Religious Social Concern

A Quaker View

by
Ferner Nuhn

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INTRODUCTION

This pamphlet, published specifically by and for the Wider Quaker Fellowship, deals appropriately with the source and scope of social concern for "all God's children" everywhere in His world.*

The spiritual pilgrimage of the author and his wife led them to the Society of Friends partly because of the intrinsic place which a concern for human beings has in its faith and practice, even in war time. Members of the Fellowship, many of whom have followed a similar pilgrimage, may find a special interest in this study of the relationship between religious faith and social concern. We have often been told that "faith without works is dead." It is here shown that the call to "good works" comes from God and is carried out in particular times and particular places by those who are sensitive to that call.

Quaker faith seems to have produced a special sensitivity to social injustice but the author points out weaknesses as well as strength in modern Quaker efforts to mediate their social concern to the needs of the world today.

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RELIGIOUS SOCIAL CONCERN
A Quaker View

The question of the role of social concern in religious faith—specifically in the Christian faith—helped to determine my religious affiliation. May I explain what I mean.

My wife, the novelist Ruth Suckow, and myself were both brought up in ways which led us to take Christian truth seriously. Ruth has told sensitively the story of her spiritual pilgrimage in her small book called *A Memoir*. Our pilgrimages were similar. Each of us, after formative years in religious homes, had taken a detour aside from what at the time we might well have called "organized religion." These paths, however, were not lacking in the earnest search for truth. In the latter half of the 1930s the signs were pointing us back toward the main road of the Christian faith. But to what company of believers?

It was here that what Milton Mayer has called "the Quaker conspirary"[1] began to move in around us. The Second World War had been looming, and then it came. We had had little personal acquaintanceship with Quakers. But the Quaker "image," to use a fashionable term, had been hanging off in the middle distance for some time. Against the gloomy skies it had a shiny look! Here were a people, apparently, who in fair times and foul for three hundred years had been holding to the more demanding implications of the Christian faith. The Quaker faith itself, arising in the days of George Fox, was, according to William James, "a religion of veracity rooted in spiritual inwardness," "more like the original gospel truth than men had ever known before in England."[2] We found ourselves meeting Friends and becoming involved in Quaker activities.

In due time, this Quaker "image" was to loom somewhat less large and to show certain tarnishes of its own. At this juncture in our lives, however, the actual Quaker faces we saw seemed

to reflect much of that light we were looking for. I think of Walter Lewis, of Gate, Oklahoma, coming to sit quietly for an hour in our living room in Cedar Falls, Iowa; Martha Balderston, moving among a group of European refugees in a hostel at West Branch; Harold Chance and Raymond Wilson exemplifying Quaker peaceableness during the sometimes turbulent sessions of an international institute. Then, at a conference at Oskaloosa, Iowa, we came upon a whole cluster of "public Friends"—Rufus Jones, Clarence Pickett, and others. Yet, with these distinguished persons, I remember equally well the face of a rural Quaker woman, Ella Newlin, which seemed to shine with a true saintliness and love. The conspiracy was working.

During the quarter of a century since I began to find my own Christian leadings tied in with the faith and concerns of Friends, the truth which is at the heart of this subject has not dimmed at all, but grown grander than ever. But it has also grown more mysterious and difficult.

Part I

THE DIVINE AND HUMAN SOCIAL CONCERN

The linking of religious faith and social concern is not of our own doing. The linkage is in heaven as it may be on earth.

The heart of what we might call the *divine social concern* is a mystery. It is the mystery of shared being, of God's infinite life somehow extended to our finite lives. It is the universal feast and sacrifice of existence. All religious thought struggles with this mystery.

Our own social concern finds firm ground only in this divine social concern. To understand something of its grandeur, let us look both at its scope in existence and its quality in experience.

In my view, the divine social concern involves a community of life whose setting must be no less than the whole space-time continuum of existence, past, present, and to come. This community of life includes beings such as myself, of my own human species, and those of other life-forms, known and unknown. All these living things are supported, somehow, within the vast natural order of the universe which is the providence of God.

No doubt we find our greatest social concern with our fellow human beings, and among these, with those nearest to us. But here I am asking: how *far* does our social involvement and concern go? In our day, we are talking of the possibility of "intelligent life" on other planets. How likely this possibility is I do not know. But if indeed living beings exist elsewhere in space, and we can relate to them, then we are involved with them, and if involved, we should be concerned *how* we are involved.

As for other forms of life than human beings, such as plants and animals, no doubt we need some way of describing our par-

ticular concern with them, as compared with our concern with our fellow human beings. To this question a Christian might make a somewhat different answer from that, say, of a Buddhist. But think of Noah and his arkful of God's creatures, Jesus and his words concerning lilies and sparrows, St. Francis, Dr. Schweitzer; think, in another connection, of Rachel Carson and her book, *Silent Spring;* and it seems clear that both from the point of view of spirit, or love, and of common sense, or ecology, such life comes into the scope of Christian social concern.

As for the physical universe itself, when we see the way in which God has allowed the human intellect, in our time, to penetrate into its most hidden recesses, and through incredibly cunning technology to effect the most profound, far-reaching, and unpredictable changes in it, then obviously this physical environment of ours comes into the scope of our social concern. In ways St. Paul could hardly have suspected, we have indeed become co-workers with God.

Finally, there is farness in time as well as in space. In a most subtle and profound way, social concern extends to the community of lives which have preceded and which may follow ours. I understand the traditions of chieftaincy in parts of Africa involve the concept that the tribal lands ought to be administered with a view to the welfare of *all souls,* those of the dead, the living, and the unborn. So ought our earth to be administered, and whatever parts of the rest of space we may be able to do anything about. The world is the Lord's and the fulness thereof.

Christ, the Measure of Depth

If the range of the divine and therefore, in some sense, of your and my social concern reaches out into all existence, its inward nature may be measured by the quality of God's spirit as it seeks communion with our own. As a Christian, I know of no better way to understand this quality than as it is shown in Jesus Christ, the divine love incarnate in man and history. Nor is the figure of Christ out of place when seen against the vast back-drop of the universe as revealed by modern astronomy. A generation or two before our own day of celestial probes, a fine Christian poetess, Alice Meynell, wrote a poem called "Christ in the Uni-

verse." "With this ambiguous earth," she wrote, "His dealings have been told us."

But not a star of all
The innumerable host of stars has heard
How He administered this terrestrial ball. . .

Nor, in our little day,
May his devices with the heavens be guessed,
His pilgrimage to thread the Milky Way
Or his bestowals there be manifest.

O, be prepared, my soul,
To read the inconceivable, to scan
The million forms of God the stars unroll
When, in our turn, we show to them a Man.

The depth of the divine social concern and, as we respond to it, the potential depth of our own is the grace and power of God's love as manifested in Christ. This is the height of the mystery of the shared being of God: that love to the depth of Christ, revealed and tested on our own earth, is available to each of us in the conditional world of time and place in which he lives.

The Dynamics of Christian Concern

The dynamics of Christian social concern always have two factors working jointly together. One is the power of love and truth to the potential depth of the *logos*, or Christ; the other is the unique occasion of a social concern in existence, with all its actual conditions as they bear upon our and other accompanying lives. The latter factor is infinitely various; the former, in its source, is always the same; but the former can work through us only in terms of the latter. That is why a religious social concern must in some respects always be a new and creative act.

The ethics of social concern I take to be the same as the ethics of the golden rule and of the second great commandment. In my dealings with another person I am dealing in effect with myself in another situation: wrapped about, so to speak, by another pattern of existence. But when we relate the significance of the second commandment to that of the first, we see the powerful

dynamics of religious social concern. Our dealings with one another are first of all dealings with God. I find joy, work, suffering, redemption, in God as I treat others with myself as the equally loved children of God.

The wonderful dynamics of Christian social concern come out of the fact that, while its conditions lie in the realm of the second commandment, its source of power and fulfillment lies in the realm of the first; and the two realms finally are one. Our faith is that the work of God, through our instrumentality, may be done on earth as it is in heaven; but at a given time there may or may not be evidence of this. Actually, often there is evidence. In the grace of God, we are often wonderfully rewarded by the responses of others to the outreachings of love and concern. But again, our most concerned reaching-out may find no response, or a hostile one. The dynamics of religious social concern involve the carrying of this cross with continued love and faith—not the shifting of it to another person, even in our own minds. For power and fulfillment do not rest here, but in the under-girding relationship pointed to in the first commandment.

The Primary Act

The problem of our theme, then, is how can we be found by the love and power of God in any actual social situation, so that we become instruments of that love and power in the lives of others involved in the same situation. No individual can fully answer this for another.

The hard, physical, biological, economic circumstances, bearing with firm cause and effect on all persons concerned in a given situation, are part of God's test. There is no space to follow out here this practical side of social concern except to say that many anxious concerns fail somewhere just in this department of practicality, and many concerned organizations break down here, too.

The first and most creative act in the play of Christian social concern is the act between God and the concerned person under the actual conditions of his life. Well-known examples of such an act in the lives of great people—St. Paul, George Fox, Rufus

Jones—will occur to you. No doubt each of us could testify to a moment in his own life, when, in some measure, this act took place. Here let me cite a moment in the life of a contemporary person, Martin Luther King.

Those who have read his personal record, *Stride Toward Freedom*, will know this moment as the time during the Montgomery bus boycott when, alone at midnight in his kitchen after a particularly exhausting day, Martin King felt that he could not go on. Here is how he describes the moment:

> With my head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud. The words I spoke to God that midnight are still vivid in my memory. "I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. But now I am afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I've come to the point where I can't face it alone."
>
> At that moment I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never experienced Him before. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice saying: "Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth; and God will be at your side forever." Almost at once my fears began to go. My uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything.[3]

The power which lay in that moment has visibly widened out, through Montgomery, Birmingham, Washington, Selma, and other places and occasions, helping to write a new chapter in the history of human relations.

The Principle of Closeness and Involvement

There are no limits to the range of religious social concern. In some degree, first in the realm of our inner life of faith, thought, and prayer, and then through certain definite outward channels, each of our lives affects the lives of everyone else, including people far from us, people we may never see.

But with this test of universality of religious social responsi-

bility comes another: that of nearness and relatedness to the people concerned. Our power to do good or evil varies with the degree of our involvement in the lives of given persons, *including our own.* This is why Jesus talks about removing first the beam from our own eye before helping others, and then of loving, not humanity in the abstract, but "our neighbor," the nearest person. This is why Gandhi uses the term "swadeshi," concern for those close to us, as a principle of Satyagraha.

If we want to meet a certain concern, we must either already be involved with the people affected, or we must go and put ourselves close to them.*

Let us return to Martin King in his kitchen. Both far and near relationships were already involved in Martin King's religious social commitment at this time. But his immediate fear at this moment was for his family and for himself, for these were the lives closest to him. The event which happened, the sense of his being undergirded by the divine concern and power, touched near and far relationships at once, beginning with his own life, including his family, and going out to the wider community, Negro and non-Negro. In some such way, every social concern tests our near relationships with our farther ones.

Purification and Liberation

In our situations of social involvement, we may thus distinguish between our pre-existing relationships and the new relationships in which we may now be involved. We think of these latter as the subject-matter of "social concern." But the divine social concern is indivisible and covers both. Our capacity for ministry in a farther situation depends upon our sensitivity and response to the divine power as it may work in all our social relationships, including in our own lives.

The Quaker term, liberation, suggests very well the sort of exercise through which we should go before we are clear about embracing a social concern beyond those in which we are already

*The etymology of the word "concern" suggests a "seeing with," so that a social concern might be described as something seen jointly with others.

involved. I should like to see this term used in an even more searching way than it often is.

Liberation may be defined as the seeking of guidance both from God and from our associates with respect to our responsibilities, material and spiritual, toward all the people involved in a given concern, those previously and those newly affected. John Woolman, perhaps the best example among Quakers of a man of sensitive and powerful social concern, went to great pains in this exercise of liberation.

The quality of our pre-existing social relationships may hamper our effectiveness in a new concern in one of two ways, or in both ways at once. The more common way is through our *over-favoring* those near and dear to us, beginning with ourselves. Through a selfish, possessive sort of love, we surround ourselves and our families with more care and comfort than we need or is good for us and them. Thus we may seal ourselves off from wider concerns, and nurture in our lives the seeds and occasions of injustice and strife. And these seeds of strife, by the way, should be understood as likely to grow into trouble not only in the wider social world, but within the small, over-favored circle, beginning in our own souls.

But there is a second way in which we tend to violate the divine social concern near at hand, and people with strong concerns for general social justice are often prone to this sort of violation. This is to be less sensitive to God's love for those in our nearer circle, including ourselves, than we are for persons in more distant circles. It is tempting to be tender with the visitor, the foreigner, the needy person, while we are callous, brusque, overdemanding toward those in our inner circle. We talk of taking on the suffereings of the world while we are unable to recognize the sufferings of our spouses, colleagues, and ourselves. Herein lie the seeds, not of redemptive love and truth, but of a wearing and wearying busy-ness, a contagious anxiety, and exhibited self-pity and martyrdom.

Our one help is the divine concern, and often it is just in our closest relationships that God seeks first to test and transform our lives. The divine concern provides us with a love both less indulgent and more joyous toward every life we touch.

The Kairos of Social Concern Varies

A particular social situation, existentially unique, provides the opportunity for social concern. *Kairos*, "in the fulness of time," is the Greek word used in the New Testament to describe this ripeness of a situation for a given concern.

My *kairos* and your *kairos* of concern may thus be different My compelling opportunity may be now and here, yours later and there, another person's at a still different time and place. You and I must be involved, must take our part in a given situation. But just how, when, and where we meet our chief tasks will depend on various things: our citizenships, our racial and cultural backgrounds, our given talents and resources.

The *kairos* of the freedom movement in India came with greatest force to Indians themselves. Yet its opportunity extended to Englishmen, Americans, and others, who had necessary, if more limited, roles to play. The *kairos* of the American Negro movement today offers its chief roles to American Negroes. Yet this *kairos* demands other roles to be played by non-Negro Americans in many situations, South and North.

Opportunities in "the fulness of time" change over the years and centuries, too. The nature of the *kairos* for Quakers in the seventeenth century was one thing, that for Quakers in the twentieth century is another. Yet the divine power available to all is the same.

The Logos through Word and Deed

The one true source of human social concern is the divine concern, the *logos*. We may call this the Word with a capital "W," but this may or may not need words with a small "w." The divine concern may work through the words we speak or write, through deeds we do without words, or through words and deeds together—but only as we ourselves are instruments of the wordless Word.

This is the sense of the admonition of George Fox, so often quoted in our day (though usually only in part), made in a public letter of some length to Friends in 1656. The letter should be read in its entirety. At least this much of it needs to be quoted:

> And this is the word of the Lord God to you all, and a charge to you all in the presence of the living God: be patterns, be examples, in all countries, places, nations, wherever you come; that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them. Then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering to that of God in everyone; whereby in them ye may be a blessing, and make the witness of God in them to bless you.[4]

Friends who took part in the Eighth Meeting of the Friends World Committee in Kenya, Africa, were made aware of the great effectiveness of a social witness through both word and deed. This well-rounded sort of witness was made by those Quakers from the American Midwest who came to the shores of Lake Victoria around the turn of the century. The now thirty thousand or so East African Quakers who responded to their witness would not likely have responded to a ministry grounded in corporate silence, nor to the concerned deed done without the concerned word, nor yet to the word preached without accompanying deeds. They responded to words and deeds together —and, incidentally, to words often put to music; for how these enthusiastic people like to sing the Christian hymns!

Yet many persons have been reached through the divine word working in silence, others through the word spoken, still others through a deed done with divine inspiration and loving concern, and no word spoken. There are occasions in our complex and noisy world of the present when the divinely inspired deed, done with no preachment, may be the one surest way of reaching the divine center of life in another person.

Part II
QUAKER SOCIAL CONCERN

Quakers have been known for their sensitiveness to social injustice and social concerns. Does Quaker religious experience throw a particular light upon the nature of Christian social concern? What are the strengths and weaknesses of Quakerism today as an instrument of the divine social concern?

Christian *and* Universal: The *Logos* of Early Friends

First we should note that early Quakers did not talk about a "social witness" or "social concern." As was the case with other Christian groups of the day, the social effects of their religious faith followed from the faith itself. Yet the social effects of the early Quaker faith were striking. Was there something in their religious faith that made this so?

I believe there was, and that it lay in what, to this day, remains most difficult and controversial about the Quaker interpretation of Christianity.

Early Friends located the source of the divine-human movement at a point prior to any fixed or definable landmark of the usual Christian theology. They saw the divine as inspiring and revealed by the Judeo-Christian scriptures, but not as originating in or limited to them; as revealed in the life of Jesus Christ on earth, but not as circumscribed or concluded by that historical life; as being capable of expression through meetings of the faithful, but not as having its authority delegated to a particular ecclesiastical body.

There is no question of the Christian character of the descriptions of religious experience made by early Friends. "There is one, even Christ Jesus, who can speak to thy condition," were

the words heard inwardly by George Fox early at the time of his greatest religious crisis. The spirit of Christ, the light of Christ, Christ within, are terms which come frequently to the lips of early Friends as they name the inspiring power in their lives.

But Friends have used other terms in trying to describe the ultimate in their lives: God, that of God, living God, Truth, Light or the Light within, Power, Seed, Life, and many more. "Universal and saving light" was the term chosen by Robert Barclay, the leading theologian of early Quakerism, to describe the *logos* as understood by Friends.[5]

We must conclude from these and other considerations that Quaker religious experience testifies to the divine power as both specifically Christian and as necessarily universal. In my view, it is precisely this Christian *and* universal testament which has been socially most challenging in the Quaker interpretation of Christianity. Inspired Friends, early and late, have tried to spell out Truth with both a capital "T" and a small "t." They have been stretched by the experience of the divine both as unrelated to any particular faith, institution, or company of men, and as particularly revealed in Christ, and therefore with the wonderful concreteness of God so manifested in time and place. Our Quaker witness will remain strong as it holds to both of these demands, will be weakened as it gives up either of them.

The most characteristic Quaker practices and testimonies have followed from this difficult union of a Christian and a universal theology.

The Changing *Kairos* of Quaker Concern

Early Quakerism has rightly been called "apostolic," that is, infused by a great, immediate, heated, living experience of the holy spirit which sent scores of "publishers of Truth" travelling about the world and drew thousands of seekers and followers into its glowing stream. The social effects of apostolic Quakerism were latent in the historical circumstances of these inspired people. These circumstances, generally speaking, were spiritually

constrictive. Early Friends, drawn to a large extent from the less privileged classes, were hemmed in by institutions, laws, and customs which were in process of change, but which as yet were very confining to the Spirit which now took hold of them. Christ himself, one might say, with all the latent revolutionary force of his coming Kingdom, was now beating at the doors and pulling at the bars which held his people captive. For one to be true to the spirit of Christ, the living Word, was necessarily to come up against the constrictive laws and customs of the time, and by a redemptive suffering of the consequences to help transform society.

And for Quakers to be true to the spirit of Christ was to be true to a non-ecclesiastical, "in-the-world-and-not-out-of-it," interpretation of the spirit of Christ. It was this "religion of veracity," to use William James's phrase, which led William Penn to challenge juridical procedures, George Fox to "utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fighting with outward weapons," and Friends in general to refuse "hat honor" and to use the familiar "thou" in addressing persons of whatever status. Somewhat later, it was a similar concern for the worldly relevance of religious truths which led Quaker business men to fix upon a single fair price for goods sold, and thus to help bring about the "single-price" system in trade.

The circumstances of Quakers have changed over the centuries and thus occasioned new directions for their religious social concern. By the time of John Woolman and Elizabeth Fry when Quakers were no longer socially underprivileged not persecuted for their faith, they began to turn their social concern more and more toward the unjust and under-privileged circumstances of others. By the twentieth century, Quakers in England and America were mostly of a decidedly privileged class. Few of their own civil and religious rights were now curtailed. Significant aspects of the Christian ethic had, in fact, been incorporated into the structure of society, through such revolutionary political instruments as the American Constitution and Bill of Rights and comparable evolutions in England. Separatist reform movements among Christian groups were beginning to reach the point of diminishing returns. One might say that Christ himself, in this

new "fulness of time," was beginning to draw his people back from their divided paths into a revised, renewed, enlarged design for the one great "household of God."

The privileged position of Quakers in these latter times, while it gave them certain material advantages, made their social witness morally more vulnerable and difficult.

The institution of war, however, was still part of the accepted international system in the twentieth century. At this point, there remained for Quaker Christians a *kairos* a little different from that of most other Christian groups. Here, Friends were likely to find themselves at some point in opposition to the secular power.

When the relatively privileged economic position of twentieth-century Quakers and of American citizens in general is placed alongside an interpretation of the divine spirit as seeking only non-violent, loving means for the realizing of God's kingdom on earth, there is opened up a great channel for religiously-motivated social concern. Heightened by the savagery of first one, and then a second great world war, the opportunity for this witness has come to a great ripeness in the twentieth century. It is this *kairos*, if I may return to a personal note, which has had great meaning for me.

Mediation and Continuity: the On-Going Problem

But now we come to a question which lies in wait for every religious movement which survives its apostolic period. This is the question of continuity of the movement and mediation of the divine. How is the supreme fact, the immediate experience of God, communicated from person to person over the days and years by a specific on-going religious body?

The term *mediation* may serve for the name of this problem, if by mediation we mean the way in which God is able to use persons, occasions, and things brought together by human agency to communicate himself to people in the world.

In their revolt from current religious forms and practices, early Quakers tended to overlook the fact of religious mediation itself, even though they themselves inevitably used means of

mediation. Public travelling, public preaching, called meetings, pamphleteering, were forms of mediation used by early Quakers. So also was the whole system of monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings for worship and business which Friends in time set up. So was the formation very early of a central executive committee called the Meeting for Sufferings, which dealt, among other things, with questions of accreditation of persons and with fund-raising on behalf of persecuted Friends.

There is no contradiction between the supreme truth of the immediacy of the presence of God and the necessary fact of mediative means which may serve as a channel for this supreme truth. The latter is necessary because the former is not continuously realized. When the Lord comes, he is experienced in immediacy, but meanwhile even "waiting upon the Lord" in a silent meeting is a form of mediation. When early Friends rejected the anarchical ideas of so-called "Ranters" and others, who argued for no formal order at all, they accepted mediative means along with the goal of divine immediacy.

Ministry as "Bridging"

Meanwhile, the Quaker movement was illustrating its own quite remarkable interpretation of mediation of the divine through persons, that is, of *ministry*. At their most creative, early Friends rejected the Calvinist view that ministry by a redeemed person means, essentially, obtaining the conviction of utter helplessness on the part of a lost person, whereupon the atoning grace of Christ may save him from the wrath of an angry God. Friends recognized the saving grace of Christ, but they saw this grace as God's own spirit enlightening every man who comes into the world, if he will but heed this light.

Early Friends were not always consistent in this view of grace. Sometimes they reflected the Calvinist view, as on those occasions when George Fox recorded in his journal, with apparent satisfaction, that this or that person who had rejected his ministry had been "cut off by the Lord." But the most moving and creative witness of George Fox, James Naylor, Edward Burrough, William Penn, John Woolman and other leading Friends, early and late, was to another way of grace.

Without here attempting a formal definition, ministry, for Quakers, assumes the prior presence of the divine, whether recognized or not, in the human beings to whom, through this or that channel of grace, it now comes with healing power. To use Fox's words, ministry is to "answer to that of God" in another person. The mediative act is thus a catalytic, bridging, releasing act, rather than the unilateral conveyance of a power in which the minister has some sort of prior property, but the ministered-to has none.

Contemporary Quaker Institutions

Quakers as a whole must grant that, though their mediative actions have often been catalytic and influential, the body of people who have been moved to join them in their ways and witness has been a very small one. Yet the visible, on-going body of the faithful is one of the most important instruments of divine mediation. See, for example, how the great and ancient Roman Catholic Church, through inspired leadership, has been able to do an important part of God's work in our particular time. Friends have left to other Christian communions the main burden and opportunity represented by "the visible church" as a means of mediation.

Quakers, especially those bodies which have kept close to the policy and practices of early Friends, must ask, why has God found such limited use for their religious communion? How may it connect with God and men to become a greater channel of his living power?

Quakers over the last century or more have been asking these questions and have been led, rightly or wrongly, to develop means of mediation which have departed in certain ways from early Quaker practices. Quakers of various persuasions need to recognize that they all do use means of mediation of the divine, whether of an old or new sort, and to review these means in the light of God's grace, power, and purpose in our time.

Friends in recent times have developed many sorts of organizations and institutions to do common services among themselves and work in the world. There is no space to assess in detail these various means of mediation used by Friends. Two developments

in modern Quakerism, however, each of which has departed in some ways from earlier Quaker practices, may be considered in pointing up the general problem of mediation raised here.

One is the development in certain branches of the Society of Friends in America which involves, among other things, the programming of worship services, employment and compensation of pastors, mission programs abroad, and a certain emphasis in general upon evangelism as a means of mediation.

A question raised by certain sections (by no means all parts) of this movement is, not that of evangelism itself, which most Friends value as a means of mediation, but whether evangelism, the verbal Christian word, must accompany *all* means of mediation: whether in effect, the wordless Word of God is not able to act in the world.

The pastoral movement as a whole has shown definite powers of outreach both in communities in the United States and in other places, such as East Africa. Bodies of Friends of this sort now make up the largest segment of Quakersim. But to what extent is the Quaker Christian witness, including its historic social testimonies, vivid and strong in the individual lives of Friends who participate in this form of corporate mediation? How might God use Friends in these bodies more fully and deeply for the reconciliation of men both within the Society and in the world at large?

A second development in American Quakersim is illustrated by the remarkable organization called the American Friends Service Committee. Initiated by Quakers of various branches during the First World War as a means of answering the concern of many people, Quakers and non-Quakers, to channel their personal and material resources aside from war-making activities and as much as possible into constructive and healing activities only, the organization later turned its attention to other social concerns as well. As it reaches a half-century in age, it is well-established as a multi-program, social-religious institution in its own right. Though called a "committee," it is not set up by and responsible to any given body of the Religious Society of Friends.*

*It differs in this respect from the comparable British organization, the Friends Service Council, which is a joint committee of London and Ireland Yearly Meetings.

It is responsible to its own national board and in a lesser degree to various executive and program committees, central and regional, composed predominantly (wholly so in the case of its central committees) of members of the Society of Friends, who act, however, as individuals.

As an organ of mediation, the AFSC has found great strength in the combined import of two major factors: the historic peace witness of Quakers, and the critical nature of international war in the twentieth century. Its greatest mediative opportunities have come during and in the aftermaths of the great wars of our times. Yet it has also branched out into other social activities: work in civil rights, penology, economic and social welfare, and international relations.

The relatively large resources which have flowed and continue to flow through the hands of the AFSC are evidence of its inward power as a mediative instrument of our time and place. Its structural independence is apparently both a strength and a weakness. It is a strength, in that it has enabled it to respond more widely and freely than it otherwise might to opportunities coming from and directed toward people not of the Society of Friends, who yet are sympathetic to the spiritual and social approach of Quakers. The AFSC undoubtedly has been an instrument of the holy spirit among many persons. It has served, too, as a major instrument of outreach for the Religious Society of Friends.

Yet the structural independence and self-perpetuating character of the AFSC gives it certain liabilities. It is neither a religious communion nor the direct instrument of a religious communion. To what extent does the fresh inspiration of religious motivation continue to nourish the lives of its employed personnel? To what extent do the "lay" committee people, presumably responsible for policy and program, but who leave their execution to others, continue to feel spiritual nourishment in their work? Can the organization preserve and communicate the specific Christian witness which is the inspiration of its Quaker inheritance?

Finally we come to a fact about Quakerism as a whole in

America which bears on all of its mediative organs and activities. It is, to a serious degree, a divided religious communion and movement. The fact that the AFSC, as well as its sister organization of social concern, the Friends Committee on National Legislation, are not directly responsible to the Religious Society of Friends is chiefly because there is no one Religious Society of Friends in the United States which might commission them and their work. In so far as the detachment of these organizations raises questions about their "right to speak or act for Quakers," it raises the prior questions of division in the Society.*

These questions can be answered only through self-searching by each divided branch.

Yet, the AFSC, in its inheritance of Quaker inspiration, is faced with a related question. Concerned to mediate conflicts and tensions in society in general, has it a concern for differences and tensions within the Society of Friends? This and other questions which may come to an organization as young, but also now as old, as the AFSC can be answered, in view of its structural independence, only from within the organization.

The Opportunity and Role of Friends

All I have said about the frailties of Quakerdom leaves still to be stated a remarkable fact. In the grace of God, way is generously open for Friends to serve their fellow men. Our history and make-up are such, thanks especially, perhaps, to our inward-directed faith and our declared peace witness, that doors may be open to Friends which are closed to many.

*The weakening of the spiritual power of Quakerism through its divisions is well stated by Richard L. and Patricia Naeye in their study, "Reconciliation Among Friends" Pendle Hill Bulletin #178, September, 1965. "In our Society, the inheritance of early Friends now seems divided among our parts. Individually, we seem poorer for our losses. Some of the power of early Friends is manifested in evangelical Friends who stress the prophetic and Biblical aspects of early experience. Friends with an unprogrammed meeting affiliation often center on the mystical and ethical strains while other groups center on other combinations of the wider Quaker experience. A dialogue between such groups might again open that spring of power which launched the Society."

Our varied Quaker make-up can be an advantage. Friends of one body or organization can do that which those of another cannot do, and vice versa. But we must recognize the divinely-intended interdependence of us all, as of all men.

Our work, I feel sure, may often involve serving, quite inconspicuously, in relationships with other groups, often larger and more conspicuous than our own. Part of our witness is that God works through many other bodies than the Society of Friends.

We must claim our role both as Christians and Quakers within the widening ecumenical movement, even as we reach out to the divine in men everywhere. We must use the force of our citizenships in civil society, wherever we are, as far as our civil relationships go, even as we witness to and work for a commonwealth of all mankind.

Our individual destinies and the destiny of humanity are intertwined as never before. In this fullness of time, God is working in a large and complex design. He has allowed such powers to come into men's hands as can either destroy or help to redeem the world. Knowledge and virtue cry out for a new dependence on each other. Non-violence is no longer an ethical luxury but a prudential necessity. Separateness—the notion that any person or group has an isolated destiny—is (as Teilhard de Chardin has so brilliantly shown)[6] a delusion and self-deception. Small as our numbers and powers may be, in God's hands we can work close to the heart of his purposes in our time.

I said earlier that the theme of Christian social concern now appears to me both grander and more mysterious than it seemed at first. I see it is no specialized affair, but lives at the center of life, twenty-four hours a day.

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