

The 1972
James Backhouse
Lecture

**The Quaker Message:
a Personal Affirmation**

L. HUGH DONCASTER

About the Author

L. Hugh Doncaster was born into a Quaker family in 1914. He was educated at two British Friends' School - Sidcot and Leighton Park. At Cambridge University he took a degree in Natural Science. After a year of part-time teaching and part-time organizing of workcamps with Jack Hoyland, he went to do educational and social work amongst unemployed miners in South Wales, later becoming caretaker of the Friends Meeting House in Cardiff. From 1942 to 1954 he worked full-time at Woodbrooke College, Selly Oak, Birmingham, England, where many gained richly from his interpretation of Quaker history and from his portrayal of the lives and teaching of early Friends. This work was continued until 1964 on a part-time basis whilst he developed his small property in Worcestershire. Since then he has travelled widely and made himself available to Friends in England and South Africa. This lecture was given at the Australia Yearly Meeting held in Hobart, Tasmania in January 1972 after six weeks tour of Australia and prior to a further visit to South Africa.

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Library of Congress catalog card number 79-182982

Printed in the United States of America by
Sowers Printing Company, Lebanon, Pennsylvania

January 1972: 3,500

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Note

I am grateful to the following friends who read an earlier draft of this essay and made helpful comments:
Maurice A. Creasey, Irene M. Gay, Geoffrey F. &
Mary Nuttall, David W. Robson, Peter Scott,
& to my longsuffering wife, "Shifa."

THE JAMES BACKHOUSE LECTURE

This is the eighth in a series of lectures instituted by the Australian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends on the occasion of the establishment of that Yearly Meeting on January 1, 1964. This lecture was delivered in Hobart, Tasmania, on January 5, 1972, during the sessions of the Yearly Meeting.

James Backhouse was an English Friend who visited Australia from 1832 till 1838. He and his companion, George Washington Walker, travelled widely, but spent most of their time in Tasmania, then known as Van Diemen's Land. It was through this visit that Quaker Meetings were first established in Australia. James Backhouse was also a botanist and he published full scientific accounts of what he saw, and besides encouraging Friends, he followed up his deep concern for the convicts and for the welfare of the aboriginal inhabitants of the country.

It is good that Hugh Doncaster should visit Tasmania 140 years after James Backhouse landed there, to present the Quaker Message as he sees it.

The present pamphlet has been published jointly by Pendle Hill and Australia Yearly Meeting. Further copies may be obtained from Pendle Hill, Wallingford, Pa., or from Australia Yearly Meeting, 631 Orrong Road, Toorak, Melbourne 3142, Australia.

1. The Universal Light of Christ

THE QUAKER MESSAGE is the Christian message as Friends understand Christianity.

The central affirmation in the Quaker message is that God is continuously revealing himself to every person, that "every man is enlightened by the divine light of Christ."

It is necessary to characterise the word "God," which is, of course, impossible to confine within any definition. By "God" I mean the Ultimate Reality behind and in existence, who (or which) gives significance and purpose to life, who gives strength and inspiration, and whose nature is revealed to us most fully in the person of Jesus. It is that kind of Spirit who claims our loyalty and who gives us strength; it is a Christian discipleship to which we are committed.

Thus Jesus is supremely significant for Friends. Different Friends view him differently, some giving more emphasis to his "divinity," others to his "humanity." But he himself remains central, the focal point in which these concepts merge. He shows us what the character of God is like, what the character of man can be, what is the nature of the universal Light of Christ.

This does not in any way reduce our claim that God is known in measure to every single person, whether or not he would express his faith in Christian terms. We believe that all people at all times have some knowledge of this reality, known "within" but recognised as in some way coming from "without," inextricably mixed up with that which makes us

human and yet stretching our manhood towards a fulness it does not reach.

At the same time we recognise that all men also have within them powerful drives away from God. The light shines in darkness, and makes clear how dark the darkness is. The Quaker message has never been that men are angels (well disguised), but that, having an inborn tendency to self-centredness with all its consequent sinfulness, they also have that in them which can lead them away from self towards God.

This central affirmation, which the Light of the Christlike God shines in every person, implies that our knowledge of God is both subjective and objective. It is easy to misconstrue "Inner Light" as an invitation to individualism and anarchy if one concentrates on the subjective experience known to each one. But it is an equally important part of our faith and practice to recognise that we are not affirming the existence and priority of your light and my light, but of the Light of God, and of the God who is made known to us supremely in Jesus. The inward experience must be checked by accordance with the mind of Christ, the fruits of the Spirit, the character of that willed caring which in the New Testament is called Love.

It is further checked by the fact that if God is known in measure by every person, our knowledge of him will be largely gained through the experience of others who reverently and humbly seek him. In the last resort we must be guided by our own conscientiously held conviction - but it is in the last resort. First, we must seek carefully and prayerfully through the insights of others, both in the past and among our contemporaries, and only in the light of this search do we come to our own affirmation.

In these two ways our knowledge of God is saved from being merely subjective.

I have referred to this experience of God in rather abstract terms like "Ultimate Reality" and "Inner Light," and tried to make these more specific by relating them to Jesus. But the heart of the Quaker message does not lie in a doctrine expressed in abstract terms, but in an experience of power and grace, known in our hearts and also related to the structure of the universe; known individually and also recognized as belonging to all men, immanent and also transcendent. At the same time, this universal Spirit knowable by all men at all times is focussed and made personal in Jesus in a way which makes it appropriate to speak of the universal light as the Light of Christ.

It is from this double emphasis on universal and Christlike that the Quaker message starts. On this foundation—a mixture of faith and experience—has been built the faith and practice of Friends. It is these two elements, held firmly together, which provide the coherence and unity of Quakerism. From this central affirmation, that there is something of the Christlike God made known to every person, follows a whole sequence of further affirmations, hammered out in corporate faith and practice through more than three centuries.

2. *Belief & Creed*

"The Friend had a life within him to wait on and to obey, not chiefly a creed to believe; and it was this life which developed in the Quaker groups a common body of truths to which they sought to bear unflinching witness. Accordingly they accumulated 'testimonies' rather than Articles of Faith. . ."

The Second Period of Quakerism, 1919, p. 377.

IN THESE WORDS William Charles Braithwaite expresses something which lies near the heart of essential Quakerism. Experience of God evokes response from the whole man in which his mind, his feeling and

his will are all involved. It is a response in a life of commitment, obedience and discipleship, the response of our whole being to the deepest and highest we know. Such a response will naturally include thought, and the way in which we believe will clearly affect our actions and is extremely important. But faith is more than belief, and the finite nature of our thought makes any formulation of belief tentative and subject to constant review. "Head knowledge" must go with "heart knowledge." The primary emphasis of Friends is on the inward life of God expressed in an outward way of life, and correctness of belief, though very important, is secondary.

This attitude, immediately derived from the central affirmation that God is present in the hearts of all men everywhere however they may think, leads to putting doctrinal belief in a subordinate relationship to discipleship. William Penn puts it clearly when he says Friends "placed religion in a clean conscience, not in a full head; in walking with God, more than in talking of him" (*The Christian Quaker*, 1674, Preface). But it very easily can be misconstrued into suggesting that "doctrine" is unnecessary or irrelevant, and this is a misunderstanding of Quakerism. Friends' emphasis on response to God is emphasis on response to, among other things, Truth; and it is no accident that they called their first missionaries "publishers of Truth," and that before the word "Quakerism" came into current use, the word "Truth" was used in its place. Doctrine is teaching about Truth, and without it there is at best confusion, at worst untruth.

Thus on the one hand Friends have never asked their members to subscribe to any particular credal affirmations because a creed appears to them to put first things second: it stresses the intellectual formulation of belief rather than the personal response in discipleship.

But on the other hand to suggest that because Friends do not insist on their members subscribing to a creed means that Friends do not stress the importance of belief is a misunderstanding of Quakerism. The rejection of creeds is because Friends do believe so firmly. Because we

do not all subscribe to a single creed, we need all the more to formulate for ourselves what our own "creed" is; we emphatically need to know what we believe.

I think it is right to repeat here what I wrote in 1963:

Such a position exposes us to very grave dangers. The refusal to set up an external standard of belief to which all must conform leaves room for untrue thinking, muddled thinking and no thinking at all. Such a position itself may undercut the very commitment we are seeking to maintain. It may prevent us from stating crisply and authoritatively just for what the Society stands. It may hinder us in the communication of our belief to others. It exposes us to such diversity within the body that contradictory positions may be found among us. To the outside observer, and to some among us, it appears confused and confusing, unclear and untidy. The great historic creeds of the Christian church have had immense value in safeguarding the church from drifting into dangers such as these.

But we believe that the response to such dangers is not the imposition of a creed but the summons to mental fight to which H. G. Wood has called us. To say that Friends have no creed is not to say that each Friend has no belief. Far otherwise. Each one, and each group, has the responsibility to seek, and seek, and seek again where the Light is leading; to find what the life of God means in the life of man; to wrestle with the great facts and mysteries in the heart of our Christian experience, and to know what we believe about them. It is only when we have formulated our faith for ourselves that we can communicate it to others or know its incisive power in our own day to day discipleship (Swarthmore Lecture, 1963: *God in Every Man*, pp. 38-39).

3. *The Bible*

FROM WHAT has already been said about the Light being the Light of Christ, about seeking for its promptings prayerfully through the insights of others, about the emphasis on doctrine being important *within* a context of Christian discipleship, it will be clear that the Bible is fundamentally important to Friends, and at the same time it is not their final authority.

It is important as a unique record of religious experience, showing the development over more than a thousand years of insights which nourished the faith of Jews, Christians and Moslems. The Bible (Old Testament) also nourished the experience of Jesus and provided the framework of thought in which he expressed himself. It is the historical record of all that we know of his life and character, his teaching, the impact he made upon his contemporaries. It tells us of the way in which the first two generations of his followers understood and misunderstood him, and how they organized the group life of the early church. It provides a solid base in history, set in a time and place of which we know quite a lot from other sources, for that which has proved itself relevant and contemporary in every subsequent generation. To cut ourselves off from the biblical roots of our faith would be to open the way for airy-fairy speculations and hunches, unchecked by the objective reality of a historical person set in a developing culture and giving birth to a new world faith.

But it is also clear that the central affirmation of Friends makes our ultimate authority that Christlike Spirit whom we see mediated to us through the Bible but frequently mixed up with and distorted by the limited humanity of the writers of scripture. Although early Friends accepted the divine inspiration of the Bible, they affirmed repeatedly that it must be read and understood in that Spirit which lies behind and inspired it, that it is "a declaration of the fountain itself . . . a secondary rule subordinate to the Spirit. . ." (Robert Barclay: *Apology*, Prop. III)

When the "liberal" attitude to the Bible came to be developed three quarters of a century ago, it was natural that this basic insight of Friends should open the way for acceptance of a liberal rather than literal understanding, and the great majority of Friends today would accept the Bible in this way.

Note. There are some Yearly Meetings, particularly in the Midwest and West of the United States and those which have been derived from their missionary activity, who would describe themselves as fundamentalist rather than liberal. This comes about through historical reasons. Similarly, there is another extreme wing found scattered widely among Friends though not represented in any official Quaker writing, which tends to neglect the Bible as unimportant because its thought-form seems misleading to a biblically illiterate generation or because it seems to exclude non-Christians.

4. *Worship*

A WELL KNOWN English dictionary refers to Friends' "peculiar priestless religious meetings". The overall impression is one of oddity, but each word has its appropriate meaning. No other Christian community has made its central experience of Christian worship a gathering of ordinary people met together for unprogrammed silent prayer from any of whom spoken ministry may arise.

Friends came to this way of worship through experience the experience of utter dependence on God-and they found it to be the form most consistent with their central affirmation. Its evolution is probably through the "time of prophesying" at the conclusion of Puritan services in the 17th century when "after the priest had done his stuff" anyone present could contribute with prayer, exhortation or comment on the

sermon. This in turn led to the unprogrammed gatherings of the Seekers, which were taken over into Quakerism when Seekers became finders and the Society of Friends was born.

But though its origin was probably through the experiments of their Puritan forebears, its continuance was because it was seen that this pattern gave the best opportunity for the Light to shine through all. Our way of worship is not just a historical accident; it is a corollary from our conviction concerning the universal Light of Christ.

Believing that in every worshipper, regardless of age, learning, sex or any other human label, the promptings of God's spirit are at work, Friends meet together in entirely unprogrammed silent prayer, opening themselves to him. It is our experience that in such corporate worship, although we are deprived of the outward aids which all other Christians use (human leadership, regular reading of the Bible, liturgy, the symbolism of architecture, etc.), we are led into a depth of communion with God and with one another that is deeply meaningful and spiritually refreshing. It is a fundamental part of the Quaker message that where two or three are gathered together in the name of God, there he is in the midst of them. They need no consecrated building, no priest, no altar, no organ, no bread nor wine. At any time and in any place they may enter into the deepest communion with God and with one another, knowing something of the joy of praise and thanksgiving, the cleansing of confession, the passionate caring of intercession; and knowing at the same time the healing of forgiveness and the strengthening which comes as vision is clarified and faith deepened.

But the unprogrammed nature of Friends' worship demands discipline. For instance, the fact that there is no arrangement to read the Bible regularly in worship, means that Friends need to read it regularly in private. Neglect of its teachings has led to serious impoverishment. We are asked to come to Meeting "with heart and mind prepared" (Query 7). Our worship is in a real sense spontaneous, and yet it does not just

happen. It is greatly enriched by preparation of heart and mind before, and by willed focussing of heart and mind during, the period of worship.

Note. To the author the unprogrammed form of worship is the characteristic and essentially Quaker pattern. This is true also for Friends all over Europe, in New Zealand, Australia and Southern Africa, in Japan, in much of the Eastern United States, in parts of Canada and elsewhere. However, in most of the United States, the rest of the Americas, East Africa, Madagascar and elsewhere, Friends worship in a service very similar to that of other Protestant nonconformists in Britain; and in fact the majority of Friends in the world worship in such services, often guided by pastors. The historical reasons for this development need not here be outlined. Suffice it to say that in the late 19th century in the Mid-west of America conditions developed in which it seemed appropriate to have pastors, that the pastoral system met certain needs much more successfully, that missionary activity at home and abroad was fostered by it and fostered it, and that it tends to be self-propagating. Consequently both forms of worship are found within the world family of Friends. Each has strengths and weaknesses, and there is considerable need for Friends in each group to learn from those in the other. In the foregoing section on worship I have declared my personal understanding of the unprogrammed type of worship as being more consistent with essential Quakerism. Here it is right to re-affirm (see Report of the 4th World Conference of Friends, pp. 55-56) that those of us living in areas of Quakerism in which our worship is entirely unplanned, desperately need to learn from our pastoral Friends something of their ways of giving religious education to their adult membership. Unprogrammed worship undoubtedly needs supplementing by good teaching at other times.

5. *Sacraments*

AS WITH WORSHIP and several other of Friends' affirmations or testimonies, our attitude to the sacraments began in experience and was found to be consistent with our conviction concerning the universal

Light of Christ. Some of the Puritan forerunners of Friends had found themselves led to give up the Lord's supper and baptism, and with the development of an entirely lay society it naturally followed that any kind of "administration" by priest or minister was abandoned. In the depth of their worship and the richness of their fellowship Friends knew an experience of communion as deep as or deeper than any which they had known when taking the elements in another church. No ceremony could add more to what they already knew.

This experience lies at the heart of their central affirmation, and the corollary follows that no outward elements are necessary or even helpful to the realisation of the deepest communion with God, or commitment in membership of the church.

Consequently Friends have not practised the sacraments of the Lord's supper and baptism as particular occasions, but sought to know the reality behind each of these in their normal day-to-day living, and in their Meeting for Worship.

6. *Decision-making*

FRIENDS' MEETINGS for church affairs, like their Meetings for Worship, probably were influenced by the church meetings of the Independents and Baptists in which the whole congregation was actively involved. This was reinforced by their central affirmation. Matters concerning the whole body should be the concern of the whole body, and decisions should be taken as far as possible by meetings at which as many as possible of the members are present. Of course committees are appointed to do particular work, and have a responsibility to report back to the appointing body, but ultimate responsibility rests with the whole group and not with some appointed elite.

In such meetings of the whole membership, as well as in committees, decision-making also follows a distinct pattern which grows from Friends' central affirmation. Believing that God reveals himself in each one, the attempt is made to let all business meetings take place in a context of worship. Such meetings begin and end in silent worship, and may have periods of silent worship introduced into them. But even more important, they are at their best when the participants remember that we are in some sense met together not to press our own particular point of view, but to seek what we believe to be the will of God. In such a context, each contributor will be mindful of, but not entirely bound by, what is already known and accepted as true and right, and will present as positively as possible what is on his mind and heart. There will be little or no cut and thrust debate, but a bringing in of relevant facts and comment so that the picture gradually emerges rather as it does in the doing of a jig-saw puzzle. One starts with the intention of trying to apprehend what is not yet known, rather than to press a point of view already firmly held. Belief in the revelation of God through each one, encourages listening to and weighing each contribution with care and respect, from whatever quarter it may come.

Moreover, believing that the same light shines in each heart, we expect to be led into unity as we get behind the superficial differences, and because we are expecting unity we are looking for it. The time comes when "the sense of the meeting" is evident, and the clerk can draw up a minute which expresses this without a vote having been taken.

7. *Women & Men*

TODAY the "equality" of men and women is much more widely accepted than it was in the 17th century, at which time Friends affirmed that since the Light shines in every human heart, it shines as much in women as in men, and there should consequently be equal opportunity and responsibility for each sex.

In practice this has meant full equality in worship, where women and men equally are to be responsive to the promptings of the Spirit. It has meant fully equal vows and true partnership in marriage. It has meant fully equal responsibility and opportunity in service, for instance as overseers and elders, and women have indeed been at the forefront of much of the missionary activity of British Friends overseas. It has meant fully equal part in the "business" meetings of the Society. (Through historical accident many men's and women's meetings developed separately with different functions, resulting in the men's meetings being more significant until the end of the 19th century, when men's and women's meetings united.) It meant providing as good education for girls as for boys at a time when this was still uncommon. It has meant, in fact, a comradeship in work and worship which grows out of and is fostered by a deep respect for that of God in the other. It is no accident that Friends have been active in earlier generations in movements promoting the rights of women.

8. *Personal Integrity and Political Action*

A VERY far-reaching part of the Quaker message, affecting character and behaviour unconsciously, is the affirmation that if God is revealing himself to every human person, then there can be no parts of life which are "secular" in contrast to other parts which are "sacred". God is equally relevant to every part of life, whether it is Saturday (recreation), Sunday (worship), or Monday (work). The attempt is made to level up, even though in practice we sometimes level down; the underlying faith is that at all times our behaviour should reflect the conviction that God is at work in those among whom we mix, and in ourselves; that every human encounter can fan or quench the divine spark in another; and that our lives are at all times lived in the presence of God. This is not to be thought of as a joyless response to oughtness, with God as the unseen

disciplinarian standing by with a rod or a pained look of disappointment, like the small boy overheard rebuking the family dog: "O go away, Jock. What with you and God following a chap around, how can I ever be alone?" Rather is it accepting and entering into the abundant life of which Jesus spoke, the liberty of the sons of God.

This attitude issues in many different ways, some known and specified in our *Advices & Queries*, others less conscious. It affects our general attitude to people, which gradually becomes more positive, more considerate, more caring. It affects the nature of our work - both what we do and how we do it. It affects the standards we adopt, and sometimes makes us reject those that are conventionally acceptable. Standards thought appropriate to the kingdom of men may seem inappropriate in the kingdom of God, and if we accept his sovereignty, we are to live in his kingdom here and now, "a colony of heaven."

This attitude is sometimes criticised as being "puritanical", and there are Friends who reject it as separating us from our fellow men. It is, of course, all too easy for this to grow into a "holier-than-thou" attitude, and that most certainly separates. But the essential Quaker testimony is not that we should cultivate pride and hypocrisy, nor that we should condemn those who do not see as we do, but that we should allow the fruits of the spirit to grow unhindered by the cramping inadequacies of conventional morality. This leads to scrupulousness in matters of conduct that is not scrupulosity. The latter may arise from a self-conscious pursuit of righteousness; the former arises from the habit of seeking "to answer that of God in everyone".

John Woolman expresses this well:

"Whatever a man does in the spirit of charity, to him it is not a sin; and while he lives and acts in this spirit, he learns all things essential to his happiness, as an individual; and if he does not see that any injury or injustice to any other person, is necessarily promoted by any part of his form of government, I believe the merciful Judge will not lay iniquity to his charge. Yet others, who live in the same spirit of charity, from a clear conviction may

see the relation of one thing to another and the necessary tendency of each; and hence it may be absolutely binding on them to desist from some parts of conduct which some good men have been in" (Preface to *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes*, Pt. II, 1760).

Several of Friends' affirmations clearly fall within this last category.

It is from this approach to life that there grows integrity, reliability, honesty in trivial matters as well as larger ones, an attitude which seeks to make every human encounter a truly personal one, which shows respect for and enhances the dignity of each person.

It is from this approach too, that there comes the attempt to bring into the affairs of commerce and industry standards which are based on awareness of God in each one, rather than those which assume that in this field maximum profit is the criterion of success. In the days when giant commercial empires had not yet been created, it was possible for initiative to be taken more readily, and the 19th century provides a long list of Quaker employers who contributed to new standards for workers which we now take for granted. (Cadburys, for instance, introduced half holidays without lowering pay.) Within the more complex society of today, it is less easy to make radical experiments of this kind, but the principle still holds that the world of "business" is just as much an area in which God is to be known and obeyed, as is the period set aside for worship.

Another area which is often assumed to be beyond the reach of God and too compromising for a Christian rightly to enter, is that of political action. For a long while Friends were excluded by law in Britain from accepting responsibility as local councillors or members of Parliament. When it became possible, there was a good deal of reluctance among many Friends at the thought of Friends going into these fields and becoming involved in "worldly" compromises. But as the doors opened through changes in legislation, there were found

Friends pressing the essential Quaker insight that there is no area from which God abdicates, and that if politicians are men and women in whom he is at work, there is great need to help and strengthen his witness in the hearts of those who have been entrusted with responsibility for government. Friends soon came to see that to refuse to act politically was to accept and to support that status quo-which is also to act politically; they saw that abdication was irresponsible. Consequently Friends found themselves entering Parliament and local government, becoming magistrates, and trying generally to enter fully into the concept of Christian citizenship.

When this happened in England in the 1830's, after a few years there were far more Friends as Members of Parliament or local councillors than their small numbers would justify. (In 1880 there were 10 Friend M.P.'s; in 1945 there were 9.) But just as the growth of giant commercial concerns hampers Friends from making their particular contribution in industry, so the hardening of party political discipline has made it less easy for Friends to make their way effectively into positions of political responsibility, and numbers of Friends in these fields have recently declined.

Note. The historical references here are so brief as to be misleading, and they all refer to Britain. It will be recognised that Friends played a very active part in the government of most of the British colonies in America in the 17th and 18th centuries. There, even more clearly than in Britain, the difference of outlook between the "purist" and the "political" Friends was clear; but the essential point is that there were "political" Friends. William Penn and George Fox were both held in good esteem!

9. *Social Testimonies*

THE FAITH that God reveals himself to everyone means that human personality is sacred, that each individual matters as an individual, is

"precious in the sight of God". But though Friends have tried to maintain this attitude, they have realised that the collective arrangements which mankind makes in ordering society can in themselves foster or quench the divine life in individuals. Thus it comes about that Friends have corporately been concerned not only for children but for good education, not only for wrong-doers but for a reformed and reformatory penal system, not only for slaves but for the abolition of slavery, not only for immigrants but for right race relations. The list could be extended almost indefinitely.

This is not simply saying that Friends tend to be humanitarians and so are concerned about these things as any responsible human beings are; it is saying that it is a corollary of our religious faith that we should be concerned with so ordering human affairs that they give the best chance for the divine life to grow in all human hearts.

And so Friends have developed a series of "testimonies" which have begun in the hearts of individuals, been shared, deepened, widened, adopted by small groups of Friends and by Yearly Meetings, passed on to new generations and adapted to changed circumstances. Each one has a history of growth and development. Occasionally changes in society have made a testimony unnecessary. For instance, we no longer have a testimony against "hat honor." More often, changed circumstances have brought the need for new applications or changed emphases; or it may be that further insight has come and a new generation sees more deeply than its forebears. For instance, the first Friends realized that slave-keeping Friends must be humane to their slaves, treat them as persons in whom the Light of God shone, encourage them to worship, etc., but they did not see that slavery was wrong even when practised humanely. Gradually the insight deepened and the circumstances changed: they came to be against slave-trading, then against slave-holding. When Friends had cleared themselves of complicity in both, they launched into the campaign to abolish the slave trade, and then to abolish slavery itself. With the 20th century has come a new situation in which the creation of right race relations, both overseas and very closely at home, has come to be

increasingly urgent. The newest of all the concerns of Friends-for the right sharing of the world's resources-is a fruit in part of this same testimony. The original insight, that God's Light shines in the hearts of all members of all human races has been maintained, and has fruited in these different ways in successive generations.

Thus it comes about that Friends collectively are committed in a number of areas of social life to pressing for action which seems to enhance the dignity of the individual, and allow the life of God in him to grow.

But this is not simply that Friends are committed to a "political" campaign for certain reforms, using the normal methods of political democracy. The growth of concern normally involves first a personal commitment, often involving a personal renunciation. Before Friends became ardent abolitionists they had freed themselves from the evil of slave-holding.

Thus it is that there is a characteristic way of life which expresses itself in many ways, leaving great freedom to the individual, but growing naturally from the basic conviction. For instance, again: what began as a testimony against "vain fashions" and degenerated into a Quaker garb elaborately designed to be simple (though expensive), continues in the tendency for Friends to choose clothes which are serviceable and attractive but not ostentatious. Our *Advices* remind us to

endeavour to make your home a place of peace and happiness where the presence of God is known. Try to live simply. Remember the value of beauty in all its forms. Encourage the appreciation of music, literature and the other arts and the development of a taste that will reject the worthless and the base. God's good gifts are for all to enjoy; learn to use them wisely. Choose recreations that do not conflict with your service to God and man . . .

From such a background, it is natural that there are certain social issues on which Friends feel deeply and which call forth from them a response in conduct which is different from that of convention. In particular, Friends are concerned about the widespread use of alcohol and other habit-forming drugs, and the widespread habit of betting and gambling.

This is not the place even to outline the reasons for total abstinence from alcohol. But it is the place to indicate how once again the concern about alcohol is a direct consequence of a religious conviction concerning man's relationship to God and his fellow men. The current "Advice" of London Yearly Meeting reads;

"In view of the evils arising from the unwise use of alcohol, tobacco and other habit-forming drugs, consider how far you should limit your use of them, or whether you should refrain from them altogether."

In view of the appalling tragedy known to be associated with the taking of alcohol, many, but by no means all, Friends have felt that they must not themselves indulge even temperately in that which may lead someone to harm. They see the possible good in even occasional drinking to be in no way commensurate with the possible evil consequences. Refusal to take alcohol is for them an expression of caring, an acceptance of the principle that "I am my brother's keeper". It is the direct consequence of taking seriously the injunction so to live that our lives will "answer that of God in every man". The attempt to take seriously the movings of God's spirit in the human heart, leads them to reject alcohol which poisons and coarsens.

The Society has long been concerned with the evils in betting and gambling, and concern about lotteries goes back even to the 17th century. Friends believe that the principle is the same whether the gamble is taken through football pools, the stock exchange, or in apparently harmless activities like raffles in aid to charities, and most would refuse to share even in the latter, believing that the appeal to

selfishness and covetousness is a denial of our conviction that the spirit of God dwells in every human heart, and it is to that that we should make appeal.

The social testimonies of Friends are many, and naturally they are changing quickly as new circumstance calls forth new response, so any listing of them would be as misleading as it would be informative. Perhaps the simplest indication is to mention that in London Yearly Meeting four independent bodies which operated in this field-the Penal Affairs Committee, the Race Relations Committee, the Social & Economic Affairs Committee, and the Friends' Temperance & Moral Welfare Union - were united in 1970-1 into Friends Social Responsibility Council. This body will help to guide Friends' thinking, keep them informed, and express their concern on issues of "social responsibility" including the four areas mentioned. Traditionally, in addition to concerns which have already been mentioned, Friends have refused to take judicial oaths as being contrary to the teaching of Jesus and as setting up a double standard of truthfulness; have been totally against capital punishment in all circumstances as being a direct denial of God indwelling every man; and have been concerned to undertake relief work in areas of distress arising from natural disaster or war.

10. The Peace Testimony

YET ANOTHER corollary from Friends' central affirmation is that large area of concern and commitment which we call our peace testimony. This has two deep roots: the conviction that God is Christlike, and the conviction that God is in every man. If in the way that Jesus met and overcame evil we see how God meets and overcomes evil, then the way of organised violence is out. If something of this spirit is at work in every human heart, then the destruction of an "enemy" is a denial of that which is most sacred.

But our peace testimony began and continues as a *peace* testimony, and is only incidentally an anti-war testimony. It begins with the affirmation that peace is the will of God, that if we so live as to answer that of God in every man, the peaceable kingdom of God will be born among men. It is basically a testimony to a way of life growing from a religious conviction.

Like our other testimonies which have a long history, the peace testimony has developed through the centuries with changing circumstances. It has lost nothing, and gained much. Beginning with an affirmation about the peaceable nature of God's kingdom on earth, continuing into a refusal to use "carnal weapons" either for the kingdoms of this world or for the kingdom of Christ, it has led Friends into many other implications such as the concern to promote international conciliation, to educate public opinion, to encourage the principle of arbitration in international disputes, to encourage disarmament, to oppose military conscription, to promote institutions for the building of peace, to build bridges of understanding across dangerous gulfs such as the East-West divide. . . . As these and other aspects of the peace testimony have grown in significance, others have remained; and although in some ways the nature of modern war makes the witness of the individual conscientious objector less significant than it was a generation ago, it remains a basic religious corollary in the life of Friends.

There are, inevitably, acutely difficult questions when it comes to seeing how these convictions can be best expressed in contemporary situations. What should be our attitude to U.N. peace-keeping "forces"? How can Friends' peace testimony be applied in a situation in which the majority are being held down by a violently repressive minority, as in areas of South America and Southern Africa? Does not our renunciation of violence seem to mean in practice acceptance of the hidden violence of the status quo? Does our peace testimony here come in conflict with our concern for racial justice and harmony?

This kind of question involves us in deep searching, and leaves us rightly disturbed. There are no simple answers to some of the fiercely divisive dilemmas of our time. But they do not shake the firm foundations from which the peace testimony grows. My purpose here is not to discuss a Quaker strategy for southern Africa, but to affirm the message of Quakerism which is, among other things, that God is ultimate, that his spirit is ultimately the only one which is creative, that our business as Christian disciples is to be loyal to what we can see of his will even if we cannot see solutions all the way, that this involves us in both the renunciation of violence and the pursuit of justice, that means do in fact determine ends, and that Christian discipleship is still as much concerned with The Way as it is with the goal.

11. The Meaning of Membership

I HAVE BEEN writing of The Quaker Message. I have taken this to be the corporate understanding of its faith and practice by the Society of Friends. I have tried to outline the basic affirmation of Friends, and the corollaries which they have found implicit in this as they have together sought the relevance of their faith to the circumstances in which they live. I have tried to show that these corollaries are natural outcomes of the basic faith, organic parts of the whole and not appendages which can be regarded as optional extras to be accepted or rejected as individuals feel led. The Quaker message includes them all: this is our corporate understanding of Quakerism.

But individual Friends may not go all the way with every one of these derivative affirmations. What is the relationship of the individual to the Society? Must he be able to accept the whole before he can be a loyal Friend? Is there room for variety of conviction among us? or must we all think and act alike? What, in short, is implied by membership?

Let us put this question in a particular context. Suppose a member or inquirer tells us that he is very much at home among Friends, that our worship satisfies him and that he goes along with the corollaries in faith and practice which Friends have accepted, with the exception that he cannot accept our view that capital punishment is always wrong. Suppose he is convinced that in the present state of penal institutions thirty years of imprisonment is worse for body, mind and spirit than a mercifully quick death, what then? How do we respond?

First, just because we believe that our convictions do all hang together and belong in an organic whole, we would try to explore together what he *really* means by believing in the Light of Christ in every man. Dissent could mean that he had not realized the ultimate claims that this faith makes on us. He could see our conviction concerning capital punishment as a socio-political judgment rather than a corollary of faith, and exploration at this point would be needed.

But if we are sure that we are together at this deep level of faith and that it is a difference of judgment on the implications of that faith, then what? Then Friends warmly reassure the person concerned that membership is right for him that we welcome variety of opinion as this helps us to grow, that we have found in experience that as we "walk in the Light" more Light is given. Membership is not confined to conformists, nor would we want it to be so.

But while stressing this, we would also stress that Quakerism has a wholeness in it, that there is a corporate commitment to the kind of convictions outlined above, that when we say that Quakerism is a way of life we mean this way of life, and that membership involves loyalty to the wholeness of Quakerism. We would not expect a Friend in the position we have indicated to think or to say, "I personally am not convinced that capital punishment is always wrong, and I am accepted as a Friend. Therefore the Society is not committed to be totally against it." We would expect him to think or say, "I personally am not convinced

that capital punishment is always wrong, but the Society is totally committed to opposing capital punishment." In this way individual liberty and corporate unity exist together.

How, then, does change come about? Is the group always right and the dissenting individual always wrong?

The "business meetings" of the Society provide the built-in mechanism for change and development. In the interaction between Friends, gathered corporately to seek corporate insight, there is opportunity for new understanding and new commitment. Sometimes the dissenting individual is thought not so wise as the group: sometimes his insights seem to be the deeper. Every move forward begins with a minority of one. When Woolman was a young man, the Society of Friends represented by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting had no testimony against slaveholding though they already knew that any participation in the slave trade was wrong. Woolman was not typical; he was out of step with Friends on this particular issue at that time. But he was very much in step with them in other ways, and his voice was listened to, and the spirit he brought to the discussions enabled Friends increasingly to see Truth. Within a decade or two, the Society had caught up with him, and a new testimony had been born. But while he was still unsupported by a corporate decision, he was scrupulously careful not to act as though Yearly Meeting was committed to his position.

To summarize, membership involves commitment not only to an indefinable inward Spirit, but to that Spirit whose character is manifest in quite a large number of areas of faith and practice, outlined roughly in our Books of Discipline, summarized roughly in our Advices & Queries. The uniquely Quaker message includes them all. Membership involves commitment not in a dead uniformity but in a living unity. It involves loyalty to the Society's insights as well as personal integrity.

EPILOGUE

The Lord's Power Is Over All

TO PROCLAIM the Quaker message is much more than to proclaim a doctrine and to point to its implications in life. It is to communicate an experience of triumphant power-power over the evil in human nature, power which is of God. This is one of the dominant notes in 17th century Quaker writing, and is sadly lacking in our tentative present. But it remains fundamental. The Quaker message is, as Fox expressed it, that the *Lord's* power is over *all*.

But the Lord's power is very different from the world's power. It "delights to do no evil, nor to revenge any wrong, but delights to endure all things . . . for its ground and spring is the mercies and forgiveness of God."

These are words from James Nayler in the 17th century, but they are as true and significant for our own time. The horror of the Second World War did not shatter faith in the Lord's power.

During it, a Norwegian Friend, Ole Olden, was taken as a hostage and held in prison over Christmas with an extremely uncertain future. He made a simple Christmas card to send to his friends: a picture of a Christmas tree and a star, with the words, "Nothing can hinder a star from shining."

Soon after the war ended, a Friend sent us from Germany a small greeting picture. It showed a stylized mass of rusty barbed wire, tangled, cruel and ugly. At first glance, this was all that could be seen. On looking more carefully, down at the bottom and deeply within the mass, was a cowslip in flower. The German name for cowslip is "Keys of Heaven". Beneath the picture were words in German long since forgotten, but the meaning was something like, "Loudly clang the ways of men; silently grows the way of God."