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A

Quaker

Approach

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An address delivered at the Avon Institute of the American Friends Service Committee, June 12, 1955. Reprinted from *The Spectator* of July-August, 1955.

MY OWN discussion of this theme would begin with one of my favorite Quaker stories. Two gentlemen walking along the banks of the Thames observed a vigorous swimmer in the river below. After watching his strokes for a few minutes one of the observers remarked that no doubt the swimmer was a Quaker. The other scoffed at such conjecture but they agreed to wait. When the man emerged from the river they asked him, "Are you a member of the Society of Friends?" Surprised in his turn, the swimmer replied, "Yes, I am a Quaker, but how in the world could you tell?" "Easy enough," answered the first gentleman, "You were swimming against the current."

I speak or write on this theme with a grave sense of responsibility and a willing awareness that I can claim to speak only for myself as I have earnestly tried to find the Quaker way. Since ours is a non-creedal, non-sacramental religion, no one Quaker can speak for all. We seek to view the whole of life sacramentally and such unity as we have in the Religious Society of Friends is found not in doctrine but in experience.

The thinking of early Friends is helpful here: William Penn wrote, "It is not Opinion or Speculation or Notions of what is true; or assent to or Subscription of Articles or Propositions, though never so soundly worded, that makes a man a true believer or a true Christian." Barclay both confirms and expands this, "Friends were not gathered together by unity of opinion or by a tedious and particular disquisition of notions . . . but the manner of the gathering was by a secret want which many truly tender and serious souls found in themselves . . ."

There is one other distinction that I feel needed at the very beginning. Quakerism is neither Catholic nor Protestant, though it has kinship with both approaches. The point here

is the basis of authority. For the devout Roman Catholic the final authority in matters of faith and morals is the Voice of the supernatural Church. For the Protestant, generally and historically speaking, it is the Word of a supernaturally inspired Scripture. The Quaker finds both the fellowship of faith and the wisdom of the past helpful, but these are not identical with Church and Book and he rejects both *as ultimate authority*. His "Authority" is found in the inward experience of the seeking soul, confirmed or corrected as may be, by the corporate experience of the worshipping community of believers.

What then is the Quaker Approach?

I should like to think of the Quaker approaches to Truth and to Society. All approaches of whatever kind begin with an assumption. Probably the most nearly universally accepted assumption among Friends is that there is a Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. Some would identify this with the historic Jesus of Nazareth; probably more would think of it as the Eternal Spirit of Truth, in our tradition called Christ, but existent from the beginning. (In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word was God.) Some would not feel the need of any name but would be content with metaphor: The Light Within, the Inner Light, the Seed of God, the indwelling Presence, the Wisdom that is Pure. Perhaps our most familiar phrase is "that of God in every man." Indeed in the realm of the Spirit figures alone are adequate; definitions are not only difficult but dangerous. They tend to become dogma, and Friends have rightly held not that God *spoke*, but that God *speaks*. Creation is not ended but continuing, inspiration is not closed in a canon of scripture but available in the hearts of men.

The quest that rises in response to such a "secret want" and such a faith in a direct and continuing revelation, takes form in Meetings for Worship and Meetings for Business or Discipline.

The Quaker Meeting for Worship is a quiet "waiting before the Lord" in confident expecta-

tion that the spirit of the living God will be felt, and in holy obedience to its invading presence. The framework is silence. There is no altar or pulpit, no priest or choir, no bell or candle. Each worshipper bears a full weight of responsibility for the ministry to the whole but no one is left in lonely isolation in his search for Truth. Whittier speaks of "the silence magnified by these still forms on either side." In such communion, the whole is greater than the mere sum of all the parts and under this Light or 'Covering,' the faithful worshippers know each other in that which is Eternal.

Barclay testifies in his *Apology*, the most notable single statement of Quaker doctrine, "For when I came into the silent assemblies of God's people, I felt a secret power among them, which touched my heart, and as I gave way unto it, I found the evil weakening in me and the good raised up; and so I became thus knit and united unto them, hungering more and more after an increase of this power and life."

As young Alexander Parker wrote of his experience in 1660:

"Those who are brought to a pure still waiting upon God in the Spirit are come nearer to the Lord than words are, though not a word be spoken to the hearing of the outward ear, for God is a spirit and in the spirit is He worshipped. ". . . and this is the end of all words and writings to bring people to the eternal living word."

That this approach to the "pure wisdom" that is of God is still valid and still available to the genuine seeker, I have ample evidence from my AFSC experience. I remember a Turkish student who shared the Meeting for Worship with which a summer seminar closed. Deeply moved, as we walked toward the breakfast hall, he said quietly but firmly, "Now I *know* what to do with my life." Or the high school boy after a week's experience—his first—with silent worship, who said, "The most significant experience I have had was the discovery that silence is the most intimate form of communication with God and my fellows." Or the young man, facing imprisonment for conscience sake, who wrote me of his embarrassment and confusion in his first World Affairs Camp,

years before. "Then, one morning, in the silence, something spoke to me," he wrote. "I found a new direction for my life and I have tried to follow it ever since.

The Meeting for Worship is rightly held to be the dynamic center of the Quaker approach. But the Meeting for Business is based on the same principle and is scarcely less significant. It is decidedly a religious exercise. Here the assumption is that one Light leads to unity if the search is faithful. Decisions are never reached by a numbering of noses, by a 'division' into majority and minority. To do so would be to tear the whole garment of Truth. Fox admonished Friends, "Keep your Meetings in the power of God, and in His Wisdom and in the love of God." To do this requires high seriousness (not necessarily solemnity) and often long patience. But the results are worth the discipline. Friends come together not to win an argument nor to 'make' a parliamentary point. (There are no parliamentary procedures and the only officer is a Clerk whose duty is to gather and give expression to the "sense of the Meeting.") Here, as in the Meeting for Worship, each concerned member is responsible for sharing his best insights and giving earnest consideration to those of others. Where differences arise, loving consideration and quiet waiting often, indeed usually, result in a new and better solution than any *one* member had proposed. I have known nearly half the time of a long business session to be spent in silence without any feeling that a minute had been wasted; and I have known the rightly expressed objection of one deeply concerned Friend to delay important action without any one feeling defeat or frustration. More often, I have heard non-Quaker visitors amazed at the seemingly sudden sense of peace and unity with which agreement may come even after long and difficult deliberation, refer to the quiet approvals with which the final minute is received as "a miracle." And indeed it is, the miracle of love.

This is not mere unanimity and it is more than 'democracy.' It is action based on the daring assumption that the faithful practice of corporate silence, "under the Light," can lead

the gathered company into corporate witness to a common body of truth. One able and experienced leader in the world of large affairs has declared that the Quaker approach to decisions is the major contribution Friends have to make to the understanding and use of non-violence in the conflict situations of our time.

Just as the Inner Light leads into oneness of Spirit in Meetings for Worship and decision, so the experience of the Meeting leads inevitably into social practices or concerns. Indeed, we shall not understand the "testimonies" unless we understand that they arise, not from logical deductions from doctrines, but from a whole attitude of personality that is developed in the Meeting for Worship. And Harold Loukes, the British Quaker whom I have just paraphrased, goes on to say truly that there is nothing particularly original in the Quaker position on Christian brotherhood. The originality, the radical element, in the early Quaker witness was that Friends tried to behave as if this concept of brotherhood were true in practice now or, as modern scholars would have us read, "The kingdom of heaven is within your reach." A contemporary Friend put it in concrete terms in response to the familiar challenge that you can't trust the Russians. "My religion does not require me to *trust* the Russians but to *love* the Russians and trust *God*." "This," says Loukes at another point (and I agree with him), "is the distinction between the Quaker position and the general tendency of organized Christianity."

It is important to insist here that the Society of Friends is not a relief agency but a Religious Society (a religious fellowship in the seventeenth century meaning) and that the relief work of the American Friends Service Committee is not primarily a humanitarian social service but social work under religious concern. As such it is more interested in bearing witness to the validity of Love and in bringing men to the knowledge of Truth than in merely clothing their bodies or bringing them into membership in a group.

Howard Brinton and Roger Wilson may both be quoted here with profit. Brinton says:

"The pioneering quality of Quaker social work is largely due to the character of the meeting for worship. Silent waiting worship permits a fresh and direct facing of facts under conditions in which the conscience becomes sensitized."

Wilson, who speaks from extensive experience as head of British Friends Relief Service during the war, adds: "Undertaking work under concern means that the whole service is the Lord's and puts the chairman, the general secretary, the shorthand typist, the lorry driver, the store keeper, the doctor, and the accountant under an equal moral and spiritual commitment. And because as we recognize in the whole of our Quaker method of meeting for worship and discipline, there is equality before the Lord, so there was equality of responsibility in FRS which invalidated all orthodox conceptions of executive relationships. For in the work of the Lord, the most junior member of the Service had a moral obligation to take responsibility for ends, and therefore for means, and unless he did take this responsibility the service ceased to express that part of its nature which was rooted in personal service 'under concern.'"

Possibly because of their testimony *against* all war, possibly because of their long experience of imprisonments and sufferings, but for whatever reasons, Friends have always been especially concerned for the relief of suffering and particularly of man made suffering without distinction as to 'friend' or 'foe.' But this testimony of the 'sensitized conscience' of the worshipping community is by no means its only expression.

Although the testimony against war was equally clear, it was not so immediately an issue for so many Friends in the seventeenth century, and the testimony against oaths was perhaps the one by which Quakers were best known in their first period. With the winning of the right of simple affirmation, not just for themselves but for all men, and the growth in recognition and respect for civil and religious liberties, emphasis on this testimony declined. By many it even came to be regarded as a

quaint and largely irrelevant survival, like the custom of plain dress. Circumstances of our time have brought it again to the center of attention and given it a heightened emphasis. We are seeing it anew, linked with the testimony against military service, as part of the central question of our time: the relation of the individual to the state.

The simplest and earliest bases of the refusal to take or administer oaths of any kind are obedience to the familiar New Testament command and the insistence on a single standard of truth-telling. There is a curious parallel with modern times in that the oath normally tendered to early Friends was to abjure the authority of the Pope and the doctrine of transubstantiation. Although the primary objection seems to have been to the *form* of the oath and not to its substance, Friends' proven devotion to freedom of religious opinion (even for Roman Catholics in a day when that was not common) suggests that they resisted on conscientious grounds attempts to restrict that freedom. That the center of emphasis and suspicion has shifted from religion to politics is a comment on our times but does not affect the principle involved.

Eight thousand Quakers were in prison at one time in seventeenth century England. Braithwaite sums up the significance of this Quaker approach to contemporary affairs:

"Their noblest contribution lay in the constancy and character of their protest against the invasion by the state of the conscience of the Christian . . . Its character is as notable as its constancy. When the law could not be obeyed, the Quaker suffered its consequences without evasion or resistance. He stood clear of all plots against the constituted authorities, and could be no party to revolution by violence. Masson says, 'by their peculiar method of open violation of the law and passive resistance only . . . rendered a service to the common cause of all the Non-conformist sects which has never been sufficiently acknowledged.'"

It is their peace testimony, or as I would prefer to say, the testimony against all war, by which Quakers are probably most widely known today. *Fortune* magazine, aptly described one attitude of the 'gentile,' that is non-pacifist, world toward this approach: "The Quakers . . .

a people peculiar enough to be picturesque and small enough to be harmless."

The source of this testimony is clearly indicated by Edward Burroughs' letter to soldiers in Ireland in 1655: "This Light reproves you in secret of violence . . . And it will teach you not to strengthen the hands of evil doers . . . And it will teach you not to make war but to preserve peace on the earth . . ."

Howard Brinton makes this clear in a passage that shows the emphasis of the Quaker approach as distinct from much of the thinking of contemporary pacifism:

" . . . Quaker objection to war was based primarily on feeling and intuition rather than on rational arguments or scriptural authority. The intuition was dynamic; an enhancement of life rather than a part of doctrine. The Light Within gives more than knowledge of moral values. It gives also power to act on values. 'For all dwelling in the Light that comes from Jesus (Fox, Epistle 1657) it leads out of wars, leads out of strife, leads out of the occasion of wars, and leads out of the earth up to God, and out of earthly mindedness into heavenly mindedness.'"

I have implied that the Quaker approach to peace has negative as well as positive aspects. Fox's first public statement on the subject was a declaration of conscientious objection to war. It seems clear that just as the light and power of electricity in the physical world requires both plus and minus particles, so spiritual light and power require both positive and negative charges for their release. No one has stated this more explicitly than Henry Cadbury, Chairman of the American Friends Service Committee. "The positive side of the Quaker approach to peace is inseparable from the negative. They supplement each other, are consistent with each other, and neither can be expected to be effective without the other . . ."

It is impossible of course in one short statement to explore systematically the Quaker approach to all contemporary affairs, but it does seem important to explore briefly two others in which there is widespread current interest and concern. These are Brotherhood and Education.

Friends have historically had a concern for the social problem involved in race relations

arising, inevitably, out of the belief that there is 'that of God' in every man and a felt necessity to make social behavior consistent with religious belief. Both Fox and Penn urged Friends to have a care for Negroes and Indians. The story of Woolman and the gradual but early abolition of slave holding in the Society is well known. So is the continuing concern for the welfare of Indians and other minority groups among us. But the Quaker method is slow and in this, as in other areas, our reach is well beyond our grasp. One explanation lies in the remark of a Friend with whom I was discussing the "State of Society" who said, "The only trouble with Vermont Quakers is that they are too much like Vermonters." (Only it wasn't Vermont of which we were speaking!) However, the ideal has been well defined in a statement of the Philadelphia Yearly Meetings of 1949: "Jesus taught, and exemplified in His life, that love is the highest law and that every individual, of every race and nation, is of supreme worth. The Quaker approach in this area might well be guided by two advices given by the wise John Woolman exactly two hundred years ago: "Whoever rightly advocates the Cause of some, thereby promotes the good of all," and at Burlington Meeting, 1758, "It is not a time for delay."

One hundred or more years ago Horace Mann and his co-workers were striving mightily for a system of public schools in the belief that education would provide a solvent for most if not all social ills. Today we are not quite so sure. The system of public schools and colleges is firmly fixed in the American scene; faith in education is well-nigh universal in the American mind. But the ills remain; they appear to multiply.

Aldous Huxley, in his searching study of *Ends and Means*, has observed that the decline of democracy has coincided with the coming to political power of the second generation of the compulsorily educated. A fairly recent and fully responsible study of our university system has challenged our present 'higher' education as not only a failure but positively harmful to our sense and practice of community. Such judg-

ments may not record the full truth but there is more than enough truth in them to compel our earnest attention.

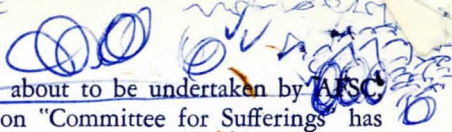
What is wrong? I suggest that we have achieved a serious unbalance between *thought, intellect, and reason* on the one hand and *wisdom, feeling, imagination* on the other. One of the many recent tributes to Einstein, certainly one of the greatest minds of our age, quoted him as saying that "imagination is more important than knowledge." Not much modern educational theory or practice appears to recognize this truth. In the last century, John Ruskin declared that "Education does not mean teaching people to know what they do not know; it means teaching them to behave as they do not behave." This concept, I believe, is wholly consistent with Quaker approach to education. Howard Brinton has insisted that thinking may tell us what is true or false, but only feeling can tell us what is right or wrong.

Quaker schools have traditionally patterned themselves after the family and sought to emphasize and achieve the values of community. The AFSC work camp seeks always to provide a balanced experience of the three main forces that operate on the growth of the whole personality: Worship, Work and Words. I have found this emphasis and balance in the Quaker ideal of education nowhere better expressed than in a report of the President of Haverford College: "Courses of study, buildings and grounds, endowment, and alumni organization all are important. But they are important only as they contribute to an environment in which young men may be encouraged to grow in intellectual ability, in moral and spiritual sensitivity, and in the courage to act upon their convictions . . ."

But we have not yet reached the heart of the matter and we shall not learn the secret of the Quaker approach until we have recognized and accepted the role of suffering.

It is no accident that the first organized body of Friends in the world was called and is still known as the Meeting for Sufferings. It is symbolic, I think, that in discussion of a

*The quiet
Battle -*



~~new project about to be undertaken by AFSC
the expression "Committee for Sufferings" has
been used. William Penn, three hundred years
ago, defined the Quaker's choice as "not fight-
ing but suffering," and a message from the
Meeting for Sufferings, dated London, Fifth
Month 1955, concludes, "Our hope for a new
world will be fulfilled when men are willing
to suffer rather than to cause sufferings."~~

I think of James Naylor in 1660, describ-
ing the Spirit which delights to do no evil, "It
never rejoiceth but through sufferings . . ." I
recall the petition of a number of early Friends
imprisoned in Lancaster Castle without trial.
After months of waiting they claimed their
right to be heard, explaining that they did not
wish their families to become "an Unnecessary
Charge and burthen" upon others and conclud-
ing, "Wee Desire nothing from you but yt wee
may live quietly and peaceably in our owne
houses, Eate our owne bread and follow our
owne Callings in the feare of God for the good
of all; and to mete together to serve and wor-
ship our God according as Hee requireth of us.
But, if you will not Grant these things unto
us, then shall we lye downe in the peace of
our God and patiently Suffer under you."

This was the Spirit that overcame persecu-
tion and established liberty in the seventeenth
century. This is the Spirit that overcomes the
World in our day.

This is the Spirit of the Quaker Approach
to Contemporary Affairs as I understand it.
But it is not limited to Quakers; it is not
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AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE
Middle Atlantic Regional Office
20 South 12th Street
Philadelphia 7, Pennsylvania

Available at 10c each or \$7.00 per hundred,
postpaid.

3M-12-56-L.P.-1st ptg.
3M-9-57-L.P.-2nd ptg.