Practicing the Gospel of Hope in the Nuclear Age

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On Martin Luther King's birthday, an official holiday for the American Friends Service Committee office in which I work, I thought I would use the time off to see the film *Gandhi.*

Arriving at the theatre, I was suddenly reminded that King's birthday is not only a holiday for the AFSC, but also for many New York City high schools. A festive pandemonium reigned outside the movie house as swarms of teenagers waited to be admitted.

Undoubtedly gathered through the organizational virtuosity of the film's promoters, the young people themselves seemed to have little notion of what they were getting into. The chaos was so considerable that I seriously thought of coming back another day when it might be more likely that one could hear the film's sound track. Nevertheless, I did persevere and joined the youthful crowd when the theatre opened.

It is a credit both to the makers of the film and to the young people themselves that what seemed an unruly mob outside the theater was quickly turned into a most sedate, attentive audience, one which readily recognized Gandhi as a hero and which thoroughly identified with him. But things did go awry between the film and its young audience at one point.

As the story unfolded there occurred, as we know, a series of horrifying repressions, perpetrated by the agents of the British colonial administration against those struggling for India's national independence. At last, after there had been much suffering and death, a final

atrocity committed by the British wore down the patience of some nonviolent demonstrators, and they suddenly turned with the torches they were carrying, marched on a police station, burned it down, and brutally assaulted the police officers who fled from the flames.

At the moment when this change of heart among the nonviolent demonstrators was portrayed, and they turned resolutely to attack the police station, wild cheering, whistling, and the stamping of feet broke out among the youthful audience which surrounded me. For the next few minutes one could have thought one was in an old-fashioned cops and robbers, Wonder Woman, or Superman matinee, with the spectators cheering enthusiastically as the violent counter-attack by the "good guys" unfolded. The film maker did not dwell on this painful turn of events, but quickly cut to a scene in which Gandhi, upon hearing the news of what had occurred, reacted with complete dismay. In the instant that awareness of the hero's attitude penetrated the audience, the cheering stopped abruptly, rather than subsiding in the way it normally would have, and one could feel the psychological imbalance in the theatre as the enthusiasm which had been unleashed was replaced by a kind of stunned silence, as if something awful and unnatural had just taken place on the screen.

Whenever a great spirit plumbs the depths of human experience, she or he does indeed summon us to something which, if not awful and unnatural, is at least beyond the commonplace. Whether they speak about becoming Enlightened, as Buddhists do, or entering the *moksha,* as Hindus do, or finding the Kingdom of God within us, as Christians do, they indicate to us that we have within us something very great, something of God, something farseeing and all-transcending, something which, if we ever receive the grace to get in touch with it, enables us to be born again of the Spirit and to live in a new and different way.

This new way of living is not the property of any particular religious faith.[1] One line in the film has Gandhi proclaiming: "I am a Hindu, I am a Muslim, I am a Christian, I am a Jew, I am a Sikh." And indeed, when an individual or a company finds this new level of life—George Fox and the Valiant Sixty, St. Francis of Assisi, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Mohandas Gandhi, Thich Nhat Hanh, Mother Theresa, or Ham Sok Hon—we immediately recognize in them something which is neither of the East nor the West, neither ancient nor modern, but something which is simply the Truth, the plain Truth.

And the works of social change and of service which are born out of this great Truth are at once so awesome and so sweet, so firm and so clear, that they fill us with joy and hope and wonder.

Surrounded as we are in the present age by a world in the grip of economic and political tyranny, seething with revolution, and haunted by the prospect of humankind's extinction in a nuclear holocaust, it is both natural and good that we should seek to emulate the practical accomplishments of a Gandhi or a Martin Luther King. But we must be careful. For one of the things we find when we examine closely the lives of great spirits is that the strategies, actions and events which are so likely to preoccupy our attention were really not their own main concern. True, they undertook everything they did with mindfulness. But they also understood that if a person in his inward nature is not great, then all his cleverness, all his strategems, will come to nothing.[2] They believed that we should be concerned not so much with what we do as with what we are. They were more interested in cultivating an inward rebirth than they were in designing their public strategies. And they saw the works of service and of social change in which they engaged, and which so captivate our attention, essentially as the outward expression of an inward condition, an expression which flowed naturally, as fragrance does from a flower. Their work was simply an inner condition made visible.

At the end of the film about Gandhi's life, he is portrayed as regarding his efforts as having failed, a frame of mind which can be verified in his writings. The film was not, obviously, a suitable vehicle for exploring the details of this attitude of Gandhi's, although it did portray the terrible fighting which had broken out between Muslims and Hindus and which necessitated the partition into two countries, Pakistan and India, of the people whom he had served. But from his writings, we learn that Gandhi perceived the trouble as stemming from the fact that his followers had neglected this cultivation of the inward spirit, that their nonviolence was not an expression of an inner reconciliation and centeredness, but was simply a technique being used by their unreconstructed selves as a means to a narrow political end.

This falling away from the true source of authentic, spirit-directed activism and into the world's violent business-as-usual is not something which occurs only in South Asia, needless to say. Let me give you an example, admittedly a somewhat unusual example, which took place under Quaker auspices. The American Friends Service Com-

mittee once ran a Peace Corps-like program which sent young adults to assignments in Latin America, Africa, and the Far East, to assist in peaceful social change and in community development projects. One of these young volunteers was Diana Oughton, a friend of Friends whom AFSC sent to Guatemala to work in an Indian community there. When she departed for this service she was a recent debutante, the highly regarded daughter of a wealthy family from Dwight, Illinois, and an intelligent person sincerely enthusiastic about the work she was about to undertake. I took her and her boyfriend to the movies as they passed through New York City in the summer of 1963 on their way to their respective overseas assignments. Yet a few years later, Diana was tranformed into a terrorist, a member of the Weatherpeople underground. Ultimately, just seven short years after departing for her 24 month assignment abroad with the AFSC, she was killed in Manhattan a few blocks away from the AFSC office when the elegant townhouse which she and her collaborators had turned into a bomb factory exploded while they were in it. In a sympathetic but sobering biography written by Thomas Powers, entitled *Diana, The Making of a Terrorist,* Diana's experience in AFSC service is given due credit for the metamorphosis which had taken place.

In any large scale endeavor something is apt to go wrong with a few of the people in it. It would scarcely be pertinent to drag out the case of Diana Oughton unless it was a glaring example of something more subtle, something which can infect not only Gandhian and Quaker enterprise, but other spirit-based movements as well. This Diana-like metamorphosis, this fall from grace, is made manifest by such things as the elaboration of concepts of "just revolution" by certain theologies of liberation, by the sympathetic incorporation into Christian literature of Kenneth Kaunda's statements about his conversion from nonviolence to violence, by the devotion of great amounts of energy to organizational modes which turn on the color of persons' skin rather than on the quality of their inwardness, and by a restless search for what is new, exciting and different, rather than a centered openness to what is authentic.

This is not the place to document in detail how a drift away from Truth can gradually be manifested in enterprises which are presumably based in spirit. But it is useful to recognize that this drifting away is closely related to concepts of the practical, that is, to concepts of what is realistic, pragmatic and effective. A "sense of the practical" can

esteem Christian values not for their intrinsic merit, but merely for their usefulness as a way of achieving something else: how will the love preached by Jesus provide us with security against the Russians?; how will adherence to Christian values allow the transformation of the social order so that there is a more equitable distribution of wealth?; will faithful obedience to God's commandments earn me a sinecure in some eternal kingdom?[3] [4]

Indeed, it is in the name of being practical that President Reagan unveiled his mind-numbing scheme for achieving peace by the year 2000, a scheme which involves extending the arms race into outer space. Thus, in spite of his homiletics from a presidential pulpit to Christian evangelists, he has nothing to offer us but 17 more years of precarious living with a nuclear arms race, with no apparent thought that our efforts in outer space will inspire equal and perhaps greater enterprise by the Soviet Union, a turn of events which promises to leave us in the end not only not better off, but perhaps much worse off, than we are now.

When Canby Jones first telephoned me to inquire if I would be willing to address this gathering, he proposed the topic "Practical Applications of the Gospel of Hope in the Nuclear Age." I was certainly very happy to be invited to be with this group of Friends whom I have long admired from a distance, and I was certainly glad of an opportunity to give more thought to the significance of the Gospel of Hope in the Nuclear Age. The word "practical" was a stumbling block for me. I was afraid you would expect me to outline a series of techniques, such as gathering signatures on Nuclear Freeze petitions, which would guarantee the avoidance of nuclear calamity. There was yet another reason why I was troubled by the word practical. When you think about it, Diana Oughton, President Reagan, and those of our co-religionists who tend in subtle ways to dilute our traditional testimonies, are acting in the name of practicality, of realism.[5] Diana Oughton and President Reagan have in common a way of action based on the assumption that for all practical purposes only the tangible is real. No matter how vigorously a practioner of this view may disavow materialism at White House prayer breakfasts, the belief that the tangible is the only reality leads naturally to the idea that one fights fire with fire, rather than quenching it with the living waters of Truth.

Clearly, the search for practicality is a sticky wicket through which one passes at one's peril. Since I suspected I would not be ready to do

this by July of 1983, when we discussed my coming here, Canby suggested that I take the liberty of changing the topic somewhat if I so desired, just so long as I let the Quaker Theological Discussion Group know my revised version. Alas, the publicity was circulated sooner than I expected, and so here we are discussing "Practical Applications of the Gospel of Hope in the Nuclear Age," although I hope that without being too long-winded I can also address my preferred alternative topic: "Practicing the Gospel of Hope in the Nuclear Age."

Like many commonplace words, "practical" has several layers of meaning, and each layer has different spiritual import, although we are apt to float from one to the other quite casually without taking much notice of this. As has already been mentioned, practical can mean expedient, that which is a means to an end. Practical can also connote the matter-of-fact, the prosaic. On another level, practical has to do with those things which we know from direct experience, rather than from theorizing or speculating. In this sense, Quakerism is a practical religion, in that it is based on ideas and testimonies of which its founders actually had experience, and which many of its followers also experience, and to which they give expression, or practice, like breathing in and breathing out.

And so, a brief excursion into the meaning of practicality returns us to the theme with which we left Gandhi, a theme which he and Quakers share, which is simply that to breathe out the Gospel of Hope, we must be born again of hope in our inwardness. Our activism will only be practical and will only be an authentic expression of the Gospel of Hope to the extent that this Gospel genuinely informs our inner condition, a condition which our outward works make visible.

Before turning to some practical ways in which we can cultivate this quality of inwardness, it should be stated outright that there is no program or formula which can guarantee[6 7] for us that after undertaking it we will all become reincarnations of Gandhi or of the Valiant Sixty! It is reasonable to say that if a program for spiritual development is humbly and sincerely undertaken, we shall certainly emerge better than we were when we began it. But even to imagine that by sheer personal effort one could become a modern Saint Francis of Assisi is to doom oneself to failure at the outset. The important concept of grace is a subject beyond the scope of the present consideration. But before outlining a few ideas regarding the cultivation of a Quaker inwardness which will nourish a practical activism for the nuclear age, it is useful

at least to note that while spiritual growth cannot be attained *merely* by our seeking after it, it is, paradoxically, only those who do engage in the seeking that begin to find it. We must learn to wait, and yet we must also learn to expect actively. "The wind of God's grace is always blowing, but we must raise our sails," Vivekananda used to say. Unless we raise our sails we will get nowhere, but how far we go will depend upon the wind of grace.[8]

The authentic practice of the Gospel of Hope in the nuclear age, or in any age, requires that our sail be held aloft by three legs, or masts, which must function like a tripod. Unless these three components are all present and in balance, the structure of our activism will founder.

In Quaker terminology the three legs of this tripod can be designated faith, practice and worship. They might be given different labels by people of other faiths, but the essential experience, regardless of the label, is universally the same.

> **Faith** is what we know to be true. It might be called spiritual knowledge. It is not what we know to be true about the prison system in the State of New Jersey, or about the activities of the CIA in Central America, or about the nuclear weapons manufacturing facility at Rocky Flats, important as this kind of knowledge is. Spiritual knowledge is essentially a knowledge of relationships at a fundamental level. It cannot be fully grasped by the mind alone, although nothing about it directly contradicts the rational faculties. Rather, it is a knowledge which must by apprehended by the mind, by the heart, and by the deeper layers of our being. Lack of spiritual knowledge does not necessarily manifest itself as lack of intelligence in the ordinary sense. Being essentially a knowledge of relationships, spiritual knowledge or faith, draws upon those of our faculties wherein love, compassion and wisdom reside. As we read in scripture: "It is not the eyes which grow blind. It is the hearts within the breasts that grow blind." (Koran, XXII, 46). Spiritual knowledge has to do with the meaning and purpose of human life and with humankind's role in and relation to the Creation as a whole. As such, this faith, if we have a grasp of it, infuses and informs all that we say and do.
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> **Practice**, or service, is the expression of this faith in activities, in works. This is the leg of our tripod which in previous eras was apt to be the most neglected, as people devoted themselves to the fine points of dogma and the comforts of ritual. We now know well enough that faith without works is an empty thing. [9] [10] [11] [12] Indeed, to attempt to develop some kind of personal faith or serenity while shutting ourselves away from the needs of humankind is simply to be guilty of ingratitude and irresponsibility to the created world. Martin Luther's critique of medieval institutional monasticism is certainly much to the point in this regard, as is our Quaker heritage (ex-

cept for the period of quietism). This is not to deny that an eremitical or contemplative life can also be a life of service. Thomas Merton is a great spirit of our own time whose sense of humankind's needs and of his mission to serve them in this nuclear age was never far from his Trappist hermitage.

As St. Francis of Assisi stated so beautifully and so simply, "One possesses only so much wisdom as he puts into practice."

While in previous eras practice, or service, may have been neglected in the pursuit of dogma and ritual, in our own age the reverse is true. Practice is apt to be emphasized to the neglect of the other two legs of the tripod. It is our culture's habit to equate worth with productivity. We tend constantly to be concerned with doing something worthwhile, with bringing about changes, with planning, organizing, structuring and restructuring, and it often occurs that to be busy and to be where the action is becomes our sole goal. It is not uncommon to see an activism is taking place under what are presumably religious auspices. Such activism comes inevitably, if gradually, to resemble in nature the very substance of the evil which it has set out to transform.

Worship is the process through which, in silence, the spiritual knowledge, or faith, and the experiences gained through service, or practice, are transformed from something which resides in the intellect only to something which, through a process of purification and centering, becomes a part of the deeper aspects of our being. Great spirits, like Gandhi, are not people who know anything more than the rest of us. Indeed, they usually rely on a few simple, ancient truths which are available to all. Nor are they people who have had experiences much different than thousands upon thousands of others. I am certain that Gandhi was neither the first nor the last person to be thrown out of a first-class carriage in the Republic of South Africa! But what is different about these great spirits is that this faith and this practice becomes a part of their being in a new way—it enters the marrow of their bones, it breathes from every pore, it becomes an abiding vision rather than a transient impulse. It is through worship that we advance the process of reconciliation at the deepest levels of our being between universal and eternal things and the particulars of our own human experience.

Now to be sure there is faith in our Quaker meetings and in our larger and smaller Quaker agencies. We often refer to that of God in every person, to the consensus process, to the equality and dignity of all human beings regardless of sex or race, and, somewhat uncertainly it seems to me, to the sacredness of our commitment to nonviolence in our activism. These are all elements, or fragments, of faith. But while the great truths of faith are simple things and do not need exhaustive elaboration for their meaningful articulation, there is also a way our faith can be reduced to mere slogans whose very repetition anesthetizes us to their real meaning. Truth is often betrayed merely

by its constant reiteration, as if by formula.

In cases where our activism is carried out through coalitions or agencies organized in an ecumenical spirit, where the work draws together people of many faiths and backgrounds, it can happen that we often deliberately dilute the faith content of the atmosphere so as not to seem dogmatic or sectarian. Our correct understanding that the God of our universe is the loving shepherd of many flocks, and that none has an exclusive monopoly on the truth, rather than leading to an enriching sharing of insight, somehow causes us to remove all faith issues whatsoever from the agenda.

In such circumstances, we are inclined to presume that the animinating values of faith exist in each others' hearts in a relatively static state, available to be called upon when needed. In reality, these elements of faith probably drizzle away, or blur in focus—sloganized into dimensionlessness; drained by the spiritless grinding on of petty business focused on externals; eroded by the relentless impacts of a mainstream culture fallen very far from right ordering. The misuses of the "that of God" phrase to justify the idol-worship of personal notions, and the consequent relativisation of truth, has been discussed elsewhere and need not be elaborated upon here by way of example.[13]

Our capacity for faith, for spiritual knowledge, is nourished by the preaching and writing of people of holiness, and most especially by scripture. All great spirits derive sustenance from some source of truth external to themselves. St. Francis of Assisi was steeped in the four Gospels; George Fox, in the sweep of the Old and New Testaments; Gandhi and Thomas Merton, in the great scriptures of both the East and the West. Rufus Jones found intense and living nourishment in the church fathers and in certain of the women and men of towering spirituality who flourished in medieval times, and he in turn spoke inexhaustibly to the condition of modern humanity. He was an activist, too, and a key founder of the American Friends Service Committee, and in recognition of this his portrait hangs in the Committee's National Office and a conference room there is named after him. Yet how many of the virtual army of volunteers, community activists, committee members and staff who carry out the AFSC's work have even a passing familarity with Rufus Jones' thought or with the thought of those who nourished him?[14]

The burden of evidence is that seeking an authentic realization of the Gospel of Hope in our activism without providing for periodic,

programmed reaffirmations of the content of our faith is highly risky. Most of us, unless we are extraordinarily far advanced in spiritual realization, need some outside reinforcement, some upliftment. One need only consider the average unprogrammed meeting which, having become aware, at least, of its own need for renewal, seeks to accomplish this through encounter processes among its members, which is simply a way of marinating in its own maladies, to realize this.

Such programmed reaffirmations of faith as are required need not be formulas or creeds or anything else which is mechanistic. There are, obviously, volumes of scripture and of other writings of people of holiness, so that there is no danger of such programmed reaffirmations becoming stale. This programming can take the form of liturgies, of contemplative readings in small groups[15], of hymn singing, of dharma talks or homilies by qualified persons, and other activities.

> There is only the fight to recover what has been lost,
> And found and lost again and again. (T.S. Eliot)
>
> I sing the songs of olden times with adoration. (Svetasvatara Upanishad)
>
> The path is beautiful and pleasant and joyful and familiar. (Meister Eckhart)

Not only our faith but also our worship, or our devotional exercises, can also get lost in the shuffle of our activism.

One is reminded again of the film *Gandhi*. While it is an extraordinarily fine film, to be sure, and one can only give thanks that a production in which truth resounds so vigorously actually emerged from the agitation which film making usually seems to involve, yet we must recognize that, being essentially a visual event, a kind of epic, the movie inevitably concentrates on the sweeping external drama of history in which Gandhi played so great a part, while the twenty years which the Mahatma and his closest collaborators spent in spiritual preparation at his ashram was passed over in the twinkling of an eye.

The spinning wheel, such an important part of Gandhi's life, was much in evidence in the film, but its use was interpreted solely as an economic one—an attempt to restore the vitality of Indian village industry in the face of the unfair colonialist competition from Manchester and Leeds. This was a true enough portrayal of Gandhi's attitude, as far as it went, but the film did not mention that Gandhi also regarded the art of spinning as a devotional exercise. For in using the

devices we saw in the film, it is necessary to introduce the fibers of cotton at the point where they are twisted into thread in a very consciously even way, otherwise the thread will be coarse and irregular in diameter. There is little opportunity when doing this hand spinning for wanderings and rovings of mind, for day dreaming. It is said that by examining a piece of Indian home-spun, one can assess the degree of spiritual centeredness of the craftsperson who produced it.

It is the true aim of devotional exercises in all religious traditions, whether it be Gregorian chanting, spinning thread, listening to a mantra, saying the Rosary, counting the breath, rendering sacred texts calligraphically, or reciting the Jesus prayer, to purify our hearts, minds and spirits of the cravings, the transient concerns, the business pursuits, the idiosyncratic likes and dislikes, and all the accidental, phenomenal, and passing things which ordinarily distract us, and to make a space within ourselves where universal and eternal things can be heard.[16]

The meditative silence practiced in Quakerism is one of the purest of such devotional techniques, provided that in our meetings we are seeking a shared *internal* silence, as well as a silence of physical externals. It is easy to forget that it is not the idea of the meditative silence practiced in Quakerism that those undertaking it will be engaging in private, mental movies, while merely maintaining an external hush in the physical realm.

Hopefully, as we meditate silently, we will not be preoccupied with the social engagement to which we must hurry once meeting is over, nor with the next step to take on an important project back at work, nor with last year's vacation or next year's vacation. In true silence all of these circling thoughts, inner conversations, and imaginings are laid aside. The great Quaker leader Isaac Penington encourages us to still what he called "the wanderings and rovings of mind." Even the thinking of theological thoughts is to be laid aside, for there is a difference between thinking about theological concepts and actually experiencing the Divine Presence.[17] [18] Inner silence is the quality of bringing ourselves wholly into the present moment, of bringing our spirits wholly to the place where our bodies are, by stopping the circling thoughts which take our minds elsewhere. Inner silence is the quality of being thoroughly present here and now.[19]

Robert Barclay, one of the earliest and most persuasive apologists for Quakerism, repeatedly in his writing[20] commended to us that we

repair to that measure of grace within ourselves which can be sensed if we refrain not only from outward words, but also from inward thought and desires, so that the seed of eternal things which is already within us can begin to come to the core. Thus, through inner silence we become poor in spirit, and becoming poor in spirit brings us closer to the Kingdom of Heaven.

To the extent that the blessing of peace is achieved by humankind, it will not be achieved because people have outraced each other in the building of armaments, nor because we have outdebated each other with words, nor because we have outmaneuvered each other in political action, but because more and more people in a silent place in their hearts are turned to those eternal truths upon which all right living is based. It is on the inner drama of this search that the unfoldment of the outer drama of history ultimately depends.

Knowing the subtlety of this, Quaker activism avoids making false muscular efforts in the hope of producing effects which are, in reality, beyond the powers of human manipulation, which are ultimately a matter of grace. Quaker activists avoid conceiving of themselves as "social change engineers," trying one technique after another to produce results which, when they fail to materialize, inspire yet more frantic searching for techniques, until, at last, one finds oneself building bombs, or excusing those who build bombs. Friends know that it is not through worldly political vituperation that we inspire people to raise a sail for themselves upon which the winds of grace might operate; rather, it is through the quality of our being—it is by who we are, and by how we live, and by what we do, that we touch the hearts of others. This is why our great social witness organization is not called the American Friends Debating Society, not the American Friends Social Change Committee, not the American Friends Political Action Committee, but, whatever its recent lapses, it is called the American Friends *Service* Committee, for all that really matters is our own very direct experience of seeing what Love can do in practice.

It has always been the particular genius of sanctity to absorb and reconcile the paradoxical. In this spirit, authentic Quaker activists accept the irony that pragmatism is not pragmatic, that the greatest positive effect on the human condition will be had not by those engaged in a calculus of effect-seeking, of claiming results, of juggling means and ends and strategies, but by those seeking to express the good alone and for its own sake. True Quaker activists always seek to

illuminate rather than to conquer.[21]

We face the sharpest sort of challenge in the matter of keeping our silence and our activism in proper alignment with each other, in being sure that our activism grows out of the things of the spirit, especially out of our corporate worship. Even on the scale of the monthly meeting, whose main business we think of as being to nurture the life-in-worship of the Quaker community, action projects can become detached and take on a life of their own, running parallel to the meetings for worship more or less as an independent stream, with only the vaguest sense of connectedness, and with the moments of silence which begin and end activities serving merely as a kind of window dressing.

If this can be so even at the monthly meeting level, what about an enterprise of the scale of the AFSC? Certainly substantial numbers of AFSCers are active in their respective churches, synagogues, temples, and meetings. Certainly the Board of Directors worships together for perhaps four hours a year. Certainly most staff and committee meetings open and close with a moment of silence. Certainly a handful of staff may attend additional weekly or monthly worship opportunities. It is not to denegrate all these beautiful and good things to wonder if their extent is adequate to balance the heroic scope of the 17 million dollars a year of service activism which they are supposed to inform.

The dilemma which Gandhi faced as his life drew to an end is still with us. It is our dilemma. How do we keep our sail aloft, catching the winds of grace, with a tripod whose elements are in balance and integrally related to each other? Many people have accomplished this as individuals in what amounts to one-person satyagraha crusades. In addition to Gandhi himself, John Woolman springs immediately to mind. Our task is to figure out how this can be done by groups, even masses, of people on a sustained basis. If, in the great unfolding drama of the Creation, every age has its proper duty, this, certainly, is ours.

A practical program which makes the Gospel of Hope live in the Nuclear Age will be one of a social activism firmly rooted in faith and worship, in the life of contemplation. It will resist being totally devoured by the claims of exhausting work; it will be aware of the grave damage done by the noise and rush of a pressurized existence. It will be a program which unfailingly allows activists to look to the nourishment of the inner condition. This is scarcely a new idea, and indeed

has been eloquently expressed many times since olden days. Let us consider the beautiful words of St. Augustine as an example:

> Two persons were in the house at Bethany, both blameless, both praiseworthy; two ways of life—and with them the source of life; Martha, an image of the present life; and Mary signifying the future life. Both were friends of the Lord, both lovable, both His disciples. What Martha did, we are. What Mary did, we are in hope of. Let us do one well, so that we obtain the fullness of the other . . .
>
> Righteous, unselfish, peaceful and calm work in temporal things makes us worthy of eternal things. Only we should not let ourselves be held by it, we should not cleave and cling to it. Toil should not engulf us while it grows, should not ensnare us as it unravels itself. We should attain a certain freedom from perishable things and strive after the unchanging, eternal, certain values, superior to the merely earthly things. Our doing should be such as to attain a calm peacefulness instead of degenerating into a restless hurry. Mild and calm according to the image of Christ be the labor of the soul which desires rest to accomplish her task—not lazy, not careless, but as it is written: "In meekness perfect good works."

Practical activism based on the Gospel of Hope recognizes that Mary and Martha were not enemies living apart—they lived in the same house and were, in fact, sisters. Both depended upon each other and indeed completed each other, just as in our own nature we should always seek to harmonize the relationship between doing and being. Even the prospect of a nuclear holocaust must not be allowed to panic us into a frantic round of activities geared to humankind's physical and social needs exclusively. We should resist the belief that everything is politics, and that yet one more radical rearrangement of "the system" will suffice to save civilization. Such is only another way of trying to live by bread alone.

Before concluding this reflection on practicing the Gospel of Hope, it might be useful to think about the "scientism" which is so much a part of this nuclear age. By the term scientism I mean the idolatry of science. Science is useful and fitting in its proper place. It becomes an idol when people try to extend it to realms where it has no relevance or competence. Science has to do with things which are tangible, which can be weighed, measured and enumerated. Science has little to tell us about justice and mercy, about compassion, love, wisdom, freedom or liberation. Science becomes an object of idolatry when it is applied in these realms which are foreign to it; when it is used in attempts to mechanomorphosize the spiritual layers of reality.

Happily, the limits of science seem to be coming more and more

clearly apparent through the very processes of scientific inquiry, as it probes more deeply ino the macrocosmos and microcosmos. One never knows quite how to react to *The New York Times'* latest news about astronomy or quantum physics, as theories become more and more strained in the face of their inadequate attempts to deal with realities that are beyond our grasp. We read of the construction of vast and costly particle accelerators built to pursue yet one more micro-entity whose existence and peculiar properties are necessary in order that the current preferred theory of the universe might remain intact; we read indigestible contradictions about the spacing, extent, and motion of vast and remote galaxies; about space curving back upon itself; about things which are neither particles nor waves but which manage to move forward and backward through time as easily as they move from right to left; and about black holes in outer space which lead to yet other universes whose states are beyond our powers to comprehend.[22]

Sometimes when reading these stories, it seems as if we mortals are somewhat like the inhabitants of the goldfish bowl in the living room who might seek to apply, from within their bowl, some scientific method rooted in their own condition in an attempt to figure out the source of the family income. The facts of the comings and goings in the living room itself reach them only in the most blurry and distorted fashion, and their capacity for gathering data about, no less for comprehending, the vast and complex world of economic acitivity which takes place beyond the household is clearly such as to consign them to perpetual bewilderment.

If we can continue this train of thought, we might observe that the goldfish bowl in the livingroom contains inhabitants of different nations. There may be guppies, angel fish, and neons, as well as goldfish. They might eat each other up, as sometimes happens, turning their goldfish bowl into a nightmare of violence and death. On the other hand, it might be quite possible for them, without explicitly knowing the source of the family income, to make their goldfish bowl a place of peace and harmony. But it is interesting to realize that if they succeed in doing this they will have done so because they have made manifest in their own sphere and on their own level principles which are beautiful and true and which hold not only within the goldfish bowl, but which also are the law for the great world outside of the house and even beyond the nation, in spheres of which the goldfish cannot even have a glimmering.

The wisest of our goldfish will know this truth with an unshakable certainty which will bring them a joy, a consciousness, and a bliss which will enable them to be a healing influence in the affairs of their small aquarium. And while their knowledge of a truth which holds for every universe empowers them to work unceasingly for harmony within the goldfish bowl, they also know that it is wrong to take their aquarium too seriously. They will know that the goldfish bowl is not everything; that whether it is harsh with envy, greed, and assault or whether it blooms with friendship, courage, and truth, it is at best . . .

> . . . but an inn on a thoroughfare. '*Provincial,* one might call the mind contented there." (Edna St. Vincent Millay).

The analogy of the goldfish bowl is a necessary prelude to the final thought about the Practical Applications of the Gospel of Hope in the Nuclear Age. For if the truth is to be told, there is no way that anyone can guarantee that the most purely conceived and strenuously carried out efforts on the part of people of peace will avert a nuclear calamity. But true religion always teaches us how to live with an apocalypse around the corner. It does not guarantee us that there is a sure way to turn enough people around quickly enough to save the modern world. Just as our raising our sail does not guarantee any particular degree of spiritual advancement for ourselves, for these qualities of soul are ultimately beyond the power of human manipulation, so too is it true that what we cannot do for ourselves we also cannot do *to* or *for* others. We can raise a sail or a flag on a firm and steady tripod and observe how many people salute, but whether they do so or not is determined at the deepest core of human nature where ultimate mystery resides.

Will, then, the ultimate catastrophe occur? True religion teaches us that it is fitting that we have no answer to this question. For any answer would mislead in some way. To answer "yes" would lead to despair; to answer "no" would lead to complacency. To practice the Gospel of Hope is to leave despair and complacency behind us and to get down to work.

And so in our goldfish bowl we build castles of sand. It is right for us to do so because we need them; and it is also right for us to value them, not for themselves, but because they radiate a certain beauty, reflecting in their fragile moats and turrets the patterns of another place. For though we may be surrounded by hunger, by tyranny, and by nuclear militarism, we are more properly the citizens of a different

realm, a city of God, a city whose poise, balance, harmony and peace is the natural destiny of the Creation, a city whose ordinarily dim outlines become luminously etched in the present for those who become awakened to its possibilities, and who in their right toiling are faithful to its laws. And in our work, we do for this world as if we were to live in it for a thousand years, and we do for the next as if we were to die tomorrow; for we know that the eschaton, the divinely ordained climax of history, is here, now, as it is in all times. And in our practical activism there is neither chance nor change, neither anger nor affliction, but only love and joy; the same love that has summoned all things up from the dust, the same love which sustains them; the joy which always comes from the simple tasting and feeling of all goodness, from the simple knowing of all Truth. For those to whom it is given to find natural delight in such being and such doing, the world is, indeed, a smiling place!

NOTES TO THE TEXT

[1] Speaking on the topic of "conversion," Mother Theresa of Calcutta has said: "I hope I am converting. I don't mean what you think. I hope we are converting hearts . . . What we are trying to do by our work, by serving the people, is to come closer to God. If in coming face to face with God we accept Him in our lives, then we are converting. We become a better Hindu, a better Muslim, a better Catholic, a better whatever we are, and then by being better we come closer and closer to Him. If we accept Him fully in our lives, then there is conversion. What approach would I use? For me, naturally, it would be a Catholic one, for you it may be Hindu, for someone else, Buddhist, according to one's conscience." Speaking of Nirmal Hriday, her community's hospice for dying destitutes, Mother Theresa comments further: "We help the poor die with God . . . We live so that they . . . may go home according to what is written in the book, be it written according to Hindu, or Muslim, or Buddhist, or Catholic, or Protestant, or any other belief . . . Nobody in Nirmal Hriday has died depressed, in despair, unwanted, unfed or unloved. That is why I think this is the treasure house of Calcutta. We give them whatever they ask according to their faith. Some ask for Ganges water, some for Holy Water, for a word or for a prayer. We try and give them whatever they want." See *Mother Theresa: Her People and Her Work,* by Desmond Doig (Cambridge: Harper and Row, 1976), pages 156, 161.

[2] "If you yourself are just, then will your works be just. Works do not make us holy. It is we who must make works holy. In so far as we within ourselves are as we should be, we make holy all that we do. Those whose nature is not great, no matter what they do, it will be as nothing. People should not think so much about what they do, but rather they should think upon what they are. If only they themselves were good and their way of life was good, then would their works give off a beautiful light." *(Meister Eckhart).* See *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation* by Matthew Fox, O.P. (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1980), page 473.

[3] "When a person practices charity in order to be reborn in heaven, or for fame, or reward, or from fear, such charity can obtain no pure effect." (Sutra on the Distinction and Protection of the Dharma).

[4] "When one performs works of virtue without the preparation of the will, and without a special purpose of one's own toward a just or great cause, and does work for its own sake and from the love of virtue and has no 'why,' then one possesses virtue perfectly and not before." (Meister Eckhart). See *Meister Eckhart: Selected Treatises and Sermons Translated from Latin and German with an Introduction and Notes* by James Clark and John V. Skinner, (London: Faber & Faber, Ltd., 1958), page 98.

[5] "Today a man is required to prove his worth by demonstrating his 'efficacy.' In such a world the monk may simply decide that it is better to be useless—perhaps as a protest against the myth of illusory efficacy. As an American monk I am forced to view with shame and compassion the lengths to which the myths of 'efficiency' and 'practicality' have led American power in Viet Nam. To the machinery of an organized efficiency that produces nothing but mass murder I certainly prefer the relative 'inefficiency' of my own monastic life, which produces only some milk, some cheese, some bread, a few paintings,

and an occasional book." See Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1973), page 243.

[6] ". . . we ourselves cannot create that extraordinary moment of new consciousness. When it occurs it is at once recognizable as a new and unique experience—nothing has ever happened before which is in any way like it because it is out of time. So we can recognize it when it comes and even try to prepare ourselves for it; but it comes by gift only and is not an automatic return for our virtue. We cannot compel such a state to come to us but can only surrender ourselves to its mystery, as the bride surrenders in the Song of Songs. Such surrender signifies great trust and love on our part and it is through this and not through techniques or virtuous behaviour that we find ourselves void of ourselves and at one with the mystery itself." Anne Bancroft, paraphrasing Saint Bernard of Clairvaux in *The Luminous Vision* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), page 93.

[7] "We do not obtain the most precious gifts by going in search of them but by waiting for them. Man cannot discover them by his own powers, and if he sets out to seek for them he will find in their place counterfeits of which he will be unable to discern the falsity." See Simone Weil, *Waiting for God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), page 112.

[8] "Although I bid you plainly and boldly to set out in this contemplative work, nevertheless I feel certain, without error or doubt, that the grace of God is always the chief stirrer and worker, either with your techniques or without. And you or any like you must make yourselves open and receptive to consenting and suffering to such work until you are pure in spirit and discover by the proof of your own spiritual seeing that you are one with God." See *The Book of Privy Counselling*, written anonymously in the fourteenth century by the same person who wrote *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

[9] "As I have often said, even if a person were in rapture like Saint Paul, and knew a sick man who needed soup from him, I should think it far better you left the rapture for love and served the needy man in greater love." (Meister Eckhart)

[10] "Christians are emerging from an era of individualistic piety. The new emphasis on the communal brotherly life of those who have been called to oneness in Christ is in fact a liberation from a narrow, self-preoccupied struggle for a perfection too evidently tinged with narcissism." See Thomas Merton, *op. cit.*, page 251.

[11] "None is permitted to lead a life of pure contemplation in such a way that in his leisure he would not mind his neighbor's needs. On the other hand, no person should be busy in such a manner as to have no desire to contemplate God. One's leisure should not be a rest without action, but either searching or finding of truth, and this in a way which would profit our neighbor through our own growth and personal stability." Quotation from Saint Augustine in *The Soul Afire*, edited by H.A. Reinhold (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1973), page 231.

[12] An extended comment on the relationship of faith and works appears on the well known passage in the Letter of James, Chapter 2:14-26. Briefer references to the same subject may be found in Matthew 16:27; Romans 2:6, 7,10; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 10:35; 1 Peter 1:17; and Revelations 22:12.

[13] A full discussion of this may be found in the essay "That of God in Every Man—What Did George Fox Mean by It?" by Lewis Benson, published in Volume XII, Number 2 of *Quaker Religious Thought* (Spring, 1970). with comments by T. Canby Jones and Francis B. Hall. A much shorter reflection relying less on theological analysis and more on the practical effects of the phrase's uses within the AFSC can be found on pages 19-21 of the present author's essay "Convinced in the Present Day," available from the New York Office of the AFSC.

[14] "If you are wise you will show yourself as a reservoir rather than as a canal. For a canal spreads abroad water as it receives it, but a reservoir waits until it is full before overflowing and so gives, without loss to itself, its superabundant water. But in the Church at the present we have many canals and few reservoirs. Many are those who pour all fourth before they themselves are filled with it; they are more prepared to speak than to hear, are quick to teach that which they have not yet learned, and long to preside over others while they do not yet know how to govern themselves." Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, quoted by Anne Bancroft, *op. cit.*, page 96.

[15] The practice of contemplative reading aloud in small groups seems to the author to be one of the most promising, yet undeveloped, approaches for nurturing faith among unprogrammed Friends, as well as among mixed groups of Quakers and friends of Friends gathered on an ecumenical basis, such as occurs within the AFSC. He first encountered the practice at Woodbroke when participating in a short course on George Fox sponsored by that study center and the New Foundation Fellowship. Each afternoon conferees would break up into small groups and read early Quaker literature aloud, using venerable first editions from Woodbrooke's remarkable library.

Coincidentally, the same reading practice experienced at Woodbrooke, or something very much like it, was described in the bulletin of Pendle Hill (October, 1981) where Parker Palmer, then Pendle Hill Director, describes the experience he and his family had on sabbatical at St. John's Benedictine Abbey in Minnesota. There they learned about the monastic practice of *lectio divina,* or "divine reading."

Parker Palmer writes: "Originally it *(lectio divina)* referred to the contemplative study of the Bible; today it has been expanded to include any book which brings one closer to the truth. The vital feature of the discipline is not what one studies but how one studies it. The approach is a slow, thoughtful, prayerful dialogue with the material, grounded in the faith that behind the words we read there is always a Word to encounter.

"We have been schooled to study for information; in *lectio* we study for insight. We have learned how to study to 'master' a field; in *lectio* we study so that truth might master us. In the academy we study with our minds, always analyzing and dissecting; in *lectio* we do not abandon the mind but let it descend to the heart, where the 'hidden wholeness' of things may be discovered again. Normally we read and question the text; in *lectio* we allow that text to read and question us. At its best *lectio divina* nurtures a contemplative intellect—a mind which does not do violence to self or others or the world, but seeks to live in harmony with all. I saw these fruits in some of those Minnesota monks and nuns, people who have truly had a 'higher' education."

In his biographical memoir which introduces Thomas Kelly's *A Testament of Devotion,* Douglas Steere describes how T. Canby Jones, while a freshmen

at Haverford, organized a group of fellow students to visit the Kelly home one evening each week to read together books of mutual interest. "They lived on a mixed diet of St. Augustine's *Confessions* and Gibran's *The Prophet* for the first few weeks and had an easy time of silence together after the readings," Douglas Steere writes. "During the next few years they read a number of books of devotional literature together: Pere Grou, Meister Eckhart, Brother Lawrence, Letters by a Modern Mystic, The Little Flowers of Saint Francis, and then, quite naturally, the New Testament and the Psalms."

The New York Office of the American Friends Service Committee has experimented in small ways with contemplative readings for committee members and staff. After the period of silent worship which begins each Executive Committee meeting, a member (on a rotating basis planned in advance) shares a short passage of devotional literature which he or she finds particularly meaningful. At one meeting a substantial portion of the agenda time was devoted to a *lectio*-like experience. In January of 1983 an evening-long reading and discussion was held for AFSCers interested in youth programming; a series open to all committee members and staff is planned for the fall of 1983.

[16] "Keep to that of God in you, which will lead you up to God, when you are still from your own thoughts and imaginations and desires and counsels of your own hearts, and motions, and will; when you stand single from all these, waiting upon the Lord, your strength is renewed." George Fox, *The Works of George Fox* (New York: AMS Press, 1975), Volume 4, page 132.

[17] "When you go apart by yourself in solitude, do not think about what you will be doing afterwards, and put away all good thoughts as well as evil ones; and do not pray with words unless you feel you really must. Or, if you do have something to say, do not look at how much or how little it is, nor what it means, whether it is orison or psalm, hymn, anthem or any other prayer, general or specific, silently formed within or spoken out loud. And look that nothing remains in your conscious mind but a naked stretching unto God, not clothed in any particular thought about God—what he is like in himself or in any of his works—but only that he is as he is. Let him be so, I pray you, and do not make him otherwise. Pry no further into him by subtlety of intelligence; let faith be your solid ground. That naked intent, emptied of ideas and grounded in very faith, shall be to your thoughts and feelings a naked thought and a blind feeling of your own being; as if, with your whole heart, you said to God: 'That which I am, good Lord, I offer to you, without any looking into the nature of your being, but only that you are as you are, without any more.' " *The Book of Privy Counselling.*

[18] "If to any one should grow hushed the tumult of the flesh, hushed the images of the earth, and of the waters, and the air, hushed, too, the poles, and if the very soul should be hushed to itself, and were by cessation of thought of self to pass beyond itself; if all dreams and imaginary revelations, every tongue and every token, were hushed, and whatsoever fall out through change; if to any, such should be wholly hushed to silence, since could any hear them, they all say: 'We made not outselves, but He made us, who abideth forever,' and this said, if now they should cease to speak, because they had inclined our ears to Him, who made them, and He Himself by Himself should speak, not through them, but of Himself, that so we should hear His Word, not uttered by a tongue of flesh, nor by a voice of angel, nor by thunders of a cloud, nor

by a parable of comparison, but Himself, whom in these we love; if, I say, we should hear Him, without these, as now we strained ourselves, and in the flight of thought touched upon the Eternal Wisdom that abideth over all things; if this were continued, and other visions of a nature by far inferior were taken away, and this one alone should ravish, and absorb, and enwrap the beholder of it amid inward joys, so that life everlasting might be of such a kind, as was that one moment of comprehension for which we sighed; were not this an 'Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord'? (Matthew 25:21). And when shall that be? Shall it be when 'we all shall rise again, but shall not be changed'?" See Saint Augustine, *Confessions,* Book IX, Chapter 10..

[19] In fact, the practice of inner silence, or presence, is commended to us by sages not only for periods of worship, but for all times. For only by being present and mentally silent can we see the truth of the situations we are in, and can we know what response is called for from us in truth. Without such mindfulness our ability to respond precisely and compassionately in everyday affairs is crippled; and if we cannot serve our spouse, children, parents, coworkers, and friends, how will we serve society—of what use will be our grand theories of politics and of social change?

An experiment was once performed using two groups of educators. Each group was shown the same film of a child at play. But one group was told the child came from a broken home and had siblings who were drug addicts and delinquents. The other group was told that the child was the offspring of happily married professional parents and had brothers and sisters who were attending well-known schools. Each group was asked to analyze the child's play behavior as revealed in the film. Needless to say, the result showed that very little true observation took place, as each group tended to superimpose the agitations and ideas of their own minds on the data presented by the film. Inner silence is the key to the accurate perception of things as they really are.

Indeed, inner silence, or presence, is the key to any authentic living whatsoever: "If while washing the dishes, we think only of the cup of tea that awaits us, thus hurrying to get the dishes out of the way as if they were a nuisance, then we are . . . not alive during the time we are washing the dishes. In fact, we are completely incapable of realizing the miracle of life while standing at the sink. If we can't wash the dishes, the chances are we won't be able to drink our tea either. While drinking the cup of tea, we will only be thinking of other things, barely aware of the cup in our hands, Thus we are sucked away into the future—and we are incapable of actually living one minute of life." See Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), pages 4,5. Reverend Nhat Hanh, of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, was a leader of that denomination's effort to advance peace in the midst of war. He now lives in exile in Paris, and has served as vice-chairman of the Fellowship of Reconciliation.

[20] See especially pages 239-300 of *Barclay's Apology in Modern English,* edited by Dean Freiday.

[21] "The sun is seen to pour down and extend itself in all directions, yet it is never exhausted. For this downpouring is but a self-extension; sunbeams, in fact, derive their very name from a word signifying 'to be extended.' To understand the property of a sunbeam, watch the light as it streams into a darkened room through a narrow chink. It prolongs itself forward in a straight line, until

it is held up by encountering some solid body which blocks its passage to the air beyond; and then it remains at rest there, without slipping off or falling away. The emission, and the diffusion, of thought should be the counterpart of this: not exhausting, but simply extending itself; not dashing violently or furiously against the obstacles it encounters, nor yet falling away in despair; but holding its ground and lighting up that upon which it rests. Failure to transmit it is mere self-deprivation of light." Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations,* translated by Maxwell Staniforth. (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1964). Page 134.

[22] There are, nevertheless, interesting parallels between the theories of modern physics and the cosmologies of ancient mystical religions. For lucid discussions of this see *The Tao of Physics* by Fritjof Capra (Boulder, Colorado: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1975) and *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* by Gary Zakov (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1979).

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