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Friends

and Other Faiths

Otto Van der Sprenkel



THE 1973 JAMES BACKHOUSE LECTURE
AUSTRALIA YEARLY MEETING

THE QUAKER UNIVERSALIST FELLOWSHIP

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While being convinced of the validity of our own religious paths, we not only accept but rejoice that others find validity in their spiritual traditions, whatever they may be. Each of us must find his or her own path, and each of us can benefit for the search of others.

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ABOUT THIS PAMPHLET - This is the text of the Ninth James Backhouse Lecture given in Canberra at Australia Yearly Meeting, January 7, 1973, and published by Friends at the same time.

This second, North American, edition, came into being when the Quaker Universalist Fellowship went looking for expressions of universalist perspectives in Quaker writings from sources other than Britain and North America.

The text has been lightly revised, to make it more “reader friendly” in North America. But the use of masculine terms to represent all people, the norm when the address was given, has not been changed to reflect the practice of the 1990s.

Pamela van der Sprenkel, the author’s widow, has participated in the creation of this North American edition.

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About the Author

Otto Berkelbach van der Sprenkel was born in Holland in 1906, and educated in England, taking a degree in economics at the London School of Economics. After graduating he lectured at the University of Toronto in Canada, and on his return to England worked in adult education, journalism and broadcasting. During the second World War he joined the London School of Oriental Studies, as a student of Chinese and lecturer in Far Eastern history. In 1949-51 he was Visiting Professor, under the British Council, at Nankai University, Tientsin, and experienced the Chinese revolution there.

In 1956 he left England to accept an invitation to Canberra, where he initiated the Department of Asian Civilizations of the Australian National University. He retired from the University in 1971 to devote his full attention to a major selected and annotated bibliography of Chinese History and Thought begun several years earlier. He was recognized internationally as a distinguished scholar in Chinese history, thought and social institutions.

He had a non-religious upbringing, and first became aware of Friends in China. Soon after his return to England in 1951 he joined Hampstead Meeting. He was a member of Canberra Meeting from 1956 until his death in 1978.

The Vatican II Council of the 1960s greatly stimulated his interest in the re-evaluations being made at that time by Christian thinkers. He became an active participant in the debates of the day, listening to new voices and seeking to question, clarify, and deepen his own understanding of the Quaker position in the world. That involvement prepared him well for the role of ninth James Backhouse Lecturer in 1973.

The James Backhouse Lecture Series

James Backhouse was an English Friend who visited Australia from 1832 to 1838. He and his companion, George Washington Walker, traveled widely, though mostly in Tasmania. His visit led to the first Quaker Meetings in Australia. A botanist, James Backhouse published full accounts of what he saw. While encouraging Friends, he also pursued his deep concerns for the welfare of convicts and of the Aboriginal inhabitants of the country.

Australian Friends established this series of lectures in his name, dedicating them to bring fresh insights into the truth, and further the aspirations of Australian Quakerism.

One of the best informed and most readable accounts of the Council, written while it was in progress, is in the four volumes by 'Xavier Rynne:' Letters from Vatican City; The Second Session; the Third Session; the Fourth Session. They cover the debates and the decrees. Also recommendable is John Moorman, Bishop of Ripon, *Vatican Observed, an Anglican View of Vatican II*. No better introduction to the Council could be found than Pope John XXIII's *Journal of a Soul*, available in paperback in a Four Square edition. The best first approach to Teilhard is through his own writings, especially *The Phenomenon of Man* and *Milieu Divin*, together with the more recently translated *Christianity and Evolution*. Short and extremely good is N. M. Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, Fontana, London, 1968. Two standard books on Teilhard's thought are Henri de Lubac S.J., *The Religion of Teilhard de Chardin*, London, 1967; and Emile Rideau, *Teilhard de Cjardom. A Guide to His Thought*, London, 1967. The definitive life is Claude Cuénot, *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Les Grandes Etapes de Son Evolution*, Paris, 1958. Abridged English translation, 1965. Also by Cuénot: *Science and Faith in Teilhard de Chardin*, London, 1967, with a comment by the French Marxist Roger Garaudy. On the theology of hope the basic text is Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope, on the Ground and the Implication of a Christian Eschatology*, London 1967. Also Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, New York, 1971, some chapters of which appear in *Man on His Own, Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, New York, 1970. Also recommended are the following from *New Theology*, No. 5, London and New York, 1968: Carl E. Braaten, 'Toward a Theology of Hope' (pp. 90-111); J. B. Metz, 'Creative Hope' (pp. 130-141) and Harvey Cox, 'Ernst Bloch and the Pull of the Future' (pp. 191-203).

37. Alec Vidler, *The Church in an Age of Revolution, 1789 to the Present Day*. Pelican History of the Church, Vol. V. Harmondsworth, 1961. p. 40. Vidler is writing with England mainly in mind. The Quaker experience in America, notably in the first half of the nineteenth century, was different, in that spiritual quietism was fruitfully combined with an active political role.
38. The words quoted are from London Yearly Meeting Epistle, 1836. See A. Neave Brayshaw, *The Quakers, Their Story and Message*, 2nd ed., London, 1927, Chapter XIV, and especially pp. 199-204. See also Rufus M. Jones, *The Later Periods of Quakerism*, London, 1921, Vol. I, pp. 488-511.
39. It is appropriate to mention James Backhouse at this point, whose name these lectures bear. He was a forerunner of Quaker missionary work, and as Rufus Jones has it, 'felt a call to pay a religious visit to Australia, Tasmania and some of the islands of Australasia, with a special "concern" for the men in the penal colonies.' *The Later Periods of Quakerism*, II, p. 880. Backhouse was a fine example of outgoing evangelism at its best.
40. *The Later Periods of Quakerism*, II, p. 941.
41. For both stories, see Fung Yu Lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, New York, 1938, pp. 257 and 263-4. *Ch'an* is the Chinese term used for Sanskrit *dhyana*, of which it is a rough phonetic equivalent. The Japanese reading of this character is *zen*. *Dhyana* is usually translated 'meditation.' It refers to a 'religious discipline aimed at tranquilizing the mind and getting the practitioner to devote himself to a quiet introspection into his own inner consciousness.' K. S. Ch'en, *Buddhism in China*. Princeton, 1964, p. 350.
42. For references to Bonhoeffer, see note 29. The literature on Vatican II is already large and continues to grow.

FRIENDS AND OTHER FAITHS

Otto B. van der Sprenkel

Among the implications of my title is the following: that Friends themselves have a 'faith' or system of beliefs that can usefully be compared or contrasted with 'other faiths.' I shall begin by examining this assumption.

It is well known that the Society of Friends is non-credal. This of course does not mean either that Friends, theologically speaking, are committed to no beliefs at all; or, conversely, that they will believe anything. What it means is that our Society does not require acceptance of a set of propositions, purporting to formulate Quaker belief, as a test of membership. In fact the very concept of membership was unknown to early Friends, and the practice of recording people as 'members' of a particular group of Friends, either at a national or local level, began only in 1737.⁽¹⁾ Today we have become reconciled to the idea and fact of official membership and have even laid down procedures regulating its acquisition, transfer and dissolution.⁽²⁾ But all this we tolerate purely as a matter of practical convenience. No Friend would be found to dispute the view that, not an external sign, but an inward commitment, is the true test of belonging.

How then did one join Friends when there was no such thing as formal membership? A beautiful answer was given to this question by Richard Claridge, around the year 1697, recounting his own experience. It well bears quotation.

This was the way Friends used with me, when I was convinced of truth, they came oftentimes to visit me; and sate and waited upon the Lord in silence with me; and as the Lord opened our understandings and mouths, so we had very sweet

and comfortable seasons together. They did not ask me questions about this or the other creed, or about this or the other controversie in religion; but they waited to feel that living Power to quicken me, which raised up Jesus from the dead. And it pleased God so in his wisdom to direct, that all the great truths of the Christian religion were occasionally spoken to. Now this was Friends way with me, a way far beyond all rules and methods established by the wisdom of this world, which is foolishness with God. And this is their way with others that are convinced of the truth.’⁽³⁾

Moving on two and a half centuries from the time of Richard Claridge, we find the Friends World Conference in 1952 laying it down that ‘the test for membership should not be doctrinal agreement, nor adherence to certain testimonies, but evidence of sincere seeking and striving for the Truth, together with an understanding of the lines along which Friends are seeking the Truth.’⁽⁴⁾

Is it possible to reconcile this position with the view that an identifiable ‘Quaker Faith’ is to be found in the Society of Friends? Certainly there are some who would answer this question with a decided ‘No.’ Calvin Keene, in his essay in *No Time But This Present* entitled ‘The Society of Friends and World Religions,’⁽⁵⁾ takes the view that ‘modern Quakerism, like so many forms of modern religion, is quite unable to define itself, at least among “liberal” Friends’ (p. 82). He distinguishes, among ‘liberal’ Quakers, ‘those who deny that Quakerism has any part in Christianity [and] see its relationships, rather, with the mystical religions of the East;’ others again who see in Quakerism ‘no religion at all, but a form of humanism concerned with ethics and the improvement of the human lot;’ and finally some ‘who veer in every new wind of thought that comes their way, and so move from Zen Buddhism to Vedantic

the Christian dialogue with Marxism and secularism is Hanfried Muller’s *Von der Kirche zur Welt: Ein Beitrag zu der Beziehung des Wortes Gottes auf die Societas in Dietrich Bonhoeffers theologischer Entwicklung*, 1961.

30. *ibid.*, letter of May 5, 1944. Fontana edition, 1959. pp.94-5.
31. Ernst Lohmeyer, *The Lord’s Prayer*. London, 1965, pp. 101-2. Lohmeyer was born in 1890; in 1920 he became Professor of New Testament at Breslau. He disappeared at the end of the war, and it is assumed that his life ended somewhere in Russia in September 1946.
32. Gerhard Ebeling, *The Lord’s Prayer in Today’s World*. London, 1966. p. 83.
33. Hendrik Niclaes (c. 1501-c. 1581), the founder of the Huis der Liebe or *Familia Caritatis* (House of Love), is of great interest to Friends. His ‘Familist Movement’ declined on the continent after his death, but spread to England where it enjoyed some popularity in the seventeenth century before its virtual absorption into Quakerism. The basic study is F. Nippold, ‘Heinrich Niclaes und das Haus der Liebe’ in *Zeitschr. F. d. hist. Theol.* 32 (1862) 321-402. This has been largely reworked by Rufus Jones in his *Studies in Mystical Religion*, London, 1909, pp. 428-48. See also Allen C. Thomas, ‘The Family of Love, or the Familists,’ *Haverford College Studies* 12, Fifth Month, 1893, pp. 1-46.
34. E. Léonard, *A History of Protestantism*,. London, 1967. II, p. 284.
35. The phrase is from Owen Chadwick, *The Reformation*. Pelican History of the Church, Vol. III. Harmondsworth, 1964. p. 176.
36. Quoted by E. Léonard, *op.cit.*, II, p. 290, from Olivier’s introduction to his edition of Milton’s *Areopagitica*, Paris, 1955, p. 10.

Rufus Jones mentioned by Wach, which I list for completeness sake, are *Studies in Mystical Religion*, London 1909; *Spiritual Reformers of the 16th and 17th Centuries*, London, 1914; *Mysticism and Democracy in the English Commonwealth*, Cambridge, Mass, 1932; and *The Flowering of Mysticism: The Friends of God in the 14th Century*, New York, 1939.

24. *ibid.*, p. 164
25. Evelyn Underhill, *Worship*. Fontana Library of Theology and Philosophy, London, 1962, pp. 308-9. Miss Underhill makes no reference to the fact that there are Quaker groups in some parts of the world, though not in England, whose meetings are programmed, and who sing hymns.
26. Rufus M. Jones, Quoted in *Christian Faith and Practice in the Experience of the Society of Friends*. London, 1961, No. 91.
27. Howard Brinton, *Friends for 300 Years*. Pendle Hill, Pa., 1965. p.58.
28. A. R. Vidler, *Essays in Liberality*. London, 1957. p. 96.
29. *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Fontana Books, 1959 *et seq.* This is an English translation of one of the most influential theological books of the century. It has a message of particular relevance for Friends. Understandably, an enormous literature has grown up on Bonhoeffer. On his theology I can recommend John D. Godsey, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, London, 1960; Peter Vorkink (editor), *Bonhoeffer in a World Come of Age*, Philadelphia, 1968; and James W. Woelfel, *Bonhoeffer's Theology, Classical and Revolutionary*, Nashville & New York, 1970. The great biography by Eberhard Bethge, now available in English translation, is indispensable. A book that has been described as 'the most perceptive interpretation of Bonhoeffer's thought to date' [1967] and one that had special relevance for

Hinduism to existentialism, and, more recently, to the theme of *Honest to God*' (p. 83). Hence, 'when we speak of contemporary Friends we are discussing an amorphous body concerning which it is not possible safely to generalize.' Clearly, it is equally impossible to discuss the relation of such a body, already at sixes and sevens with itself, to other religions; and Keene understandably abandons his task in despair, limiting himself to a few pages on 'original Quakerism' and how early Friends regarded other Christians, and 'heathen.'

But have we really to take so pessimistic a view of the present generation of Friends? Or even of the liberals among us? Is it really impossible to identify guiding threads in contemporary Quaker belief? I cannot think so. We do not insist on doctrinal agreement or that every Friend should give his adherence to every testimony advanced by some, or most, of his fellow Friends. But there is in practice a broad consensus in the Society about what we see as basic beliefs, especially belief in the primacy of religious experience, and in the content of that experience (no matter how we choose to formulate it, or what concepts we find best suit our needs as we do so).

There is, of course, a large measure of agreement among Friends on practical issues; many concerns are widely shared. And I suspect that even in theological matters – for example, Friends' attitude toward, and use of, the Bible – there may be more discoverable common ground than is sometimes thought to exist. It is a matter of record that Quakerism has a more than respectable theological literature. You will remember in the quotation from Richard Claridge, that though 'creeds and controversies' were avoided, nevertheless 'all the great truths of the Christian religion were occasionally spoken to.' Theological discussion, therefore, was not wholly eschewed; and Claridge himself later became one of Quakerism's prominent theologians.

II

It is necessary at this point to refer to the so-called duality that undoubtedly exists in historical Quakerism, and see where we stand in relation to it. This duality arises from the presence in our tradition of two rival views: first, the evangelical Christocentric position that stresses Christ's supernatural character and salvific role, and correspondingly emphasizes sin and man's helplessness, and his salvation as dependent upon specific belief; and second, the doctrine of the Inner Light.⁽⁶⁾

The evangelical position, in its most literal form at least, has, to my mind, more historic than actual significance in the Society of Friends today. On the other hand, like many theological statements, it is open to demythologizing reinterpretation. And further, be it not forgotten that the spiritual experience underlying the evangelical position has necessarily much in common with that which finds expression in our recognition of the Inner Light.

However this may be, I propose to confine myself here to the second view, whose central teaching is that there is 'that of God' in-dwelling in every man, knowable from experience, and able to instruct us as to God's purposes and our duties.

The existence of the Inner Light is not susceptible of scientific proof. Our certainty of its presence, in ourselves and in all mankind, is the fruit of personal and corporate religious experience. Such experience, it can hardly be repeated often enough, is at the root of all Quaker belief.

Insofar as my subject is 'Friends and other faiths,' the decision to take spiritual experience and the Inner Light, rather than evangelical Christocentrism, as a point of departure, is a fateful one. For while the evangelical position relates those who accept it, formally and in a rather defined

A, 6:3-7. It is usually advantageous, if the Chinese text is not accessible to the reader, to compare several translations of a passage as important as this one, particularly if it includes so many key expressions for which it is difficult to find English equivalents. The two passages will be found as follows: Lau, pp. 193 & 82-3; Legge, pp.402-3 & 202-3; Dobson, pp. 113 and 132.

16. Howard Brinton, *Quakerism and Other Religions*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet No. 93. Pendle Hill, Pa., 1957, p. 13.
17. Both the sayings in this paragraph are quoted by Lau in his excellent introduction to his *Mencius*. I have reproduced them in the form in which he gives them, which differs a little from, and I think improves upon, older translations.
18. Lau, *Mencius*, p. 17.
19. *ibid.*, loc. cit.
20. Compare the following statement by Francis H. Knight (1881-1945): 'I am by temperament a skeptic. But at my feeblest, I am conscious of a power of choice, of a better and a worse. This 'ought' is my insignia of personality. Directly I admit that my life might be better than it is, I have a sense of failure and feel a need of help from something or someone outside myself. This sense and this need are to me the meanings of the terms "sense of sin" and "need of salvation."' From 'The Faith of a Skeptic' in *24 Wayfarer* (1945) pp. 110-11, quoted in *Christian Faith and Practice*, London 1961, no. 107.
21. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*. London, 1957. Vol. II, p. 96.
22. *ibid.*, Vol. III, 1964, p. 152-3.
23. Joachim Wach, *Sociology of Religion*. Chicago, 1944. pp. 163-4. The further reference is to Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*, London, 1911. The books by

- antiquity]?” ‘Yes,’ he replied.’
10. Thomas Clarkson, *A Portraiture of Quakerism*. 3 vols. London, 1806. Volume II, p. 313-4. Howard Brinton describes this work as ‘the best account of Quakerism’s second century.’
 11. David Hodgkin, *Quakerism, A Mature Religion for Today*. 1971 (reprinted 1995 by Quaker Universalist Fellowship). pp. 3-4.
 12. *Analects*, 2:4. The dates traditionally assigned to Confucius are 551-479 B.C. Most of the material in the *Analects* probably dates from the middle of the 4th century. See Arthur Waley, *The Analects of Confucius*. London, 1938. p. 88. Also James Legge, *The Chinese Classics, I, Confucian Analects*. Oxford, 1893, pp. 146-7. There exist many translations of this great book. Also recommended is W. E. Soothill, *The Analects of Confucius*, in the Oxford World’s Classics, London, 1910.
 13. ‘Self-cultivation towards sagehood’ is never advocated by Confucius for any reason other than that it is the ‘way’ of truly human fulfillment. As Howard Smith puts it, ‘Though goodness was his supreme aim, he refused to dangle before men the expectation of reward for virtue either in this life or the next. As regards this life he knew from his own bitter experience that the pursuit of virtue may lead to suffering and poverty. As regards a life to come he seems to have been totally unconcerned.’ *Chinese Religions*. London, 1968, p. 43.
 14. Meng K’o (372?-289? B.C.) Recommended translations of the *Mencius* book are D. C. Lau, *Mencius*, Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth, 1970. James Legge, *The Chinese Classics II, The Works of Mencius*. 2nd rev. ed., Oxford, 1895. W. A. C. H. Dobson, *Mencius, a new translation*. Toronto, 1963.
 15. *Mencius* VI A, 6:5-7. An important parallel passage is II

way, to the theological stance of most of the churches of the Christian communion, the experiential position favors a much more flexible relationship to other Christian bodies, and, in addition, throws out bridges to the non-Christian religions.

To define the place of Friends, both within the confines of Christendom, and beyond them in relation to the other world religions, and indeed non-religions, we had best begin by looking at some of the theological consequences that follow from the full doctrine of the Inner Light. The first of these is its universality: the belief that there is ‘that of God’ not in a few, or in some, but in all men.

III

Robert Barclay set out this teaching for us most plainly in his Apology,⁽⁷⁾ Propositions V and VI, ‘Of Universal and Saving Light,’ paragraphs 25 and 26. He is concerned to prove ‘that it is by light, seed, or grace that God works the salvation of all men;’ and in particular ‘that by the working and operation of this, many have been, and some may be, saved, to whom the gospel hath never been outwardly preached, and who are utterly ignorant of the outward history of Christ’ (pp.174-5). This part of his argument is especially interesting as it poses the question of the condition of the countless generations that lived before the Christian era, as well as of those who lived later but in parts of the world to which, in their time, the Christian message had not penetrated.

Barclay, as is his wont, supports his case by adducing scriptural texts, in this case Titus 2:11, ‘The grace of God, that brings salvation, hath appeared to all men; teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.’

His comment is, ‘...than which there can be nothing more clear.’ He goes on to consider ‘objections,’ and answers them. One of these, which he calls ‘the great objection,’ is much to our purpose, and runs as follows: ‘If it be objected that there is no name under heaven by which salvation is known, but by the name “Jesus,” therefore they (not knowing this) cannot be saved.’ Barclay answers, “Though they know it not outwardly, yet they know it inwardly, by feeling the virtue and power of it... they are saved by it: I confess there is no other name to be saved by. But salvation lieth not in the literal but in the experimental knowledge. Those that have the literal knowledge are not saved by it, without this real experimental knowledge. Yet those that have the real knowledge may be saved without the external’ (pp. 184-5). The great importance of this passage lies especially in Barclay’s reiterated use of the word ‘experimental,’ by which he means ‘founded on experience.’ It is also significant that he uses ‘experimental’ as equivalent to ‘real.’

A page or so later he takes up the odd argument that ‘if... this outward knowledge... were even of the essentials of salvation,’ then how could deaf persons be saved? And yet, he continues, ‘our adversaries deny not, but readily confess, that many deaf persons are saved without it.’ And so Barclay concludes, ‘But if this charity be extended toward [deaf persons] who are where the gospel is preached, so that they may be judged capable of salvation, because they are under a simple impossibility of distinctly knowing the means of salvation; what reason can be alleged why the like charity may not be had to such, as though they can hear, yet are under a simple impossibility of hearing, because it is not spoken unto them? Is not a man in China, or in India, as much to be excused for not knowing a thing which he never heard of, as a deaf man here, who cannot hear? For as the deaf man is not to be blamed, because God

NOTES

1. Henry J. Cadbury, *The Character of a Quaker*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet No. 103. Pendle Hill PA, 1959, p. 8.
2. *Handbook of Practice and Procedure*. Religious Society of Friends in Australia. Sydney, 1967, pp. 13-15.
3. Quoted in *Christian Faith and Practice in the Experience of tire Society of Friends*. London, 1961, No. 369.
4. *ibid.*, No. 368.
5. J. Calvin Keene, ‘The Society of Friends and World Religions,’ in *No Time but this Present: Studies Preparatory to the IV World Conference of Friends*, 1967. Birmingham, England, 1965, pp. 82-89.
6. Henry J. Cadbury has a brief but useful discussion of this dualism in *The Character of A Quaker*, pp. 24-28. He expounds both points of view and attempts to find an accommodation between them.
7. Robert Barclay, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, 1675. Page references are to the 7th English edition, London, 1765.
8. It is right to mention that some modern theologians arrive at the same conclusion – that ‘some may be saved to whom the gospel hat not been outwardly preached’ – not as derived from an explicit acceptance of the universality of the Inner Light, but as inferred from Matt. 25:31-46. See, e.g., Gunther Bornkamm, ‘End-Expectation and Church in Matthew,’ in G. Bornkamm, C. Barth and H. J. Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, London 1963, pp.23-24. But cf. also W. F. Albright and C. J. Mann, *Matthew, a New Translation with an Introduction and Notes*. Anchor Bible, New York, 1971, pp. 308-9, note (g).
9. See *Matthew* 5:48 and *Mencius* VI B, 2:1. The latter passage reads: ‘Mencius was asked, “Can all men make themselves like Yao and Shun [saintly rulers of Chinese

It is unhappily true that this ferment has so far left the Society of Friends almost untouched. It would seem that while we are glad to hear that our Christian brethren are laboriously raising themselves to higher ground – which we see ourselves as having occupied two or three centuries ago – we are not really sufficiently interested to find out what is actually going on in modern theology. And this is a pity. Because of all the minority groups in the Christian world we are perhaps the best placed (though not, alas, at this present time the best equipped) to interpret such new developments to the religiously uncommitted inquirer.

And there are many such: young people particularly, who are not interested in pursuing their personal salvation, who are not attracted by promises of everlasting life in a world to come as a reward for believing what seems to them incredible; but who are profoundly conscious of the dangers, injustices, and hardships that are the lot of millions in this ‘here and now’ world we live in, who are prepared to make sacrifices, and anxious to help in building a safer, juster, and better world. Such people exist in great numbers outside the churches. They are religiously uncommitted, probably suspicious of ‘religion,’ possibly hostile to it. If they become ‘inquirers,’ it is because they feel that there is more purpose in life than pure reason can explain.

I am deeply persuaded that there are none in our Christian community better able to ‘speak to their condition’ than we ourselves in the Society of Friends. In thinking of our relation to other faiths – and non-faiths – would it be too presumptuous to see ourselves as chosen for a new ‘apostolate to the gentiles?’

has been pleased to suffer him to lie under this infirmity; so is the Chinese or the Indian as excusable, because God hath withheld from him the opportunity of hearing’ (pp. 186-7).⁽⁸⁾

So in spite of never having heard the gospel ‘outwardly preached’ and having no ‘eternal knowledge’ of Christ’s history, the Chinese and the Indian can yet, in the words of Titus 2:11, ‘deny ungodliness’ and ‘live soberly, righteously, and godly’ by virtue of the universality of God’s in-dwelling in every member of the human race. This is in truth a bridge from Quaker Christianity to the non-Christian world religions, and an acknowledgment not only of the universality of the spirit but of the solidarity of mankind.

This teaching, when proclaimed by early Friends, aroused the hostility of many other Christians. The reasons for this opposition are obvious, and some of them persist.

In the first place, this doctrine strongly favors an optimistic view of human nature – one that has more in common with the position of Mencius than with that of, say, Calvin. It encourages the opinion that human perfectibility is a not unattainable goal.⁽⁹⁾ A corollary of seeing human nature as ‘God-infused’ is that the doctrine of original sin is either rejected or, at least, devalued. Thomas Clarkson, in his excellent *Portrait of Quakerism* (1806), writes: ‘The Quakers scarcely ever utter the words “Original Sin,” because they never find them in use in the sacred writings.’⁽¹⁰⁾ This is one ground why Friends avoid a phrase whose implications are so inconsistent with the teaching of the Inner Light.

There is a second reason. If we believe that a participation in the divine spirit is, and has been, and will be the birthright of ‘every man that cometh into the world,’ from the beginning of history on, we are bound to look at the doctrine of the Incarnation in a very different light from

that in which it is traditionally regarded. The unique historical event of Christ's coming in the flesh as a sacrifice for our sins in God's plan for our salvation then appears either as a work of supererogation, or as a 'mystery' that needs to be demythologized if its message is to be truly conveyed.

IV

We may turn now to a second theological consequence that follows from the doctrine of the Inner Light, a concept which I would like to call 'Quaker humanism.' If we accept that our human nature is 'God-infused,' and that there is indeed 'that of God' in all men, it would appear that we are committed to a position which is both optimistic and humanistic. Nevertheless, in whatever way we may decide to interpret the word 'God' in the last sentence, our position remains an inescapably religious one.

May I quote here some words from David Hodgkin which I have found useful. "Conceptions such as 'God' are by their very nature so intangible, that words must fail... The idea of God as 'ground of being' is meaningful for many Friends, but for most, this would not conflict with Jesus saying: 'God is spirit.' [John 4:24] All these expressions avoid any personalization of God, but I, at least, cannot refer to him as a 'non-personal God. . .' One thing is certain. I am not speaking of a man-centered religion, or even of one where God is made in man's image. It is very much a God-centered religion, but centered toward a God who is not cramped by definitions which will satisfy some, but estrange others; toward the God each of us finds in his own experience."⁽¹¹⁾ Quaker humanism, then, far from rejecting or excluding God, sees our inward experience of divine leading as critical to our understanding of man's humanity, and of his potential for good.

It is an unfortunate complication, I think, that so many Friends who give themselves unstintingly to good works are inclined to shy away from what they refer to as 'theology.' Howard Brinton is clearly right in saying that it would be a good thing if Quaker 'doctrines and methods' were 'better understood, especially by Quakers themselves, who are frequently unaware of the roots, and fix their attention mainly on the plant above ground.'⁽⁴²⁾ This is true, of course, not only of Quaker 'thinking and doing,' but of 'thinking and doing' by Christianity generally. Theology can be defined as the 'theory' of Christian 'practice.' And who should know this better than Friends? The precept of 'looking inward and acting outward' is central to Quakerism. It is even reflected in the title *Christian faith and practice in the experience of the Society of Friends*. Practice tests and informs Belief, and Belief nourishes and informs Practice.

It is more than ever important at this time that Friends should be attentive to and informed about what is going on in theology, especially front-line theology. It has been claimed in recent years that Christian thinking, after an interval of some four hundred years, is once more undergoing a major 'reformation.' Such a claim should not be lightly made; but indications that great changes are in train are not hard to find. Some may be listed:

Bonhoeffer's continuing and growing influence.

The Catholic *aggiornamento* set in motion by Pope John's Vatican Council.

The religio-evolutionary vision of the French Jesuit paleontologist and mystic, Teilhard de Chardin.

The forward-directed 'theology of hope' of Jürgen Moltmann, stemming in equal parts from Christian eschatology and the insights of the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch.⁽⁴²⁾

XII

What, finally, is the contribution that can be expected of the Society of Friends today, and how are we placed to make it?

At this point I wish to say something about belief, and its role in the relations between Friends, other Christians, and non-Christians.

That we are non-credal means that as a Society we are prepared to be hospitable to a wide variety of beliefs; and furthermore, that we do not assign a high priority to the task of embodying our beliefs in verbal formulae. This last is one of the distinguishing traits of the mystic, and one we share with other mystics. Ch'an Buddhists, for example, also warn against the danger of 'falling into the net of words' by trying to express what is, ultimately, inexpressible. When a disciple asked the Ch'an Master Wen-yi 'What is the First Principle?' the Master replied, 'If I were to tell you, it would become the second principle.'

Friends equally share with Ch'an Buddhists the belief that the whole of life is sacramental, and that no one particular observance, or practice, or place, is to be marked off as more sacred than others. Compare the following Ch'an story of a monk who walked into a temple and spat on the statue of Buddha. When his behavior was criticized he said, 'Please show me a place where there is no Buddha.'⁽⁴¹⁾

These two positions may help to indicate the nature of the boundaries that delimit Quaker territory from the formally laid out gardens tended by other more institutionalized Christian bodies. But Quaker country on the other side of the garden wall (if I may pursue this metaphor) lies open and easily accessible to seekers wandering towards it from the broad heathland of Humanism.

The situation of Friends as between fellow Christians and nonbelievers is in fact a good deal more complex than this rather twodimensional image suggests.

V

I should now like to examine some analogies to this view that I find in the teachings of Confucius and Mencius. These teachings are certainly not identical with those received by us; but they contain, I believe, insights of value to Christians.

A passage of fundamental importance in the Confucian *Analects* is the following, which may be considered a kind of spiritual autobiography.

The Master said:

At fifteen, I set my mind upon wisdom.

At thirty, I had planted my feet firmly on the ground.

At forty, I no longer suffered from perplexities.

At fifty, I knew what were the biddings of Heaven,

At sixty, I heard them with a docile ear.

At seventy, I could follow what my heart desired, for what I desired no longer overstepped the bounds of right.⁽¹²⁾

What seems to me to be notable in this passage is, first, that it describes a moral progression from youth to sagehood; second, that this progression is achieved by purposeful and unremitting activity on the part of Confucius himself; and third, that throughout his life he seems to have been looking within as well as without, seeking to know the Will of Heaven, and striving, with increasing success, to shape his life in conformity with it.

How was he able to do this? Friends might reply, By answering that of God within him. Though a Chinese response might be differently phrased, I believe the sense conveyed would be close to ours.⁽¹³⁾

The moral philosopher who tried to give a precise answer to this question was Mencius, foremost disciple of Confucius.⁽¹⁴⁾ His name is generally associated with the

teaching that men are by nature good. What in fact he taught was that all men are born with a potential for goodness that is part of their quality as men, and that it is this that differentiates us from the rest of brute creation. 'That whereby man differs from the birds and the beasts is but slight. The common man casts it away, but the superior man preserves it.' [IV B. 19:1]

Mencius is at pains to make it clear that he regards this potential as an original part of man's genetic makeup: It is not fused into us from without; we originally possess it. [VI A. 6:7]

This is all very different from how orthodox Christianity sees the human condition. Consider, for example the following sentences taken from the Dutch Catholic *New Catechism*:

Our destiny is outlined by something that is part of our common but free responsibility-sin... Christian faith teaches that man is of himself totally incapable of effecting his own deliverance. Contact with our foundation, God, has been broken off by sin, and we cannot reestablish it without him... But Jesus raises us up from our impotence by the gift of his Spirit, which contains a new birth: the conquest of sin, life with God and salvation out of death.

To a Confucian-minded Chinese who, not knowing about original sin and fallen humanity, would be mystified by the notion of needing a Savior to do things for him that he felt completely capable of doing for himself. Confucianism is in no sense a redemptive religion, but rather one concerned to encourage men to move from moral potentiality to moral realization. It is because Mencius taught that all of us possess a human nature that makes

I think it is fair to say that this is also the temper of Quakerism in Australia. It must be our responsibility to keep it so, for in these last decades of the twentieth century we also stand before great and testing challenges.

XI

In some earlier paragraphs I briefly traversed the historical periods through which Quakerism has passed. I gave this review because I wanted to point to a unifying theme and draw a moral from it. The unifying theme is that in each century Quakers, together with all their fellow Christians, were exposed to, and reacted to, one and the same social and political environment and climate of opinion.

In the turbulent seventeenth century we too were turbulent; in the quiet eighteenth century we too were quiet and withdrawn; in the nineteenth we too were powerfully marked by the evangelical movement; and in the early twentieth, in a world that was being changed by technology and moved by new ideas, we too were aroused to a new awareness and new tasks. The moral would seem to be that however much we see ourselves as 'separate,' we remain inescapably a part of Western Christianity; and hence that our relations with other Christian bodies ought to recognize that fact.

At the same time, at every stage our response has been a characteristically Quaker one; and our contribution (unless we flatter ourselves unduly, which I think we do not) has always been one that only we could make. It is also right to remember that the position from which we have made our response and given our contribution has always been 'to the left of center,' both theologically and in terms of social concern and commitment.

X

The Society of Friends responded successfully to the challenge of the early twentieth century. Why it was able to do this is a question worth examining, for the answer carries a lesson of fundamental importance for Friends today. In what, to me, is the most rewarding chapter in Rufus Jones's masterly history of the *Later Periods of Quakerism*, the one entitled 'The Awakening of England,' he has this to say:

In the Quakerism of Great Britain and Ireland... no large separations had taken place... Very real differences existed, and controversies were often intense, but they were always kept within limits and restraints, and the unity and integrity of the Society were maintained. Throughout the period of theological earnestness, while Friends in America were breaking asunder, English Friends... were working out their destiny together and were preparing... for the greater things that were coming. It is almost impossible to overestimate the value to English Friends of the integrity of the body. The Society as a whole held an inclusive point of view and united many aspects of the truth. Friends thus merged together into one undivided whole the conservative and the progressive tendency. Neither influence could have its way unchallenged. Give and take became a necessity. The situation was often a heavy strain on temper and patience, but it proved to be a condition of immense value. The habit of holding a position confronted by an opposite position which must be respected has great importance in the formation of spiritual character. ⁽⁴⁰⁾

that kind of movement entirely possible – provided always we have the will to undertake it – that he is credited with teaching that man's nature is originally good.

Mencius teaches that all men are naturally endowed with what he calls the four beginnings (*ssu tuan*). He called them beginnings because each of them corresponds to a 'virtue of which it is the seed, the germ, or the initial growing point; and into which it can be developed if properly tended, cared for and nourished.

The 'four beginnings' (potential goodness) and the virtues into which they can grow (realized goodness) are described in a famous passage of Mencius' writings as follows:

From the feelings proper to it, man's nature is constituted for the practice of good. This is what I mean by saying it is good. If a man does what is bad, that is not the fault of his original endowment. Every man has a feeling of Compassion – distress at the sufferings of others; a feeling of Shame – for his own shortcomings; and Dislike – for the bad actions of others; a sense of Courtesy and Deference – to others; and a sense of Right and Wrong. From man's feeling of compassion comes the principle of Love – or human-heartedness; from his feeling of shame and dislike comes the principle of Righteousness; from his sense of courtesy and deference comes the principle of Propriety; and from his sense of right and wrong comes Wisdom.

These four principles are not fused into us from without. We possess them within ourselves. But we do not always consciously reflect on them. This is why it is said, 'Seek and you will find

you have them; disregard them and you will lose them.' These are instances where one man is twice, five times or countless times better than another man, but this is only because some of us fail to make the best of our native endowment. ⁽¹⁵⁾

A few words of comment on the 'four beginnings' are in order.

Compassion

The feeling of compassion arises out of what Mencius calls the 'non-bearing heart' (*pu-jen chih hsin*), the heart that is unable to endure the sufferings of others. This first movement of compassion, he says, is present in all mankind. We can see it at work, for example, in Friends' campaigns against slavery and for penal reform, as well as in our peace testimony. It is interesting, too, to find Howard Brinton writing: 'One basis for this doctrine of the universality of the Light was the sensitivity of Quakers to the suffering of others... Friends could not believe that all men have not been given an equal chance by a God who is love. If he sends his rain on the evil as well as the good, why not also on the ignorant?'⁽¹⁶⁾

It is easy to see why the 'beginning' of compassion should give rise to the virtue of *jen*, a term that has been variously translated as 'love,' 'human-heartedness,' 'benevolence,' and even 'altruism.' I must confess my preference goes to the first or second of these. The point, however, is that for Mencius the injunction 'love one another' has its ground in human nature itself; while the sense of compassion, grown to positive love, is also revealed as the strongest motive to moral action.

Joseph John Gurney (1788-1847), the principles of Light and Leading were overborne and pressed into the background, and in their place came a new evangelical emphasis on the total depravity of man and his dependence on Christ's sacrifice for his salvation, and on the Scriptures as the final authority for 'making known to us the blessed truths of Christianity.'⁽³⁸⁾ Friends seemed no longer to be standing by the distinctive witness of their founders in the 'apostolic age.'

It would be wrong to suggest that the evangelical phase in the Society's history was all loss and no gain. It was a period that saw effective work by Friends in the anti-slavery cause, in the peace movement, in penal reform, in education, in the initiation of Quaker Missions abroad, and in efforts to alleviate the miseries of poverty at home.⁽³⁹⁾ We can also see today, with historical hindsight, that the period was also one of incubation for many developments that bore fruit only much later.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, many new movements – technological, political, social, intellectual – were combining to usher in a new kind of world, whose powers of rapid self-transformation have continued and accelerated during the last fifty years. These changes naturally affected the religious climate. They assisted, one could almost say enforced, the Christian Churches, and also the Society of Friends, to move constructively away from evangelical philanthropy and adjust to a social environment on which labor movements and anti-colonial national struggles were beginning to leave their mark, and to an intellectual environment which had digested Lyell and Darwin and the 'higher criticism' of the Bible and was now masticating Marx, Freud, and Einstein.

English seventeenth century is entitled to a place in the forefront of the general history of Protestantism... elsewhere Church life was mainly the concern of princes, councils, clergy and theologians, while in England the popular masses. . . played a decisive part.'⁽³⁴⁾

This active commonalty can be generally characterized as 'puritan.' The word was first used, mostly as a term of abuse, in the 1570's, but by the 1600's it referred primarily to the Calvinists and other 'Protestants of the left wing'⁽³⁵⁾ who, dissatisfied with the Elizabethan Reformation, wanted its further purification. It is important to remember that George Fox and the first generation of Quakers emerged as a religious force in a turbulent period when the political and social order as well as 'orthodox' Protestantism were under radical challenge. It has been well said that Puritanism 'implied, rather than a creed, an attitude of mind, a dynamic element in society which belongs to all times.'⁽³⁶⁾ Early Quakerism was a vital expression of this dynamism.

After the storm, the calm. In the eighteenth century, writes Alec Vidler, the Society of Friends gradually subsided, along with other dissenting bodies, into 'much the same condition as the Established Church - dry, commonsensical, averse to "enthusiasms," acclimatized to the Age of Reason.'⁽³⁷⁾ It was aroused in the early nineteenth century, after a long interval of Quietism and sectarian seclusion, by the new and increasingly influential evangelical movement, whose religious tenets and philanthropic fervor profoundly affected Friends. If its influence brought back an intensive life to the Society, it also provoked schism in America, and effected an appreciable shift in the foundations of Quaker belief, both there and in England. During the half century or so when theological leadership in the English Society of Friends was largely provided by

Shame and Dislike

The feelings of shame and dislike, particularly the former, are strongly emphasized by Mencius, who writes, 'A man must not be without shame, for the shame of being without shame is shamelessness indeed.' (VII A. 6) 'Only when a man will not do some things is he capable of doing great things.' (IV B. 8)⁽¹⁷⁾ The 'virtue' in this case is *yi*, generally translated as 'righteousness.'

Courtesy and Deference

Lau translates the third 'beginning' as 'the sense of courtesy and deference.' Other suggested equivalents are 'modesty and complaisance' (Legge), 'deference to others' (Dobson), and 'respect and reverence' (Chan Wing-Tsi). Lau's gloss is very good. 'Courtesy and deference,' he writes, 'describe both a man's modesty, which does not allow him to claim credit, and the courtesy that prompts him to yield precedence to others. This is the basis of rules of conduct in polite society. In a sense, this is a curb on one's natural self-seeking tendencies.'⁽¹⁸⁾

A quality can often be best described by naming its opposite, in this case 'egotism.' A respectable name for egotism is 'enlightened self-interest;' or less respectably, 'Each for himself and the Devil take the hindmost.' Mencius is here affirming that present in our primal human nature is a 'beginning' that runs positively counter to egotism.

The 'virtue' into which it can be developed is *li*, a word that is commonly translated 'ritual.' It has a wide range of meanings in Chinese, with 'liturgy' at one end of the scale and 'good manners' at the other. In the present context, perhaps its best equivalent is 'propriety,' denoting the kind of behavior that is fitting to the occasion and to all circumstances. It therefore denotes behavior that is never entirely spontaneous, but always 'mannered.' And unless it has become what we call 'second nature' to us, it is usually

preceded, however briefly, by some reflection. It has some affinity, we might say, with what used to be known as 'Quaker gravity.'

Right and Wrong

The fourth and last of the 'beginnings,' the 'sense of right and wrong,' has two distinct meanings. It points first to our ability to distinguish between right and wrong, and second to an in-built predisposition in us to approve the right and disapprove the wrong. The first indicates the existence of an ethical consensus among us. The second further asserts that an 'inclination to good' is implanted in our nature. Note that Mencius says nothing about our necessarily practicing the good and rejecting the bad. He says only that when we distinguish good from bad, and nevertheless pursue the latter, we do so in full awareness of its badness, and will inevitably feel remorse of conscience as a result. Dr. Lau believes that 'in this way the statement that human nature is good is given a sense which is completely independent of the way in which human beings in fact behave.'⁽¹⁹⁾ I think this is largely true, though I have reservations about the word 'completely.' But does this reduce Mencius' statement to nullity? Of course not. What is important is that when we behave badly we should know it, and feel badly about it. For only then are we likely to do better next time. And this is what Mencius claims for us.⁽²⁰⁾ It is fitting that the 'virtue' into which this fourth 'beginning' can be developed should be *chih*, or 'wisdom.'

Mencius lived in one of the most violent and disorderly periods in Chinese history, known to her historians as the 'Age of the Warring States.' Far from living as a recluse in an ivory tower, he spent the greater part of his life traveling from court to feudal court, engaging in polemics with rulers and with other philosophers, and advancing his views on matters as diverse as family relationships, the organization

IX

All human populations can be divided into two groups: those who are committed to the future and determined to bring about a social order in which men 'created in God's image' can hope to realize their full humanity; and those who are not so committed. The former are our allies. The latter – the unawakened, the drugged, the new heathen – are our missionary field.

We must realize that we have allies all over the world. Some of them are Christians and some adherents of other religions. Some are without religious belief and others perhaps even hostile to the very idea of religion. We do not always know who our allies are. And even when we do we are not always happy about recognizing them as such, especially when they identify themselves as Marxists, or Maoists. But we in the Society of Friends, a very small minority even among committed Christians, have to recognize and take comfort from the fact that we are part of a great army on the march.

It is incontrovertible that in the Christian ranks we form a distinct, almost a detached, company. In some ways, as I have suggested earlier, our relations with our non-Christian and non-religious friends are easier and more open than with some of our Christian brethren. But let me stay for a moment on the question of our relations with other Christian groups.

Historically we belong to the 'second wave' of the Reformation, to the century following that of Luther, the Council of Trent, Calvin and the 'first wave' radicals like the Anabaptist Thomas Munster, and Hendrik Niclaes, the founder of the Family of Love.⁽³³⁾ If the earlier period was dominated by Germany, Switzerland and France, the second stood under the aegis of England. The historian Emile Leonard stated an important truth when he said, 'The

passage that follows is taken from the sermon on 'Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.' After quoting this text, he continues:

That means surely: may heaven come upon earth and the earth become heaven. May the realm of hostility to God be broken, and the will of God be manifestly done in us, and by us, and around us. Is that the spirit of submissiveness? Is it not the spirit of revolution, compared with which what we know as revolutionary spirit is the most harmless romanticism? Jesus teaches no submission to world events. For how could one declare war on what we call world events in sharper terms than by saying: 'Here on earth God's will is to be done as manifestly and unopposedly as it is in heaven'?(32)

To describe the Christian's purpose in the world as 'helping to bring in the kingdom of God on earth,' however valid a general statement, is open to criticism on a number of counts: as being visionary, utopian, impractical and, perhaps worst of all, vague. What we say in our own *Advices* may help make the picture a little more precise: 'Do not be content to accept things as they are... Seek to discover the causes of social unrest, injustice and fear; and try to discern the new growing points in social and economic life. Work for an order of society which will allow men and women to develop their capacities and will foster their desire to serve.'

The task we set ourselves – or are set – is an immense and daunting one. But we have certain things in our favor. For instance, if we are standing for Truth, we have Truth on our side. If we wish to recover and preserve an unpolluted planet with standing room on it for the next generation, we need to feel that we are not alone, that we have allies, that the Light in others will answer to the Light in us, and we to them.

of society, democratic government, economics and conservation, and man's capacity for moral growth. No man's experience could have been less likely to give him an idealized picture of human nature, and it is infinitely to his credit that he never wavered in his belief in man's potential for good.

§

Naturally there are fundamental differences between the Mencean teaching of the 'four beginnings' and orthodox Christianity, which must set its face against every notion of self-salvation. There are also differences between Mencean teaching and our own doctrine of the Inner Light. Are they too insurmountable? Mencius of course feels himself under no necessity to account for the presence of the 'four beginnings' in our nature. He knows by introspection and experience that they are there, and from his practical standpoint this is enough. A man, he believes, because he has these 'beginnings,' can with their help and with the help of other men and of the transmitted wisdom of the sages accomplish his own salvation, that is, his moral progress from potential to actual human goodness. The intervention of no divine Being is needed either to start him on the journey or sustain him on the way. Nevertheless there are contexts when Mencius, like Confucius before him, refers to 'Heaven.' I cannot see why we should have scruples about seeing his 'four beginnings' as corresponding closely to what we call 'that of God' in all men. Can we not, then, on many grounds, claim Mencius as an 'early Friend?'

VI

I should like now to turn to a different matter; to turn, one might say, from belief to experience, from faith to practice.

The Quaker has sometimes been described as a combination of mystic and practical man of affairs. The second of these labels is hardly controversial, and I will consider it later. The first merits prior discussion.

If mysticism is given its most inclusive meaning, then there is no doubt that Friends are mystics. In his *Systematic Theology*, Paul Tillich defines the mystical as 'a category which characterizes the divine as being present in experience.'⁽²¹⁾ However, mysticism, defined less broadly and more radically, has other characteristics. Radical mysticism is more typical of certain Asian religions – Hinduism, some forms of Buddhism, Taoism – than of Western religion. It finds its point of departure in the 'I' and concerns the innermost self, whose goal is ecstatic union with, or absorption in, the One, the Absolute, the Brahman, the Tao. Tillich writes of this radical form of mysticism that 'it experiences the Spiritual Presence as above its concrete vehicles and its various transformations... [Radical] mysticism transcends every concrete embodiment of the divine... But for this very reason, it is in danger of *annihilating the centered self*, the subject of the ecstatic experience of the Spirit. Communication between East and West is most difficult at this point, with the East affirming a "formless self" as the aim of a religious life, and the West... trying to preserve in the ecstatic experience the subjects of faith and love: personality and community.'⁽²²⁾ The more extreme Eastern types of radical mysticism are no less antipathetic to Quakerism than they are to other Christian groups. In this area we find no bridges linking East and West.

On the other hand, mystical experiences of communion with the Spiritual Presence (to keep to Tillich's phrase) have always held an honored place in Western Christianity and of course in Quakerism. One has only to

to help elucidate their meaning. This is first from Ernst Lohmeyer's book, *Das Vater-Unser*, and concerns the words 'Thy kingdom come.'

Even since the first commentaries on the Lord's Prayer there have been two contrasting interpretations of this petition. One envisages a gradual coming of the kingdom and an increasingly deep and extensive penetration of it into the hearts of men... To use the New Testament picture, the kingdom develops in men, in nations, in the whole world, through a steady growth like the grain of mustard seed. Although this growth is quite clearly in pursuance of the will of God and is brought about by him, men are still his co-workers... So the idea of the kingdom of God becomes the ordering of moral or social or religious life in accordance with the demands of the Gospel of Jesus...

The other interpretation envisages the perfect kingdom of God at the end of time and history, the *regnum gloriae*. It has not yet appeared on earth, but it will 'come' one day, and... will manifest itself in great glory, will put an end to all dispute and injustice, all evil and godless powers, and exist eternally in peace and holiness.'⁽³¹⁾

Of the two interpretations suggested here, the first will probably be more intelligible, and acceptable, to Friends than the second, though I myself have some reservations about its emphasis on gradualism. In the 1970's eschatology has acquired a new significance, and we seem not to have so much time in hand as once we thought.

The second quotation comes from a collection of occasional sermons preached at Zurich by Gerhard Ebeling on the theme of 'the Lord's Prayer in today's world.' The

of John that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son for its salvation, sending him into the world, not to condemn the world, but to save it. (John 3:16-17). Bonhoeffer's teaching on 'worldliness,' which has worked like a powerful leaven in contemporary Christian thought, is found mainly in his *Letters and Papers* written from Tegel Prison in the last two years of his life, before his death on April 9, 1945, at the hands of Nazi executioners.⁽²⁹⁾

Bonhoeffer's message is one to which Friends, I believe, both can and should relate. He sees Christianity, not as a redemptive religion, mainly concerned with the salvation of souls for eternal life in another world after death in this one, but as a religion whose essential business is with 'this world as created and preserved and set subject to laws and atoned for and made new.'⁽³⁰⁾ It is only by rooting himself firmly in the world and making the world's problems his concern that the Christian can be fully Christian. But once in this world – what has the Christian to do?

In attempting to answer this question – and bearing in mind that the context of both question and answer is 'Friends and other faiths' – I shall speak to the following topics: the task, allies, and the relations between our actions and our beliefs.

VIII

The task of the Christian in the world today, stated simply and bluntly, can surely be nothing else than the bringing into existence of the Kingdom: 'My kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.' (Matt. 6:10). Around these words of the Lord's Prayer, seemingly so clear and straightforward, disputes over interpretation have divided theologians for many hundreds of years. I propose to quote passages from more or less contemporary writers

read through the first hundred or so pages in *Christian Faith and Practice*, gathered under the heading 'Spiritual experiences of Friends,' to realize the vital contribution mystical experience has made to the life of the Society.

We normally think of mystical experiences as happening to individuals. Joachim Wach, in his *Sociology of Religion*, argues that mysticism 'favors individualism,' and commends E. Underhill's choice of the term 'introversion' to describe this type of experience. He goes on to write: 'This interpretation of mysticism, which emphasizes its individualistic character, differs from that of another outstanding student of mystical religion and life, Rufus Jones. He has traced with great sympathy and understanding collective movements of mystical tinge, especially in Germany and England during the Middle Ages and in the beginning of modern times.'⁽²³⁾ Although Wach is prepared to admit that corporate mystical experience is perfectly possible, he still maintains that 'even in the groups [discussed by Rufus Jones] the individualistic inclination of the mystic looms large... Mystical fellowship can but be characterized, in a term Ernst Troeltsch coined, as a "parallelism of spontaneities."⁽²⁴⁾

As a description of a gathered Friends meeting for worship, Troeltsch's phrase strikes one as ludicrously wide of the mark. A more perceptive judgment, though again from an outsider, is given by Evelyn Underhill in her book, *Worship*:

Historically, Quakerism may be considered as the mystical wing of the Puritan movement. Here the intense Puritan suspicion of institutional worship is pushed to its logical consequence, in the rejection of any organized or premeditated service, even the use of hymns. This, however, is the negative and least

attractive side of Quakerism. On its positive side, it is a noble experiment in corporate contemplative prayer. A Quaker Meeting does not merely provide a suitable environment, within which individuals can follow in the silence their own devotional attract [inclination]. It is – if it be indeed a living Meeting – an organic and concerted act of recollection. In the silence the whole community ‘centers down’ to that ground of the soul which is the agent of contemplative prayer; and thus achieves a common experience of communion with God, and with each other.⁽²⁵⁾

This outside witness, however unattractive she may find the drab setting of the meeting house and the lack of liturgical color in the unprogrammed proceedings, well brings out the corporate nature of Quaker mystical experience.

The next quotation, this time from an insider, describes worship, not in the meeting house, but in the home. In it Rufus Jones recalls his childhood in a country Quaker community in Maine a century ago.

We never began a day without a ‘family gathering’ at which mother read a chapter of the Bible, after which there would follow a weighty silence... There was work inside and outside the house waiting to be done, and yet we sat there hushed and quiet, doing nothing. I very quickly discovered that something real was taking place. We were feeling our way down to that place from which living words came, and very often they did come. Someone would bow and talk with God so simply and quietly that He

never seemed far away. The words helped to explain the silence. We were now finding what we had been searching for.⁽²⁶⁾

VII

A text that appeals greatly to all Friends is this: ‘Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only... Pure religion undefiled... is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.’ (James 1:22 & 27) Add to this another text from Howard Brinton: ‘In Quakerism there are two complementary movements, withdrawal to an inward Source of Truth and return to action in the world.’⁽²⁷⁾

In the light of these two quotations, I should like now to consider Friends in action, as ‘doers of the word,’ in their operational rather than contemplative role.

This needs to begin with some discussion of ‘worldliness.’ You may have noticed that the word ‘world’ occurs in both the texts just quoted. In one we are told to ‘return to action in the world’ and in the other to keep ourselves ‘unspotted from the world.’ Up until recently, ‘worldliness’ was generally regarded by Christians as sinful. As Dr. Vidler puts it, ‘To be worldly in this bad sense is to conform uncritically and complacently to the standards and fashions of the earthly society of which one is inevitably a member.’⁽²⁸⁾

Today, ‘worldliness’ is also used by an increasing number of Christians in a good sense; and this turnaround of meaning, which we owe largely to the influence of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, reflects a veritable revolution in Christian thinking.

In traditional terms, the ‘world’ is seen as one of an unholy trinity, the other members of which are the flesh and the devil. What nonsense this makes of the testimony