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# Friends Intelligencer

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## Going to Meeting

By LEONARD S. KENWORTHY \*

Learning to worship in silence is very much like learning to swim. Some people need no instruction. They grasp intuitively the art of silent worship. As soon as they enter the silence they sense what to do. They relax physically, stretch themselves out spiritually, and feel the power in and around them. They revel in their experience of group meditation and come out of the meeting for worship spiritually refreshed—better able to live truly Christian lives.

Others have more difficulty in learning to worship in this way. They seem to fight the silence as an inexperienced swimmer sometimes fights the sea. They feel as if they had been carried out to where the water is deepest and then thrown overboard without any idea what to do. Only the handshake at the close of meeting saves them from "drowning" in the silence.

These people need some simple suggestions for worshipping in silence just as the swimmer is taught some of the simple techniques for swimming. If you are one of these people perhaps the following comments will help you in making the most of the meeting for worship.

Many people find it helpful to read something of a devotional nature before going to meeting. They may read a poem, an essay, a story, or a section from the Bible. Perhaps they have their own notebook of favorite quotations which they pick up and glance through. Others find it helpful to take a walk outdoors when weather permits, feeling that this helps them physically, mentally, and emotionally to prepare for a period of silent meditation. Then as they

enter the room where they are to worship they are already partially prepared for that experience. As the expert diver considers his approach on the springboard a part of the dive, so these worshippers consider the moments immediately preceding meeting a part of their worship.

After taking their seats quietly and reverently, most persons find it important to make themselves comfortable physically. They become relaxed in order that they may forget their physical beings and concentrate upon their spiritual selves. Many bow their heads and close their eyes so that they may shut out the outside world and concentrate upon the world within themselves. As the swimmer finds it easier to progress if his body is completely in the water, so the worshipper finds it easier to progress if his mind and body have cast off the outer world and he is completely surrounded by silence.

Individuals differ as much in the way they use the silence as swimmers do in the strokes they employ. In both cases the more advanced person has a variety of methods which he can use interchangeably without much thought as to what he is doing. Some people find it helpful to repeat a prayer at the beginning of their silent devotions. It may be the words of someone else, like the famous lines of Edwin Hatch:

Breathe on me, Breath of God,  
Till I am wholly Thine,  
Till all this earthly part of me  
Glow with Thy fire divine.

Or it may be a simple petition of one's own phrasing—"Be Thou with me and help me in the period ahead." It may be the familiar words of the Lord's Prayer, or for non-Friends the Apostles' Creed or some other part of the church liturgy.

The worshipper is now alone with God. In the intimacy of silence he can think back over the past week or day and be thankful for those parts of it

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which have been worth while and worthy of him at his best, and he can be penitent for those parts which have been worthless and unworthy of him. He can plan ahead for the day or week or longer period to come, asking for help in choosing the right course and in living up to the highest and finest which he knows. He can talk over with God his relations with each of his classmates, his family, his friends, his teachers, and others whom he meets in the trolley or bus, at the store, or elsewhere.

As he becomes more adept as a worshipper he can venture out into deeper water farther from home, thinking over his relation to others at home and abroad with whom he is not acquainted—the Negro, the Oriental, the immigrant, the sharecropper, the slum dweller, the employer and the employee—asking that he may help to create Christ's kingdom here on earth, a kingdom in which these men and women and children will fully share.

The worshipper may find his meditation more fruitful at times if he thinks about some topic such as justice, love, faith, or prayer. Just what, he will ask, do these mean to me now and what could they mean to me? And he will seek to answer such questions for himself in relation to his daily life with and for others.

Or he may attempt to ferret out the true meaning of a hymn he has heard or a play he has read. Songs like Whittier's "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind" or plays like Wilder's "Our Town" are filled with meaning for the person who would pause long enough to meditate upon them.

Oftentimes the recollection of experiences which have raised the level of the worshipper's life at some time in the past can be helpful in one's meditation upon the present and future. To discover what qualities there were in a person whom he admired or a book he enjoyed or a beautiful scene he saw, and to pray for those qualities in his own life, can bring added joy and power during the meeting and after it is over.

As one meditates and prays he should remember that worship is the meeting of God and man and it should be a conversation, not a monologue. In the silence one discovers that God, too, speaks if we are still and listen to Him. Just as He has spoken to people of all ages and classes and nations in the past, so He speaks to us today, telling us wherein our lives approach the ideal as exemplified by Christ, wherein they fail to approximate that ideal, and how we can find the sources of spiritual power for Christian living today. When one has had the experience of hearing God speak he has passed from the outer courts of the temple of worship and has pushed aside the curtain and entered into the Holy of Holies. This is the height of spiritual experience, but a height which everyone can attain.

In any group of worshippers there are likely to be those whose years of practice in feeling the presence of an Unseen Spirit make them better spiritual swimmers. Often they are older people with a rich experience of life behind them. Sometimes they are

younger people who seem to grasp quickly and easily the meaning of silent worship. When they feel strongly that God wants to use them to speak to the group they are under a compulsion to speak and should do so. Whether the phrasing of the message is perfect matters little. It is the message that counts. Since God speaks to everyone who listens, it is to be expected that He should speak through every worshipper at one time or another. The ministry in a Friends meeting is based on the assumption that everyone is a minister rather than that one person occupies that position.

There does not have to be speaking, however, for a meeting to be a worth while occasion. A meeting should not be judged by who speaks or how many people speak or even by what they say. It should be judged by the spirit in which people worship, silently or vocally, and by what that experience does to the daily lives of those who thus come together.

When someone speaks or prays aloud the other worshippers must decide for themselves whether they will listen or not. If they are already having a rich personal experience in worship they may continue without in any way disturbing the person speaking or praying. Usually the entire group pauses in its individual meditation to hear the special message which is being given. Often the worshipper will find that the thought of the speaker is similar to or the same as the thought which he himself has had. This similarity or unity of thought in a group often occurs when an entire assembly is worshipping in spirit and in truth.

In any meeting for worship there will be disturbances, too. A moth will get caught in the window and frantically beat his wings; a fellow worshipper will become restless and thoughtless of others; a noise from outside will break the silence. These can be used as the swimmer uses the brief time when his head comes out of the water or the time when he floats along on his back. They can be intermittent breaks in the slow, steady flow of silence. And by thinking about them or praying about them these so-called disturbances can become an integral part of the worship. The moth has much to teach human beings; the restless worshipper can be an object of special concern; and the noise of a car or train or whistle can be quite symbolic to those who would make use of them.

People sometimes ask why they should worship in a group instead of worshipping alone. It is not a question of one or the other. Both are necessary to the person who would become a fully developed Christian. In group worship one feels the companionship of other spiritual seekers and is strengthened in his own search by their companionship. In group experience one is often helped by the spoken words of others. And in group meditation at its best the sensitivity of each worshipper to the spirit of God somehow seems to be heightened by the experience of being together.

Occasionally people go to meeting and do not seem to find silent worship meaningful. They either do



not return or they go back with the feeling that they will not find the time spent there helpful. They fail to realize that even those who swim easily when they first venture into the water spend long hours of practice in perfecting the art, and that those who find it more difficult the first time eventually learn to swim after they have spent time and energy in the learning process. So it is with the silent worshipper. Even if he has grasped quickly and easily this art, he will want to spend hours of practice in perfecting it. And if he has had difficulty at first in getting the most good from his meditation, he can with practice find it a helpful experience. In matters of the spirit, exercise is just as important as in matters of the body.

When the swimmer glides along in the water without worrying about when and how he is going to breathe or when and how he is going to use his arms or legs, he really begins to enjoy swimming. Similarly

with the worshipper. When he begins to sit in silence and to worship spontaneously without thinking about the next steps in his meditations, he begins to enjoy the silence and to derive real satisfaction from it. He feels the power in and around him and is helped by it.

Throughout any period of worship it is well to bear in mind the thought expressed so beautifully by the English painter, J. Doyle Penrose, in the painting known as "The Presence in the Midst." In it he portrays a Quaker meeting of the early days with the men in their broad-brimmed hats on one side of the meeting house and the women in their plain bonnets on the other. Through the lattice window between the facing benches streams the sunlight. In the sunlight appears the figure of Christ in dim outline, signifying the Spirit of Christ in their midst. In every meeting for worship that Spirit is there for those who would have spiritual communion with him.

## Religious Faith and World Affairs

By MARY S. McDOWELL \*

Last August ninety-three distinguished Christian leaders issued to the press a Declaration from Christians to Christians to urge more vigorous support of the war. The comment of *The Christian Century* (which also supports the war, in a way) was: "It (the Declaration) has nothing to say about God or Christ or the Christian Church as determinative of the Christian's way of looking at war. . . . This is not the language of Christian faith." The argument of the ninety-three Christians does not apply Christian principles to war, but asserts that victorious war is necessary to overcome the evils that a Nazi victory would create. I wonder if the same comment does not apply to all arguments of Christians in justification of war; they would admit that war itself is evil, but the end justifies the means. For instance, it has been stated in regard to Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931, that while the use of military force to suppress brigandage might have cost thousands of lives, not to use it "was bound to cost millions." If we are going to justify the means by the end, we should be sure that the desired result will follow and that it could be gained in no other way. Could we be sure that the death of millions would be prevented by the killing of thousands, and only by such means? Military suppression is not automatically followed by durable peace. There might be fifty different actions, or thousands of combinations of actions by different nations following that refusal to use military force in 1931.

Isn't it possible that some non-military course of action might have prevented the present war? Of course it is probable that in 1931 the nations failed to use military force largely for selfish reasons;

they did not wish to run risks that would not advance their national interests. But suppose their lack of action had been a pacifist reason, that they did not wish to do harm to either of those peoples; and that their next acts had been searching for the causes of Japan's aggression, and trying to relieve their situation. Suppose the Oriental exclusion act had been revoked, no scrap iron or oil for military purposes had been sent, and international measures had been taken toward disarmament and cooperation in trade and finance. Though we cannot prove that this war would have been avoided by such methods, neither can it be disproved. But if the military method of destruction and killing is used, the evil results of those acts are certain; whether there will be good results that will counteract these is, to say the least, uncertain. The statement that failure to use military measures "was bound to cost millions" of lives is made without the possibility of getting sufficient evidence.

Yet to many people such statements seem plausible for the following reasons:

1. People have been trained to think of the soldier as the defender of a nation's liberty and ideals in international relations; and war seems the only practical means of defense when diplomacy fails. Many have been so indoctrinated with this idea, or are so moved by the war situation that they are prevented by emotion from seeing what would otherwise be quite clear. But when international justice and good will are recognized as the true basis of security and peace, men's imaginations will be stimulated to think of a multitude of possible steps toward that end.

2. It is contrary to the generous, sacrificial spirit of war to count the cost closely; and it is merely assumed that victory will bring about the moral aims of war, and atone for all the cost. For instance, people are apt to forget that to a great extent, the lynching,

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