

The Personal Relevance of Truth

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O LORD, my Maker and Protector, who hast graciously sent me into this world, to work out my own salvation, enable me to drive from me all such unquiet and perplexing thoughts as may mislead or hinder me in the practice of those duties which thou hast required. When I behold the works of thy hands and consider the course of thy providence, give me Grace always to remember that thy thoughts are not my thoughts, nor thy ways my ways. And while it shall please Thee to continue me in this world where much is to be done and little to be known, teach me by thy Holy Spirit to withdraw my mind from unprofitable and dangerous inquiries, from difficulties vainly curious, and doubts impossible to be solved. Let me rejoice in the light which thou hast imparted, let me serve thee with active zeal, and humble confidence, and wait with patient expectation for the time in which the soul which Thou receivest, shall be satisfied with knowledge. Grant this, O Lord, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

Samuel Johnson

This world where “much is to be done and little to be known.” How aptly that describes our living day by day and the world in which each of us finds himself. We have to make a steady stream of decisions for which we have in most cases little pertinent information and whose results are far-reaching, both for ourselves and for others. And even in our best constructed plans unpredictable coincidence brings a welter of confusion so that the apparently insignificant suddenly explodes into momentous tragedy or creativity.

Nevertheless over against this power of fate, this “Dark Necessity,” stands the equally evident power of our minds to grapple with our environment and to change it to our will, consistently and predictably. Think of the mastery over the world represented by a loaf of bread, or a watch, or a jet plane, or the factories where these are made!

We live in a twilight zone between the total darkness of pure chance and the bright light of truth. Every moment of our lives has an urgency, often only thinly veiled, because we know deep down that this moment may be our last, that death is an instant possibility and an eventual certainty. We know a great deal about dying, and that disturbs us; we know nothing about death, and that disturbs us.

Furthermore, at moments when we are most alone, we become acutely aware of a presence that can only be thought of as “The Other,” powerful and full of awe, and to whom we feel responsible for what we have done, and for what we are. It is also clear at such moments that “The Other” is directly related to the fact of our existence. Relatedness to “The Other” seems to have become a matter of life and death, and our search for that relatedness is our search for life itself. Wrapped up with this experience of “The Other” is not only our feeling of awe and relatedness, but also a sense of the incompleteness and the inadequacy of our efforts, and a restlessness even in the face of success.

A powerful factor in our uncertainty and restlessness is the fact that for a long generation in this country it has been the fashion to deny the validity of Absolute Truth and consequently to reject any clear-cut standards of action. Yet

it is also true that more and more the price we have to pay for the rejection of Truth as real and knowable is becoming apparent. Although the tossing out of “right” and “wrong” may be temporarily pleasant, and although the awareness of “ugliness” and “beauty” may be for the moment concealed by fads in art, and although we may even swallow the suggestion that “justice” and “injustice” are not fundamentally different (until, of course, we become the victims of injustice, when the illusions swiftly vanish); yet when we are suddenly faced with the fact that rejection of Truth means also the denial of any real difference between life and death, and that our living is therefore without meaning or reality, then our pain becomes acute, and we squirm ceaselessly in the presence of Emptiness, Meaninglessness, Nothingness.

This long generation in its rejection of Truth began as the age of intense individualism; then men becoming frightened of their aloneness tremulously rushed for company under the shelter of man-in-the-mass. In addition it has been an age of marked materialism, of swift divorce, and personal treachery, and national treason. It is the age of writhing (for writhing relieves pain); an age of alcohol, dope, peyote among the irresponsible; among the responsible it is the age of mammoth relief agencies and a spectacular flowering of healing drugs and anesthetics. Such developments are inevitable in an age that suffers and through the media of swift and certain communication knows the suffering of the world.

The very powers which have made it possible for us to know of this suffering more swiftly and sharply are the

powers which make it possible for us to inflict horrible suffering universally; and these powers likewise present us with the means to alleviate and perhaps even remove hunger, and exposure, and disease as the causes of suffering. We know, moreover, that the true solidarity of mankind is not his skeletal, organic, animal kinship, important though that be. We men stand as one because we suffer, because we can be hurt in ways and to depths not known among the other creatures of this earth.

Since this is an age predominantly materialistic, in the face of suffering we package dried milk and vitamins and penicillin and send them racing out by plane and ship, only too often in pathetic dribbles, soon lost in the thirsty sands of human need. In an earlier age, one that is sometimes thought of as more spiritual than this, men entered monasteries, or collected holy relics, or bought indulgences for relatives they gratuitously assumed were in Purgatory, or wandered about as preaching friars. As solutions to suffering these efforts have provided at best dubious answers.

For men suffer most acutely and most often because they have the power to love, and even deeper than man's solidarity in suffering is man's solidarity in the power to love. At this point we see most clearly our common origin, and our common destiny: because we love, we suffer, living as we do in a world of imperfection and limitations. Where the beloved is the self, there follows inevitably the anguish arising out of the frustrations and bruises imposed by other opposing selves. Such conflict and such anguish are both endless and meaningless. They are therefore truly

hellish, for suffering without meaning or purpose is Hell. Where the beloved is another, there is more hope of creative results and freedom from Hell. But we need a new philosophy of suffering quite as desperately as we need new sources of food and shelter and medicines. Well-fed, well-housed selves can still be wounded, and pointless suffering can still submerge the world.

This is an age which, in its rejection of Truth, has seen also the swift disappearance of passionate intellectual curiosity and delight in search for the Truth for its own sake. Milton's *Areopagitica* reads almost like a subversive pamphlet: "A man may be a heretic in The Truth; and if he believe things only because his Pastor says so, or the Assembly so determines, without knowing any other reason, though his belief be true, yet the very truth he holds becomes his heresy." And J. S. Mill's *On Liberty* seems nearly treasonable: "Not the violent conflict between the parts of truth, but the quiet suppression of half of it, is the formidable evil: there is always hope when people are forced to listen to both sides."

And I regularly meet a more insidious form of this heresy among young people who insist that the search itself, in and of itself, is the good life; a search to which, apparently, the finding of truth is irrelevant, and even unfortunate. Such a search is a vicious kind of spiritual dilettantism. Similar to this is the worship of method as method, whether it be in education, or science, or worship. The result is often the loss of responsibility to the Truth. The moral implications of the results of the method are lost sight of, and the bits of fact discovered are never held up to the Truth itself.

Crude, pragmatic common sense suggests that we have paid too high a price for the rejection of the validity of Truth, that what we are reaping in the moral and intellectual degeneration among us is the inevitable reward of separation from Truth. Most appalling of all is the realization that this doctrine of the Relativity of Truth has been fed to a whole generation of teachers as the outgrowth of the application of John Dewey's philosophy to the field of education. This relativity has in turn been fed to an unimaginable number of youngsters entrusted to their care. Part and parcel of this process has been the dilution of the word "Truth" into a description of changing scientific statements, (which are subject always to revision and discard) about comparatively imperfectly observed relationships in the natural world.

In my own search for Truth, a major step came during the years 1952-53. This step consisted in a release from the belief that Truth had to be "certain"; rational, logical, self-sustaining, self-evident, publicly demonstrable. I suddenly came to see that whenever I made such demands I inevitably discovered only myself: I was walled in by myself, limited to myself, for I was the one who was being logical, being rational, standing as judge over the Truth. It is a small world on those terms.

Along with that realization came its companion: that it is impossible for me to withdraw from the process of living while I make up my mind how to live. While I try to decide whether this is the proper train for me to take, the doors close, the train moves on, and I am left on a vacant platform. Drop a man in the pounding surf: he does not

have time to conduct an elaborate survey of winds, tides, wave-motions; he has to swim as best he can. And we are in the surf, spiritually speaking. It became clear to me that unimpassioned detachment on matters of death or life, what some philosophers call the existential issues of life, is nonsense and immoral.

Out of this flow of experience has come a series of personal convictions or tools of thought which it will be useful at this point to make clear. In the first place I am convinced by my experience that our reality is derivative from a primary Reality, our Personal existence from an underlying Existence, our being from an original Being. This primary Reality is that principle or power from which all existence springs, the essence upon which all creation depends for its continuation. Furthermore out of my experience has come the conviction that Truth is a life-giving relationship to Reality; Truth, to put the matter another way, is Reality appearing in time and space; it is Reality rightly perceived and communicated among men.

Therefore my sense of responsibility to “The Other” whose presence I feel is an awareness that there are real consequences for real disobedience and that separation from Reality is death. Man’s search for Truth is his search for life itself. Hence its immediate, personal relevance.

Granted that I cannot compel anyone by force of logic to comprehend the validity of Truth, any more than I can by force compel anyone to love music or his family, I can, and indeed I must, stand as a witness to the conviction that the continuation of life is impossible apart from Truth. Truth

and Reality are one, and there can be no life, no existence without Truth. There is no living water in a mirage, however lovely, and however thirsty a man may be: nothing can save him but that which gives him water.

In the field of human biology it is clear that unless I eat, I cannot live; or if I eat some chemicals like lye, my body will be destroyed. In the realm of physics, if I wish to remain as an integrated mechanism, I must stay out of the path of rapidly moving bodies like automobiles or small boys. And love, such as that between two persons, can survive only within the framework of Truth. Loyalty to Truth is the key to survival.

As to the nature of survival, I think we should all agree that under some circumstances a man must give up all thought of physical survival if he is to survive as a man, and a man may not use just any means he will to gain his ends. Remember the Macbeth of Act I, brave, generous, sensitive, who yields to his passion for the throne, wading deeper and deeper through blood to reach it, until in the last Act, he has moved so far that when he hears of Lady Macbeth's death, he can say in utter hardness of heart, "She should have died hereafter." And Macbeth dies in a flurry of abusive language, frenzied bragging, of brutal slaughter and animal vigor. Macbeth is but the archetype of all of us who try to soar on wings of treachery. But what survived of Macbeth just prior to his death and what was lost because he died? Almost nothing.

Our hearts leap to the words of Socrates before the jury who had condemned him: "And I would rather die, having

spoken after my fashion, than speak in your manner and live ... The difficulty, my friends, is not in avoiding death, but in avoiding unrighteousness, for that runs faster than death.” Who has survived, Socrates, or his judges? Even the oldest and hardest of the judges is dead. But who will say that Socrates has not survived?

These examples make it clear that survival, whatever its nature, cannot depend upon our human judgment. Only “the judge of all the earth” can know. But this is sure: where there is survival, it depends for its existence upon a close relationship with Reality, for by definition, Truth and survival are closely linked. Truth-full men and actions full of Truth are “in the Life” and will survive. Thus it is that citizens engaged in the passionate search for Truth are their nation’s highest patriots and most valuable citizens, for it is they who bring the life-giving contact with Reality. The life of individual citizens is closely allied to the survival of a nation, for a nation cannot exist without citizens; and if the nation warps, twists, regiments the minds and spirits of its citizens, the nation that was is no longer there. How long is our beloved country to survive? She can be destroyed by inner untruth far more swiftly than by any other force.

I have just said that Truth is essential to survival. The basic problem “How shall I know the Truth?” remains.

If the Truth for which we search is, as I have suggested, of the same nature as Reality, then whatever Truth there is to be found is basically one Truth. Just as there cannot be two sources of existence, two Realities, so there cannot be, in any important sense, different kinds of Truth. But how can

one explain the Unity of Truth in terms common to science, philosophy, and religion? Or must we subordinate two of these to the third?

Dr. Paul Tillich in his lectures on Church History opened my eyes to a very interesting passage in Justin Martyr, a Christian Apologist of the second century. Justin Martyr, an educated, high-minded pagan, had been searching for that universal philosophy which would meet three conditions. He wanted a philosophy that was intellectually respectable, that genuinely molded his daily life, and that made him a part of a community of finders of Truth. He found that universal philosophy in Christianity; it was for him not simply a corner of sectarian Truth, but rather, the all-embracing Truth about the meaning of existence.

In his experience he found that wherever Truth appears, it is Christian Truth. This does not mean that any Christians have all the Truth, which, as it were, they invented by the sturdy powers of their intellects or discovered through rigid inner discipline, for Christians do not discover or invent the Truth; they are simply granted an insight into Reality. Furthermore, said Justin, all those who have lived according to the Truth are Christians, and he mentions specifically Socrates, Heraclitus, and Elijah, though they lived long before the time of Christ.

Now please note that Justin is not comparing religions: he is making a statement about Reality and our relationship to it. By "Christianity" he does not mean denominational Christianity or the institution of the Church as it appears among us. He is not talking about religions; he is talking

about Truth. Christianity is not a religion among religions; Christianity is not right and others wrong; it is the negation of “religions” as a plural noun; it is the all-inclusive interpretation of Reality, the universal philosophy. This means, of course, that wherever Truth is found, regardless of its immediate source, it must be acceptable in principle to Christianity. No Truth, whether scientific, psychological, historical, or religious, is by its nature foreign to Christianity, for Christianity is based upon Truth appearing in time and space.

The strength of Justin’s argument may be explained by an analogy. Each of us is a self, and though that self is very hard to explain or describe, impossible to weigh or measure or photograph, it does exist. Self-consciousness is likewise complex and mysterious, but very well known. Each self is a lonely unit, never known fully and perfectly by any other self, but we can know something of another self by its acts, through its words, through its creations in art or music or motion, through what we lump together as “self-expression.” This self-expression depends for its existence upon the self; it could not exist without that self; and yet it is different from the self of which it is the expression and from which it springs. At this point there can be no grin without the cat.

Justin suggests that this may be the nature of the Reality with which we have to deal. The Self-hood of God expressed in the creation of the Universe. This Creative Self-Expression, this Creative Principle of Reason, this power of Self-Manifestation of God not only to himself but to others not himself, Justin called the Logos, borrowing a

term long familiar to Greeks and more recently to Christians in the Gospel of John. The Logos is utterly dependent upon God, but it is not *created* in the way matter was created out of nothing; it is not identical with God any more than a person's self-expression is identical with his inner self. Just as "The Messiah" is permeated in every part by the genius of Handel and reveals something very profound about Handel's nature, so Creation reveals something very profound about the Nature of God, about the kind of Reality from which our existence draws its essence.

As the Creative Self-Expression of God, the Logos has kinship, as it were, with all the universe, revealing itself in the world of nature as the undergirding, interrelated forces of nature, the principles and powers that sustain our world. Because the Logos also shines through in the realm of our minds, our minds can comprehend the powers of nature and can reach further out into the real of the "unnatural," into imaginary numbers and toward the Idea of the Good. It is not without significance that one of the time-honored maxims of philosophy has been that "the laws of thought are the laws of being." Because of our kinship with the Logos, whose creations we are, deep, valid religious experience is possible, in which, through the Logos, the very self-communication of God himself, we communicate with God. So it is in all aspects of our life, whether physical, intellectual, emotional, aesthetic, or religious, wherever there is Truth, that Truth is rooted in the Logos of God, the one God, in whom rests the unity of Truth.

So far the thinking of Justin Martyr does not seem radically different from that of many systems of mysticism and pantheism which are built upon the principle of the permeation of the universe by the One and in which the goal is the absorption of the particular into the Universal, the many into the One.

But it is just at this point that Justin's thought takes the crucial step, the same crucial step that every thoughtful Christian must take, and without which Christianity remains simply one religion among others, one philosophy among others, all equally open to the smorgasbord nibbling of the enlightened eclectic. The razor-sharp commitment, the bridgeless leap is this: that the Logos became the human being, Jesus of Nazareth. Let me say that more slowly: the Logos, the Self-Expression of God, the Creative Power that brought this Universe into being, became flesh and blood; mind, body, and soul; fully, unequivocally human; "full of grace and truth" as the Gospel of John says. This incarnation, this "becoming red meat" of the Self-Expression of God, was, furthermore, not solely as dominion and power but principally as love, of suffering, of triumph over death, as joy and peace; as healing and lifting; as radical, active, passionate opposition to evil.

I should like to re-emphasize the implications of this statement about the Logos-Christ. In the first place Christianity so understood is not like one religion among others or like one which is chosen as a student chooses courses out of the college catalog. In the second place Christianity does not see itself as right and other religions wrong, as for instance a Democrat might be right and a

Republican wrong. The “simple” claim of Christianity is that the full Truth of God, the very center of his Being, appeared in time and space as Jesus Christ, and that this revelation of Reality in human, concrete, historical terms is the basis of Christianity. Thus Christianity speaks about the nature of Reality and the relevance of Reality to us.

Insofar as this is a revelation of Reality radically different from the concept of Reality set forth in other religions, especially Buddhism and Hinduism, men of these different faiths may worship in the same place very happily, but they cannot claim that they are worshipping the same Reality. In that sense men may worship “in each other’s company,” but not “together.” Furthermore, since the concept of Reality which men have determines the kind of signals they will listen for, there will be radical differences in the individual experiences which come out of shared religious services where the worshippers claim relationship to as radically different “Realities” as Brahma or Yahweh.

Let us try another analogy. Since we have mentioned the Far East, let us turn to Gandhi. Suppose that in the United States a professor is making a thorough study of Gandhi. He interviews everyone he can who has met Gandhi, he collects every published article, he pores over maps and charts and statistics, and gains some understanding of the conditions in India and the effect that Gandhi has produced. But the simplest Indian peasant who lived with Gandhi in his ashram knows more about Gandhi from meeting him face to face, talking his native language with him, working on the same creative projects with him, than the professor, however earnest his study. To make clear the obvious, the

simplest Christian knows more about God because he has met him face to face in Christ, Christ's face in which is the glory of God, than the most earnest non-Christian. And the converse is true; wherever a man worships God in spirit and in truth, wherever he has met God face to face, he is a Christian, for it is through the power of the Logos-Christ, the Self-Expression of God, that men know God truly.

And so it is, as I said before, that any Truth appearing anywhere in the world, in any age, in any form will be acceptable in principle to Christianity because all Truth is of God, and there is only one God. If we are to call Jesus the Christ, the Logos, the Self-Expression of God made flesh and blood, there cannot be any Truth in China or India, or in Judaism and Islam, in science or philosophy or mysticism, which cannot be received in principle by Christianity.

To the question we asked earlier, "How shall I know the Truth" we have yet to give a full answer, although I have suggested that there is Truth and that the Truth pervades our world, ordering and sustaining it. But how shall I *know* the Truth? How shall I act Truthfully in this life, so that I may live and not die? How shall I detect the true signals in all the noise and motion around me?

Indeed, the detection of Truth is like the detection of a signal. Why do I accept the traffic light and the policeman's whistle as signals in the midst of city traffic? Why do I answer to a baby's cry in the midst of a heavy thunderstorm? How do I know that I have made a bad mistake in family relations without ever a word being

spoken? Or how shall I know beauty, or courage, or honor, or love?

The greater the noise, the wider the variety of sound, the brighter the light, the more dazzling its movement, the less likely I am to be aware that a given sound or a given light is an important signal, unless, of course, it be of the overpowering volume of the trumpet in battle or the air-raid siren. Is it because we know this that we live in such a welter of sound and fury? Are we under the illusion that the more noise, the more signals, *the more importance gained*, or are we afraid of signals and hope to drown them out? If either is true, we live in desperate times.

I respond to the policeman's hand and to the baby's cry because I have had a previous and meaningful relationship with the signaler or his equivalent. A child who tries to stroke a "wood-pussy" is likely never to forget the signals of striped back and raised tail.

This fact of previous relationship in signal detection marks the fundamental urgency of the question "Where do I come from? What has been my previous relationship with Reality?" For it is this previous relationship that will determine what kind of meaningful signals I shall be able to distinguish in the pounding surf of life, and it will determine the methods needed to intercept those signals. If the stork brought me, I had better learn, like Dr. Doolittle, the language of the storks; if a little chromosome, then perhaps I can discover some important wigwags through the electronic microscope. But if I come ultimately from

God, prayer and Meeting for Worship is the most important business I have in life, in order to have life at all.

Thanks be to God, I do have a previous relationship with Truth; I *can* distinguish the true signals from the irrelevant noise, truth from error, life from death, although I must qualify this to exclude any idea of my infallibility. For I am the creature of the Logos, I am made in the image of God, who breathed the breath of life into me; God, who gave me a mind that apparently fits the world around me, not unlike a key and its lock, a mind that apparently can, in part at least, comprehend the timeless, the disembodied, the infinite; God who gave me the power to love and, therefore, to suffer, wherein man can come nearest to the nature of God. Since I am the creature of God, I can never escape relationship with him. But it must be noted very clearly that I am not divine because of that relationship. I am not God, *and nothing that is in me as man is God*, any more than the painting is the artist; neither paint nor canvas is human, but only the means through which the genius of the artist shines. But, as man, I have the choice to accept or reject the proffered life.

Yet I am not left to the labors of reason alone and to the shadows of intuition, for, if what I have outlined here is “in the Life,” God has performed the ultimate act of communication: he himself became man. The infinite became finite, the timeless dwelt in time, the formless took on form; the ineffable spoke in human tongue, the Lord of History lived under the tensions and temptations of human history a fully human life, but in a fully god-like manner. How could communication be made any clearer? He

became what we are, that we might become as he is, not by accident or trial and error, but clearly and with directness.

And the record of the life, lived as God would have us live our lives, stands clear and firm before us; a record human through and through, subject to all the vicissitudes of human memory and littleness, but witnessing unequivocally to the power of the Incarnation. For I am sure that God, who is willing to suffer with us, has likewise taken care to preserve the essential record of the historical even through which his nature shines most clearly. In the New Testament as a whole and in the Gospels especially shines the Light of God made visible to human eyes in the life of Jesus.

God has, however, not left us to work out our own salvation in fear and trembling from the recorded word alone. That would be most cruel, for the times in which Jesus lived faced social, economic and political problems radically different from ours, though the human problem is still the same. Jesus gave no specific answers in his life to the anguishing questions of atomic energy and its use, big business and its limitations, labor unions and their responsibilities, and when we make the attempt to apply almost mechanically the teachings of Jesus to these situations, there is almost always some breach of Jesus' fundamental law of love. We do have the record; and we also have the continuing and living presence of the very man whose life and works we read of. Jesus himself promised that he would return, promised to be with us always, even to the end of the age, promised that when two or three are gathered together in his name, he will be

among them. His guiding, comforting spirit of Truth reveals to us here and now the inner intent of the Scripture, just as he did on the road to Emmaus when he opened the Scriptures to the two disciples, and their hearts burned within them. And likewise there comes the leading of his Spirit in the solution of our own problems. These things we know experimentally. The early Friends were right when they said that Scripture could not be read aright except in the light of that Spirit in which they were written. They were equally right when they maintained that revelation was not static and final, but expanding, even as the universe and the process of creation itself seem to be expanding. There is no “new” Truth, supplanting the “old” Truth, but there is the clearer perception of Truth and of its meaning for us in this age and under these circumstances.

Just as we have the Indwelling Christ to guide us into new perceptions of the Truth and its relevance to modern life, so we have the concrete, historical record against which to check the impulses that well up within us and which, as we ought to know only too well, may be simply the honeyed impulses of self-will and self-worship. Whatever action, whether proposed or actual, which is found to be contrary to the over-all intent and spirit of the New Testament, cannot be regarded as in the Life and is therefore denied the Christian.

Thanks to this combined experience of the historical and the eternal, the man of Palestine and the Inner Light, the fixed and the responsive, there is no need for us to fly blindly in the storm, trusting only to our own limited power and vision.

But if this is true, why is it that I do not see the Truth in every situation with infallible clarity? That I and others make mistakes on important matters is obvious and the possibility of such error must always be kept clearly in mind. Following the figure of speech of signal detection I would suggest, in simplest form, that the cause of my error is my missing the key signals. There may be too much noise and confusion, too many sights and sounds, too much busyness of body and spirit. It may be the result of misinterpreting signals, like the time when I was shooting some small rapids and in response to a shout to “PULL LEFT,” my companion pulled right, and we went over a waterfall sideways and bottom-up. It may be that I behave as though a signal was given when there really was none. Woolman called this “outrunning his guide.” Or, I may want *not* to hear the signal. The position of the adverb is deliberate. I may want *not* to hear the signal. I know from experience that students can train themselves to turn off a considerable number of alarm clocks and sleep on undisturbed, because deep down they do not want to get up and face an unpalatable situation. In the same way men can train themselves never to hear the signals from Reality, (and the world we live in makes that training fatally easy) and so they cut themselves off from life. Adam’s history is personal history. Certain aspects of modern life can only be explained as resulting from some such denial of the signals, a denial arising from a divided will. For how can I, who profess to be a Christian, come to Meeting for Worship bedraggled, annoyed, with no spiritual wedding garment? How is it that I can fill my life so full of motion that there is no time for stillness, no time for prayer? How is it that I

spend so little time, really, in the study of the Scriptures? Or given the living words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, how can I make statements, as some of us have done, with the words “War is contrary to the will of God, BUT....” Should not that last word be “Therefore?” If the discriminatory treatment of men is known to be starkly contrary to the whole spirit and teaching of the New Testament, surely when I practice these things deliberately I have cut myself off from the Truth that gives Life. How can I lust, and guzzle, and cheat, and lie, and swagger, and quarrel, and gossip, unless I want not to accept Jesus as the Living Truth?

Like the moving finger on Belshazzar’s wall, a personal letter has carved these words on my conscience: “The insensitive and righteous glory with which Christians seem able to bask in the message of Jesus without any need of commitment or sacrifice.”

To know the Truth is not to accept it by an act of the intellect, as a man may know the Greek alphabet, or as a man may know his neighbor across the street. To know the Truth is, rather, like the way in which man and wife know each other, a life of wholly shared commitment, of utter trust, of freedom from fear. Indeed, there is no knowledge of the Truth where there is no commitment which results in significant action, for the living root produces living fruit after its own kind. We know the presence of love, not by sighs and simpers, nor even by desire, but by its power to lift men and women outside themselves and to live beyond themselves. Honor is known by honorable actions. Beauty is known by its creation among us. Truth is not a group of

intellectual concepts to be manipulated at will like the symbols in mathematics or the notes in music: Truth is living and life-giving, and those who have welcomed the Truth have life.

This is crucial: it is not that we discover the Truth and make it our own for our own purposes as men might harness a mountain stream to light their houses or run their machines. We are, rather, discovered by the Truth, and are given power by the Truth to light our souls. We are besieged by the Truth, who stands knocking at the door, the Hound of Heaven, our Imperious Lover and Tyrannical Servant, who would give us our hearts' desire if we would only throw our selfish desires away, and who longs to release us from the folly of the "freedom of choice" we seem to think so important even on matters of life and death.

This is the Good News: we *can* know and be known by the Truth; we can live according to the Truth, here and now, for the Truth is both principle and power, master and servant. In the Truth we can overcome the crushing sense of inadequacy and guilt through the knowledge of God's forgiveness and new life; this is the given power to lead changed, explosive lives, not for our own glory, but that men may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven. And this is the given power in which suffering is transformed.

If suffering were in and of itself malignant and powerful, it could have no place in the very heart of God without destroying that heart or being itself destroyed. Yet the

Cross is the eternal symbol of God's suffering for us, and not only has suffering not been destroyed, it remains instead as the recurring crisis out of which new life can spring, if the suffering is comprehended in the light of Truth. Granted that the fruits of suffering may be terrible: bitterness, self-centeredness, demonic hatred. We also know, however, that great gains are made only at great risk, and if we are to grow into a richer life through the Truth, the situation out of which the growth is to come will be one in which there is an equal and opposite opportunity for destruction and darkness through the denial of the Truth.

Therefore it is just possible that a frantic effort to remove suffering may not be the most loving act. Parents do their children no loving-kindness by overprotecting them from the assaults of the world they live in. Such protection in its extreme form may be the denial of the opportunity to grow in stature and compassion, in solidarity with other men, in self-understanding, and in the knowledge of God. And we who try to evade suffering at any cost may be rejecting the Truth knocking at our door, asking that we sup with him and he with us, including most significantly, the drinking of his cup. The Good News is that suffering is not in itself alien and terrible, or hostile to the nature of God, but that suffering is that peculiar environment in which the love and power of God can shine most clearly, for it was God who suffered for us, who suffers with us, and shares our travail.

About the Author

Thomas Shipley Brown (1912-2011) was born in Philadelphia into a family of noted Quaker teachers and

campers; educated at Westtown, Haverford and Harvard. During 1949-1953 he was a member of the department of religion at Earlham College and an instructor of English, Latin, the Bible and Quakerism at Westtown School, Pennsylvania where he also served as Dean of Boys and head soccer coach. Tom Brown served as principal of Olney Friends School in Barnesville, Ohio, from 1963 to 1969. Tom ended his formal career in 1977, serving for eight years as the first executive secretary of the Friends' Council on Education.

The substance of this pamphlet was first given as the William Penn Lecture for 1954 and is published in the Pendle Hill pamphlet Series by special arrangement with the Young Friends Movement of the Philadelphia Yearly Meetings.

Back Cover

Quakers are not often noted for their preachers, but let me introduce Thomas S. Brown! Here is language that tumbles and rolls through the power of suffering when “we squirm ceaselessly in the presence of Emptiness, Meaninglessness, Nothingness.” Here is swashbuckling language which with a jab of the dagger and the thrust of a verbal cutlass tears through the crude thinking of the day and leaves us with “suffering without meaning or purpose is Hell.”

Thomas Brown is not one to defer judgment; it is time to speak Truth as he sees it, and to declare other approaches as “nonsense and immoral.” And Truth is what he is preaching with a fundamental mixture of Aristotelian

ontology and Christian enthusiasm. “Truth and Reality are one, and there can be no life, no existence without Truth.”

A short pamphlet, but one which is thumpingly packed with insight turned to exhortation explains what that Truth is. “This is the Truth that challenges and destroys the relativism, the cynicism, the materialism that now strangles our country. This is the Truth that gives unity instead of faction; that gives integrity instead of duplicity; that gives creativity instead of destruction; that gives purity instead of debauchery; that gives joyous courage instead of fear; that gives commitment instead of security. This is the Truth that gives Life to me and to you.”

Pendle Hill

Located on 23 acres in Wallingford, Pennsylvania, Pendle Hill is a Quaker study, retreat, and conference center offering programs open to everyone. Pendle Hill’s vision is to create peace with justice in the world by transforming lives. Since Pendle Hill opened in 1930, thousands of people have come from across the United States and throughout the world for Spirit-led learning, retreat, and community.

At the heart of Pendle Hill is a residential study program which encourages a step back from daily life for reflection and discernment in preparation for deeper engagement in the community and wider world. Because spiritual experience is essential to Quakerism, Pendle Hill’s education is experiential, or experimental, at its core. Adult students of all ages come for a term or a year of education

designed to strengthen the whole person – body, mind, and spirit. The Resident Program captures the earliest vision for Pendle Hill while responding to the call of the world in which we exist today. Program themes include:

- Quaker faith and practice
- Dismantling oppression
- Spiritual deepening
- Leadership skill development
- Ecological literacy
- Personal discernment
- Arts and crafts
- Gandhian constructive program
- Building capacity for nonviolent social change.

Programs are offered in a variety of formats – including term-long courses, weekend workshops, and evening presentations. Those unable to come for a term or a year are encouraged to take part in a workshop or retreat. Information on all Pendle Hill programs is available at www.pendlehill.org. Pendle Hill's mission of spiritual education is also furthered through conference services – hosting events for a variety of religious and educational nonprofit organizations, including many Quaker groups.

The Pendle Hill pamphlets have been an integral part of Pendle Hill's educational vision since 1934. Like early Christian and Quaker tracts, the pamphlets articulate perspectives which grow out of the personal experience, insights, and/or special knowledge of the authors, concerning spiritual life, faith, and witness.

A typical pamphlet has characteristics which make it a good vehicle for experimental thought. It is the right length to be read at a single sitting (about 9000 words). It is concerned with a topic of contemporary importance. Like words spoken in a Quaker meeting for worship, it embodies a concern, a sense of obligation to express caring or to act in response to a harmful situation.

To receive each Pendle Hill pamphlet as it is published, order an annual subscription. Please contact:

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