

A Religious Solution To The Social Problem

Howard H. Brinton



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR Howard H.Brinton, Ph.D., Professor of Religion, Mills College; Acting Director, Pendle Hill, 1934-35.

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A religious solution to the social problem involves an answer to two preliminary questions — what social problem are we attempting to solve and what religion do we offer as a solution? Since religion has assumed a wide variety of forms it will be necessary, if we are to simplify and clarify our approach, to adopt at the outset a definite religious viewpoint. To define our premises as those of Christianity in general is not sufficiently explicit because historic Christianity has itself assumed a wide variety of forms. For the purpose of the present undertaking I shall approach our problem from the original point of view of the Society of Friends, which, in many ways, resembled that of early Christianity. Such an approach need not imply a narrow sectarian view. Early Quakerism exhibited certain characteristics common to many religious movements in their initial creative periods. Later Quakerism has shared the fate of other movements in failing to carry on the ideals of the founders. As for the social problem for which we seek a solution, it is the fundamental dilemma out of which most present-day social problems arise. Stated as briefly as possible, *we seek a remedy for excessive individualism, and we require of this remedy that it shall at the same time respect the hard-won rights of the individual.*

The paradoxical character of this statement suggests that, if there be a solution, it may turn out to be a religious one, for religion feeds on paradox. No merely logical scheme, based wholly on science and reason, will, it is probable, do more than submerge the individual through some sort of mechanical collectivism. Religion at its highest and most creative stage is, we shall find, the one solvent for excessive individualism which at the same time enhances the respect for individual personality.

To assume that the problem has a religious solution is not, however, to offer a substitute for economic, sociological, political, or psychological analysis and planning. A builder

who uses steam-driven machinery does not claim that steam alone can build a house or a bridge. Obviously, mathematical calculation, materials, tools, and skilled workers are also needed. By similar token the religious thinker does not claim that religion alone can reform our social order. It provides power, not tools, nor blueprints. Many a social reformer today is like a builder who orders "work ahead at full speed," while the fires are going out under his boilers. We are seeking a way to rekindle those fires.

The Primitive Christian Solution

The primitive Christian community when it met together for worship was like an early Quaker meeting in the freedom with which various members exercised their gifts and in the absence of a service programmed in advance and dominated throughout by ritual and human leadership. This is shown in Paul's so-called first letter to the Corinthians. In both early Quakerism and early Christianity religious groups were formed whose individual members were fused together as fire fuses metals, by a living infusion of the Spirit. No outer mechanical bond was necessary. The coming of the Spirit was indeed the great miracle of early Christianity. The Leader had departed in the flesh, leaving His followers forlorn and scattered. Suddenly in the flames of Pentecost He had returned seeking fresh incarnation in the body of the Church. At the beginning it was the personal leadership of Jesus which held His followers together. Now a new tie of a different sort was formed. Eventually this permeative bond held every Christian community from Jerusalem to Rome. It came most vividly to consciousness in the *agape* or love feast; a common meal partaken of reverently in remembrance of the Last Supper. Congregations became united with each other and with their Leader in a living organic communion. "Christians of the first generation," says Dr. Streeter,

“troubled themselves little about the theory either of doctrine or of Church Order. . . . The most vivid fact of present experience was the outpouring of ‘the Spirit’.” (*Primitive Christianity*, p. 73.)

In the early Christian meeting for worship, the Spirit exercised the same function that the soul exercises in the body; it united and coordinated the units of which the whole was composed. By a natural process the doctrine arose that the church was the mystical body of Christ. “The God of our Lord Jesus Christ,” writes Paul, “gave Him to be the head over all things to the church which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.” (Ephesians I: 22,23). Man is saved, therefore, not through an external historical transaction, as has been declared in many Protestant creeds, but through the Spirit of Christ inspiring and unifying the Church. Salvation accordingly becomes a social process in which the group takes part. It is not merely a transaction between God and isolated individuals.

Sin is estrangement. The individual in himself is lonely and incomplete. He is saved, that is, his isolation is overcome, by finding and being found by a greater Life which unites him at once with Itself and with his fellows. This Life, he feels, does not come up from the biological level below, like the life of the body. It possesses a special quality whereby it is recognized as divine and coming from above. Only the upward glance senses it. Its presence fills the worshiper with awe and reverence. It creates new life in him and new life in the group. It is the same creative spirit, which has always brooded over the world, bringing order out of chaos. “Without Him was not anything made that hath been made. In Him was life and the life was the Light of men.”

The central doctrine of the great Church of the Middle Ages held that man is saved in and through a Christian Society which is the body of Christ inspired by His Spirit. In

the hands of theologians and priests it became mechanized and was given a ritualistic interpretation. But the Church never forgot that Christ was present in His house of worship. His presence was realized in the sacrament of the Mass. Nor was it forgotten that fellow Christians could contribute to one another's salvation, though only a shadow of the early belief remained in the doctrine that sinners might have some share in the abounding merit of the saints. The Catholic Church has developed, more directly than is often realized, in unbroken continuity out of the primitive Christian Church.

There are many ways by which an aggregate of individuals can overcome excess of individuality in its parts and be united as a whole. The means may be biological, as in the family and the tribe; they may be economic, as in the trade union or business organization; or they may be political, as in the state. There is, however, as history has repeatedly shown, no more dynamic nor effectual means of social integration than that which we call religious. The roots of the Church go deeper than the roots of family, of state, or of any other type of human organization. The early Church was a religiously integrated group bound together by an invisible presence in the midst. The individuality of each part was not thereby canceled out; rather it was lifted up into something higher, through which the essential purpose of each individual was fulfilled. Out of this higher unity in the Spirit, the lower types of organization were generated, including the economic. The Church at Jerusalem acted at first like one large family. The communism in which it began was soon given up, but there remained a considerable degree of economic interdependence. The poor were carefully provided for. The fact that other types of worship and church organization soon superseded this original community of spirit on a basis of democratic equality before God does not detract from its significance as an important social phenomenon.

The Early Quaker Solution

Early Quakerism went even further than early Christianity in its dependence on a purely spiritual type of unity. Baptism was given up because it was an unnecessary external addition to an inner spiritual reality. There is some evidence that the *agape* or love feast occurred in some primitive Quaker groups,¹ but quite early and generally the supper of the Lord was celebrated wholly in silent spiritual communion. The Quaker meeting was a religiously integrated group. There was no bond but the Spirit, no creed but that which came fresh and upwelling from the Eternal Fountain of Truth. The unit was not the individual but the meeting, for it was the "sense of the meeting" and not the sense of the individual which determined the course of action.

As in early Christianity, the higher unity generated the lower types. There was in early Quakerism a large degree of economic interdependence; — the poor, the sick and the persecuted were carefully looked after by the meeting. Francis Howgill thus describes the nature of the bond which united the early Quaker meetings: "The Lord appeared daily to us, to our astonishment, amazement, and great admiration, insomuch that we often said one unto another with great joy of heart: 'What? Is the Kingdom of God come to be with men?' And from that day forward our hearts were knit unto the Lord and unto one another in true and fervent love, not by any external covenant or external form, but we entered into the covenant of life with God, and that was a strong obligation or bond upon all our spirits which united us one unto another." (Testimony concerning Edward Burrough.)

The Quaker doctrine of the Inner Light has sometimes been interpreted as an extreme form of religious individualism. This seems at first sight to be a natural deduction. If man has a Light within, he is, by this view, independent

of Church, Book, and Society in his search for truth and salvation. He is subject to no law outside himself, for his final authority is an Inner Guide. This individualistic interpretation has arisen partly from the mistaken belief that Quakerism is the extreme left wing of Protestantism and the result of Protestant doctrines carried to their logical conclusion. According to this view, Protestantism, in abolishing the Church as a means of salvation, substituted a direct relation between man and God. Fearful, however, of the anarchy resulting from so extreme an individualism, Protestantism sought for a means of external control which it found ready at hand in Bible and in creed. Quakerism, however, did not retreat. It placed its whole dependence on a direct relation with the God Whom it found within. Creed, Bible, and ritual were dispensed with and religion was reduced to pure interiority. Quakerism, according to such an interpretation, is simplicity. By a process of subtraction it has eliminated all that is institutional, ritualistic, and historical and has thus carried Protestant individualism to its logical conclusion.

There was, indeed, a Reformation Group in England which followed this path, but it was not the Society of Friends. The Ranters, with whom George Fox had many vigorous disputes, declared that everyone who considered himself inspired by the Inner Light was a law unto himself. To have God within was to be God and so become incapable of sin or error. Fox denied the Calvinistic doctrine of total depravity, but he as vigorously denied this easy means of attaining perfection. In his Journal, Fox relates that the learned Justice Hotham said to him that "if God had not raised up this principle of light and life which he, Fox, preached, the nation would have been overrun with Ranterism." There was, however, a Ranter party in the early Society of Friends.² When a form of church government was set up through meetings for business, there resulted a

separation on the part of some who believed in a purely individual form of guidance. This was the Wilkinson-Story separation of 1676.

The Society of Friends took the position that the source of guidance was not merely an individual light but the “sense of the meeting,” in other words a communal light. This communal light which illumined the group was reached in a spirit of worship through which each individual aspired to a super-individual level of reality where all individual lights merged into one. It is difficult to make this process clear to anyone who has not actually experienced it. Individual insight is not suppressed, but rather it is expanded into something higher and more inclusive, just as a view gained from the foothills is not denied, but fulfilled and interpreted by the view from the mountain top. The individual view may not be wholly in error. It is simply fragmentary and incomplete. The individual, provided, of course, that he is in the true spirit of a worship which orients him toward something higher than himself, finds himself saying in the end, “that is just what I really meant but did not quite see clearly.”

Dean Inge says that “Quakerism is an individualistic mysticism” (The Social Teaching of the Church, p. 21), but Troeltsch is right in asserting that “the Quakers overcame the natural antisocial or rather individualistic tendency of mysticism.” (The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches, Vol. II, p. 700). The group method of arriving at conclusions is the one unique contribution which Quakerism has made to Christian thought and practice. Trevelyan (History of England, p. 431) says that “George Fox made at least the most original contribution to the history of religion of any Englishman.” The Quaker method is more than just a process of group thinking such as is described in some recent books.³ It is a group thinking where God is present in the group. Groups often tend to sag below the level of the

individuals of which they are composed. But the divine presence insures an integration on a higher level. A mob can be fused into unity by looking downward to the infra-human instinctive level. A Quaker meeting aims to become united by looking upward to the supra-human, that is to something higher than any one individual or any collection of individuals.

This is not a "democratic" method in the narrow sense of that term, for there is no domination of a majority over a minority. If a good degree of unity is not reached, no action is taken. It sometimes happens, of course, that an individual who disagrees will either submit as best he can or follow his own guidance at all costs. More often he finds that the conclusion arrived at expresses his own deepest insight. The search for unity is not a search for a compromise nor for the greatest common divisor of a number of diverse opinions. It comes rather as an integration in which the parts are not overbourne, but transmuted into something more complete, just as oxygen and hydrogen in uniting to form water are not destroyed, but transformed. This figure can be carried further. As in the combination of oxygen and hydrogen energy is released which can cut through the strongest steel; so a group of persons if it be able to arrive at a higher unity generates a spiritual energy which becomes available for incalculable practical use in the world around.

The History Of The Social Problem

The significance and character of this Quaker method can be better understood if we turn now to the social problem. This problem can best be defined through an historical approach. It arises in an age of transition when a highly individualistic culture has run its course and the time is ripe for society to pass over into some more collective form. A change such as this occurred in the early Christian

centuries when a decadent individualistic Graeco-Roman culture passed over into the collective culture of the Middle Ages. The Graeco-Roman culture at its beginning was centered first in the tribe and then in a collection of tribes forming the city-state. These were essentially religiously integrated communities.

Eventually, with the formation of great cities, the expansion of commerce, and the wide development of learning, individualism set in, until society lost all inner cohesion and could only be held together by the dictatorial policy of a Caesar. Religion, which once had been an integrative social force, degenerated into a skeptical or pantheistic philosophy, or into a solitary negative mysticism, or into a passionate effort to secure personal immortality. Finally when all inherited reserves of social unity had been exhausted; when, in the ruthless struggle for economic advantage, wealth had become concentrated in the hands of a few, the whole structure crumbled to a chaotic mass of atoms and barbarians from the north walked in upon the ruins undeterred.

Yet in this chaos and disintegration there existed islands, religiously integrated groups of Christians who offered to the world a new way of life. They were not thinking of a purely individual salvation. They had their gaze fixed upward awaiting a Messiah who had promised to descend and inaugurate a new social order. But they did not wait passively for His coming. They set up examples of that new promised social order in their own groups for there the Messiah had already come in the Spirit. The visible Church became the kingdom of God on earth at least in germ, as St. Augustine shows in his "City of God." This Church, the outward body of the Messiah, grew and increased in power until in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries it dominated the whole culture of Europe. In itself it united all things: philosophy, theology, science, art, politics, language,

education. It cut across national boundaries just as the League of Nations attempts to do today.

But, like all living things, the Church reached its zenith and decayed. The current of life grew weak until the whole structure seemed to many only a lifeless mechanism. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a new era of transition set in. This time it was in the opposite direction from the earlier transition of the fourth and fifth centuries. A growing individualism broke up the old dying group life expressed in church, trade guild, and feudal system. The Protestantism of Luther and Calvin abolished the Church as a means of salvation and substituted an individual relation between man and God. The mechanics of Galileo and Newton revealed a world governed by law, not a world integrated by souls. The Spirit had no place in the system.

The great humanists of the Renaissance uncovered the brilliant age of classical antiquity when man once before had used the matchless power of his own individual reason to discover truth, goodness, and beauty. Great explorers opened new vistas of human wealth and adventure. Philosophers discovered that knowledge is power to overcome nature with the tools of science; it does not remain the passive contemplation of changeless truth. Mankind revealed in his powers "like a giant refreshed with new wine." The old supernaturalism with its other worldly standards of life was thrown off like the fetters of a prisoner. The seventeenth century was an age of giants whose achievements increased the general self confidence, — Bacon, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Kepler, Galileo, Newton, Harvey, Descartes, Pascal, Locke, Spinoza, Leibnitz, — the list could be extended much further. Quite naturally there grew up a doctrine, strange to the Middle Ages, that progress is inevitable. The discovery of biological evolution in the nineteenth century confirmed this belief.

In the nineteenth century individualism in the well-known form of "liberalism" asserted the right of every man

to freedom and equality of opportunity. Among its principal philosophers were Mill and Spencer. Under the stimulating influence of this type of thought a rapid advance was made in many fields of human achievement, though not in art or religion. To be "liberal" meant to be willing to give to everyone the right to advance his own opinions whatever they might be. The result was new light on many questions. It meant also the right of the strong man to accumulate wealth in whatever rank of society he might be, provided he played according to the rules of the game. The result was a rapid increase in the total amount of wealth. Yet liberalism by itself, however important its achievements, is an incomplete and one-sided philosophy of life. In defending the rights of the parts it tends to forget the rights of the whole. It stands for increased freedom, but has less to say of increased responsibility. This is illustrated by the fact that the so-called "liberalism" of the present moment, though it still attacks all forms of regimentation, has largely tended to become reactionary. The doctrines, once used to advance reform, may also be used to retard it.

With the rapid advance of humanism and individualism the supernatural has gradually faded from the picture. Protestantism venerated it, but banished it to Bible times or the next world. Science could discover nothing higher than human reason, and reason seemed capable of solving every practical problem. Writers on social theories, endeavoring to be scientific, declared that enlightened selfishness was enough to hold society together. Their "economic man" pursued his own interests but he was compelled to regard the interests of others in so far as they affected his own. In the nineteenth century science succeeded in reducing the world of matter to a swarm of molecules and atoms each going its own individual way regardless of any "spirit of the whole." In the same way scientific economists reduced society to a collection of human

atoms each pursuing its own interest. In politics also, science set the pace. As in mechanics the bigger swarm of atoms exerts a greater force than the smaller, so in politics the bigger swarm of human atoms prevails over the smaller swarm. Questions of right and wrong are settled by counting heads just as in the science of mechanics problems are solved by counting pounds and feet.

In every field of human endeavor the process of atomization continued. Art broke away from the whole of culture and wanted to be art for art's sake. Religion declared that it would stick to its own field and leave politics and social questions alone. Science declared its independence of religion. The field of knowledge became completely departmentalized so that a professor of physics was proud to know nothing of psychology.

It is a curious fact that science, the chief instrument of man in his victorious struggle against nature, was the first to betray him and hand him over, bound hand and foot, to his adversary. Science declared that man has no freedom of will, but is the helpless victim of blind mechanical forces; that instead of a fallen angel he is only a risen animal; that his mind (if any) is a mere bundle of reflexes; that his most exalted emotions result from certain chemical compounds exuded by his glands; that his most heartfelt opinions are manufactured by the science of propaganda. It is hard to understand why man has endured all these insults from science with such serenity just as we are puzzled by the Calvinist who takes a kind of pride in his total depravity and eternal damnation.

In spite of all, a general belief in human self-sufficiency lingered until the World War. The shock of this catastrophe and even more the inability of man to learn anything by it or take any valid measures to prevent its recurrence has given a terrific jolt to faith in the inevitability of human progress. One thing yet remains, however, a faith in the

inevitability of scientific progress. The Century of Progress, celebrated at Chicago, clearly marked a great and calculable scientific advance. Here it was shown that if science cannot make life significant, it can at least make it comfortable. But even this last hope seems now to be vanishing. Vast progress in the mechanical means of manufacturing goods has not brought physical comfort as much nearer as might be supposed. It has increased the extremes of greed and want and piled up goods which the needy are unable to buy. The result is, a gigantic depression which still continues. No wonder that pessimism is replacing the optimism of a generation ago. It is the pessimism of the isolated individual standing alone in a friendless universe, with no means of meeting the vast impersonal economic and physical forces which bid fair to overwhelm him.

A group of modern humanists come forward at this point with a remedy. The excellence of their literary abilities somewhat conceals the naiveté of their plan of salvation. They ask man to assert his humanity; to deny that he is a beast or a machine, to defy the tyrant Nature and to declare his independence of natural appetite and natural law. But they can point to no source of power through which this declaration of independence can be made effective. They can only assert that this attitude is essentially reasonable (or human). They do not seem to realize that man can raise himself above the animal level only by grasping hold of that which is higher than himself. Without external help he cannot lift himself spiritually any more than he can lift himself physically. Man is not self-sufficient. He becomes independent of nature only in so far as he becomes dependent on that which is above nature.

The modern literary humanists ask us to take our standards of conduct from the humanistic ages of classical antiquity or of the Renaissance. But these ages, unlike our own, followed immediately upon epochs when man reached

up to the divine, and it was largely from those epochs that the humanism of the past drew its reserves of power. At the present time the reserves of power are becoming slowly exhausted, and the pull from below is becoming stronger than the pull from above. Three centuries ago man began to lose his faith in the super-human. Little did he know then that this loss of faith in the super-human would cause him to lose faith in the human also. Losing his grip on the higher he sags into the lower.

This new fall of man is not just a declaration on the part of science that man is either an animal organism, as biology asserts, or a machine as mechanistic physics would have us believe. It is more than a change of viewpoint. If, in this God-forsaken world, man believes that he cannot look upward for help he may conclude that he can at least look downward. Why not be a beast in fact as well as in theory and enjoy the satisfaction of animal appetites with a clear conscience. The animals are natural and unaffected. They are not, apparently, tormented by a sense of lonely isolation in a merciless universe. Our human isolation is due to our artificiality and hypocrisy; our attempts to be other than that which, Freud tells us, we really are. Let us therefore forget our troublesome pretensions and indulge ourselves in a healthy, sincere sensuality.

But can we forget? The sensuality of the modern man is a deliberate, self-conscious sensuality, not a self-forgetful animal naturalness. In his endeavor to be a natural beast he becomes an unnatural man. His enjoyment of sensuality often depends largely on the attraction possessed by forbidden things. The fruit is sweet because it comes from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This is shown particularly in the sex literature so voluminous today which lives on a knowledge of its own depravity. Such a sophisticated sex interest is very different from the healthy sensuality of the barnyard. It is accordingly no real escape

from self-conscious individuality. Its emptiness is illustrated by the nature of its principal medium, the silver screen, which depicts a civilization as soulless and unstable as the shadows of which the pictures are composed. The moving picture presents, in more senses than one, a two dimensional world with no depth. In order to exist this world must always continue in restless motion.

As neither humanism nor sensualism are aware of the true nature of the social problem, they make no attempt to meet it. They are content to think of man in individual terms. There are, however, three important remedies for excessive individualism which recognize the nature of the problem, the first is autocracy; the second, world denunciation or asceticism; the third is a religiously integrated group. Let us consider each in turn.

The First Solution — Autocracy

When men have lost faith in themselves they tend to seek refuge in a strong man. The rise of dictatorships today, whether of the fascist or communist type, is evidence of the retreat of the individual and his failure of nerve. Just as individual pieces of matter, not united by an inner bond, can be held together and coordinated by force externally applied, so over-individualized men can be forced to cooperate by the power of the state. This is the oldest of all remedies, but it is always a sign of decadence. It means that there is no living power which can vitalize the community. The soul has fled and a mechanism is left behind. Some philosophers of communism, as for instance John Macmurray, realize this but they believe that a dictatorship is a preliminary stage to organic unity. This is probably wrong. Mechanisms produce mechanisms. We do not know of any case where a mechanism has produced life. It may be that a religious fire is burning beneath the

surface in Russia, fusing individual elements, but of this we cannot speak positively as yet.

The retreat to a mechanical level is exhibited also in the recent growth of extreme nationalism. Nations are today declaring their complete independence of each other, economic and otherwise, and are arming to enforce it. Past history has shown that international anarchy is usually overcome by the dictatorship of one nation, after a career of conquest. As there is apparently no present possibility of a Pax Romana, we must look either to a balance of power which sooner or later will become unstable and result in war as in 1914, or to an organic union of nations, such as is imperfectly foreshadowed in the League of Nations. Extreme individualism in nations is as intolerable as extreme individualism in persons.⁴

The Second Solution — World Renunciation

The second solution proposed for the problem of over-individualism is renunciation. The individual in his loneliness and isolation cannot contend with the forces against him and so he retreats from the vain pomp and glory of this world. As long as he is confident of success in this world his religion is generally a religion of action. When, however, this confidence is lost, the pain of individuality and inadequacy is assuaged by complete surrender to that which is above and beyond the world. The ascetic crucifies the flesh that his spirit may be purified and freed from carnal bonds. The solitary mystic purges himself of all that is sensuous in order that he may achieve union with the super-sensuous.

This solution was particularly widespread at the time when the Graeco-Roman civilization was crumbling into individual atoms. When Indian culture had reached a similar stage the Buddha preached one form of this method. The

doctrine of reincarnation presents the Buddhist with a more difficult problem than that faced by the Christian. The Buddhist aims not only at annihilating his egoism in this world but also in the next. Suffering and individuality, he holds, are due to desire. Eliminate all desire and nothing of the ego will remain which is capable of suffering. As a candle flame dissolves in the darkness and goes out; as a drop of water loses itself in the ocean; so the separate soul by ceasing to exist, enters the nameless peace of Nirvana. The process by which desire is eliminated as taught by the Buddha is elaborate, but the end is simple. The Buddhist overcomes his individuality by destroying it. This may solve the individual problem but obviously it does not solve the social problem.

This method of world renunciation assumes many intermediate forms. It is not the fashion today to retire to the wilderness but there are many who refuse to fight the battle of life because it no longer seems to them important. They are spectators, not participators, looking sometimes cynically, sometimes with mild amusement at those who struggle to make the world better. It is good form today not to take anything very seriously. This world is sometimes interesting but generally boring. It cannot harm us for we can always smile at it, knowing that at any moment we can turn the dial to a different wave length and hear another tune. This sense of futility arises because the individual is alone. He has found no great cause in which he can forget himself, no group in which he can merge his life.

The doctrine of retirement from the world may, however, become the very essence of a healthy, normal religion. As the body must sometimes rest, so the spirit cannot always strive. There must be some area of calm into which the wearied soul may withdraw for renewal of strength. There must be some quiet time of worship when the course of life is reset by pilot stars. There must be some pause on the

journey when the traveler can refresh himself at the well of eternal life. It is only when such a period of refreshment absorbs all things into itself that religion becomes a method of escape. The soviets called religion “an opiate of the people,” and such indeed it can be if its *whole* emphasis is on the other world. But a life which is wholly this-worldly is often like a stream which runs dry because it is not renewed by a source beyond itself. The world’s great religious leaders and social reformers have in general discovered a balance between a this-world religion of good works and an other-world religion of retirement from struggle; a retirement in which strength and insight are renewed.

The Third Solution — The Religiously Integrated Group

It is such a balance between world-affirmation and world-renunciation that we discover in our third type of release from over-individualism. This has already been described as existing in the early Christian community and the early Friends’ meeting. In such groups, when they live up to their highest ideal, the individual is neither suppressed by authority nor eliminated by retirement. His individuality is lost in that of the group but it is regained on a higher plane. In submitting to authority he falls to an infra-individual mechanistic level. In uniting with the spirit of the group he rises to a super-individual organic level. This word “organic” is often used in a purely biological sense. It is used here to designate a type of social organism made up of persons who are bound together not externally by force but internally by love and friendship.

To a scientific mind which recognizes no categories except those of mechanistic science it is incredible that a unified group can be formed of persons who respect fully the freedom and individuality of one another. The answer to this paradox is not scientific but religious. The cementing

force is not only the love of one another. It is also the love of God. If the members of the group looked only to each other they would react against each other like billiard balls, striking and rebounding. Instead they look to that which is above them all yet in them all; they look to the Spirit which unites from above.

This method has a long history. The tribe and the patriarchal family were largely biological units but when individualism arose they could not depend wholly on biological ties. The tribal or family religion was of such a character that the individual in participating in its ritual felt himself united to the whole. In the Chinese patriarchal family the shrine where the ancestors are worshiped has been the most powerful of family bonds. The totem of the tribe is worshiped as a symbol of an integrating life force. At a time when the old Greek deities were no longer intellectually accepted, Greek statesmen advocated their worship as a means of unifying the city-state. It was the worship of Jehovah which held Israel together and made her victorious over her enemies. Many races and peoples look back to some golden age when the individual found freedom and joy as a member of a group.

But this family or tribal type of religion was tied closely to the soil. Its gods were fixed in home or temple. When commercial expansion first came and men began to move freely over the earth it began to weaken. Horses, iron, larger ships, broke up the old groups and gave men new power over their fellows. The rich grew richer and the poor, poorer. Through the disintegrating force of commerce which mixed up men from widely scattered places the first great age of individualism set in — roughly about the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. Many like Amos bewailed the good old days and pronounced a doom on greedy merchants who exploited their brethren. Almost at the same time in widely scattered places great religious geniuses appeared offering their

remedies for the decline of social forms of religion. Jeremiah preached a personal religion, a new covenant written not on tables of stone but on the heart. In China, Confucius and Laotze; in India, Buddha and Mahavira; in Persia, Zoroaster; in Greece, the first philosophers and the nameless founders of the "mystery religions"; all appeared to offer some solvent for an excess of individuality. Sin is estrangement, loneliness, separation. Salvation is a closing of the gap between the isolated life and a higher life, an atonement or at-one-ment with deity. The remedy is a redirection of will (Judaism) or a mystic union (Taoism, Orphism) or annihilation of self (Buddhism) or social adjustment through decorum (Confucianism).

These methods of aiding the isolated human atom, either to endure existence or to dispose of it, have met the needs of many millions of persons, but it is doubtful whether any of them will widely appeal to the occidental world of the twentieth century. Nor can we go back to the tribe, the patriarchal family, or the small city-state. There is, however, one remedy which fully meets the difficulty and which is consistent with modern life and modern conceptions of the world. This is the religiously integrated community comparable to that which existed in early Christianity and early Quakerism.

It may well be asked — why insert the adjective "religious"? Are there not around us a vast number of associations of all sorts in which the modern individual in some measure overcomes his isolation; such associations as clubs, lodges, political parties, trade unions, and organizations for the advancement or elimination of everything conceivable? These, however, are held together by what might be called a horizontal relation between man and man. Those who have common interests find cooperation and mutual adjustment of individual desires essential to success. Such associations range all the way from a business

corporation organized through a system of authoritative control, to a discussion group interested only in a search for truth. These associations may contain religiously-minded individuals but, with some possible exceptions, they are not religiously integrated.

In religious worship the horizontal bonds are supplemented by vertical bonds leading up to a higher Being who unites men by drawing them all to Himself. The integration is on a higher level. When Jesus said, "Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them," he did not mean that he would come as one individual among other individuals. His Spirit includes but transcends each individual. "I am the vine, ye are the branches." "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." Men can be united by all falling into the same pit or they can be united by climbing by various paths to the same mountain top. A lynching mob is obviously integrated on a lower level than a religious meeting held in the spirit of Christ.

An upward striving toward a higher world can, under certain conditions, create the strongest human bonds within the world. This is the fundamental paradox of religion which resists all attempts at rationalization because it is creative of the new and unpredictable. Social progress is a child both of this world and of a higher world. Each world is sterile without the other. The other-worldly person seeks only for a flight from this "vale of tears" to a haven of peace and security; the this-worldly person ignores the "supernatural"⁵ as mere "wish fulfillment," a means of escape for those unfit for life's struggle. Yet the history of mankind shows, especially in the great creative periods, that it is only the fertile union of both worlds which can bring about a new birth of a higher level of existence.

Protestantism has failed to bring about such a union because, by its very nature, it seems doomed to be one-

sided. For a long time it condemned this world as evil, teaching a purely individual salvation through faith in Book, creed, sermon, and ritual. Now it is either swinging toward fundamentalism, which revives the old exclusive dependence on the supernatural and transcendent, or it is preaching a social gospel devoid of characteristically religious elements. One difficulty is that Protestantism has evolved no religious method nor theory for fusing the two. Catholicism effected a practical synthesis of nature and supernature nearly a thousand years ago which satisfied the mind of the Middle Ages but it carries into the present so much obsolete baggage that it cannot lead in social or theoretical advance. In early Judaism, as described in the Old Testament, the conception of a Holy Community integrated by a common worship of Jehovah was developed by the prophets and in large measure actualized. This Holy Community was the parent of the Christian Church. In modern Judaism, scattered about as it is over the face of the earth, there is little opportunity to revive this ancient order.

Quakerism And The Ideal Community

Quakerism combines in religious worship two elements which are usually considered incompatible, a mystical approach to God and a social relation to our fellows. The lonely mystic knows only the vertical relation to God, the "social gospeler" too often only the horizontal relation to man, but group mysticism takes account of both God and man. In the group we find that we need our fellow worshipers in the search for God and we need God in the search for our fellows. Each search leads into the other. In the silence of living worship we strive to create a sensitivity to the Divine presence by removing selfish, individual desires. We find that the partition which separates God and man also separates man and man. Or we may first reach out in love

toward our fellows in an endeavor to understand them and the conflicts and problems which trouble them; and suddenly some window of the soul opens and the breath of a diviner air comes in. Once more the Spirit which has brooded over chaos from the beginning has spoken the creative Word and chaotic human atoms are reborn into the unity of a higher life. "We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren." (I John 3:14.)

The words "one another" occur with surprising frequency in the early Friends' writings. Fox in his letters often identifies the tie which unites the worshipers to God with the tie which unites them to each other. "Mind," he says, "that which is pure in one another which joins you together"; "therefore, all Friends, obey that which is pure within you and know one another in that which brings you to wait on the Lord"; "Friends, meet together and know one another in that which is eternal which was before the world was," "feel the power of God in one another," "that all may be as one family building up one another and helping one another."⁶ Penn, in his preface to Fox's *Journal*, speaks of the early Friends as "treating one another as those that believed and felt God present."

The group that has thus found God has solved the social problem within itself. None of its members henceforth face the world alone as individuals. The ties which bind it together are not easily broken by material or economic forces. It cannot ignore the needs of any of its members. But it is not a Noah's ark built to save a few from a drowning world. Experience proves that there is always generated an over-plus of spiritual power which seeks outlet in a larger field. If there is no going out from the group to transform the world into a greater Holy Community then the group is either dead, or it is a plant-like existence. If the group is to resemble the highest type of living things it must, like them, modify its environment. An inner sense of peace, security, and spiritual

power is attained in group worship but it is not henceforth confined to any particular place or time. Each member carries it about in his heart wherever he goes and acts accordingly. He becomes an apostle of a new social order patterned after the type of procedure which created a living unity in his own more limited group.

This type of social order is based not on the tyranny of an individual or a majority of individuals who use violence or threat of violence to enforce their wishes. Differences are adjusted by a process of integration in which no individual is submerged but in which every viewpoint takes some place or exerts some influence in the final achievement. The way to bring about a new social order like this is to achieve it first in one's heart and in the religious group to which one belongs and then to live in it wherever one may be. It will then be aroused in the hearts of others and grow by contagion. Such a method involves serious risk to those who undertake it for a person living in this kind of a social order becomes subject to the violence of those not in it. Nevertheless this method of venture and sacrifice is the one method by which the kingdom of God propagates and reproduces itself.

Quakerism at its best presents this answer to the Social Problem. It is not a plan based on (though it does not exclude) economic or political theories, but a social dynamic arising out of a certain type of unifying experience. The history of the Society of Friends gives ample evidence that this experience is intimately bound up, both as cause and effect, with social reforms of a practical and far-reaching character.⁷ But the general application of the Quaker method has hardly begun. There are large areas of conflict, particularly in industry, which await pioneers of social progress.

There are some reasons why the present age may be more favorable to the Quaker religious and social method than the seventeenth century when the Society of Friends

arose. In the seventeenth century, as we have already seen, the man of western Europe was just emerging from the control of an old culture and acquiring an unlimited confidence in himself. A new continent awaited his exploitation and a new science was ready to furnish him with the means to exploit it. Newton was a contemporary of Fox but Newton increased while Fox decreased. As science developed, man's faith in his ability to control his destiny grew and faith in a religion which looked to the superhuman for help correspondingly lessened. The Society of Friends retired into a shell of rigid discipline in order to preserve the pattern of life it had developed. But in the last few years the direction of the current has changed. Humanism, a moment ago everywhere triumphant, stands baffled and without resources before a crumbling social order. Man is losing confidence in the power of science to save him. What is even more significant and prophetic, the greatest scientists of today have turned to philosophy and have discovered that the older mechanistic conceptions describe only a shadow world. The deeper reality, they say, is organic and its nature is revealed not through balance or measuring rod but by the mystic vision.

An age of collectivism of some sort is apparently dawning. The central question is — will it be a collectivism based on external authority to meet a purely economic or political need, or will it be a “culture” — that is, a collectivism based on Spirit which guides men from within. If the second alternative is the hoped-for answer we must realize that it can come about, not through some sudden revolution but only through a long, slow process of growth. Because the Kingdom of Heaven is an organism and not a mechanical collectivism Jesus compared it to a tree which begins in a very small seed. Like a tree, it cannot grow if it is cut off either from the Light of Heaven above or from the dark earth beneath.

That the case is far from hopeless can be shown by a comparison of the present time with the time in which Christianity arose. There is the same excess of individualism and a corresponding effort to establish a collectivism based on authority. There is the same failure of nerve, the same cynicism, skepticism, and stoic apathy, the same sense of futility in the face of blind economic and political forces. No wonder that to many men of the first century the situation seemed hopeless and the only remedy a sudden revolution and the coming of the Messiah from the clouds of heaven. No wonder that to many men today a bloody revolution seems the only remedy. But the early Christians did not wait for revolution. They set up the new social order in their own religious communities. These communities were the seeds of the kingdom. The Church became the kingdom of God on earth, very imperfect of course, but a living entity through which men were raised up to a higher and a more than individual life. That the Church later compromised with the state and adopted some of its methods does not detract from its great achievement in offering a real solution to the problem of excessive individualism. The hope of building up a social order in which the Sermon on the Mount would be accepted for what it obviously means was never given up. In the monastery a sincere but abortive effort was made to avoid compromise with the world and to create spiritual and economic interdependence in a religiously integrated community.

The world today awaits that individual or group which can minister to its needs in the same way in which the early Christian communities administered to the needs of their time. The remedy for social disintegration is not more centralized authority which sooner or later is destroyed by the very forces which it sets in motion. Nor is it a retreat to a monastery, nor to an attitude of indifference, nor to a purely other-world mysticism. We must have a kind of social

cement which binds from within so that the unity formed is not mechanical but living. Where can we get it except from the source whence it has always come from, a type of religious experience which at once creates and is created by an organic social order? In this task we can take only one step at a time. Mechanical things can be made quickly but living things grow slowly. We are at least able to build up small bits of the kingdom here and there wherever a group of persons become united and lifted up by the "Presence in the midst." If these groups are living they will increase and multiply for reproduction is the law of all life. It is essential that we help bind up the broken wounds of the world. It is even more important that we at once set about building up a world in which these wounds shall not occur.

"Christianity," says Heiler in *The Spirit of Worship*, "is weary of individualism which weakens and divides; it is striving to escape from the narrow bondage of the subjective into the wide freedom of the objective, the Universal; from the limitations of the isolated individual to the fullness of strength of the great Community." Many are the seekers searching for such fullness of strength. They will find it in an upreaching self-forgetful mind which unites and creates; in a mystical insight which senses both the upward pull of Divine power and the frail tendrils of lonely human lives reaching out for support; in a sacrament which is at once communion with God and with man. This was the earliest human search. It will also be the last.

The Fundamental Christian Doctrine

Can there be a social salvation which ignores the Christian doctrine of the atonement? To many persons today this is not an important question, but its consideration brings to bear on our central problem some interesting and significant facts. The individualistic interpretation of the

atonement, as set forth in most Protestant creeds, can help us but little. But primitive Christianity, as we have already seen, did not put its central emphasis on individual salvation. It brought a social gospel to meet a social need.

In the history of our religion we find many attempts to express in symbols the nature of that living power which holds society together from within. The early Christians symbolized it in the love feast eaten together in memory of the Last Supper. In the first account of the Last Supper to be written (I Cor. 11), Jesus takes the cup and says "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." These words mean little to us today but to the men who first heard them they were fraught with profound significance. Perhaps their minds went back to the old covenant which was made between Jehovah and Israel at Mt. Sinai. Here a contract was sealed according to which the people of Israel formally adopted Jehovah as their God and promised to serve only Him and He, in turn, promised to aid and protect them. The Old Testament, taking its name from this contract, was written to show that Jehovah had always kept His part of the bargain, but Israel had been unfaithful many times and had suffered in consequence. Moses sealed the contract by an impressive ritual (Exod. XXIV). The people stand before God who is represented by an altar. Victims are sacrificed and their blood poured into bowls. Half of the blood is sprinkled over the altar. Moses then reads the terms of the agreement and the people say, "All that the Lord hath spoken will we do and be obedient." The remainder of the blood is then sprinkled over the people, with the words "behold the blood of the covenant."

This ritual had a significant meaning. The blood represented "life" (Lev. XVII: 11,14). Two parties formerly independent of each other are united into a single living whole because each is made to share in the same blood, that is, in the same vital essence. To accomplish this it is

necessary that the life of a third party be sacrificed in order that its life, being shared in by the other two, might unite them into a single life. Before the covenant was sealed Jehovah and Israel were merely contiguous. After the covenant they were united by a living bond, a third life, in which both shared.

What more natural than that Jesus, knowing that his own life would be sacrificed on the morrow, should think of his blood as the "blood of the new covenant" creating like the blood of the old covenant a living bond between man and God. His life was to become that third thing, bridging the gap between the divine and human, thus overcoming that isolation of the individual, the estrangement, which is called "sin." This is "atonement," the central doctrine of the Christian religion.

Though the symbols by which religion speaks change from age to age, old truths remain. It is in that inner bond of unity between man and God which Moses and Jesus symbolized by "blood" that we must seek the power of social salvation. In the early Church Jesus saved the individual because it was His Spirit which was the soul of the Christian community, and it was in and through the Christian community that the individual was saved from insufficiency and isolation. Among the early Quakers it was the "Christ within," who was the Spirit not only within the individual but also within the group as a living whole who bridged the gap between the separate individual and a larger whole of life. In the religiously integrated community the individual finds his problem solved for he is no longer alone. He has found man and God, each through the other.

"But now in Christ Jesus ye that once were far off are made nigh in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace who hath made both one, and broken down the middle wall of partition" (Eph. 11: 13,14).

Notes

1. See Barclay's "*Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth*," pp. 375-377. Barclay, the Quaker Apologist, defines the "Love Feast" as "to eat and drink together in the dread and presence of the Lord as His people *which custom we shall not condemn.*"
2. In early Christianity the new found liberty from the law of Moses gave rise to the same problem. Paul twice warns the Corinthians that "All things are lawful; but all things are not expedient." (I Cor. 6:12; 10:23.)
3. Such, for instance, as W. S. Elliott, "*The Process of Group Thinking.*"
4. It is interesting to notice in this connection that the Council of the League of Nations arrives at its decisions much after the manner of a Quaker meeting. As one objection will, in most cases, make action impossible, it is useless to take a vote and so conclusions are arrived at by general assent.
5. Such words as "supernatural" and "other worldly" are unfortunate inheritances from an age when "human" and "divine" were considered as distinct and separate as oil and water. A life which is qualitatively higher is no more "unnatural" nor "miraculous" than the lower.
6. These quotations are taken from Brayshaw, "*The Quakers*," page 99.
7. Such as religious liberty, peace, the abolition of slavery, temperance, prison reform, the care of the insane, etc.