that it came from the Scottish philosophers of the 18th century, especially Francis Hutcheson. Jefferson believed that each person possesses a moral sense designed to harmonize human community, and that things will work out if we can succeed in appealing to this sense among the persons involved in a controversy. As Wills puts it: “Not only are men designed for life in community; Jefferson expects them to achieve communal wisdom in their life together: ‘I have great confidence in the common sense of mankind in general’ (Ford, VII, 455).”⁶ By “common sense” Jefferson means the beliefs or conclusions that persons arrive at when they work out something together. Jefferson wanted to limit the power of governments, because any government is composed of one party and therefore leaves people out. He could be hopeful about rebellion, not because he saw some specific resolution emerging but because he saw that a rebellion would throw a new set of people into the attempt to work things out, so that more conscience and common sense would come into play. Jefferson’s hope is based not on knowledge, not on scientifically proven facts, but on insight or something akin to faith.

I have avoided giving examples, but each one of us can think of many occasions when it would be appropriate to apply Jefferson’s wisdom, and say, “Characters wherein fear predominates over hope may apprehend too much from these instances of irregularity.” What is the appeal of that statement? Does it belong to the domain of religion or of politics? As soon as we ask this question we realize that it belongs to the domain of religion. Politics lives on fears. A party in power kindles fears about what will happen if they should be thrown out of office. A party seeking power kindles fears that the present policies will lead to disaster. Politicians

kindle fears because they seek control and there seems no plausible reason for control except to guard against harmful results. Jefferson believed that the natural course of human events, if everyone could participate, would be harmonious, and being thus freed from the need for either controls or fears, he emphasized the importance of hope. In this he was more an ally of Friends than of politicians.

IV

We live in a world that is full of agonies and brutalities, full of individual interests and desires, full of political schemes and promises. We might wish to live in a different world, but such wishes are for another day, and for another set of concerns. "Ye have no time but this present time," said George Fox, not for one minute doubting or making light of the troubles and darkness of the time in which he lived, and in which we all live. "Better to light a candle than to curse the darkness," the saying goes. Fox made the point in more ringing terms in 1663, at a time when the movement had recently lost such leaders as Mary Dyer, James Nayler, and Edward Burrough; when he and other Friends were imprisoned capriciously for refusing oaths or for assembling to worship; and when England was in the midst of all the anxieties, all the plots and counterplots, of the restoration of monarchy:

Sing and rejoice, ye children of the day and of the light; for the Lord is at work in this thick night of darkness that may be felt. And truth doth flourish as the rose, and the lilies do grow among the thorns, and the plants atop of the hills, and upon them the lambs do skip and play. And never heed the tempests nor the storms, floods nor rains, for the seed Christ is over all, and doth reign. And

so be of good faith and valiant for the truth: for the truth can live in the jails (Epistle 227).⁷

It is, then, in this dark world, and no other, that we are called on to act. But how can we be in the world and not of it? Upon what basis are we to act, and what is it that we are called to do?

Our tasks are founded on vision and faith rather than documentation. If we need statistics and photographs to convince us of the need, or if we require documented empirical evidence that what we do will have a beneficial effect, then we are not yet ready to answer the call. I have a faith that there is that of God in each person, a faith which is connected with glimpses of the godhead manifest in the actions and in the potentials of these persons. When I have a hard time discerning it in myself or in some other, I do not doubt whether it is really there and seek some additional evidence; rather I doubt whether my discernment is sharp enough and seek help in seeing things aright. Jefferson expressed a similar faith when he said that moral sense is as much a part of a person as an arm or a leg. It would be absurd to suppose that George Fox ought to have required documentary proof before he said that the Lord is at work in this thick night of darkness. We may all formulate it differently, and no formulation will capture the whole essence of it, but one way or another the foundation from which we act in the world must be a faith in God and a vision of God's presence and glory.

This is not to say that we should scorn documentation. In our worldly work, and in our assessment of worldly schemes, documentation is very important. In an address to New York Yearly Meeting in 1975 Kenneth Boulding spoke movingly of "Holy Doubt," i.e., that in worldly affairs we have a divine duty to remain skeptical of whatever is not proven. Examples would be the claims that the Soviets have a preponderance

of military strength, or that Communist subversion is a threat to free governments in Latin America, or that thousands will die of starvation if the food stamp program is abandoned. Faced with such claims, we should insist on documentation, and we should then look with a tough skepticism at whatever is offered to us as “iron clad proof,” resisting any proposed action until such proof is forthcoming. It is only in our distinctive tasks as Friends that faith is our foundation. In the preparation of budgets and the certification of power plants faith is as much a broken crutch as documentary proof is in affairs of the spirit.

Our tasks are founded on hope, not fear. The problems of this world naturally generate fears, and we should let fear remain the engine of politics and economics, of crisis and schemings. In religious witness we need to build on hope, and avoid trying to motivate one another by saying that something awful will happen if our projects fail. Hope is not based on the idea that there may cease to be any darkness at all, but rather that it is possible for light to shine in the midst of the darkness. We should not say that terrible things will cease to occur, for that would be a silly and childish fantasy. Our hope is based on the faith that wonderful things can occur within a terrible world, and that in the midst of agonies and brutalities there are tasks to which we are called which will touch people’s souls. The hope we bring is that the kingdom of heaven can be built in this world, in the midst of its squalor, because it is not of the world. It is the hope of a society composed of all the most unlikely folks, where “the lambs do skip and play.”

Our tasks are founded not on hate — and not even on justice or reform — but on love. The love in question is not a hot passion but a steady caring. Its delight is not its own gratification, perhaps not gratification in any ordinary sense at all, but rather the steady growth and manifestation of courage and faith in those we love, combined with a sense

of inclusive identity or mutuality. Love is rewarded by thoughtful conscientious action on the part of others, whether or not it confirms our expectations. When love is our motive, we have the right foundation for action. But not when we are filled with hate, for hate is an urge to suppress rather than to encourage another. Nor when we wish to reform, for reform implies a constraint on how another should act, and a lack of trust that the moral sense within will be a suitable guide for that person. Nor can justice be the foundation for our work, for justice comes with a sword, insisting that someone or other must give up some prized possession or suffer the consequences.

Love is an inclusive sentiment, a positive intention to draw others into the kingdom. A.J. Muste once shocked and puzzled many of us by saying that if he could not love Hitler then he could not love anyone. That is still a pretty awesome thing to say, but I now see that what he must have had in mind is this infinite inclusiveness of love: it does not exclude, as does hate; it does not preempt and control, as does reform; it does not threaten sanctions as does justice. However valuable these other sentiments may be in political affairs, each implies a division between “us” and “them”, and is therefore essentially divisive. Love alone is a conciliatory and unifying motive. Love alone respects the moral sense and dignity of others, that of God within them.

Our tasks are founded on conscience, not authorization or approval. Although we must first test our ideas with other Friends, there will come a moment when it is clear that a certain action must be done, upon pain of losing some vital element of faith. Such moments of conscientious necessity are the right basis for action. We then are ready to go forward, and need not wait for the consent of others. An example of an inappropriate deference to authorities occurred in the 1966 New York Yearly Meeting. Friends were called to witness to the brutalities of war and the overriding fact of human

suffering and bleeding bodies in Vietnam by sending medical relief to all parts of Vietnam, through the Canadian Friends Service Committee. The U.S. Treasury Department, however, warned that such action might be contrary to the Export Control Act or the Trading with the Enemy Act, and New York Yearly Meeting therefore sought an export license which would permit the shipment. Once conscience is clear, no such license makes sense. (The license was in fact never issued and never denied, and the Yearly Meeting eventually gave up waiting and sent the aid without a license.) A conscience which has been tested among Friends, and thus held up to the light of their criticism, provides a clear and sufficient ground for action.

Finally, our tasks are founded on witness, not results. The question to be asked is whether the action is itself a testimony to the presence and glory of God. If we take seriously the final message of Jesus, then we must believe that by visiting those in prison or by nursing the wounded we are thereby *ipso facto* testifying to the presence of God. Nothing more is needed. It is then irrelevant whether those prisoners will ever make anything of their lives, or whether the wounded will go back to fighting, or whether we could make more profitable use of our time and money. The witness is immediate, since it is the act itself rather than a consequence of it. That, I think is part of what Fox had in mind when he said that we have no time but this present. Results lie in the future, the uncertain future about which reasonable persons may reasonably disagree. The contrast between acts of witness and utilitarian acts can hardly be expressed better than by the words which T.S. Eliot put in the mouth of Thomas Becket in *Murder in the Cathedral*:

You argue by results, as this world does,
 To settle if an act be good or bad.
 You defer to the fact. For every life and every act
 Consequence of good and evil can be shown.

And as in time results of many deeds are
 blended
 So good and evil in the end become confounded.
 It is not in time that my death shall be known;
 It is out of time that my decision is taken
 If you call that decision
 To which my whole being gives entire consent.

Politicians and businessmen, of course, must continue to make decisions, and to make them on the basis of foreseeable results. Witness is as inappropriate in politics as tough calculation of consequences is as a basis for religious witness.

These are the foundations on which we tend to our religious affairs and initiate action as Friends. Of course it is not always easy to make the necessary distinctions, and it is never easy to be sure in practice that we have the right foundation. But if we seek out and act on these foundations, what we do will constitute religious service rather than political or economic enterprise, respecting the distinction between religious and political affairs which emerged from our consideration of Jesus and Jefferson. Given these foundations there remains the question of just what our tasks are. I would like to speak to the question in general terms, letting each of you apply the general considerations to the circumstances and situations with which you are familiar.

Our first task is to love one another, to be valiant for the truth upon the earth, and to remain attentive to the true spirit in all that we do. This task infuses all our lives. It is, indeed, not so much a specific thing to do as a manner in which to do all things. For that reason its importance is likely to be overlooked: we are tempted to rush on past this advice about every little action, about the details of everyday living, in order to get to those tasks that may save the world, or at least change it. But this temptation must be firmly

turned aside. We do need to attend to the spirit and manner of all our actions. Openings for witness are never obvious: they have to be *seen*, and they cannot or will not be seen by those who do not practice seeing them in daily affairs. If we neglect this daily task, we shall end up like the foolish virgins, without oil for our lamps at the time of great need, when the bridegroom arrives.

The second task is to minister to the suffering: the hungry, the poor, the lonely, the naked, the bruised and battered victims of all sorts of violence. Human misery and agony knows few limits, and though it is often unclear what one can do except in cases of starvation and open wounds, a little thoughtful consideration usually turns up something that a concerned person can offer. The American Friends Service Committee, and other similar organizations, arose out of the wish to band together to offer service at places of greater need, further from the situations in which we live. Such ministry, whether at home or abroad, remains the simplest and most direct way to submit to the injunctions of Jesus in his final message. What, then, are we doing for the nomads displaced by the war in the Horn of Africa, for the victims of oppressive regimes in Latin America, for the homeless men of Manhattan, and for the person crying in the next room or the next house?

In connection with this second task, we should be wary of a common criticism that has been raised against service projects, the soup kitchens of the Catholic Worker as well as the material aid programs of the Service Committee. It is that they are mere band-aids, and that responding with service projects to massive unemployment, starvation, or the war wounded in Vietnam, is futile and perhaps even farcical. The trouble with such ministry to the suffering, the critic continues, is that it treats symptoms and neglects causes; and therefore what we really need to do is to redirect our effort away from these superficial matters to challenging

the causes of violence, injustice, and poverty.

We should reject this criticism firmly, for these words are those of the tempter in modern voice. The criticism arises, of course, from a deep concern for human suffering, and its good intentions are not to be doubted. But this fact merely serves to remind us how very tempting the temptations are. The human ills and agonies we minister to through the AFSC and our personal charity are the very same symptoms which Jesus called on us to attend, whereas their causes are a properly political affair. Then, too, we know about suffering directly and immediately; whereas its causes are uncertain, and anything we say about them must depend on theory and hypothesis. Of course we should direct our politicians toward the causes where they are known and where the necessary resources can be mobilized; but our task, the specifically religious side of the matter, is to treat the symptoms.

A third task is that of listening to others. Since we believe that there is in each person something divine, or what Jefferson called a moral sense, we are naturally called upon to listen to what other persons have to say, to what their hopes and aspirations and concerns are at the deepest level to which we can reach. There are many occasions where such listening is needed, and part of what it means to be a Friend in the world today is to slow down and listen carefully on at least some of those occasions. Sometimes listening will just be a soothing balm to someone's loneliness; but we need to listen attentively at many other times too, when business is being done and we are pressed to conclude the matter and let the details take care of themselves. Listening involves attention to details, and in this respect Friends can feel an affinity with the remark of architect Mies van der Rohe that "God is in the details." In addition the Quaker agencies provide specialized listening in a number of tense and worrying situations, through the Friends Committee

on National Legislation, through the Quaker UN Programs in New York and Geneva, and through the Quaker International Affairs Representatives who have been stationed in sensitive spots from time to time by the AFSC and the Friends Service Council of London. Very often this sensitive listening can lead to conciliation, but it is something which we are called to as a matter of faith and witness, whether or not it also has such fortunate consequences.

A fourth task is to delimit the domain of politics. One reason which might be given for the peace testimony of Friends is that this "sad work, destroying of people," as George Fox once put it,⁸ is not part of the legitimate activity of politicians. But whatever reason we give for the traditional refusal to bear arms, it is certainly a testimony which protests the powers which most governments believe that they have.⁹ A related testimony is that of refusing oaths, for which many Friends in the 17th century found themselves in British prisons. Loyalty oaths, which were the primary sort involved in that century as well as today, are particularly distasteful, since loyalty is that sort of thing which ought to characterize one's fundamental commitments, which can only be to God and truth, rather than to the pragmatic arrangements which constitute political government. The campaign of civil disobedience against segregation laws and other forms of legalized racial discrimination in the 1950's and 60's, and also the war tax resistance, are other examples of conscientious protest against government attempting to extend itself beyond its legitimate range. Likewise the action of New York Yearly Meeting in sending forward the medical aid to Vietnam in 1966 without a license was not only a testimony of service but also one of limiting the domain of government. There are now questions worrying some Friends about how much information the government may rightly collect, and how it may store and use the information it has.

In many of these instances it is a matter of some

controversy how far the rightful domain of government and politics extends, and it requires much sensitivity and prayerful consideration of the proposed action, including testing it before the light of other Friends, in order to become clear that the testimony is genuinely a matter of religious conscience rather than political protest. But such difficulties ought not to blind us to the importance of this sort of witness. Not everything which touches politics is political, any more than whatever touches on religion becomes religious. The presence of God does not become manifest in political action, and divine power would disappear if everything became political. Limiting the domain of politics is an essential part of our religious witness because the kingdom of heaven is not a political one “My kingdom is not of this world” and we can build it only in those spaces in our lives which are left free from political control.

A fifth task is to nurture hope in these times of darkness. All around us we find that people are suffering from great fears. When a major issue is raised, we find it surrounded on one side by fears about what will happen if a particular course of action is followed — and on the other by equal fears about what will happen if it is not followed. Each side defines the matter as a crisis, and there is little room for hope. Action is then taken to minimize damage rather than with hope for the great things that may take place. Governance becomes “crisis management,” not only in politics proper but also in business and the universities. The antidote for these fears is faith in the glory of God, manifest in human affairs through the conscience or moral sense in each person. The hope such faith offers is much more than simply being secure; it is conquering fears by becoming a member of the blessed community and entering the kingdom that has been prepared for us since the beginning of time. To trust in God is to trust in that of God in others, as in oneself. The hope and the trust are

inseparable. When we become rightly skeptical of security which depends on economic and political and military schemes, and realize that our fate depends on other human beings some of whom are “enemies,” then it is only through trust in that of God in all persons that hope can thrive. In all the lonely fearful sounds around, in our time as in Jefferson’s, we see clearly the great need for this hope. And although I have listed it last, encouraging this hope is one of the most urgent tasks before us, so that we may help turn others into our companions in the kingdom as characters in whom hope has come to predominate over fear.

V

The foregoing remarks describe a certain sort of human undertaking, or religious witness, upon which we embark sometimes alone and sometimes corporately. They arise out of a sense of anguish and urgency about corruption which I see and feel in me and around me — corruption of the spirit by worldly threat, worldly rewards, worldly temptations; corruption of politics by messianic hopes of making government holy, of attempting to render Caesar’s realm to God. My words are, no doubt, inadequate to my message. They are addressed to Friends, but they are not meant to exclude others. Quite the contrary. Since each person is endowed with what Jefferson calls moral sense and Friends call divine light, these tasks have an appeal which stretches far beyond the Society of Friends. The experience of weekend workcamps, of international workcamps, of Civilian Public Service (in spite of its shortcomings), of draft resistance, of peace vigils and sit-ins, and so forth all of these have shown that many outside the Society of Friends are receptive to the appeal to conscience and conscientious action; and the Society has been enriched by new members gained through such experience. We must remain ready to confirm and

celebrate this spirit wherever it appears, in whatever persons.

Nor have I meant to imply that Friends should avoid political action. I personally do not know how to avoid political action; but I have no great hopes that anything lasting or of moral worth will come of it. Given the way political issues are defined, there are always at least two sides and one can nearly always see good sense on both sides, even in cases where rights and justice are involved.¹⁰ Political positions and political actions are therefore divisive and lack both conviction and finality. But they are not inherently evil. Politics seems a respectable domain of human enterprise, where one can act either well or badly. It can never help to build the kingdom of heaven; but that is no reason why individuals may not engage in politics, nor why we may not continue to feel in loving unity with politicians as well as with those in other worldly careers.

The message that I offer arises from a deep and long-nurtured concern about the corruption of religious witness by partisan politics and the corruption of politics by fanaticism, and from a vision of a path which avoids these corruptions. But what I have said involves hypothesis, theory, and abstraction. The reason for the hypothesis and abstraction is simple and straightforward: I have to use words to communicate my understanding. The process is an exciting one, and like witness in social action it is one in which our trust and mutuality help to build community. But since it depends on words, it involves concepts, which, like governments, have imperialistic leanings. That is, they encourage generalizations beyond the domain where they contribute usefully to understanding and communication. If my concepts and theories should at some point obscure a reader's vision, that reader should not hesitate to put them aside and focus in other terms on the life and words of Jesus, their enduring message, and the opportunities and obstacles for the practice of that message today.

Notes

1. Garry Wills, *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* (New York: Doubleday, 1978). p. 30.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., pp. 30-33.
4. *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Paul Leicester Ford (10 vols., New York: G.P. Putnam, 1892-1899), IV: 361-363.
5. Quaker prison work has been a wonderful testimony — an unmistakable declaration of community with persons whom conventional society has declared out of community, done by directly applying the admonition of Jesus in Matthew 25:36. The illusion I speak of comes only when it is supposed that the prisons can be fundamentally reformed so that prisoners would no longer suffer indignities and prison visiting would no longer be necessary. Only the abolition of the institution could accomplish that. For further details about prison reform see Fay Honey Knopp et al., *Instead of Prisons*, ed. Mark Morris (Syracuse, N.Y.: Prison Research Education Action Project, 1976); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prisons* (New York: Vintage Press, 1979); and the American Friends Service Committee's *Struggle for Justice: A Report on Crime and Punishment in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1971).
6. Wills, p. 190.
7. *The Works of George Fox* (8 vols., Philadelphia and New York, 1831), VII: 241. On the death of Edward Burrough see *Journal of George Fox*, rev. ed. John L. Nickalls (London: Society of Friends, 1975 reprint), p. 436.
8. *Journal*, p. 405. From 1662 to 1665 Friends encountered many trials and tribulations about oaths.
9. The case of Franz Jaegerstaetter is a particularly eloquent witness along these lines. See Gordon Zahn,

In Solitary Witness (New York: Holt, Rhinehart & Winston, 1964).

10. The dispute in Palestine is a good case in point, and the American Friends Service Committee wisely chose to emphasize compassion rather than justice as the basis for cautious optimism in its recent publication on the Middle East: Everett Mendelsohn et al., *A Compassionate Peace* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).