1-1-1963

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the following paragraphs from Maurice Creasey, dated September 26, which he has given permission to quote, as an extension of the thesis he developed in the original piece. He writes:

If I were to write an article on this subject [Quakers and the Sacraments] now, I would give more space to setting out a positive statement of the grounds on which the non-observance of Sacraments might rightly be based by Friends. Further, I think I may have assumed too readily that, in advance of a much greater degree of ecumenical awareness than already exists among Friends, their use of some form of "sacramental" practice in connection with our traditional mode of worship would be of value to us or to others.

I have not in any way changed my view that we need to examine critically our inherited practice in this as in other matters; and my article was intended as a contribution to this end. I often recall the remark made by H. G. Wood to me in a private conversation about Friends' attitude to the Sacraments — "I'm sure we need to think again."

J. C. K.

Beyond Diversity to a Common Experience of God

DOUGLAS V. STEERE

1

In this our day we Friends face the ecumenical theme of how so diverse a body as the Society to which we belong can find a level of unity with which it can approach its mission in the world. I see this problem of diversity in three successively wider concentric circles. There is firstly the diversity within our own Quaker group, secondly the diversity between Quakerism and other Christian denominations, and thirdly the diversity between the interiorized Christian witness of the Quakers and that of the great world religions like Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism.

QUAKER DIVERSEITIES THAT CANNOT BE OVERLOOKED

In both Africa and America there are wide differences between urban and rural meetings, and in America between the many meetings that have sprung up in university centers and those with a more diversified group of attenders. In fact, almost every one of the newer national Quaker groups bears some distinctive mark of the circumstances of its birth. Swedish Quakerism, brought into being by Dagne Thorvall, has drawn heavily on women social workers and teachers. Swiss Quakerism has been widely recruited from volunteers who have served in the workcamp movement founded by Pierre Ceresole and from the Christian Socialist followers of the late Pastor Ragaz who sought an enduring spiritual home. Present-day German Quakerism

This edited article was given in its original form as an address to the plenary session of the eighth meeting of the Friends World Committee held at Kaimosi, Kenya, on August 28, 1961.
was called into being by the exemplification of the Quakers' radical peace witness in the relief activities following the two world wars, and the German Friends' witness to pacifism and active reconciliation is especially noticeable.

In addition to these diverse marks of their origin, there are pronounced national characteristics which I might designate as "tribal," which are the sources of endless rubbings and frictions in any common Quaker undertaking. For example, in the Quaker service activities in Europe after both wars and down to this very day, British Friends have felt concerned not only to give relief but to preach the Quaker Christian message and to build up Quaker meetings wherever they have served. The Americans have tended to be more concerned to try to minister effectively to the physical, social, and political problems, and in their characteristically modest American way of putting it, "to let their lives speak." British Friends, in private, have been known to refer to their "extrovert, activity-centered" American Quaker cousins, and the Americans to murmur about the "effortless superiority" and the penchant for religious verbalization on the part of their British Quaker companions in service. In point of fact there are many American Quakers who warmly approve of this openly articulate Quaker religious approach in Quaker service and there are many British Friends who find the opposite accent most congenial, so that the tempest is at bottom a vast charade. But make no mistake, whether true or imagined, it is a tribal diversity that has yet to be reconciled.

**TASKS FOR THE FRIENDS WORLD COMMITTEE**

I have always marvelled at the genius of the 1920 edition of the first volume of the London Yearly Meeting's book of discipline: *Faith and Practice*. Instead of trying to formulate a creed of the Quaker faith, which would almost certainly have deeply divided the Yearly Meeting, the editors chose to prepare an anthology of accounts of personal Quaker experiences of God which brought Friends down into a devotional level transcending their doctrinal diversities.

It should not surprise us that this has been almost precisely duplicated in the experience of the ecumenical efforts of the World Council of Churches, moving for a moment to the second circle of diversity — that between the various Christian denominations. For it has not been in the area of faith and order (in the hammering out of some lowest common denominator of theological doctrine), or of liturgy and sacraments, or of the discipline of church government, that the Protestant and Orthodox churches have made the real strides in overcoming their diversities. It has rather been in their common experiences of God and in finding that they understood each other because they love the same Lord. If Quakers have any witness to make to the ecumenical work of other Christian denominations, it may well be in accenting this discovery that it is not in doctrine or liturgy or church discipline but alone in the common devotional experience of loving the same Lord and serving him in situations of acute human need that diversities can melt away.

Because I believe that only the Friends World Committee can serve as the satisfactory Quaker auspice, I may perhaps be pardoned for barely mentioning an extension of the second concentric circle, and a task in the third circle that needs exploring. In our rare experiences of working with and being trusted by Roman Catholics in predominantly Catholic countries like Austria and Poland, in situations of acute physical and social need, Quakers may well have a small but significant role to play in expanding the Christian ecumenical circle to explore the common Christian ground between Roman Catholics and Protestants.

As for the third concentric circle of the profound and formidable diversities which Christianity and the other great world religions present to each other, is it unthinkable that our vulnerable, unarmed, interiorized Quaker form of undogmatic Christianity might make us a peculiarly viable auspice for the task of mutual irradiation by which, I am convinced, the unadorned Christ can alone be shared with the religions of the world in the critical generation that lies just ahead? Should we not find Quakers to learn Arabic and Sanskrit and Pali and Japanese, and to study intensively in the scriptures and literature of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism? And should we not have at least one modest center in one of the areas of each of these world religions where this loving reaching out might actively take place? I have barely mentioned these opportunities...
which have been opened to us in this exciting age, but these hints are worthy of further exploration.

CHANGING AFRICA AND THE QUAKER MISSION TASK

And now to return to diversities within Quakerism. I feel that there is something peculiarly appropriate about facing this problem of Quaker diversities and a common experience of God here at Kaimosi. For in this very mission station, there is a crossing of the American Five Years Meeting pastoral Quaker approach, the East African Yearly Meeting approach with its many distinctive features, the British unprogrammed meeting approach, and, until recently at least, the Finnish and German traditions as well. Mingled with these different Quaker traditions of worship, there must inevitably be at Kaimosi considerable differences of doctrinal accent, to say nothing of the social factors of different national habits of speech, of eating, of recreation, of personal habits, and of rhythms and standards of living. When you add to this fact that these differences are all pooled in undertaking the mission task of Friends, and that mission work has a peculiarly relentless way of showing up each vein of difference (just as the sun in a room leaves no cobweb unillumined), then we are in the proper place to consider the subject of this plenary session. Listen to what the great Uganda missionary, Alexander Mackay, has to say about the way missions test and spotlight doctrine: “As Metaphysics may be called the pure mathematics of Theology, so Missions are its practical application, and are destined to play as important a part in correcting the vagaries of theologians, as practical engineering has done in the domain of theoretical mechanics.”

The mission task searches not only our doctrine, our diversity in worship, and our national tribal customs, but it also searches the very depth of our spiritual witness. It is not alone the Cameroon pastor who in his despair asks if, after all, Christianity in Africa today is more than a thin veneer, if it is not really “a matter of the whites,” and ruefully concludes that “as the whites leave Africa, Christianity will disappear.” With the rising tide of political nationalism in Africa, there is the twin phenomenon of the resurgence of the pre-missionary African religions, and among the Western-educated a transfer of loyalty from their Christian mission upbringing to a faith in science and technology which will enable them and their African peoples to live in the twentieth century. For them, the Christian religion of their youth is often little more than a pre-scientific fable to be outgrown and combated.

Nehru’s word to Hinduism is echoed by many young African leaders in their attitude to Christianity, when the Indian Prime Minister declared: “India must lessen her religiosity and turn to science... the day-to-day religion of the orthodox Hindu is more concerned with what to eat and what not to eat, who to eat with and from whom to keep away, than with spiritual values... Some Hindus talk of going back to the Vedas... Idle fancies, for there is no going back to the past; there is no turning back, even if this thought were desirable. There is only one-way traffic in Time.” The seven-year-old son of one of my Haverford colleagues announced at table one day, “I do not believe in God any longer, I know too much astronomy.” It would be easy to try to pass off this threat to our mission task with the amused and indulgent look which this father gave to his son.

This challenge makes even more urgent the theme of our session! Has the Society of Friends, for all of its diversity, a common experience of God that can meet the longings and aspirations of the African heart and that can fearlessly face the best reaches of the African mind? In such a crucible of urgent need as confronts us in our mission task today, let us look honestly at our common experience of God and see if it can measure up to this need.

III

“GOD IS WHERE MAN LETS HIM IN”

One of the African buses in Ghana carries the slogan written across its side, “We do love God, but where is he?” The query was strangely like an old Hasidist story of the famous Rabbi of Katzh who asked one of his followers, “Where is the Most High to be found?” The shocked follower answered, “Surely, esteemed Rabbi, the glory of the Most High is to be found everywhere.” But the Rabbi shook his head and answered his own question: “God is where man lets him in.”
How could the common experience of a dozen generations of Quakers about the immediate availability of God's transforming presence be better expressed than in that answer, "God is where man lets him in?" If it is true that "our opening and his entry are one," then the Quaker witness is to the constancy of God's presence, to his untried siege of every soul, to the "love that will not let me go," to his "coming all the way downstairs" to man in Jesus Christ, and to the contemporaneity of Christ and of his guiding presence at every turn of our life here and now.

It is a fact that Quakers have usually prized discipleship over orthodoxy, and that they have exercised a singular restraint in their theological formulations. Most of them would feel a bond of sympathy with the clergyman who, being told that his very salvation depended upon a right conception of the Atonement, cried out, "But what am I to do when I have already found 78 competing theories of the Atonement among my Protestant contemporaries?" However, this Quaker reluctance to make substantive statements about the inward baptism which they have experienced has not in the least inhibited their vigor in formulating queries to probe their spiritual condition: "Has your life come under the power of the inward Christ, the inward Teacher, the inward Guide?" "Have you experienced the ordination of the pierced hands? Is he drawing your life increasingly into his ministry of healing and reconciliation?"

Listen to what Isaac Penington wrote upon the occasion of his letting God in: "This is He, this is He, there is no other; this is He whom I have awaited for from my childhood, who was always near me and had begotten life in my heart, but I knew Him not distinctly or how to receive or dwell with Him. . . I have met with my God. I have met with my Savior. I have felt the healing upon my soul from under His wings." Can there be any doubt about his having been found?

ON BEING FOUND

A Sunday-School teacher is said to have asked a little girl to explain what she understood by the yoke, where Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you." She answered, "I think God's yoke is when He puts His arms all the way around your neck." But this experience of being swept by God's redemptive love is not an experience of one century or of one country or of one psychological type or of one evangelical persuasion or of one special type of worship. Beyond all diversities and yet coming in a multitude of ways, it pours in on us today as always. In a Thomas Kelly, it floods in upon him on the occasion of a great humiliation. In our Indian Friend, Gurdial Mallik, it has come again and again to illumine and guide him in crises of his life, and I have heard him sing moving hymns of thanksgiving and jubilation which he told me he had composed at these different critical moments of his life. Elizabeth Vining tells how this tide of healing light came pouring into her bereaved heart when on waking one morning she discovered that what she had thought was rain was in reality chestnut blossoms dropping upon the metal roof above her bedroom. "It is where we are wounded that He speaks to us," wrote W. H. Auden.

To others the finding has come in the extremities of sin, and they have discovered that when all else goes, he is still there. I remember a dream I had one night in which I had killed a man, and the awful realization came over me that now I was cut off from both man and God. In the same surge came the impulse to throw myself on the mercy of Christ, aware that only his redeeming power could ever restore me. I let him in, and awakened sure that nothing could separate me from his love.

Some Friends have found him in the faithful service of others and, like an Angola nurse whom I know, have washed and dressed the wounds of Christ in every patient they ministered to. Still others have met him in moments of exultation as they walked over a freshly plowed field and felt John Masefield's burning words, "O Jesus, drive the coulter deep, to plow the living me from sleep," or in the exultation of great music: "Bach took me to the center of the universe, and I found Him there."

A Japanese Friend confesses that "It has not been so much through my logical or philosophical conclusions as through the opening of my heart and of a new world of light and peace, that I became a member of the Society of Friends." No matter how many inward gates to the holy city by which they may have entered, the old Xhosa hymn, "I have been found, Lord, I have been found," might well ring out from Quaker lips in infinite
gratitude that there is One who is forever seeking them. In this common experience of God are we not all Evangelicals?

When this experience has been authentic, there is no stopping at the point where one's life has been touched. The life of discipleship is a life of continual fresh beginnings. We lose him and we lose all courage, but then we find that his pierced foot is in the door of our discouragement making it impossible ever quite to close it. We discover once again what the Song of Solomon means when it declares, "Behold, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice."

and we begin all over again. The changes go on in a disciple's life until he may scarcely recognize himself and yet be able to say with Sören Kierkegaard, "By the unspeakable grace of God, I have become myself."

ON BEING JOINED TO ALL CREATION

There is a second feature of the common experience of God to which Friends have witnessed. It is that as they have come to know the Inward Teacher, they have found that Jesus Christ exposes the nature of God just as the fires of a volcano expose the molten nature of the earth's center, and that, being brought into an inward feeling-sense of this love, they have become aware that they have been placed in a world of men and animals and plants and earth as a living and indispensable link in a great redemptive chain of being. In this awareness has come the realization that they can love God back only by responsibly loving him in his creatures and in his creation.

In his creatures! Listen to that precious French Quaker mystic, the late Marius Grout: "If contemplation which introduces us to the very heart of creation does not inflame us with such a love that it gives us, together with great joy, the understanding of the infinite misery of the world, it is the contemplation of a false God. The sign of true prayer is charity. By your capacity for forgiveness shall I recognize your God, and also by your opening of your arms to all creation."

There is a luminous line in the book of Ecclesiastes which says, "For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope," and Quakers when they have been alive inwardly have felt called to take their places in the existing social, political, and economic life of their time as emissaries of this inward attachment to all creatures. If we are alive, we know what the unrecognized Joseph meant when he told his brethren standing before him in Egypt, "Ye shall not see my face except your brother be with you."

And when an African in South Africa or a Negro in Mississippi cries out as did Yusuf Cachalia, "We are insulted on every corner, in every train, and in every walk of life. We are degraded, we are humiliated by the people, by the authorities. There is no respect for our mothers, there is no respect for our daughters, for our wives, for our sisters, for our brothers," we are involved. Friends know that when the rate of deaths of children under a year of age is twenty times as high in our brother's country as it is in our own, we are involved. We know that as long as proper food and education and health are denied to one people and are freely open to ourselves, we are involved.

Thomas Kelly once told me of an experience that he had had in the summer of 1938 when, torn as he was by the troubles he had seen men and women suffering in Hitler's Germany, he was on his knees in Cologne Cathedral. As he prayed, he felt the whole weight of the world's agonies almost crush him to the floor, but at that moment he felt the load shared by mightier shoulders than his own. "For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope."

Friends have also felt linked to the whole physical creation and, while they would reject a narrow scientism, they have never had any but the deepest friendliness for a genuine science and its discoveries. In humility before a creation that is wreathed round with the mystery of its divine ground, an Arthur Eddington could write of Science and the Unseen World, and James Vail, a president of the American Chemical Society, affirm a hidden congruity between his passion for poetry and his intensive work on understanding a small segment of the physical world. The Quaker experience of God and of our own place as links in the great chain of redemptive being has little to retract in its consistent historical encouragement of science and its findings, and its laying on men, both scientists and others, the deepest responsibility for the care of their fellows.
THE GUIDING HAND OF GOD

The third characteristic in our common experience of God that cuts across all diversities is the experience of the guiding hand of God in the ordinary affairs of life. No one has put this better than Isaac Penington when he says, "There is that near you which will guide you. O wait for it, and be sure to keep to it." It is this feature of the personal guidance of God that I want to explore briefly before concluding. When Friends have been in the stream of power, they have been confident that there were inner promptings, pluckings of the sleeve, stops in the mind, that must be tested and heeded, and that this business of letting God have more and more his undivided sway in our lives only starts to unfold when we begin in specific matters to come under the guiding hand of God.

If we believe that others have this same guiding center in them, then our whole conduct of life changes and we look out at people quite differently. Now no diversity is ever permanent; no public or private enemy is ever irredeemable; no adverse decision is ever final. When Fox bids us "walk cheerfully over the world answering to that of God in every man," his words are almost meaningless unless we have begun to feel the actual movement within ourselves of that of God, and have begun to be attentive to it in our choices and our decisions.

It is no belittling of the Christ-for-us experience of the redemptive love of God if, by it, we are brought on into the realization of the Christ in us and the inward attentiveness that it demands of us. Thomas Traherne in his Centuries of Meditation says tellingly that there is "not only the contemplation of His love in the work of redemption, which is wonderful, but the end for which we are redeemed: a communion with Him."

WE MISS THE SIGNALS

But how often we miss the signals. There is a story of a group of men gathered in a railway executive's outer office waiting to apply for an advertised opening for a telegraph operator. After a long time, one of the men got up and entered the inner office, coming back in a few minutes to tell the others that he had been hired. When asked why he had gone into the office unbidd-
den, he said, "Didn't you hear the Morse code clicking out the message: 'The first man who comes into my office in response to this message will be hired?'" He had simply attended to the message and followed its instructions.

Howard Thurman tells in his recent Pendle Hill pamphlet of walking through the center of Rochester, New York, late one quiet night: and hearing the sound of rushing water that he had never noticed before. Telling a friend about it, he discovered that he had been walking over an underground section of the old Erie Canal, and that only when all other sounds were absent could it be noticed. The spiritual guide, Fenelon, says, "How few there are who are still enough to hear God speak." When Quakers have been in a flood of life, they have been at home in their own souls, and have been attentive enough to hear, and obedient enough to attempt to follow, the drawing that came to them. Vincent de Paul talks about cultivating that gift of knowing "when to act, and when not to act, and when not to let action crowd out the time or the habit of listening" for this inward bidding. How many nudges come to us: to write this letter, to send this money, to make this visit, to undergo the arduous preparation necessary for this piece of service, to be available for this call, if we do not miss the signals and are attentive to the Guide.

Many Friends have met Yoon Gu Li, the Korean Quaker, who is heading a small educational settlement in a Korean village near the demarcation line north of Seoul. He once told us of his restlessness as a student at the theological seminary, and of how critical he had been of the remoteness of the Christian doctrine he was studying from the needs of his villagers. One day, in despair, his professor told him that he was speaking exactly like a Quaker. Instead of Yoon Gu's being put off, he begged from his professor a book on the Quakers which he absorbed with delight, and when he learned that there were a group of real flesh and blood Quakers doing a relief job in Kunsan, he was powerfully drawn to visit them.

He worked all one summer to save bits of money for a return ticket to Kunsan, and finally made the journey. When he got to the Quaker headquarters in Kunsan and asked for the head of the team, he was told that he was not available since he was
just leaving for a journey in a quarter of an hour and was packing. Yoon Gu asked if he could talk to someone else about Quakerism and was told that all the rest of the staff were too busy at present, and he was directed to come back another time. Shattered by this experience, he boarded the train and returned to Seoul where he wrote the Quaker group a blistering letter telling them that he had found them no different from other missionaries he had known—so wrapped up in themselves and their good works that they had no time to meet the real God-hunger of a lonely seeker. One could recall Radhakrishnan’s biting remark to Dr. Dewick, “If your Christ has not succeeded in making you better men and women, have we any reason to suppose that he could do more for us, if we became Christians?”

Happily, Yoon Gu Li’s story does not end there, for the Kunsan Quaker team were so humbled by the letter that they sent him a ticket and invited him to spend a month with them. But the incident is another near-tragic example of our missing the signals by living what is no doubt a highly commendable life, by the world’s standards, but a life that is too “elsewhere” to heed the inner bidding of God in the moment-to-moment fabric of life. Martin Buber in his book Between Man and Man tells of a student who came to him with his problems, and how he listened to him and answered him in a respectable but outside way. Later he learned that the young man had gone away and had taken his own life. Buber was brought up short at his utter failure to meet the young man’s need, at his having missed the signals.

“Most of us have far too much sense for everything we do,” remarks Theresa of Avila, and so we miss the deeper biddings. Our actions are what Nietzsche calls “epidermal.” They do not come from the inner response to another or to the inward Guide, but are only conventional reactions not unlike those of a telephone operator who plugs in thousands of messages a day but is herself completely uninvolved in any of the conversations. I once had a secretary who complained that I had written to people from whom I had not had letters in my file! It did not seem to occur to her that one might write a letter in answer to an inner as well as an outer summons.

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ON YIELDING TO THE “FIRST SMALL ACT THAT GOD DEMANDS”

Why do we miss the signals? Robert Frost says, “We are not always there,” and it is a searching reply. But there are also other reasons. Often enough we do not hear, or, hearing, we do not obey because we do not wish to obey. Instead of raising the performance, we prefer to lower the requirements. A hidden strategist deep within us interposes, and we play it safe. “I had certain little plans of my own,” writes John Baillie in his Invitation to Pilgrimage. “I wanted to arrange things a little differently.” But any Quaker who has ever felt even a minor concern begin to grow like a child in his body knows the price of disobedience. “Once open to the light,” wrote Adrienne von Speyer, “man may ask God to claim him more essentially and profoundly. But on one condition only, that he does not refuse the first small act that God demands of him.” She might have added, “nor the second nor the thousandth.”

Once open to the light! I remember ever so vividly one corporate Quaker wrestling with the light in a meeting in Stockholm in early January, 1948. Per Sundberg had begun the organization of an expensive and arduous program that would bring to Sweden, for a month of refreshment, some fifteen outstanding Germans who in those grim days were bearing the heaviest of responsibilities for their fellows. Per Sundberg also meant to invite their opposite numbers from the neighboring countries for a week’s conference in order to have the German guests know and have a first-hand experience of the fact that they were once more an accepted part of the European community. In November, 1947, Per Sundberg died very suddenly and the Stockholm monthly meeting had met after the Christmas holiday in order to make a formal decision to terminate the project as an almost impossible undertaking with its master-planner removed.

During the early part of the meeting, there was a good deal of speaking and the difficulties were heaped up until, by all worldly wisdom, the case was complete and the members virtually unanimous for abandoning the project and writing the German guests explaining that Per’s death had made it impossible to carry through his invitation. At this point the meeting sank into a time of burning silence, and after a considerable inter-
val, first one Swedish Friend and then another arose to speak, admitting with great reluctance that they must not, after all, lay it down: that in spite of complete uncertainty about where to get either the material means or the enormous amount of personal time involved, they must nevertheless continue; they dare not fail God or Per Sundberg or his German friends in this undertaking. In this decision I saw a corporate Quaker group literally compelled against its surface will to turn around and undertake what, by any earthly reckoning, we believe became one of the most important gatherings that Quakers ever sponsored in postwar Europe. The participants who are still alive speak even now of what that act of Swedish Quaker caring, and that fellowship, did to kindle hope in them in that dark time of trouble.

Beyond all diversities, Friends’ common experience of God, both corporately and personally, is marked by our being called to an ever-deeper attentiveness to the guiding hand of God in specific undertakings. All our corporate checks and our willingness upon occasion to assume the risk of being mistaken or of apparent failure, only heighten the experience of Friends’ being brought under the weight of the greatest concern of all: the concern to be open and obedient to divine leading in the minute affairs of daily life and to feel and to heed God’s touch upon our sleeves.

WHAT KIND OF SEED WILL QUAKERS SOW IN THE FURROW?

In early August, 1940, just after Germany had overrun France, I shared at Saugatuck, Michigan, in the first of Stanley Jones’ “ashram” conferences, and after a long afternoon of discussion on what God was doing in the tragedy that had fallen on Europe, an old Negro bishop arose to speak. He told us that he had been listening all afternoon to his white Christian brothers. He noted that we had said nothing about the eight years of horrible destruction in China, nothing about the four years of suffering in Ethiopia, that we had been entirely absorbed in the homeland of our white culture in Europe. “I’ll tell you, my brothers,” he said, “what God’s doing in Europe today. He’s ploughing. And you can’t stop him for he’s going to plough still deeper before he’s through. There’s only one thing, brothers, that is in your power to decide, only one thing, and that one thing is, what kind of seed are you going to sow in the furrow?”

Beyond all of our Quaker diversities, beyond all diversities among the branches of the Christian church, beyond even the diversities of the great world religions, what kind of seed have we Quakers to sow in the furrow? To be found in life and in death by the all-caring Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; to be responsibly joined to all of the living and to creation; to be called to be increasingly attentive and obedient to the Inward Teacher, the guiding hand of God: these three marks of our common experience of God are the seed of our witness — sound and precious seed to be sown in the open furrow of a swiftly changing Africa and in the troubled heart of America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. May God quicken the sowers, and may he sow that seed in the deepest reaches of our hearts as we open them to him in the silence.

References