

LSH - Garvey
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To Seekers Everywhere: A Quaker Message For Our Times*

We live today in a war-weary world, with material and moral destruction and disintegration all about us. Millions of men and women are discouraged, apathetic—without hope for the future. Others are cynical, disillusioned, bitter.

Society today is staring blankly into the rim of an abyss the horrors of which were previewed in the concentration camps of Belsen and Dachau; in the mass murder of bombed cities in many parts of the world; and in the fiendish horrors of Hiroshima. And what is even more grim, society seems paralyzed, helpless to move away from that rim on which it precariously sways. Should the worst take place, society will slip into that awful chasm from which it has just struggled to emerge. This time its plunge is likely to be headlong; it is doubtful if it has strength enough to grasp the tiny protrusions along the edge of this yawning chasm and pull itself back again even to the rim.

The alternative is for society to move slowly but surely away from that rim, until it has again escaped what seems to be the magnetic attraction which keeps pulling it again and again toward its own grave. In the decision as to the alternative which society chooses, each person has a part, for you and I are in that swaying mass. Our actions help to determine, even if slightly, the direction in which society moves. To those who are seeking to find ways in which to help mankind move away from imminent disaster, this "Message for Today's World" is addressed.

Friends do not feel that they have found the whole truth, nor do they feel that they have a monopoly on the truth they have discovered. But they do sincerely believe that they have found a philosophy and a way of life, a spirit of individualism and togetherness which carries a particular message for our times. They invite others in quest of the realities of life to hear this message and ponder it.

They believe this message is a universal one—for all times and all peoples, but that it is peculiarly pertinent today. If men and women can discover and live out these basic concepts, society will move slowly away from the rim of the abyss, and on toward a world community based on Christian principles. If men and women do not discover and begin to em-

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body these concepts in their own lives and in the lives of the groups of which they are a part, then a period of unparalleled chaos and disaster lies ahead for the entire world.

These concepts do not constitute a creed. One need not subscribe to all of them to become a Quaker, but they are beliefs which mark Friends as a group. Some of them set Quakers apart from other religious fellowships. Some they share in common with other religious groups in various parts of the world.

Therefore, to men and women everywhere, Friends would say simply but convincingly:

1. *There is hope for the future of humanity if men and women recover their contact with the Divine.* Wars are not inevitable, poverty is not necessary, mankind is not predestined to extinction. The evils of our times and of the periods ahead can be eradicated or minimized, and mankind can move on toward a more abundant life for all if men and women discover in themselves and in each other the spirit of God which dwells in each human being. The discovery of that spirit in ourselves and others is the prime requisite to world recovery.

Economic, political and social rehabilitation and recuperation are necessary, urgent, imperative; but spiritual recovery is even more important. Without it, man's selfishness will be projected onto nations and the world, thus leading to continual economic, social and political strife, and to wars, either open or camouflaged.

Individuals cannot achieve such a transformation either of themselves or of society by even the most intelligent and far-sighted planning and organization. Only as they find and remain in contact with the Divine within and without, can changes of a permanent character, beneficial to the world, be achieved in individuals, in nations, and in human society as a whole.

Friends therefore urge men and women everywhere to seek anew, or to seek seriously for the first time, that of God in themselves and in others, and to cultivate that of God in everyone. For they are certain that there is something of God in every individual even though it may not be evident upon first contact. Only by such seeking and by such spiritual cultivation can the changes be wrought by God through man which will dispel the shadow of fear of the future under which mankind now lives.

2. *Friends maintain that individual and group worship are central to any plan of world recovery and progress toward a more abundant life*

for all. The forces within individuals and within nations are contradictory forces, some of them for good, some of them for evil. Of the two, the power for evil seems to have the greater attraction. When left to his own devices, the tendency of man is to become a beast. Only when he dreams a great dream, only when he sees a great vision of the possibilities for himself and others, and only when he discovers the sources of spiritual power with which those dreams and visions can be translated into actuality, does he become a man—a human being—a reflection of God.

Continued contact with these spiritual forces through what man calls "worship" transforms men and women, young people, and children into sons and daughters of God, comrades of the Most High. Only such contact makes "miracles" possible.

Friends, therefore, call upon people everywhere to re-examine their need for individual and corporate worship to discover if the methods and means of communion with the Divine which they are using are the best for them, and if so, to renew their efforts to use these methods even more effectively.

If these methods are not bringing a heightened sense of purpose, a finer type of living, Friends urge people everywhere to seek other or new ways to worship, convinced that those who seek will find. Friends do not feel that their way of worship is the only way, but they invite others to feel free to share with them in their periods of worship as they seek to find God in the silence or the spoken word of their meetings for worship. They are convinced that God speaks to men and women, young people and children today as he has spoken in all times and in all places, and that intermediaries are not necessary, since God speaks directly to those who seek him. They reiterate their firm belief in the power of individual and group worship and the necessity for its full use if the world is to move ahead in our time.

3. *Friends believe strongly in the fellowship of small groups of persons with similar yet not identical purposes. They believe that the strength to be derived from such common experiences is sorely needed by society today.*

In such groups persons of all ages can share their common aspirations, explore ways and means of carrying them out in daily practice, and receive encouragement and stimulation from others in the building of more integrated lives and of a better world.

Friends believe that the basis of such fellowship groups should be spiritual or religious, just as the basis of life itself is spiritual or religious.

But they do not believe in a narrow limitation of such group life. People should worship together, but they should have much more in common than that. Their religion should be a part of life rather than apart from it.

They believe there is strength to be derived from studying together the problems of individual and group living, of social and economic problems, of political movements—all those many facets of life which true religion touches. They believe that persons should work and play together, for in such activities there are elements which bind persons together and tend to round out one's life. And they believe that such fellowships should conduct the business pertaining to the group as a group, with everyone participating in the decisions. Such common business should be conducted in a spirit of worship so that the leadership of the Divine can lead to group decisions upon which there is common agreement, rather than to decisions reached by a majority vote.

Many attempts have been made in the past to build such fellowships as Utopian communities separated from the rest of society. Friends look upon such attempts as unfortunate, leading to isolation, ingrowth, and eventual stagnation. They believe such fellowships can and should be formed and developed in the midst of society and that they need not, and probably should not, be geographically separate. They should be spiritual fellowships of individuals who come together from various parts of a city or country district for the varied kind of fellowship outlined above.

Believing so strongly in the values of such group life, Friends would urge others to examine again the groups of which they are a part, in order to determine whether the group fellowship is such that it embodies all those elements. If the groups of which they are members or participants are not yet so inclusive, Friends urge men and women to strengthen these vital cells in order to make them even more effective in developing better individuals and a better society.

Although they seldom attain this ideal of group fellowship, Friends are striving to become what their name implies—Religious Societies of Friends—and they welcome others to participate in their groups wherever they exist, and to help in forming others where they do not exist. They do not believe that theirs is the only true fellowship in the world today, but they are convinced that great strength is to be derived from such formations of individuals, and they strongly recommend their development as a part of the task of rebuilding the world on firmer foundations.

4. Friends are convinced that the search for that of God in every man, woman, and child leads not only to the enrichment of human per-

sonality and the release of tremendous potentialities in individuals, but also to the transformation of social, economic, and political relationships. They believe that the recognition and cultivation of the Divine in every human being can transform individuals and groups and eventually bring about a world society based upon human brotherhood, cooperation, and peace.

They would stress the fact that the causes of conflict within individuals and within groups of individuals of all kinds lie in the selfish striving after personal or group wealth, power, or prestige. They would plead for the examination and removal of such causes of conflict within individuals and groups, and for the substitution of a desire and a striving for the enrichment of all individuals and of society as a whole as the aim of life.

They believe that the search for God in every man, woman, and child leads to pioneering in every aspect of human society, and they believe that this spirit must permeate every human activity if the human race is to survive and progress. Such a belief in the potentialities of man when in contact with the Divine will produce a finer form of education, a finer form of human relationships between all races, religious, social, economic and political groups, and finer forms of social and political and economic organization than mankind has as yet produced.

Friends would encourage men and women everywhere to examine their own lives and the life of the groups of which they are a part to see if such a spirit of pioneering is alive in them, and if so, to cultivate it carefully, lovingly, wisely. If it does not exist in them or in groups of which they are a part, Friends would encourage them to pray and think and work for the appearance or reappearance of such a spirit.

From its inception in the 17th Century until today, the Society of Friends has embodied some of that spirit. It has not always been true to its faith nor has it always been as adventurous as it might have been, but it has pioneered in many movements for the betterment of individuals and society. It has striven for the improved care of the criminal and the insane. It has worked for better relationships between employers and employees. It has assisted the Negro and the Indian to achieve a better status. It has worked for women's rights. It has pioneered in new forms of education, in the eradication of war, in the development of international work camps, and international centers and education. It has ventured into politics, particularly in the Holy Experiment in Pennsylvania, and to a lesser extent elsewhere. Many of its members have been leaders in the application of religion to socialism, particularly in European politics.

It is still pioneering in the transformation and enrichment of human personality and human society. To such pioneering more and more Friends are dedicating or rededicating themselves. They urge upon men and women everywhere the necessity and the stimulating and joyful advantage of such pioneering, and welcome others to join them in their efforts at spiritually-motivated service to and with society.

5. *Finally, Friends would focus the attention of seekers everywhere to the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, as the forgotten prophet of our times, whose life embodied these ideals and whose message speaks to the conditions of our times.*

There are others who have approached His message. There are others who have embodied some of the ideals to which the world needs to turn for redemption. There are elements of the truths which He spoke in all the religions of the world. But nowhere has there been the revelation of the potentialities of the divine in human beings as revealed in the carpenter of Nazareth of two thousand years ago—and today.

It was He who called for a recovery of men's faith in God which would lead to hope for the future, and would be translated into neighborliness to all one's fellow men. It was He who spoke of the divine in all persons and the perfectibility of man. It was He who organized His disciples into a fellowship and His followers who carried out that spirit even to a communal form of life. It was He who gave to us the simplest creed of all—the love of God and the love of one's neighbor as oneself. It was He who taught men that the sole sacrament was that of a dedicated life. It was He who epitomized and epitomizes the Christian citizen.

Friends would emphasize again the need to read the account of His life in the Gospels and to ponder its meaning. They would urge upon seekers everywhere a closer examination of the best writings and thought of modern scholars—and novelists—upon His life. And they would reiterate that the spirit of Christ is available to all people everywhere today.

Quakerism is basically a Christian faith and the Quaker message is a Christian message, even though the essentials which Christ revealed and taught are universal, eternal, available to all and found in part by the saints of all religions in many various parts of the world. The world has need of Jesus of Nazareth as the one in whom the possibilities of man and society are best revealed.

Such is our message to seekers everywhere; a Quaker message for our times.