

HOPE IN A CULTURE OF FEAR

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LET US PRAY: Enlighten our minds and hearts, O God, by the working of your Spirit, that we may be brought into that fullness of truth promised us by your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

“WHEN PEACE LIKE A RIVER”

These famous words are from the hymn “It Is Well with My Soul” or, variously, “When Peace Like a River.” As the story goes, Horatio Spafford was a Chicago businessman in the mid 19th century who had faced a number of tragedies including business losses and the death of his son. A friend offered Spafford and his family a trip to Europe and he and his wife and daughters decided to go. At the last minute he was unable to sail but sent his family ahead. Horatio would join them as soon as he could. Some time later he received the news that the ship with his family aboard had gone down and that his wife had survived but their daughters were lost.

Spafford set sail as soon as possible. He asked the captain of his ship to let him know when they were passing over the spot where the ship with his family had sunk. Upon reaching that place on the ocean, Horatio stood on the deck and prayed. He wrote,

When peace like a river
attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot,
Thou hast taught me to say,
“It is well, it is well
with my soul.”

It is well with my soul,
It is well,
It is well
with my soul.¹

I have used this story and the lines of the hymn on a number of occasions. It speaks to my heart and is part of a series of quotations, hymns, anecdotes and experiences that form my underlying sense of

assurance and hope as well as reflecting my “world view,” that which I hold to be true. Let me share with you some autobiography.

Growing up in Richmond, Indiana in the 1950s and 1960s was about as typically middle class and middle of the road as one can imagine. My family were all middle class professionals with college educations and my sister and I grew up with that kind of expectation for ourselves.

We lived in a neighborhood made up of newer houses on Waterfall Road (the road where Quaker Hill is located.). Everyone knew each other. There were some retired folks but mostly it was working fathers and stay at home mothers with 2.3 children. The children were welcome in every house. The sound of a banging wood framed screen door is a clear memory. In the summer months the kids were either at Springwood Lake for swimming, accompanied by mothers, or running loose in the neighborhood, or being run off the property at Quaker Hill, or playing in the woods and at the waterfall. Darkness often found us still “out” and I can hear parents, standing in front yards, calling us home. As children we felt safe largely because all of the parents took some responsibility for all of the children. We had little of the protective gear that I see children wearing as they play today. It was life as a kid without a helmet. Our helmets were one another.

My parents were pretty typical of the others up and down the street. My father went to work every morning (almost never on Saturday or Sunday) and was home by 5:30 p.m. Mom, before she went back to college, was always at home. Even the groceries were delivered. Mother was the most demonstrative in physical loving/touching ways with my sister and I. But, I do have a sense memory of sitting on my Dad’s lap. I feel a scratchy beard and a scratchy shirt (always heavy on the starch) and can still smell the shirt starch and Camel cigarettes and “supper on the stove.”

When I was nineteen I was going to college in the evenings and working downtown in a men’s clothing store. Main Street was still open with cars and buses back and forth and people shopping on

Monday and Friday nights and Saturdays. On this particular Saturday it was pretty usual when, BOOM! Richmond blew up! The windows in the foyer of the store I worked in blasted out but, thank God, the bus had just come by and there was no one looking at the displays. Part of the ceiling in the store collapsed. I remember that Alex, one of the employees, headed for the back door. Alex was from Greece and had been in the midst of a civil war. Later we learned that a gas leak and explosives stored for farmers in a large hardware/sporting goods store had combined in a circumstantial accident. But in those first hours our town was in shock as we began to understand that a block had disappeared, cars had been thrown through store windows, fires were burning and people were dead.

I remember very clearly that I was not afraid. Naive? Probably. But my life had taught me that I was safe. My father picked me up that Saturday and I could see the relief on his face. I later learned that his experiences of World War II had flashed back on him as he drove down the side streets to find me. Later I knew that my world had changed. Vietnam, assassinations (Robert Kennedy's is the one that really got to me) and mistrust of those who were supposed to "be in charge" and "protecting/helmeting" were still ahead.

This is not an exercise in nostalgia. I do not have any sense in me of wanting to "go back." Not only can't you go home again but you don't need to do so. Fortunately for good memories, and maybe unfortunately for bad ones, so long as our minds function healthily we do not lose our past.

I have told you this story to give you some idea of a life lived, thus far, with a sense of present safety and hope always. This is not to say that there is not trial, tragedy, regret and pain. Natural evil and moral evil are real. We see the evidence all around us. It is not just terrorism but all sorts of terrible things that we witness and hear about. Floods and storms, poverty and abuse, unexplainable disease and death and on and on seem to be pillars of fear. It is here in the U.S. It is worldwide, often to degrees we protected ones can barely imagine. Any trip outside of "our world" shows us moments and

systems of evil that are beyond our comprehension. I spent too many years as a pastor to say that evil is not real and not devastating.

But those are circumstances, circumstances arising out of void and negation, but which can be lived among in safety. Safety is the condition related to hope which is beyond the accidents and circumstances that come with living. “When peace like a river attendeth my way...”

On September 11, 2001 I was pastor of Wilmington Friends Meeting. It was a normal Tuesday morning and I was preparing to go to Wilmington College and teach a class. Regina, the associate pastor, came in to the office with the news. She pushed a television into a place where we could see what was going on. We saw the second plane hit the towers. I remember talking with some of my students later on in the day and working at calming their fears. For me there was some sense of shock but not of fear.

Now I live in London. People there tell me that what United States Americans now experience is what others have known for some time. For instance, one of the reasons that the streets of London seem so dirty is that the majority of trash bins were removed, years ago, after bombs had been hidden in them by terrorists and exploded. Last summer I was in Uganda where there is often good reason to be afraid - crossing the border there is a nervous thing! But I am not afraid.

Naive? Again, maybe. But my life experience has taught me, and I have learned internally, to hope and to trust. I believe that God’s desire is hope, love, joy, grace, mercy, solidarity. This is from my religious training. That training was mostly missing from my childhood except in a sort of benevolent, middle-class, Christmas and Easter way. What a calm non-intrusive God that is!

Most of my religious formation is from the Benedictine tradition (I am still an oblate) and from my days at Earlham School of Religion. It also comes from my own religious experience of God’s loving care for me. Over my desk are a crucifix, a picture of St. Benedict

offering up his soul and body at death, and a print of “None Shall Make Them Afraid,” sometimes called “Fierce Feathers” (the one with Native Americans painted and armed for war breaking into meeting for worship).

So far I have shared with you some of my life experience and a little bit about what I believe. I began this way because of the relationship among experience, theology and belief as explained by Richard McBrien in both editions of his helpful book, *Catholicism*. He tries to diagram the dynamic to show how experience, theology and belief are distinct yet interrelated technically and experientially.²

From what he points out I conclude that there is really no such thing as unmediated- and unreflected-upon experience. Immediately the one who has an experience or who receives a revelation asks a question. “What was that?” “What happened?” This leads to the area, for the context of religious experience, of theology as the activity of sorting through what happened. On the other side of this are our tentative answers which we call our beliefs. It should be obvious that this is not a linear dynamic but is, rather, more circular. Who we are, what we experience, how we sort through it, what we believe, are all related to who we have been, what has happened to us, what we have thought and answered and what we have held to be true. (A rich discussion of this understanding is available, for those who are interested, in Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*.)

My life experience has taught me to have assurance, a sense of ultimately being safe on my father’s lap. Why am I safe? How do I hope beyond pure wishful thinking? I have come to certain beliefs about that. I think that this all gives some relevant response to our central question about “Hope in a Culture of Fear.”

I am going to share with you some of my theological process beginning with the texts we are using in our time together from scripture and from George Fox. From there I want to investigate the nature of hope and the source of our hope. This will begin to move

us into what I believe. Out of that I want to offer a challenge to all of us as Friends.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:5, 11

“...for you are all children of light and children of the day... Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.” (NRSV)

By themselves these lines are comforting and tone setting. However, in seminary I was taught that to understand in a passage of scripture one needs to know the WHOLE of the pericope that is being referred to or quoted. What difference does it make? I recall a television commercial for chicken nuggets several years ago. The idea was that the advertised brand was superior to what was found in other fast food restaurants because it contained only chicken breast meat. A customer asks the worker what is in the first brand of chicken nuggets and the reply is, “Chicken parts.” “What parts?” the customer asks. The answer given is “Parts is parts!” What we want is “real chicken.” We want to know what the text really says.

Here is the whole passage, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11.

Now concerning the times and seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When they say, “There is peace and security,” then suddenly destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who

died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

Here we have not only a word *about* hope. We also have a word about where hope comes from and what we are supposed to do about it. It is one thing to say that we are children of light and of the Day; easy as a matter of fact. But what about the question in our own hearts when the night draws close? Where is hope? What is it? What do we say to others who are without hope?

Most scholars agree that 1 Thessalonians is the earliest of Paul's extant writings and dates from around the year 50 C.E.. There is also general agreement that all of Paul's letters are written with the mind of a missionary. Here we have Paul in early career. He is applying his thoughts, beliefs, the gospel he has been given to proclaim, to a concrete situation. The audience of 1 Thessalonians was made up of people who were not destitute but were part of the urban poor. They were faced with questions about how to live what they had heard Paul preach to them. How are they to live in a pagan culture? They cannot escape by being rich enough to shut out the culture around them neither are they so desperate as to have no expectations placed upon them by society. Robert W. Wall in his "Introduction to Epistolary Literature" in *The New Interpreter's Bible (vol X)*, gives some details for understanding Paul generally and for understanding his central message.

(1)...the most important theological themes of Pauline preaching (e.g., the promise and fulfillment of God's salvation, the results of Christ's death and resurrection, the life and witness of the church) and of the central theological controversies of his Gentile mission (e.g., election, law, theodicy, Israel) can be traced through the sequence of letters. Paul's theology was a work in progress.³

(2)...Paul was a christological monotheist...Because of Christ, the confession of monotheistic faith had now

been expanded to “one God, one Lord” (1 Cor. 8:6); and the social marker of God’s Israel was the public confession that Jesus is Lord (Rom. 10:9). Those who belong to the Lord Jesus are the very same members of eschatological Israel whom God will vindicate on the future “Day of the Lord” (= resurrection from the dead).⁴

(3)...Pauline letters... (were) intended for a readership formed from alienated and displaced city people. They were written to aid new converts in discriminating between the morality and life-style of a true Israel, and that belonging to “this evil age”...themes address moral or religious conflict with the surrounding pagan culture or with the social institutions of urban life... the Thessalonian congregation was primarily poor.⁵

(4) ...the acceptance of right beliefs, or what he refers to as “the obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5; 16:26), yields right behaviors as the result of participating by faith in Christ’s death and resurrection (Col. 1:9, 10). Believers become in life what they already become in Christ...⁶

Paul in 1 Thessalonians exhorted his listeners to live according to the gospel he preached to them. He attempted to answer two parts of their dilemma’s questions. “Is a Christian deprived of God’s blessings if she dies before Christ’s second advent?” “When will the Lord come to rescue?” Paul’s answers, in keeping with what we read above from the Robert Wall quotations, were encouragements to *live in the context of hope*.

Paul told the Thessalonians that God’s promises were to bless them whether they were alive or dead. They were not to worry about the timing. They were to live with hope. This hope was based upon the promise that they were God’s children and that the day of the Lord was, in some sense, already upon them. They were children of light who belonged to the day instead of the darkness. Faith, hope, and love were, therefore, like armor for them. The Thessalonian

Christians were to encourage one another by living holy lives and by proclaiming to one another, reminding one another, who they were in Christ. The rest of Chapter 5 is an exhortation to all of that.

GEORGE FOX, EPISTLE 227

“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.”

This is a familiar passage that many of us hold dear. I have part of this Epistle in the front of my Bible. What we have quoted is relevant to our theme and in itself is a real word of hope. However, once again we need to look at the whole of what Fox wrote.

Sing and rejoice you children of the Day and of the Light. For the Lord is at work in this thick night of darkness that may [be] felt. Truth does flourish as the rose, the lilies do grow among the thorns, the plants a-top of the hills, and upon them the lambs do skip and play. Never heed the tempests nor the storms, floods or rains, for the Seed, Christ, is over all and does reign.

And so, be of good Faith and valiant for the Truth. For the Truth can live in the jails. Fear not the loss of the fleece, for it will grow again. And follow the Lamb, if it be under the beast’s horns or under the beast’s heels, for the Lamb shall have the victory over them all.

All live in the Seed, Christ, your Way that never fell. [In him] you do see over all the ways of Adam’s and Eve’s sons and daughters in the Fall...

So in the Seed, Christ, stand and dwell, in whom you have Life and Peace, the Life that was with the Father before the world began.

(The 11th month, 1663) ⁷

Our f/Friend T. Canby Jones often refers to George Fox as “Dear George.” Here we have a beautiful example of Fox’s tenderness. He is writing to Friends who are going through a period of fairly

intense persecution. They have been deprived of many things and are spending a lot of time in jail. What Fox has to say as a word of hope is not new. What he wrote is so near to what Paul wrote on similar occasions that we have a fine example of why early Friends have been described as Primitive Christianity.

Doug Gwyn in his powerful book, *Apocalypse of the Word*, reminds us that Fox and early Friends preached a core message about the Reign of God and the second coming of Christ, the parousia. They believed and preached not a delayed Christ but a present Christ.

...the core of Fox's message is found in the repeated proclamation that "Jesus Christ is come to teach his people himself." Clearly, this is a bold statement on the issue of the parousia. Fox's preaching represents a historic return to the consistent eschatology of Jesus and the New Testament Church. Fox portrays every aspect of the Christian experience within an apocalyptic horizon, from personal experience and its relation to scripture, to Christian worship, ministry, and Church order, to the Church's relation to the state and the ultimate consummation of history...

Christ is come by his Spirit to judge, to empower, to war against Satan, and to rule among his people. The kingdom of God is revealed concretely on earth now...Fox by no means underestimates the problem of sin, but witnesses to the greater power of the risen Lord to save and gather his people...

...The content of the Christian revelation is eschatological: the risen Lord reveals the realities of the end-time - the last judgment, the righteousness of God, new creation - *now*.⁸

With 1 Thessalonians, George Fox refers to those who received his letter as "children of the Day, and of the Light." He reminds them that the Lord reigns! Now! The Day's children dwell in the reign of the Lord rather than in the reign of Adam and Eve's offspring.

George Fox writes that they are not to worry, in the sense of being anxious, and that they are to go on living in ways that “follow the Lamb.” What Wall said of Paul’s message can be applied to Fox. “Those who belong to the Lord Jesus are the very same members of eschatological Israel whom God will vindicate on the future ‘Day of the Lord’... Believers become in life what they have already become in Christ.”⁹

There is a familiar bit of music, sometimes wrongly said to be an old Quaker hymn. Though not of Friends’ origin, it can be heard as expressing the depth of Friends’ experience of hope and of trust. According to *Worship in Song: a Friends Hymnal*, the third verse is from the 1950s and reflects the McCarthy era.

My life goes on in endless song
above earth’s lamentations,
I hear the real, though far-off hymn
that hails a new creation.
Through all the tumult and the strife
I hear its music ringing,
it sounds an echo in my soul,
how can I keep from singing.

What though my joys and comforts die?
My Savior still is living.
What though the shadows gather round?
A new song Christ is giving.
No storm can shake my inmost calm,
while to that rock I’m clinging;
since Love commands both heaven and earth,
how can I keep from singing?

When tyrants tremble, sick with fear,
and hear their death knells ringing;
when friends rejoice both far and near,
how can I keep from singing?
In prison cell and dungeon vile

our thoughts to them are winging;
when friends by shame are undefiled,
how can I keep from singing?

I lift my eyes; the cloud grows thin;
I see the blue above it;
and day by day this pathway smooths,
since first I learned to love it.
The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart,
a fountain ever springing;
all things are mine since I am Christ's,
how can I keep from singing?¹⁰

THE MEANING OF THE TERM "HOPE"

John Punshon defines the word eschatology as "The branch of theology dealing with the last things - death, resurrection, judgment, heaven and hell."¹¹ The subject of Gwyn's *Apocalypse of the Word* is eschatology. This term applies to our discussion because, according to theologian Justo Gonzalez, "the subject of eschatology is hope."¹² The word *hope* may be defined as "confidence in God's goodness tempered by fear of (God's) justice... (Hope is) opposed to both despair and presumption."¹³

Gonzalez writes,

...the reign of God...is not another place, but another order - an order for which we hope, and which we can already touch and taste. No matter how surprising this might seem, Christian hope consists not in "going to heaven," but rather in having God's will be done "on earth as it is in heaven." Nor is the reign limited to certain things - those that are spiritual - leaving others (the material) aside. Just as the reign does not consist in "another place," nor is it limited to "other things." The reign of God encompasses all - heaven and earth, bodies and spirits...¹⁴

He continues,

...the reign consists in a new order under God's rule, and is characterized by service, justice, peace, consolation, and joy...Although the reign is a promise of God for the future, in a certain sense it is already a reality. It is a reality, because it has been inaugurated with the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. And it is also a reality because those who believe in the promise must now live as citizens of the reign of God...

Christian hope produces in us, not only trust and firmness in the faith, but also a different way of living. Giving "an account of the hope" that is in us (1 Pet. 3:15) is not only a matter of being able to explain it, but also and above all living out of that hope...¹⁵

My favorite theologian is the late Karl Rahner. To me, Rahner is clear and speaks in ways that call out in me the response, "This man speaks my mind." In his *Foundations of Christian Faith* he writes (and pardon the use of the masculine pronouns),

The life of a Christian is characterized by a "pessimistic" realism... Christian life is the acceptance of human existence as such, as opposed to a final protest against it. But this means that a Christian sees reality as it is. Christianity does not oblige him to see the reality of the world of his experience and the reality of his historical experience of life in an optimistic light. On the contrary, it obliges him to see this existence as dark and bitter and hard, and as an unfathomable and radical risk... A Christian is a person who believes that in the very course of his existence he really makes an ultimate and radical and irreversible decision in a matter which really concerns his ultimate and radical happiness, or his permanent and eternal loss. If he ventures to have this vision, if he maintains and wants to maintain this view of

the radical risk involved in reality, HE WILL TO BE SURE HAVE HOPE, AND HE WILL LEAP BEYOND HIMSELF TO THE PROMISE OF THE LIVING GOD THAT *HE* WILL TRIUMPH OVER THE RISK OF HUMAN EXISTENCE WITH HIS POWERFUL LOVE. But one has to see and recognize that life is threatened radically in order to grasp what God is and wants to be for us. It is only then that one can believe and hope and grasp God's promises in the good news of Jesus Christ...

...Christians too know joy at one moment and tears at another. They experience the grandeur and the vitality of human life, and at another moment they taste death, transitoriness and disappointment. But to be able to open oneself to the reality of life freely and unsystematically, and to do this without absolutizing either earthly life or death, this can be done only by someone who believes and hopes that the totality of the life which we can experience is encompassed by the holy mystery of eternal love.¹⁶

HOPE IN A CULTURE OF FEAR

Why are people afraid? Why is there a developing "culture of fear?" September 11, 2001 can make people afraid but it does not stand alone and become the cause of fear. What seems to many to be disappearing is the sense of neighborhood and mutual "helmeting," a sitting on Dad's lap. What seems to be more usual are explosions on Main Street and planes flying into buildings. The same can be said of any event or set of events with their proximate causes and results. It is too easy, and, therefore, tempting to simply turn to the circumstances of recent fearful events. Circumstances are not in themselves causes of fear but they may add to the overriding fearfulness that eventually develops into a culture. People are afraid in a pervasive way that builds up the culture, the reign of fear. Fear feeds on circumstances and grows into a self-perpetuating monster. Fear becomes the underlying basic out of which all circumstances are judged.

In his novel, *Dixie City Jam*, James Lee Burke has these lines of conversation and reflection. A female main character is speaking of a really bad man. She says,

“...he’s evil in a way I don’t know how to describe. It’s as if he has the power to steal the air out of a room. If I think about him, I can’t breathe. It’s like I’m drowning.

Her husband replies,

“The only power he has is what we allow our fear to give him.”

And then he reflects,

“But I was falling prey to that old self-serving notion that well-intended rhetoric can remove a stone bruise from the soul.”¹⁷

The counterfeit hope arising out of the culture’s narrative is not good enough. This false narrative is built upon an underlying basis of fear. Here is a topic for a whole other presentation! A number of contemporary Christian pastors, teachers, activists and theologians including Walter Brueggemann, James Wall and Stanley Hauerwas have written about the clashing claims of secular cultures and the God of Israel, Christianity and Islam. Brueggemann, who is not only a premier scholar of the Hebrew Scriptures but a powerful theological voice, is helpful in his ongoing use of the term “narrative.” Surrounding cultures and the Reign of God tell conflicting stories that narrate conflicting truth claims about reality. Brueggemann is clear that God’s story and the reality which it proclaims is the hope filled content spoken through the prophets. This story is the prophetic proclamation of the Church.¹⁸

If we have heard the word of hope that arises out of God’s narrative; if we are indeed children of day and of the light who dwell in God’s story, we should have, we must have, something to proclaim. We often do a fair job of proclamation in the sense of “letting our lives speak.” But that is not sufficient! It is not enough! As his student and friend I often heard Elton Trueblood speak of the inadequacy of letting lives speak. Inadequate because, he would say, “No life is

good enough!” You have to say “why,” what motivates your action, your service?

We are called to give an account of the hope that is in us. We ought not to be afraid, ought not to give in to the culture of fear. We hear young married people who say that they have decided not to have children in a world like ours. This is what the world’s narrative of fear produces as wisdom. But in God’s narrative we have places like Luke 1 where God becomes, through incarnation, the story. God’s story of hope dwells among us. Mary, in what is the first missionary journey, carries the proclamation to her family. The child, who will be known as John the Baptist, leaps for joy in the womb of Elizabeth. He leaps for all the children! Hope is more than an idea to be discussed, it is a joy to be proclaimed. (Pastors: THAT will preach!)

Edward Scillebeecx in *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, writes that,

Experience is communicable. Anyone who has had an experience *ipso facto* becomes himself a witness; he has a message. He describes what has happened to him. This narration opens up a new possibility of life for others, it sets something in motion. Thus the authority of experience becomes operative in the telling. The authority of experience has a narrative structure.¹⁹

This is not a call to enter into a religion of certainty that seeks to proclaim all of the answers to all of the fears. “If we COULD just go back to sitting on our fathers’ laps!” it shouts. That sort of fundamentalism is just another fearful reaction to frightening circumstances. Its basis is not hope, but fear. While intending comfort, which is not the heart of God’s narrative in the first place, its pronouncements sound hurtful and even hateful. Fundamentalism is a dues-paying member of the culture of fear.

Friends today revel in diversity. We talk intently about unity not uniformity. I believe that is good. It is a spiritually healthy place to be as we have courage to live in the questions knowing that we are

not immune to being fearful. But our word is not supposed to be a sort of anything goes.

Friends are not just seekers. The positive word has to do with the proclamation that Friends are finders! The powerful and authentic testimony of Thomas Kelly to Germantown Friends Meeting in 1938 is one of the purest expressions of this positive word about Friends experience of finding, having been found, by the source of hope.

To you in this room who are seekers, to you, young and old who have toiled all night and caught nothing, but who want to launch out into the deeps and let down your nets for a draught, I want to speak as simply, as tenderly, as clearly as I can. For God *can* be found. There *is* a last rock for your souls, a resting place of absolute peace and joy and power and radiance and security. There is a Divine Center into which your life can slip, a new and absolute orientation in God, a Center where you live with Him and out of which you see all of life, through new and radiant vision, tinged with new sorrows and pangs, new joys unspeakable and full of glory.²⁰

Once lives have slipped into the “Divine Center” that Kelly writes about, into Rahner’s “holy mystery of eternal love,” then nothing else will suffice. All other answers are poor substitutes, inadequate narratives and false words that attempt to fill the gap between the culture of fear and the hope that is offered.

Francis Howgill (1618-1669) was one of the “Westmorland Seekers” visited by George Fox. Howgill, who was to die in prison, wrote in 1656,

If you build upon anything or have confidence in anything which stands in time and is on this side eternity and (the) Being of beings, your foundation will be swept away, and night will come upon you, and all your gathered-in things and taken-on and imitated will all fail you...Why gad you abroad? Why trim you yourselves with the saints’ words, when you are ignorant of the life?

Return, return to Him that is the first Love, and the first-born of every creature, who is the Light of the World... Return home to within, sweep your houses all. The gnat is there, the little leaven is there, the grain of mustard-seed you will see, which the Kingdom of God is like;...and here you will see your Teacher not removed into a corner, but present when you are upon your beds and about your labour, convincing, instructing, leading, correcting, judging and giving peace to all that love and follow Him.²¹

This is serious! It is not only a question of the basis for us to live, individually and as a people, in hope in the midst of a culture of fear. It is also a question of our responsibility to speak, in word and action, a narrative of hope that is adequate. It is a question of our responsibility as seekers AND finders, as receivers AND proclaimers. We have a duty, an obligation, a calling to tell out what we know in the depths of our spirits.

Make no mistake. The Lamb's War is not just a historical oddity. In our inner parts and in the world we live in it is the war against fear. I want to say that Friends are called to be warriors of hope! We must proclaim, we must "sing and rejoice...as children of the Day and of the Light," not just out of our own joy and personal hope but out of the need of those bound in the culture of fear.

Just over 50 years ago, in his opening address at the Friends World Conference held at Oxford, England, Elton Trueblood said it clearly.

...contemporary Quakerism is guilty of treason to a great dream. Thousands of modern Friends not only do not think of themselves as missionaries, but are a bit uncomfortable when that word is mentioned. Does it not sound a little pompous, they ask, as though we had a superior message to give? After all, they say, since other people have a right to their own opinions, we ought not to proselytize. We make a virtue out of our dullness and boast discreetly of our policy of spiritual aloofness.

Thousands of those who call themselves Quakers not only never *quake* themselves, but never shake anyone else... Now this we must say as clearly as possible: the modern tendency to avoid evangelization or to feel condescension towards those who engage in it is a *heresy*. It is a sign, not of Christian humility, but rather of cowardice, of snobbishness and of spiritual decay...It is part of the cleverness of sin that it so easily wears the mask of virtue...²²

Hope is the street we live on in God's reign, God's neighborhood. Here we *are* safe. We look out for one another in prayer and deed. We take responsibility for one another. We are always held by God. When we face the world with its culture of fear, but also with its cultures filled with goodness which are part of God's renewing of all creation, we are protected by our "breastplate of faith and love... our helmet (of) the hope of salvation."

We are children of the Day and of the Light, dwellers in God's reign, who live also in that culture of fear that is around us. That culture, in good and bad, lives out of inadequate narrative. We are protected, living in hope, not just for our own sakes but for the sake of the world. Our lives should be recognizably hopeful, they should speak. We also must proclaim the hope we know and the reason for that hope. We are rejoicing children who sing the tune given by God. This hope, this life, this calling brings us great joy. I would recommend to you a re-reading of 1 John. Here is the first part of it - a passage that I turn to over and over again.

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life - this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us - we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus

Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete... (1 John 1:1-4)

For us, for children of Day and of the Light, words like these are constantly in our spirits as we live in any culture. Hope is real. It is not something imagined or wishfully thought. It is of God and freely, gracefully poured out. Hope is a central part of God's narrative of the reign of God into which we are birthed, into which our "lives can slip." "How can we keep from singing?"

When peace like a river attendeth my way; when sorrows like sea billows roll; whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, "It is well, it is well with my soul."



FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Horatio G. Spafford, "It Is Well with My Soul," see The United Methodist Publishing House, *The United Methodist Hymnal*. (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), p. 377.
- ² Richard McBrien, *Catholicism* (New Edition), (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994), pp. 20-42.
- ³ Robert W. Wall, "Introduction to Epistolary Literature," see Abingdon Press, *New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. X*, (Nashville: The Abingdon Press, 2001), p. 372.
- ⁴ IBID, p. 375.
- ⁵ IBID, pp. 376-377.
- ⁶ IBID, p. 382.
- ⁷ George Fox, "Epistle # 227," see T. Canby Jones, ed., *The Power of the Lord Is Over All: The Pastoral Letters of George Fox*, (Richmond, Ind.: Friends United Press, 1989), pp. 185-186.
- ⁸ Douglas Gwyn, *Apocalypse of the Word: The Life and Message of George Fox (1624-1691)*, (Richmond, Ind.: Friends United Press, 1986), pp. xxi-xxii.
- ⁹ Wall, pp. 375, 382.
- ¹⁰ Anonymous and Doris Plenn, "How Can I Keep From Singing," see Friends General Conference, *Worship in Song: A Friends Hymnal*, (Philadelphia: Friends General Conference, 1996), p. 245.
- ¹¹ John Punshon, *Reasons for Hope: The Faith and Future of the Friends Church*, (Richmond, Ind.: Friends United Press, 2001), p. 374.
- ¹² Justo L. Gonzalez and Zaida Maldonado Perez, *An Introduction to Christian Theology*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), p. 141.
- ¹³ F. L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 655.

¹⁴ Gonzalez, p. 145.

¹⁵ IBID, pp. 150-151.

¹⁶ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of C Christianity*, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), pp. 403, 404.

¹⁷ James Lee Burke, *Dixie City Jam*, (London: Phoenix Orion Books, 1994), p. 209.

¹⁸ There are a number of writings pertaining to this topic but see particularly Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1997), especially Part IV.

¹⁹ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus As Lord*, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981), pp. 37-38.

²⁰ Douglas Steere, "A Biographical Memoir," see Thomas Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), pp. 18-19.

²¹ Francis Howgill, "The dawnings of the gospel day (*Works*), 1676, pp. 70-71. 'A lamentation for the scattered tribes' printed 1656, see London yearly Meeting, *Christian Faith and Practice in the Experience of the Society of Friends*, (London: London Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, 1960), # 176.

²² D. Elton Trueblood, "The Conversion of Quakerism," see James R. Newby, ed., *Basic Christianity: Addresses of D. Elton Trueblood*, (Richmond, Ind.: Friends United Press, 1978), pp. 51-52.



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