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The Quaker Pastorate

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THE 1956 QUAKER LECTURE OF

INDIANA YEARLY MEETING

THE QUAKER PASTORATE

The pastoral system in the Society of Friends came as such a radical departure from traditional practices that it seemed to many sincere Friends to be a device of the Devil to destroy the identity of the sons and daughters of George Fox.

Experience has shown that it is not easy to resolve differences within or between groups when misunderstandings are nurtured on dogmatic assertions. The strong feelings engendered by the Great Separations of over a century ago drove the various branches of Friends to such extremes that each branch felt it necessary to establish its own system of doctrinal absolutes. In the burning heat of argument each group claimed to be the true torch-bearer of the Quaker faith and consequently, each branch disowned the other. As in all broken relationships, reconciliation was impeded by prejudice on all sides.

Our generation inherited what Elbert Russell has called a "mutilated Quakerism," weakened in testimony. Our prestige as peace makers was imperiled by our schisms. The judgment of history is that the experience of nineteenth century Quakerism paralleled that of the blind men in the poem, "The Blind Men and the Elephant."

> "For all were partly in the right,
> Yet all were in the wrong."

Although each group was deeply sincere, there was an obvious lack of charity and understanding.

Those meetings which were most influenced by Evangelical theology and program adopted the pastoral system more out of a sense of circumstantial necessity than internal conviction. The pastor seemed to be the only solution to the problems created by the historical forces which played relentlessly upon the Society. The isolation of the frontier, the sterility of the meetings for worship,

the contact with other denominations, and the serious tensions within the Society itself were all factors threatening the very existence of Quakerism. Those meetings which opened their doors to the mighty spiritual thrust of Evangelical Christianity suddenly recognized their inadequacy in providing competent leadership which could train and amalgamate the new converts into the life of the Church. So spiritually impoverished were Friends as they began to emerge from the Quietistic cocoon that only the outside evangelist was equipped to offer a continuing ministry. Pastoral service became a practical necessity to meet an immediate need. Many of the evangelists were not oriented to Quaker thought, and therefore, as they became the pastors of our meetings, they introduced the typical Protestant pastoral pattern.

First, preaching became a regular and expected duty of the pastors even though many of them did not have any specialized training. All messages were welcomed, while emphasis on the leadership of the Spirit was minimized, because even a teaching ministry was like a refreshing oasis in the dry desert sands of Quietism. For the first time pulpits were brought into Friends Meetings, and usually the facing benches were either discarded or abandoned.

Secondly, in typical Protestant fashion, the responsibilities which were once shared by the membership of the meeting were gradually transferred to the pastor. The pastor did the calling, the preaching, and praying and finally, even the officiating at memorial services and weddings.

Thirdly, the meeting for worship changed radically in character. From an hour of uninterrupted silence, as experienced during the period of Quietism, it became, under pastoral leadership, an hour of preaching, of praying, and finally, of singing with instrumental accompaniment. In reaction to their experience of the deadness of their silent worship, pastoral Friends substituted a programmed meeting. This change constituted a shift from waiting together expectantly upon the Lord.

Even though many Quaker meetings have tended to think of

pastoral leadership as a necessity, they have, generally speaking, made no defense of it in terms of the Quaker heritage. If they have done anything, they have been satisfied to employ conventional Protestant conceptions rather than to formulate the role of a kind of leadership which would both meet our needs and at the same time be indigenous in our genius. Though such meetings recognize the need for pastoral services, they are reluctant to accept the leadership and direction involved therein. Consequently, except for a few Yearly Meetings, Quaker pastors have not enjoyed loyal, enthusiastic support. Evidence on this point is not difficult to accumulate. Until recently their has been little concern and less action to encourage Quaker pastors to secure an adequately specialized education. Furthermore, we have maintained too many pastors on a bare subsistence basis. Because early Quakerism condemned both a hireling and an educated ministry, Friends are torn between loyalty to historic Quakerism and recognition of contemporary needs. What we need to do is to examine the concept of the Quaker ministry, as conceived by early Friends, to discover its weaknesses and strengths, and then to define unapologetically the function of the Quaker pastorate today.

Nearly every volume of importance which deals with the Quaker faith emphasizes the distinctive characteristics of the Quaker concept of the ministry. Those which seem to be particularly relevant to our time may be enumerated briefly under three classifications: the qualifications, the purpose and the nature of the ministry.

Early Friends emphasized that the only necessary qualification of the minister was that he be "raised up by the Spirit of God." Through personal experience Friends rediscovered that every person could have immediate access to God without the aid of sacrament, ritual or priest. By waiting upon the Lord in prayerful expectancy, the Spirit was free to speak and to be heard and the worshiper was free to respond to the Inner Voice.

Here is something that must be preserved by the Pastoral Friends Meeting. Every minister and certainly every pastor must

feel the commission of divine command. He must speak and live under orders; he is a servant not primarily of the people, but of the King. Secondly, the meeting for worship must be free from the rigidity which prevents the workings of the Spirit. Third, the corporate body should wait upon the Lord together so that there can be spontaneous participation or a free ministry. And finally, we must cultivate an awareness in our meetings of the personal responsibility to respond to the leading of the Light of Christ within.

The half-century old controversy between pastoral and non-pastoral meetings has now largely run its course. The real issue today lies in the fact that in either case the meeting for worship can be dead. The need is for an inspired ministry throughout Quakerism which is sensitive to human need and yet is throbbing with life and vitality.[1]

Then, too, the nature of the ministry as early Friends conceived it was necessarily evangelistic. Barclay asserted that the preacher is at the same time an evangelist, and Fox records in his Journal that he was deeply moved by the service of the sixty ministers whom the Lord had "raised up" and "sent abroad."

Membership rolls indicate that the numbers of our Society have fallen far short of keeping pace with the population increase in the United States. Many meetings in the midwest have shown an almost continuous decline in membership, and many meetings in rural areas and small towns have faded into extinction. We may argue that some of our losses can be explained in terms of population shifts, but basically we know that one important cause has been an ineffective ministry. We claim to be evangelical, but let us not deceive ourselves; our evangelism both in method and theology has been more Methodist or Baptist than it has been essentially Quaker.

John Wilhelm Rowntree in a paper entitled "Pentecost" startled his readers by revealing that at the turn of the century

1. Kenworthy, "Toward a Fourth Century of Quakerism." p. 92-93.

sixty-two percent of all Quakerdom had abandoned the idea of an entirely unsupported ministry. The pastoral system had moved in, and it was gaining ground. He did not feel at ease about this radical change in the Society, but he knew that the reason for the change was really the failure of the free ministry. The following paragraph is worth quoting because it could easily be an indictment of Quakerism today:

> "A few Friends have been aroused to the real gravity of the situation, but the majority either fail to grasp the essential point, or slumber on in undisturbed complacency.
>
> We have been weak so long that our standard of spiritual efficiency has fallen low, and habitude has bred in us an indifference to conditions which, if we were a living Church, should sting us to activity — Again and again the same story is told. The young people lack conviction, the ministry does not reach them, the half-life of the meeting for worship does not stir them and they drift away. A hundred alluring voices of the world call to them from without, and thither they pass. They remain in our books but their strength is not ours, and their children will only remember the Quaker name as something remote, a respectable desent from an honorable ancestry! Do not let us be deceived by our list of members. It is a fallacious document. As a record of our fighting strength it is a mockery. The living remnant is already dangerously small."[2]

If Friends are content to remain a quiet, middle class, highly-intellectual, exclusive group, then they had better recognize that they are not in step with their Quaker forebears. Had Friends in America kept pace with the population increase in proportion to the number of Quakers in England at the time Fox died, there would be over one and a half million Quakers in America today, 1500 times more than there are.

A revolution is needed in our evangelistic approach, and our hope lies in discovering for ourselves the Truth which the first

2. Rowntree, "Essays and Addresses", p. 226, Headley Bros., London.

generation of Quakers knew and then going forth to share it with equivalent zeal, self-sacrifice and depth of concern. As Rowntree put it, "our fellowship is small because we have not dared or cared to love enough."[3]

We turn now to the original Quaker concept of the function or purpose of the ministry. It is at this point that we confront real difficulties because we see the tremendous impact of external influences on our Society. Since the early days of the Revival Movement Friends who have appropriated its theology have tended to believe that what we are all striving for ultimately is a free pass through the Pearly Gates. Hymns, prayers and sermons have often defined the purpose of righteous living in terms of a heavenly reward. But neither is this biblical teaching nor does it agree with the belief of early Friends. As E. Stanley Jones points out, the theme of the New Testament is to be perfect "as the Father in heaven is perfect." Heaven is not seen as a goal, but as a by-product of perfection.

An Anglican priest once came to George Fox with the hope of confusing Fox on his doctrine of perfection. But the poor fellow met his match, and Fox concluded his record of the incident with this account, "and with that the priest's mouth was stopped." As Fox saw it, "it was the work of the ministers of Christ to present every man perfect in Christ" and that "they that denied perfection, denied the work of the ministry."[4]

The Puritan clergy were also in disagreement with Fox on this point. They maintained that Man was always a sinner, which meant giving up the victorious struggle against evil. But Fox could not believe that it was enough for one's sins to be forgiven if his sinful life remained uncured.

Barclay deals with perfection in the eighth proposition of his Apology. He says, "by this we understand not such a perfection as may not daily admit of growth, and consequently mean not as if

3. Ibid, pg. 229.
4. Fox, "Journal" p. 325, Everyman's Library.

we were to be as pure, holy and perfect as God in his divine attributes of wisdom, knowledge and purity; but only a perfection proportionable and answerable to man's measure, whereby we are kept from transgressing the law of God and enabled to answer what he requires of us."[5]

This definition of perfection, as outlined by Barclay, is overlooked by the critics of perfectionism and a great deal of the conflict resides in the area of semantics. Clarkson, two hundred years after Quaker beginnings, clarified the doctrine by referring to perfection as growth into Christian maturity. What early Friends seemed to be saying was that so far as man is "in Christ" he partakes of wholeness, or to put it another way, there is some measure of redemption in history.

Those who deny the possibility of perfection insist that the saint is always a sinner and that man is held inextricably in the clutches of self-righteousness. The early Quakers were willing to risk the possibility of self-righteousness in preference to moral paralysis. Friends of the seventeenth century did not believe in their own strength to overcome sinfulness, but in the Power of God working in their lives. They were confident that the Holy Spirit was the working of God in history, imparting power to triumph over sin to those who believed. The apostolic church proclaimed this faith in word symbols: rebirth, regeneration, and "a new creature in Christ Jesus." We need to recapture this emphasis in Quakerism today. Our ministry must see as its primary objective that true New Testament rebirth, the healing of the disease of the soul and not merely the saving of it from damnation.

This brief allusion to historical Quakerism reveals that its strengths have an important message for the Quaker pastorate in the Twentieth Century. All ministers and pastors must be qualified by the call of the Spirit, zealous to share their faith and convinced that a measure of perfection is the continuing challenge and blessing of the Christian life.

5. Barclay, "An Apology", Proposition VIII, Par. II.

When we consider the limitations of the primitive Quaker concept of the ministry, it becomes clear that the founders were children of their times. They were in basic agreement with the thought of their day that there was a wide chasm between the "natural" and the "supernatural" world. The Reformation had said that the chasm had been hurdled by the Revelation of the Word of God which was adequate and complete. Quakers held that the chasm was also spanned by the gift of a "supernatural Light" in every soul. They agreed with their brethern that man was evil and "fallen" and could do nothing toward saving himself. The Light was planted in man's soul by supernatural will; it was not native to man.

This line of thought led early Quakers to believe that the true minister was God's tape recorder, that is, he received the message from beyond, and he merely transmitted it as a passive instrument. The minister was a spokesman for God — a prophet — and not a teacher or interpreter because that would involve the use of human faculties which were deeply distrusted.

It is no wonder then that our ancestors deprecated education for the ministry because that requires the cultivation of the mind. They saw no possibility of bringing the human and divine together, where native powers and a caring God could cooperate in the development of healthy and whole personalities.

The consequences of this belief brought Quakerism close to cathastrophe for it interfered with the cultivation and use of individual gifts. Rufus Jones believed that the Quakers' fear of education was responsible for "their failure to win a commanding place in American civilization."[6] If our ancestors had been consistent in developing their insight regarding the "sense of the meeting," they would have advocated a "fearless education" because, through experience, they learned the necessity of checking light by the light of the experience of the larger community. "The Quaker ideal of the ministry, too, calls for a broad and expansive education even more than does that of any other religious

6. Jones, "The Quakers in American Colonies", p. XXVI, MacMillan.

body. If the particular sermon is not definitely to be prepared, then the person who is to minister must himself be prepared."[7] We agree with Fox's assertion that Cambridge and Oxford cannot make a minister, nor can Hartford and Yale. But we are aware now, through painful experience, that reference to this fact is no longer sufficient excuse for intellectual incompetence in the ministry.

A careful reading of the writings of Quaker leaders of the past discloses that with few exceptions the gifts of the ministry were considered synonymous with prophetic preaching. A recent study by H. Richard Niebuhr shows how historically Reformation thought conceived of the pastor primarily as a preacher of the Word. In the beginning we inherited this emphasis, only dropping the word "pastor" and abolishing the laity by holding that everyone was a minister or potential prophet.

We must stress the importance of retaining for Quakerism the free ministry under divine inspiration. But it is time to raise the question whether or not prophetic utterance adequately meets the needs of persons in community. Recently in studying the Greek New Testament I learned that the Greeks had four words for the verb "minister" and that when Jesus called his disciples (Matthew 10:1), Matthew used "therapeo" to describe the nature of the work they were to do. Jesus called them to be therapists, healers, for "he gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every infirmity."

The advent of psychiatry and the personality sciences has documented the close relationship between body, mind and spirit. Disturbances in any one aspect of the human organism affect the whole personality. The modern physician recognizes the relationship of the mental and spiritual factors in the total healing process. Likewise, the trained minister is aware that his concern for spiritual wholeness in the lives of his people is closely related to their physical and psychic health. If we reserve the prophetic ministry for anyone inspired by the Spirit, pastoral care is re-

7. Ibid.

served for those prepared and trained for it. Effective counseling requires more than "concern."

The pastor as counsellor is not interested in replacing the psychiatrist. Rather both are partners in the healing process. Many persons who are suffering from emotional and mental conflict cannot afford psychiatric care and in fact, do not need it. Their disturbances are of such a nature that they may be helped considerably through pastoral counseling.

Then, too, one of the oldest doctrines of Protestantism is the "priesthood of all believers." Friends have interpreted this to mean that each soul could have immediate access to God without mediation of sacrament or priest. Just as important, however, is the understanding that we can each interpret God to one another as we have experienced Him. God can thus become more real through relationships of sharing.

While Friends have emphasized "that of God in every man" and the mystical relationship of man to God, we have been slow to explore the work of the Spirit in the dynamic relationship of the member and pastor or patient and physician. Some spiritual giants like George Fox found that there was only one, Christ Jesus, who could speak to their condition, but my impression is that many found Christ Jesus through George Fox, for the Holy Spirit uses human personality as a channel through which other personalities find wholeness in Christ.

Another function of the Quaker pastorate has to do with the area of church administration. Friends have partially recognized the necessity of this phase of meeting work by arranging for a meeting secretary. But, so far as I know, Friends generally have not acknowledged this function as an aspect of the Christian ministry. To many Friends, Church organization, like pastoral work, is considered a necessary evil. Rowntree, in his essay "The Peril of the Free Ministry" reminds Friends that "Church organization and spiritual power are so closely interrelated that they cannot be fully considered apart. The familiar illustration

of the Evangelical Revival must not be forgotten. Great as was the influence of Whitefield, it would have been largely evanescent but for the organizing genius of Wesley."[8]

If the Niebuhr study has a relevance to the Quaker Meeting, it may be in helping us to recognize the importance of the new concept of the ministry now emerging in Protestantism. The average minister is now thought of first of all as a pastoral director. He is an administrator interested in building the Church by integrating persons into its life and work. The term "pastoral director" implies the close relationship between the counseling and the administrative functions. True, a part of Church administration is impersonal, but an important aspect of it consists in helping sick persons to become involved in some worthwhile organization. We have hardly scratched the surface of possibility for utilizing Church organizations as therapeutic centers. I have seen individuals transformed because they found new direction and meaning in becoming a part of an intentional and purposeful worship-centered community. Howard Collier, in his chapter in **The Quaker Approach,** suggests that "The Quaker Meeting and the Quaker fellowship are ideally designed to provide this healing society in which the lonely, isolated and morbidly shy individual may find both himself and his healing."[9]

The good church administrator strives to coordinate all of the activities into some unified program, so that two things can happen to every person in the fellowship. First, each will discover his potential power and release it through an organized effort, and second, each will experience the reality of the Spirit of God working in and through the group, and within and upon his own life.

Should we define the Quaker pastorate in these terms, some Friends may vigorously object on the grounds that the distinctiveness of Quakerism would thus be absorbed in Protestant tradition.

8. Op Cit., p. 115.
9. Kavenaugh, "The Quaker Approach", p. 198, Putman's Sons.

But vital aspects of the Quaker message would be retained, as follows:

1. Preaching in our meetings for worship would be under the leadership of the spirit. This may mean either long preparation or immediate response or both. In any case, Friends would neither prompt nor require a message by the pastor or by anyone else.

2. By retaining and adhering to Friends' business methods, power and authority would never be centralized in the pastor. The Friends meeting is an ideal situation for the pastor to implement the principles of group-centered leadership, the objective not being a display of his own power and wisdom, but a drawing out of each person's hidden potential.

3. Waiting on the moving of the Spirit would require training in the art of silence. Many of our pastoral meetings have adopted the unhealthy habit of rushing from hymn to scripture to prayer to sermon and, after a final hymn, there is the breathless amen. Sometimes we need the counsel that Joan gives to the King in George Bernard Shaw's play, **St. Joan:** Charles, the King of France complains to Joan, "Why don't the voices come to me? I am King, not you!" And Joan replies: "They do come to you; but you do not hear them. You have not sat in the field in the evening listening for them. When the angelus rings you cross yourself and have done with it; but if you prayed from your heart, and listened to the thrilling of the bells in the air after they stop ringing, you would hear the Voices as well as I do."

We must not be afraid to be quiet. Adherence to the Biblical injunction, "Be still and know" is assuredly one of the great contributions Quakerism can make to Christendom. It becomes clear then that the pastoral system and the traditional Quaker concern for the universal ministry are wholly compatible.

At its best Quakerism has been an experimental religion. Each person has been free to discover God for himself. Since the

separations, however, we have tended to become rigid groups in our method of worship. Pastoral Friends, while recognizing the need for a pastoral director, have nevertheless tended to idealize the prophetic ministry. But still we are perhaps most free of all Quaker groups today to recognize that the prophet's role historically tended to be that of the critic and not the builder, the judge of culture and not the planner of it. The Quaker pastorate involves the importance and necessity of both. The pastoral Friends Meeting can develop the prophetic ministry in the meeting for worship by encouraging wide participation under the leadership of the Spirit. At the same time it will be aware of its need for a pastoral director who will work toward implementing the insights coming out of the corporate worship experience into the program of the Church, and thus, into the life of the continuing community. In addition, through faithful pastoral care, the Friends Meeting stands not only as a critic of culture but as a redemptive healer in it.

In his poem, Passage to India, Walt Whitman describes the exciting voyage of the human soul on the sea of life. What he expresses in these lines let us apply to the great adventure potential in every Quaker pastorate.

> "Sail forth—steer for the deep waters only,
> Reckless, O Soul, exploring, I wish thee and thou with me,
> for we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,
> and we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.
> O my brave soul!
> O farther, farther sail!
> O daring joy, but safe! are they not all the seas of God?
> O farther, farther, farther sail!

Let us be done with apology for Quaker pastors! And let us be done, too, with careless contentment with what has been or with what is. Rather, let us move forward with a zeal for the unexplored, knowing that only those streams are fresh which flow, and knowing, too, that the answer to life's persistent riddles are perceived more clearly when we step confidently into the path of risk with reckless abandon. They are not perceived when we retreat to the safety of yesterday or tarry with the security of today.

Expect great things! Now if ever, is the time for Friends to raise the level of their vision, to see the Quaker pastorate as a key instead of a chain — a key to set free the latent power of the Quaker message and mission. Surely the season is right for Quakers to break **new** ground, and the pastoral type of meeting may be one of the most exciting experiments in contemporary Quakerism.

"And who knows whether you have not come to the Kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14)