Quaker Universalist Fellowship

The Place Of Universalism
In The Religious Society Of Friends

or
Is Coexistence Possible?

by
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The human enterprise can be likened to a journey. The most obvious journey is an external physical one – beginning with humankind's origin somewhere in the Middle East or Africa and proceeding over a period of millions of years to the north, east, south and west, until, ultimately, our species has inhabited the far reaches of this planet.

But there are other journeys, journeys which, although they may have an outward expression, are essentially inner or spiritual journeys. Such journeys are chartered in Homer's *Odyssey,* or in the Biblical account of the wanderings of the people of Israel in search of the promised land.

Some of these pilgrimages are entirely spiritual, such as that of Dante from the Inferno to Paradise. Others are carried out in both the spiritual and physical realms. The ancient Chinese sage Lao Tzu wandered from kingdom to kingdom seeking a prince wise enough to govern in accordance with the way of Truth. Failing to find any, he ultimately retired to a cave hermitage, and there wrote a concise scripture of a mere 5,000 Chinese characters which subsequently became the basis of a great civilization.

The Indian prince Gotama, now known as the Buddha, upon reaching adulthood within an artificial paradise fashioned by his parents so as to protect him from all knowledge of evil, accidentally encountered victims of poverty, sickness and death. Sorely troubled in spirit, he left his protected paradise and wandered across the face of India in the most strenuous of spiritual searches. Finally, he was enlightened by a great truth, and thereafter gave of himself unceasingly to yet further travels, challenging and uplifting multitudes with the power of his

teaching.

Two thousand years ago a young, itinerant rabbi in Galilee, one who was what we could be, miraculously transformed sinners into saints, social outcasts into public benefactors, common fisher folk into fishers of women and men. How many spiritual journeys were set into motion by faith in the Truth which Jesus of Nazareth revealed to humankind! A mere handful of disciples in Galilee, Jericho and Jerusalem spread to Egypt, to India, to Corinth, to Ephesus, to Rome and to the entire world. One thinks of the peregrinations of St. Francis of Assisi and his followers, who traveled the earth to spread the good news; or we remember St. Augustine's Confessions in which the author frequently likens the course of his life to a journey from darkness to light. Nor must we forget the travels in ministry under Christian inspiration of more recent times, such as those of George Fox, John Woolman and Lucretia Mott.

And yet, sadly, we have come to a juncture in the road where it is possible for reasonable people to wonder if all these many journeys, at long last, will be abruptly ended together. For we see now that the good earth, in spite of its ice ages, floods, droughts and volcanic eruptions, all of which have tried human capacity for survival over the many millions of years of these journeys, is indeed a paradise in comparison to the infernos we can create through our own spiritual lapses. Thus, in this great human journey it seems to be our own destiny to come face to face with the very worst that evil can do.

One of the many things which all people of faith have in common, no matter which it is of the world's great spiritual traditions which nourishes them, is their approach to this great challenge of our own times. People of faith know that human beings can never succeed in structuring a family, an institution, a social order, or a world community which exceeds in wisdom and goodness the degree of wisdom and goodness they themselves have a grasp of within their own hearts. They understand that the first step in rendering service is spiritual preparation of those who would serve; that social transformation depends upon spiritual transformation. With Meister Eckhart, they understand that only if we within ourselves are as we should be will our works give off a beautiful light. It is thus on the inner drama of each human being's journey in search of Truth that the unfoldment of the outer drama of history ultimately depends. People without faith, or with a kind of faith which is inadequate to humankind's new responsibilities, will not be able to build or to hold on to the new world order without which we will all perish.

Such a world order cannot be the work of people whose only vision it is to impose their particular scheme on everyone else, a foible which some Communists and some Christians have in common. Rather, the problem is for us all to learn to live together with our different traditions and to live not only without bloodshed, but in genuine peace, which implies some sort of mutual trust and active sympathy. It is of no use to talk about loving our neighbor while at the same time dismissing as inferior or mistaken his most cherished possession, his religious faith. Indeed, it is the transforming power of religious faith which offers the only hope out of our present impasse, and so a significant aspect of the great task before us is to

come increasingly to discover how the world's faiths can nourish each other and how we can collaborate with all people of faith in the challenge we face together.

During most of history, humankind's several great spiritual streams have existed more or less in isolation from each other. True, people of the Jewish faith were scattered within Christian and Islamic societies. True, there were encounters between Christians and Moslems, but these were mainly on the battlefield. Overall, until the present age, it has been quite possible for most people to live and die without ever encountering the adherents of another major stream of spirituality, and certainly without ever developing the most elementary understanding of other people's religious belief and practices. Given this great difficulty that Christians have had in getting along even with each other, this relative isolation from Hindus, Buddhists and Moslems was, perhaps, a blessing.

Throughout all these centuries, the traditional posture of the Christian Church with respect to humankind's other religious traditions has been that of proselytizing evangelism. But today, the missionary enterprise of the Christian Church is in crisis. After all, two millennia of Christian evangelism has left the Hinduism of India, for example, largely intact. Except for the case of very few Christian organizations, most evangelization has been abandoned and has been replaced by the concept of services. Canon Max Warren, General Secretary in London of the Church Missionary Society, has delivered a riveting three sentence obituary on the practice of Christian evangelism: "We have marched around alien Jerichos the requisite number of times. We have sounded the trumpets. And the walls have not collapsed."

Having been privileged to visit the sites of some contemporary Christian mission activity, I can suggest that Canon Warren's statement is perhaps overdrawn. Clearly there remain situations in which the Christian faith can provide great nourishment for people who long to hear of it, just as in our society the *missions* of Zen Buddhists or of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Society can uplift people with respect to whom our indigenous spiritual institutions have somehow failed. The main point of these observations is that we clearly live in a world which is inevitably pluralistic as far as religion is concerned. Moreover, with the shrinking of the world community into a global village, we have the unprecedented experience, not merely of hearing about Buddhists, Moslems, Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and Taoists in tales brought back by the occasional Marco Poles, but, at least in a place like New York City, where I come from, we actually drink coffee and run peace demonstrations with them every day. A universalist perspective is one outgrowth of these encounters.

There is a new world that is waiting to be born out of the exciting interaction and religious pluralism which the modern age makes possible. But the situation is not without its dangers. The most obvious, of course, is that the encounter among people of different faiths, rather than providing each with nourishment, may simply provide another excuse for strife and conflict. One can scarcely contemplate the recent news from the Punjab or from Lebanon, nor the trials of Judaism throughout the Christian era, without recognizing that religious pluralism can indeed be an explosive mixture. Even to observe a diverse group of Quakers

reacting to each other's theology can be sobering!

If strife and conflict are avoided there is another result which is sometimes produced which can be counterproductive. The universalist spirit can sometimes degenerate into a sort of amiable, broad-minded relativism, wherein Truth is simply drowned in camaraderie. It is not true universalism casually to accept the diversity of religious cultures and religious loyalties simply because one feels that no religious culture and no religious loyalty is ultimately valid, that nothing is inherently worthwhile. Such modern relativism is a sophisticated kind of cynicism. It is not a proper understanding of the diverse faiths of humankind to develop an explanation of them which simply makes fundamental nonsense of each.

A corollary of this is that a true universalist does not find it surprising or peculiar that people in western civilization who earnestly hunger after Truth find great nourishment in the teaching and example of Jesus of Nazareth, anymore than it is surprising to find devotion to the four noble truths and to the eightfold path in cultures influenced by Buddhism. Nor need it cause a universalist any surprise or dismay if people come to regard the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth as so perfectly fulfilling the leadings of Truth that this person is identical with the highest concepts of Truth in the universe, indeed with the very creative principle of the universe itself, and that this manifestation is so powerful that it can reverberate through the centuries, calling people everywhere to an awareness of their own true nature as creatures in who there is something which corresponds to this same great and true principle. Somewhat analogous attitudes are identifiable in other faiths regarding the manifestations of great Truth, and to be phobic about Christian references within the religious life of the Society of Friends, for example, while seeking to cultivate openness and tolerance for other religious traditions, is obviously not an adequate expression of universalism.

It is useful to remember that a religious tradition's worst enemies are not people of a different faith. The United States is now the object of a self-consciously proselytic movement out of the Oriental traditions, yet it is scarcely any more likely that the USA will someday be a Hindu or a Buddhist nation than it is that India would have become a Christian one. What really undermines Christianity in the United States and Hinduism in India are the degradations to which each is brought by people claiming to be these faiths' own adherents.

A universalist interest inevitably brings one into the field of comparative religion, about which it is possible to write and speak much nonsense, either about how the major world faiths are all essentially alike, or are all fundamentally different. This question of the similarities and differences among the major faiths is too complex to enter into here, but it is important to keep one principle in mind in the field of comparative religion – remembering that each religion's worst enemies are its own adherents, it is always important, when making comparisons, to compare the best with the best. It makes little sense to compare Hinduism and Christianity by using Mahatma Gandhi and John Foster Dulles as examples, even though Gandhi and Dulles were contemporaries, were both devout and were both statesmen. Nor would it make sense to compare Judaism with Buddhism by studying Martin Buber, on the one hand, and the quasi-superstitious practices of a remote

Himalayan village, on the other.

Genuine universalism is very demanding of its practitioners. For it is true, as has often been said, that a religion can only be understood from the inside. One has only to read the section of the Encyclopedia Britannica on Christianity to realize that an objective account of a religious tradition, however accurate, will never reveal the essential, spiritual experience enjoyed by those who are convinced of it. We must learn to contemplate other people's faiths not only without a chip on our shoulder, but also in quite a different frame of mind than that with which we are inclined to regard an oddly shaped sea shell. Moreover, the transforming power of any religious tradition which enables its adherent to achieve a new level of life, to be born again, and to exist in a new and different way, is not something which is achieved by a casual visit, by dabbling, or by Way hopping. Indeed, it is necessary to go so far as to say that, while exceptions are always possible, the most likely path toward an understanding of the significance of a multiplicity of religions is to encounter the experience of one religion, preferably the one closest at hand, which for the most of us would be Quakerism and its Judeo-Christian heritage.

It is true that the universalist sensibility tends to clash with those members of the Christian communion who insist that people who do not recognize Jesus of Nazareth as their Lord and Savior are ipso-facto inferior in spiritual realization. But a genuine universalist, before becoming agitated unduly over this lapse from the true Christian spirit among Christians, recalls that the phenomenon is not unique to Christianity. Something akin to it is a major theme in Islamic, Shinto and Jewish experience, with Hinduism, Taoism and Buddhism being more successful at projecting a generous and true-spirited universalism, although there are lapses in practice among people of these faiths, too.

Christian universalism began with Jesus of Nazareth, who rebelled against the kind of lawyer-like focus on doctrines which tends to divide people into chauvinistic spiritual camps. Jesus was much less interested in orthodoxy, in right doctrine, than he was in ortho-praxis, right living or right practice. With the simple statement that the Sabbath exists for people and not people for the Sabbath, he disposed of stacks of learned treatises on what was and was not permissible on the holy day. Jesus repeatedly refused to be separated from Samaritans, regarded as the spiritual outcasts, as the heathens, of his own day, and taught that a Samaritan could surpass even a Levite in goodness and truth.

Similarly, from the earliest times, sensitive Christians have insisted on seeing sanctity and holiness in the pagan philosophers, a holiness which was not only entirely consistent with Christianity, even though it occurred many centuries before Christ's birth, but which could even enrich and enhance Christian understanding. Such Christian spirits often incurred the wrath of their co-religionist over their fondness for pagans. Plato, Plotinus and some of the Stoics were the objects of this Christian veneration during the early centuries of Christianity, when for some reason Aristotle seems to have been lost. But once Aristotle was recovered by way of interaction with Islamic culture, he, too, became revered by great-souled Christians.

As has been indicated, during much of Christian history, the Greek philosophers were the only encounter in depth that Christians could have with non-Christian spirituality of an advanced sort. All this has changed in our own day. Jesuit novice masters enthusiastically study Hindu practice to gain greater insight into the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola. A Christian of profound spirituality and deep social awareness, Thomas Merton, clearly ended his life as a universalist, without diluting his Catholicism or his commitment to his Trappist community at all.

In fact, it is useful to reflect for a moment on the journey of Thomas Merton. He converted to Roman Catholicism while a student at Columbia University and a few short years later entered a Trappist monastery, one of the most rigorous spiritual communities in Christendom, and one in which the practice of silence is central. His first major publication as a Trappist monk was *The Seven Storey Mountain,* which became a best seller and which has been translated into scores of languages. It is a somewhat disturbing book. On the one hand, there is evident in it a towering spirituality, about which there can be no doubt. On the other hand, there is also an unmistakable bitterness and condescension with respect to anything not Roman Catholic. Even Anglican Christianity is treated witheringly by Merton's pen. On one occasion the author actually participated in Quaker worship at Flushing Monthly Meeting, It was, if his account is accurate, not one of Quakerism's better First Days, but he took it as being typical. Alas, this is the experience of Quakerism which is immortalized in this great work. In short, Merton's attitude in *The Seven Storey Mountain* reflects the intolerant enthusiasm of the newly converted.

With the passage of years in the practice of inner silence and in the disciplined rigors of monastic life, Thomas Merton's perspective gradually changed. He produced volume after volume of devotional literature in which the old harshness and chauvinism gradually disappeared and was replaced by a more genuine sort of Christian charity. In spite of his strict isolation he wrote with stunning insight on the great political and social issues of our time. Even more surprising, he eventually translated the writings of Chuang Tzu, one of the scriptures of Taoism. He developed an insightful introduction to a new translation of the *Bhavagad Gita,* and he wrote a perceptive study of Gandhi and of Gandhi's spiritual roots in Hinduism. He came to disown *The Seven Storey Mountain* and claimed to be struggling to live it down. Finally, near the end of his life, he was granted temporary leave from the Abbey of Gethsemane and he made a joyous pilgrimage to the great spiritual masters of the Far East, including the Dalai Lama with whom he held loving and brotherly dialogues.

As we know, he met an accidental death while attending a convocation on the eremitical life held in Bangkok, Thailand, which drew together people from both eastern and western monastic communities.

Let us consider these words which Thomas Merton entered in his *Asian Journal* upon visiting the great Buddhist shrine of Polonnaruwa:

I am able to approach the Buddhas barefoot and undisturbed, my feet in wet

grass and wet sand. Then the silence of the extraordinary faces. The great smiles. Huge and yet subtle. Filled with every possibility, questioning nothing, knowing everything, rejecting nothing, the peace … that has seen through every question without trying to discredit anyone or anything –*without refutation* – without establishing some other argument, For the doctrinaire, the mind that needs well established positions, such peace, such silence, can be frightening.…

Looking at these figures I was suddenly, almost forcibly, jerked clean out of the habitual, half-tied vision of things, and an inner clearness, clarity, as if exploding from the rocks themselves, became evident and obvious.…The thing about all this is that there is no puzzle, no problem and really no *mystery.* All problems are resolved and everything is clear, simply because what matters is clear. The rock, all matter, all life is charged with *dharmakaya* … everything is emptiness and everything is compassion. I don't know when in my life I have ever had such a sense of beauty and spiritual validity running together in one aesthetic illumination. Surely, with … Polonnaruwa my Asian pilgrimage had become clear and had purified itself.

The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton, page 233.

We, like Thomas Merton, must disown the spiritual chauvinism of the past. We must recognize that in the field of spirituality we are playing a zero sum game – it is not necessary to suppose that because we know our own faith to be true that, therefore, someone else's faith, in an equal and opposite measure, must be false.

Our experience of Truth is nourished through many things – a formula of Einstein's, the music of Beethoven, a beautiful sunset, the death of a loved one, the theology of Thomas Aquinas. Increasingly, it is possible to see that one can be nourished as well by other spiritual traditions. Is there any need to assume that Thomas Merton's Catholicism was in any measure diluted by his response to the great shrine at Polonnaruwa?

In their commitment to rediscover and to practice the essential Christianity of Jesus and his Apostles, our Quaker forebears also rediscovered and practice essential Christianity's universalist spirit.

The concept of that of God in every person obviously has profoundly universalistic implications. Bound by no religious creeds or dogmas and exercising a tradition of experimental revelation, silent worship, direct individual relationship to God and openness and inclusiveness, the Religious Society of Friends incorporated a spaciousness which can welcome into membership people who are not Christian, and to be enriched by their contribution.

There are many examples of the universalist spirit in Quaker experience. Lucretia Mott, for example, was a good friend of Ralph Waldo Emerson and other New England Transcendentalists. She averred, admittedly to the distress of some of her Quaker contemporaries, that since God is great and also loving, she fully expected that He would have provided a Messiah in any age and in any culture where one was needed.

Both George Fox and John Woolman, to their everlasting credit, recognized that

the movement of Truth could be well observed among Native Americans, even though they were unacquainted with Jesus of Nazareth. John Woolman journeyed far and visited Indian communities at great personal risk during a time of warfare between them and the settlers. Yet, in spite of the polarized attitudes which warfare commonly generates, Woolman testifies that he felt only love for the Indians; he found them measurably acquainted with "that Divine power which subjects the forward will of the human creature." He sought to feel and to understand the Spirit and the life in which the Indians lived, "hoping to receive some instruction from them," and to see, as well, if they might in any way be helped by his own following of the leadings of Truth during his visit. Woolman gave thanks that the Lord had strengthened him to make the journey in spite of the dangers of war and that he had manifested a fatherly care over him when, in his own eyes, he appeared to himself inferior to so many among the Indians. Woolman further recounts how, when he took his leave of them, an Indian who could not speak English and who had not understood any of Woolman's dialogue, said in his own language: "I love to feel where your words come from."

Certainly this is paradigmatic of the universal experience and perhaps it is one of the events which inspired Woolman to write the beautiful lines we all know and love, and, which so perfectly express the universalist spirit:

There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages had different names. It is, however, pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion nor excluded from any, where the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, of what nation soever, they become brethren in the best sense of the expression.

William Penn expresses a similar sentiment in his *Reflections and Maxims.*

The humble, meek, merciful, just, pious and devout souls are everywhere of one religion, and when death has taken off the mask they will know one another, although diverse liveries they wear here make them strangers.

In his classic systematic statement of the Quaker faith, the *Apology*, Robert Barclay makes the following observations about *The Nature of the Church Invisible:*

The Church.. . is nothing other than the society, gathering, or company of those whom God has called out of the world and the worldly spirit, to walk in his light and life.…Aside from this Church there can be no salvation, because this Church … comprehend(s) all, regardless of what nation, kindred, tongue, or people they may be, who have become obedient to the holy light and testimony of God in their hearts. Although they may be outwardly unknown to and distant from those who profess Christ and Christianity in words and have the benefit of scriptures, yet they have become sanctified by their obedience and cleansed from the evil of their ways. For this is the universal or catholic Spirit, by which many are called from all the four corners of the earth, and they shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. By it, the secret life is conveyed from the head and the heart to the extremities of the physical body by the blood running in the veins and the

arteries. There may be members of this catholic Church not only among all the several sorts of Christians, but also among pagans, Turks, and Jews. They are men and women of integrity and simplicity of heart. They may be blind in their understanding of some things, and perhaps burdened with the superstitions and ceremonies of the sects in which they have been collected. Yet they are upright in their hearts before the Lord, aiming and endeavoring to be delivered from iniquity, and loving to follow righteousness. (Pages 172-3).

In more recent times, the late Howard Brinton, faculty member at the Quaker Colleges of Earlham, Guilford and Haverford, and with his wife Anna Brinton, co-director of the Quaker center for study and contemplation, Pendle Hill, begins his book *The Religious Philosophy of Quakerism* with a comparative study of the *Bhagavad Gita, the Threefold Lotus Sutra of the Pure Dharma* and the *Gospel of John.* He concludes that:

These three writings, when they express the loftiest conceptions in their respective religions, show a remarkable similarity to one another. Though in many respects dissimilar, at their highest levels they are much alike. They are like persons who climb a mountain starting from different sides, only to find that the higher they climb the closer they get to one another.

Contemporary Quakerism will not realize its true destiny if it retreats from its traditional reconciliation of Christianity and universalism and resorts to a narrow, Christian sectarianism; or if it fails to attract, to admit into membership and to cherish non-Christians. But neither will it survive, I think, if there develops within Quakerism a climate which permits only such theological discourse among ourselves as might be admissible in a public school classroom. Quakerism's extraordinary vocation in the common human task of structuring the new age which is struggling to come to birth lies precisely in its traditional capacity to be both Christian *and* universalist, and not merely one or the other.

I feel uneasy about a tendency among some to gnaw away at the specifically Christian content of Quakerism, as if seeking gradually to reduce it to a form of ethical culture, as I do about Christocentric Friends who seem to seek to import into Quakerism the sort of dogmatism and chauvinism which has plagued so much of the rest of Christian history. It is natural and useful for the theologies of individual Friends to vary widely. But is it not also a particular mission of Quakerism to embody a Christianity capable of the magnanimity and the devotion suitable to the essential collaborative process needed among people of faith the world over in the common task of advancing the spiritual transformations without which we shall all perish.

Clearly, Quakerism is summoned to an astonishing destiny. If it fails to live up to the magnificent duty, the fault will not be in Quakerism, but in ourselves.

In February of 1984, I was traveling with two other Friends on the island of Jamaica, visiting Quaker churches there in behalf of Friends United Meeting. Although Jamaica is a small island, perhaps the size of Connecticut, the mountainous terrain and spectacular seacoast give it the grandeur of a continent. One of the Quaker churches my two colleagues and I were scheduled to visit was

located high in the mountains, and to get to it required traversing a difficult, torturously winding road which ran steeply uphill along the sides of the canyon, down the center of which rushed the waters of a very lively mountain stream. From time to time along the way we encountered a small settlement whose inhabitants we would see doing laundry in the stream, or carrying water from it for some other household purpose. Eventually, very high up, where coffee is grown on the astonishingly steep slopes, we reached Cascade Friends Church, so named because from it, in the distance, yet higher overhead, one could see a long slender waterfall which fed the stream we had seen along the way.

Various local Friends had laid down their daily occupations to greet their foreign guests and they served a wonderful lunch of curried goat, rice and peas, and a punch of tropical fruit juices given a noticeable zap with a generous dollop of ginger flavoring. And as we spoke over lunch delicate mists began to gather around the jagged peaks which surrounded us. I felt certain that if a geologist had been among us he would have confirmed that the rugged landscape which we had traversed had been created by the wearing away of the mountains by the swift stream, the stream in turn being fed by the condensation of these mists which by their delicacy, seemed so striking a contrast to the rugged rocks around which they collected.

As I sat with our fellow Friends amid these steep slopes, I remembered the wonderful Chinese paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art back in New York City, paintings of mountains and mists, which depict scenes so much like those visible to us in Jamaica that day, even though the paintings were produced hundreds of years ago and in a place about as far away as one could get while still remaining on this planet earth. These beautiful and delicate Chinese paintings reflect the Taoist philosophy of the culture from which they sprang, a philosophy which teaches us that human beings at their best are like a mountain stream: they live close to the earth, they seek the common level of life and they serve as they go along; when rooted in a spirit of gentleness like the mist, they can succeed with quiet patience in wearing away all that is brutal and hard in human nature. And I, having been brought by the mountain setting to mindfulness of another great message given on a mountain in Galilee, a message capable of filling every human need again and again, recognized how often in that remote Cascade Friends Church the same truths have been affirmed that have been sounded in my own meetinghouse amid the hubbub of New York City and which had also been understood by those great Chinese painters and calligraphers from worlds and cultures away: and it was possible to perceive, at least in that instant, the great merging of ages and of nations which Truth and faith makes possible.

In New York City, at the Quaker complex where I work, I was surprised and happy one day to see an old friend (and a Friend) from the midwest who stopped in to do some research in the Records Room of New York Yearly Meeting. My friend was looking up the minutes about the disownment of her mother by Oswego Monthly Meeting. The disownment occurred, as you can probably guess, because her mother married a person of the wrong faith. Now it was not that she married a Hindu, or a Roman Catholic, or a Jew, but Oswego Monthly Meeting, being a

Hicksite meeting, disowned her mother because she had married and Orthodox Friend! At first blush this sounded mildly comical, but it quickly took on the coloration of tragedy as my friend went on to explain that because of the rift which this situation had caused, she had never even known her own grandparents.

If we can let our imaginations loose just for a minute, let us suppose that Lucretia Mott, St. Francis of Assisi and Mahatma Gandhi could meet each other. Would they not recognize a deep kinship? Certainly, they would be clear-minded about their diverse devotional practices and doctrinal concepts and even about their very different philosophies of social change. Yet we would hardly expect any spirit of alienation, or of disownment, to arise among them.

The unity which universalism sees in the various religious faiths is not one of doctrine, nor of manner of worship, even though many similarities in these areas can be identified; rather the essential point of convergence is in the quality of the human person, the quality of spirit, which the sincere and selfless devotion to any of these different spiritual paths can produce. For spiritual wisdom is not something we know, but it is something we are, it is a quality of being. Our minds cannot contain or comprehend knowledge of God; for we cannot contain what contains us nor comprehend what comprehends us. We can embody spiritual truth, but we cannot adequately articulate it. Indeed, the longer the radius of our vision, the wider the circumference of mystery. Those who have a grasp of this never engage in debates about doctrine. They know that the Truth is to be lived, not merely to be pronounced by mouth and they know that by their so living, that which is unutterable will be rendered visible.

Thus, the unity among such spirits as Mott, Gandhi and Francis is beyond words and beyond concepts. We will experience it directly, and increasingly frequently, as our shrinking planet brings us closer to more and more people of sanctity from other religions. In this encounter we will not be creating a new unity with them. Rather, we will be rediscovering an old unity. We will discover that we have always been one with them but have only imagined that we were not.

We are told that in the beginning there was but one Word, a Word which is the Mother of all things, a Word of grace and truth. This Word abides within each and every one of us and within every human being ever called to life. Existing in the beginning before all other things were made, the primordial, saving Word was uttered out of silence and to silence we must return if we hope to hear it again. People of faith everywhere are engaged in a common journey, a pilgrimage, to discover within themselves this Word and its revelation of the universal and eternal things upon which all right living and true peace is based. There are many paths possible on this journey of search and one of them always opens up to those who selflessly seek after it. For it is one of the characteristics of Truth that those who thirst after it eventually come to partake of it and to express it, as if the price at which Truth is bought is the sincere and pure longing for It itself. This is why we are promised that those who seek will surely find.

Let us, as Friends, then, share with all other people of faith the confidence that, having already found something that is supremely good, there is something more of inexhaustible measure which, together with them, we have yet to achieve.

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