



Lecture 1936

William Penn

*The Basic
Necessity for
Spiritual
Reconstruction*

Howard W. Hintz

William Penn Lecture 1936

**The Basic Necessity for
Spiritual Reconstruction**

*Delivered at
RACE STREET MEETING HOUSE
Philadelphia*

by
Howard W. Hintz

Published by The Book Committee
Religious Society of Friends
Philadelphia and Vicinity
302 Arch Street, Philadelphia

The William Penn Lectures are supported by the Young Friends Movement of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, which was organized on Fifth month thirteenth, 1916, at Race Street Meeting House in Philadelphia, for the purpose of closer fellowship; for the strengthening by such association and the interchange of experience, of loyalty to the ideals of the Society of Friends; and for the preparation by such common ideals for more effective work thru the Society of Friends for the growth of the Kingdom of God on earth.

The name of William Penn has been chosen because he was a Great Adventurer, who in fellowship with his friends started in his youth on the holy experiment of endeavoring “to live out the laws of Christ in every thought, and word, and deed,” that these might become the laws and habits of the State.

Requests for permission to quote or to translate should be addressed to:

Pendle Hill Publications
338 Plush Mill Road
Wallingford, PA 19086-6023
Email: publications@pendlehill.org

Copyright © 2021 by Pendle Hill

ISBN:

ebook design by the [Quaker Heron Press](#)—2021

The Basic Necessity for Spiritual Reconstruction

I

Did our own immediate observation and experience not convince us that we are living in a disordered world which is rapidly approaching a period of acute crisis in its social evolution, we should be brought to the realization of the fact by the increasing numbers of the prophets of doom who are predicting the imminent collapse of our entire Western Civilization. Some years ago, Oswald Spengler in that highly provocative and deeply discomfoting book, *The Decline of the West*, anticipated the more recent school of social and economic critics in asserting the inevitable certainty of the doom that awaits us within the next half century. Last year, in a book entitled, *Was Europe a Success?*, Joseph Wood Krutch, one of the more temperate of the modern critics sang the requiem for Europe without regarding his post-mortem as being in the slightest degree premature. Recently, H. G. Wells, joined in the chorus of dire predictions in another one of his characteristic imaginative flights into the future called *On the Shape of Things to Come*. Not long ago I listened to a lecture by Dr. John Haynes Holmes, eminent New York clergyman and author, on the subject "Civilization at the Cross-Roads." He asserted that civilization was now facing the third of its three great crises of the last two thousand years and that the question of whether Western

Civilization would survive or not would be decided by the present generation.

But the most widely-known and perhaps the most profound and stimulating of the more recent studies of the impending social and economic crisis is John Strachey's *The Coming Struggle for Power*. Mr. Strachey sees the lines of class struggle throughout the Western world drawing more and more sharply to an inevitable climatic crisis the issue of which will be the emergence of either Fascism or Communism as the dominant force. The battle to the death of the privileged and the underprivileged, in other words, is almost upon us and revolution of sweeping proportions is the one certain prospect of the immediate future according to Mr. Strachey's carefully considered analysis.

There are a host of other recent studies of the present critical situation in world affairs. They represent a bewildering variety of social and economic theories: they approach the various aspects of the chaos and uncertainty of modern society from every conceivable angle of sociological and philosophical interpretation. One thinks readily of the writings of such distinguished commentators as Stuart Chase, Charles A. Beard, John Dewey and dozens of others, representing all shades of theory and opinion. Each has a diagnosis and a remedy to propound, and the analyses and solutions when considered as a whole represent a medley of absolutely irreconcilable and contradictory points of view.

One point of agreement emerges, however: the world is in chaos, it is in dire need of basic reconstruction, and the road ahead whatever the direction it takes, will be a long and difficult one. And of these truths we do not have to be reminded by the critics; they impress themselves upon our consciousness at every turn. Dictatorship, of one form or another dominates half of Europe today; the nations seem to be drawing closer to the brink of another major catastrophe with the passing of each week. In the Far East the picture is no less discomfoting. And even in those nations where theoretical democracy still prevails, human starvation and misery, injustice and oppression, class hatreds, economic and social disorders, and the evidences of spiritual as well as social disintegration are becoming more rather than less prevalent.

In our own country, despite the few indications here and there of superficial economic recovery, the number of the unemployed remains relatively undiminished. Human misery and hardship is as extensive and acute as at any period in our history. Persecutions and injustices are inflicted with increasing intensity. Class hatreds, race hatreds, party hatreds are being engendered with growing vehemence. The stop-gap economic remedies of an admittedly floundering governmental administration become daily more futile and ineffective and seem to be doing little more than putting off the inevitable day, while the counter-proposals of the political opposition appear to be largely negative and equally as indefinite, superficial and ineffective.

Signs of Moral and Spiritual Disintegration

But perhaps the most serious aspect of the whole picture of contemporary chaos is presented in the increasing indication of moral and spiritual disintegration. The traditional moral and social standards upon which Christian civilization is based are being questioned and nullified on every hand. Skepticism and cynicism are the intellectual fashions of the day; skepticism which denies the integrity and dignity of the individual human spirit; skepticism which mockingly ridicules the sanctity of marriage vows; skepticism which questions the validity of all human virtues and which casts into the discard of outmoded illusions the established concepts of human honesty, integrity and Christian charity; skepticism which scoffs at all notions of spirituality and idealism as basically inherent elements in the constitution of man.

The pervading note in the characteristic philosophy and literature of our day is one of negation and despair. Mr. Robinson Jeffers, one of the most technically capable of our modern poets shuts himself up in his stone tower and lugubriously contemplates the tragic and lonely destiny of man. Some of our ablest and most promising novelists such as Mr. Faulkner and Mr. Caldwell carry the method of “naturalism” into the realm of violence and distinguish themselves by their vivid depiction of every known form of human depravity and degradation. Quite inevitably, the economic and social chaos of our postwar world with its multiplicity of miseries, injustices, persecutions, hatreds and basic uncertainties has driven many men to despair

and hopelessness to the point where they have lost faith in God, in themselves and in their fellow men.

The Proponents of Materialistic Theories of Recovery

Not all have been driven to despair. There is another school of thought, more admirable because it is courageous enough to face the issues rather than to run away from them, which honestly seeks a cure for the prevailing ills of society and sets its eyes hopefully to the future. It proceeds upon an avowedly materialistic interpretation of human experience. It calls its philosophy, deriving its main inspiration of Karl Marx, “dialectic materialism.” It sees man and society strictly in terms of its economic or materialistic needs and satisfaction. It has a definite and constructive program to offer and it puts forward as a solution to the disruptions of contemporary society, the establishment of a Socialistic or Communistic state. As an economic and social doctrine it has elements in it which are so thoroughly consistent with basic Christian principles that Christians cannot afford to dispose of the whole idea as summarily and dogmatically as this school, on its part, disposes of spirituality, Christianity and religion as a whole. Its major, and to my mind, fatal defect is its basic and predominant materialistic foundation.

But the Marxian approach to the economic and social dilemmas of modern society is not the only one of the current theories for the solution of our problems which proceeds upon a purely materialistic basis. That school of

economic theory which stands diametrically opposed to Communist dialectic is likewise rooted in essential materialism. In the last analysis, however divergent opinions within its own ranks may be as to the best means of attaining the end, it seeks the return of "prosperity," which is simply the converse of "depression." And prosperity means in plain terms, profits; more money, more goods, more material possessions. If the social philosophy of Karl Marx is grounded in secularism and materialism so is that of Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham.

Ever since the eighteenth century our social organization has become more and more firmly rooted in the principle of the production of goods, first for profits and second, for use. It has tended increasingly to measure human success in terms of material possession, and to substitute material for spiritual values. And now once again, despite the bitter consequences of one period of mad extravagance and blind lust for luxury and wealth, we are seeing new evidence of revived efforts to create in the masses of people desires for things which they cannot afford and tempting them with enticements to the unrestrained indulgence of material appetites. We are urged to satiate our desires to the creation of new discontents and more acute poverties of mind and spirit. The very fabric of our civilization has become dyed with the purple of secular and material motivation.

With the steady evanescence of spiritual values it is not surprising that modern states should be tending more and more toward dictatorial forms of government with the

consequent nullification of all democratic principles. The loss of individual integrity leads naturally to the devaluation of the individual. Men become pawns to be regimented into mass formations at the bidding of the few who can usurp power and use them in the attainment of their own selfish ends. Individual dignity is effaced; human life becomes cheap; persecution, injustice, tyranny are the logical concomitants. Such is the fate of half of the peoples of Europe today. Such may be the fate of America tomorrow.

The Necessity for a Spiritual Basis of Recovery

In foreseeing such a possibility I am not joining the chorus of the prophets of doom. On the contrary, I am firmly convinced of the absolute validity of the prophecy of Jesus that “the law and the prophets” will ultimately be fulfilled. The rule of love in the Kingdom of God on earth will someday prevail. But before that day dawns man will first need to attain to the highest wisdom of recognizing that the one basic, eternal and universal principle of all human experience is the spiritual essence of his being. The spiritual laws of the universe are, of all its laws, the most fundamental and immutable. This truth, which transcends all truths is the one which man finds it most difficult to comprehend in its ultimate reality, for the understanding and fulfillment of that law represents the highest possible development of his being.

Man’s struggle for freedom from the world’s bondage, his progress from one stage of civilization to another is synonymous with his quest of this ultimate reality of

spiritual truth. The line of this progress toward civilization, for “culture,” in Matthew Arnold’s sense of “Sweetness and Light,” is marked by a jagged course of peaks and valleys, with periods of great light and periods of great darkness. Mankind has endured and triumphed over many obstacles in its struggle toward the light. It has recovered from many crises. It is facing at the present moment another one of these critical stages in its growth. Its world is a harried one, sorely wanting fundamental and thoroughgoing reconstruction.

Society has been brought to its present impasse, as we have seen, because men have ignored the basic law of their being. How much deeper modern society will be plunged into misery and despair in its present crisis before it again begins the ascent to new plains of light will depend entirely on how readily and effectively the forces of spiritual reconstruction can be set in motion. In numbers and influence they are today far overshadowed. Of all the myriad and diverse remedies for the diseases of the modern world being propounded today only a scattered few, and those relatively inconspicuous, carry with them any indication of an understanding of that one aspect of the problem which is fundamental to all others. I submit that the only reconstruction of our disrupted social order which can be in any wise thoroughgoing or permanent is the reconstruction that begins and ends with the spirit of the individual man. Spiritual reconstruction is therefore a prime requisite, an essential necessity in any valid reconstruction of society as a whole.

II

Realism and Idealism In The Present Crisis

The proposition we are here stating, that the only sound and ultimate basis of human relationships is spiritual, will be challenged on every hand. Those of us who assert it must be ready to meet the familiar accusation of being committed to an illusion of “impractical idealism.” The phrase has become so hackneyed that the adjective has become inseparably associated with the noun. The label will be affixed to us with equal promptness by the defenders of the existing economic system as well as by the revolutionary groups.

To affirm that idealistic motives of man are stronger than his predatory impulses, that love is more powerful in the creation of social organisms than jealousy and hate, that charitableness and reasonableness is more permanently effective in the eradication of evil than violence and bloodshed; – these are regarded as fantastic self-deceptions. The self-styled realists look upon those of us who harbor them, with amused toleration, expressing an admiration for our motives and an unexpressed pity for us and a contempt for the ideals themselves.

Well, I believe it is high time that those of us who accept the label of Christian, clarify our own thinking on this question of the efficacy and practicability of the principles of the Sermon on the Mount. Christianity in the spiritual, not in the organic sense stands or falls on the premises there set forth. Do we or do we not accept them, entirely

and unconditionally? Now the fact is that though millions of people in every age since the advent of Christianity have verbally, and perhaps even sincerely attested to an acceptance of them, no considerable proportion of Christians in any age has ever taken them seriously enough even to attempt to apply them thoroughly.

Now the only essential difference between the teachings of Jesus and the doctrines of hundreds of other prophets and philosophers both before and after His time lies in the uncompromising extremism and absolutism with which He both stated and applied them. If we as His affirmed followers do not or cannot accept them with the same uncompromising absoluteness that He maintained and do not make an honest effort to apply them to the practical issues of human affairs, then we have no conceivable right to apply the label "Christian" to ourselves. In all honesty we should call ourselves "Neo-Christians," or "Half-Christians" or "All-But-Christians."

"Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you.": "Resist not him that is evil.," "whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.," "No man can serve two masters. . . . ye cannot serve God and Mammon.," "But seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you." Re-examine the Sermon on the Mount in its entirety. On that premise unconditionally do we rest the proposition of the essential necessity for spiritual reconstruction. Here are contained the most far-reaching and radical assumptions ever propounded in human history. Do we or do we not accept and believe them in their entirety and

12

with all of their implications? “For He taught them as One having authority.”

I do not see how there can be any halfway acceptance of these principles, how there can be any middle ground. They are either all true or not true at all. Nor do we need to be reminded, I trust, that the founders of our Society saw no middle ground. To George Fox and his spiritual successors it was all or nothing. And the traditional distinction of the Friends today in the eyes of the world is their persistent and uncompromising testimony with respect to some of these tenets at least.

The Inadequacy of Prevailing Theories and Institutions

Let us indeed be realistic. The world today is sorely in need of complete and thoroughgoing realism. When realistic analysis and an honest examination of fundamental as well as surface facts is applied to the theories and ideologies upon which most of our modern social and economic institutions are based, their logical fallacies and intrinsic inadequacies become glaringly apparent. Has the “enlightened self-interest” principle of our Nineteenth Century economic philosophers worked to the advantage of the masses of men? Has it provided a sound and just foundation for our social and economic order? A glance at the chaos of the modern world answers the question. Has science, practical and applied, brought about the Utopia – the solution to all of man’s problems, which not very many years ago was confidently expected of it? A generation or two ago, Macaulay in singing the

praises of Francis Bacon, the reputed founder of modern science, saw science as the inevitable avenue of release to mankind from all of its bondage.

At the present moment it is merely platitudinous to say that despite all of the comforts and conveniences it has brought and the advances it has made in the relief of suffering and the prolongation of life, it has on the other hand created social and economic problem, far more intense and complex than society has ever before faced. So completely has it gotten out of hand in our present economic order that increasing efforts are being made on every hand to thwart its progress in the industrial realm and to find ways of limiting and diminishing its growing power to produce goods quickly and efficiently. It has almost become a menace to its own creators. And as our social disorders grow more acute, science seems completely incapable of providing the solution which will really provide man with a fundamental security and happiness. Realistically then once again, science does not seem to be the answer to our problem of reconstruction.

To proceed a little further with our realism, let us look at the forms of government and economic states which have been developed in Europe within the past few years to supplant or take the place of political democracy. Of the two types of state which have been established, Fascistic and Communistic, though they are diametrically opposite in basis and theory, certain common elements characterize both. Both types are completely and avowedly dictatorial and autocratic. Both are aggressively anti-religious and anti-spiritual, and therefore, again admittedly, materialistic

14

in concept. Both at the present time abrogate the first principles of individual freedom and integrity. Both were created by the usurpation of power through force, violence and bloodshed – and persistently and necessarily maintain themselves by these methods.

It is important, at this point that we recognize the basic distinction between these two types of state and that we further recognize that of the two, the Communistic theory is motivated by unquestionably social and idealistic aims as compared with the viciously imperialistic, autocratic, and nationalistic aims of the other, and that the one is by the general admission of competent observers, providing a social order far more beneficial to the great masses of people than is the other.

But it is important likewise to recognize the fact that Communism, with all of its challenging progress in eliminating the inequalities and oppressions which mark capitalistic societies, is nevertheless at the present moment rooted in violence, maintained by autocratic methods and dialectically committed to a completely materialistic interpretation of life and to the primal theory of class hatred and struggle. It recognizes the violence of revolution as the unfortunate but inevitable means of attaining its ends.

Let me quote a few short sentences from Strachey's *The Coming Struggle for Power*:

“A working-class dictatorship can alone open the way to communism. The assumption of power by the

workers can occur by means of a revolution alone; by means, that is, of an event which takes place over a limited number of years, and of which there may be a critical moment such as the conquest of the existing state apparatus in a capital city which can be 'dated' to a given week of a given month of a given year."

Mr. Strachey goes on to explain that the Communists do not advocate violence; they merely accept it as inevitable, for violence will be used against them and violence must be met with violence. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

Naturally, Mr. Strachey does not accept the spiritual interpretation of experience. In one chapter of his book he completely and summarily disposes of religion. In the entire chapter, Jesus Christ is not even once mentioned! It was Jesus who said, "He who lives by the sword shall die by the sword." Realistically again, there has never been an instance in all human history in which that axiom has not been proved true. The ultimate basis of reconstruction does not lie in that direction.

The Place of Organized Christianity in the Present Crisis

We have been emphasizing thus far the necessity of basing any sound program of social reconstruction upon the spiritual foundations of essential Christianity. What is the place of organized Christianity, of the Christian Church in the present state of the world? Are people turning to it for an answer to these dilemmas with the confident

expectancy of an adequate solution? Is it assuming a position of leadership among the forces seeking the way out of our difficulties?

As a matter of fact there are increasing evidences that it is steadily declining in power and influence. Numerically it has been virtually standing still for a whole generation. From the standpoint of its direct influence upon the thoughts and lives of people, its effectiveness is rapidly diminishing. Contemporary critics are predicting its imminent disintegration. Such commentators as V. S. Calverton, John Strachey and others of the same school declare that it has already ceased to be an important factor in modern society. They quote statistics to clinch the argument and cite factual evidence to prove that its place in modern life is less conspicuous than it has been at any time within the past one hundred years. Such observations are by no means confined to critics outside of the church.

Churchmen themselves are aware of the unmistakable signs of decline, and are attributing the fact to a variety of causes chief among which is the growing secularism of society. This secularism may be rather an effect than a cause, however. It is a truism that the world becomes more secular as religious institutions decline.

Why has the church permitted secularism to displace spirituality? Is it not a fact that the church has permitted itself to become secularized? Recently a group of clergymen and laymen representing the Catholic wing of the Anglican Church issued a statement demanding the complete withdrawal of the Anglican Church from

Protestantism. They desired this separation for the specifically alleged reason that Protestantism had become “spiritually, intellectually and morally bankrupt.” This, remember, from a group of nominal Protestants. That Protestantism as a whole is today disunited and floundering in an eddy of confused and indefinite objectives there can be no doubt. Fundamentalism, constituting the major element in evangelical Protestantism, with its insistence upon scriptural and theological dogmas founded upon outmoded cosmologies, is becoming intellectually and morally impossible for increasing numbers of people.

Liberal Christianity on the other hand has tended to evolve more and more into a despiritualized humanism with little more to offer than a high-minded ethical system. As a religious influence it has steadily waned because it has lost hold of a spiritual dynamic. Organizationally the Church has been imbued with a growing secularism in every phase of its activity, and spiritually it has been emasculated by almost complete identification with materialistic interests.

Ever since the Seventeenth Century the Church has tended increasingly to become aligned with the forces of social privilege and vested interest. It has in many instances not only condoned, but even attempted to justify flagrant social and economic injustices. And even in the midst of the misery and poverty, the persecution and the intolerance, the greed and injustice of the present day, does organized Christianity, except for isolated and exceptional instances, raise its voice in protest and take its stand unequivocally on the side of moral and social

righteousness? All in all the evidence clearly leads us to the conclusion that the Christian Church today, though it is the logical heir and trustee of the spiritual revelation of Jesus Christ, and therefore contains within its essence the answer to the ills of modern society, is nevertheless not consistently or effectively purveying that answer to the world.

III

The Position and Responsibility of the Society of Friends in the Present Crisis

To what extent are these reflections on tile organized church as a whole specifically applicable to the Society of Friends? That they are pertinent to some degree all will admit. Numerically, despite the fact that it has given indication of an upward trend within the past ten years, it is far weaker than it was at earlier periods in its history. The numerical factor is the least important one, however. What of the influence of the Society? What marks is it leaving on the modern world? Is it maintaining the vigor and sweep of its traditional testimony? Is it remaining true to its birthright? Is it justifying in the modern world, the enviable height of its historical reputation?

Let us of this generation of Friends answer these questions honestly and courageously and put aside the question of how much or how little the decline of modern Christianity applies to us specifically. Such a question involves the comparison of ourselves with others which it is both unbecoming and unnecessary to make. Let it be granted that we have had our serious short-comings; that too many of our birthright members have failed to recognize to the full both the challenge and the responsibility of that privilege; that in many quarters leadership and therefore a vital ministry has been sorely lacking; that our testimony on many of the tenets of our faith has been weak and ineffective; that some of our meetings have tended to

become historical rather than religious societies, that other of our meetings have become mere social groups, or societies of ethical culture. By all means, let us grant these things, and recognize the seriousness of the implications. But since they revert to yesterday or even to today let us not dwell upon them. Let us turn to the more vital question of what the state of our Society will be tomorrow.

The Society of Friends today occupies a strategic position in Christendom. In a very definite sense it is not and has never been just another sect. Its founders were clear on that point as far as their own intentions were concerned. Sects are founded upon creeds and dogmas, and the Society of Friends has neither. It started out simply as a body of Seekers for the reality of spiritual experience. That is what it must continue to be if it is to be true to its own inception. Never having been committed to theological dogmas or conceptions of scriptural infallibility, it is completely unaffected by changing theories of the origin or nature of the universe.

On the other hand, in accordance with its traditions it can never be satisfied with the pursuance of a merely ethical system of conduct. It is grounded in the principle of the Inner Light – which signifies the reality of God as revealed in the divine nature of man and expressed in spiritually motivated living. Its historical distinctiveness lies in its affirmation of the transcendent sanctity of the individual spirit which rests alone on the authority of its own direct relationship to God. This is our traditional testimony in a world, which we have seen, is herding man

into mass formations and nullifying at every turn the integrity of the individual.

It is well for us to be reminded frequently of these basic tenets of our faith, because by their very form and nature we stand traditionally and constitutionally prepared to play a leading and vital part in the spiritual reconstruction of our age. For this reason our position is a strategic and challenging one. Our responsibility is so much the greater because of the uniqueness of our opportunity.

Modern Implication of the Principle of the Inner Light

A reexamination of the fundamental principles upon which our Society is founded in the light of their implications in a changing world will help us to see more clearly our responsibility to discover effective ways of fulfilling this responsibility, in the modern world. At the very center of our testimony stands the principle of Inner Light. Just what do we as modern Friends understand that term to mean?

Basically we understand it to mean what George Fox and all of our other predecessors understood by it. But it finds new applications today. It represents the spiritual motivation of all human experience, which implies among other things the ascendancy of the law of love in all human relationships. It represents faith in God and man. It implies an idealistic philosophy of life.

But the fact is that these concepts in themselves are not peculiar to the Quakers, to the ideal of the Inner Light, or even to Christianity itself. Platonism, for instance, represents the most complete expression of abstract idealism ever propounded. Most of the major philosophical systems recognize some sort of God and imply some sort of faith in the spirit of man. John Dewey, the leading modern exponent of pragmatism, in a recent book, affirms a belief in God. But he defines God as human idealism and aspiration supported by definite action directed toward the improvement of man's well-being.

Now that idea is a provocative and valuable one, and excellent as far as it goes. John Dewey also believes in the principle of charity, of community of feeling, of love as the basis of human relationships. And his interpretation of this concept of collectivity of interest achieved through enlightened individualism constitutes the core of pragmatic philosophy and provides a reasonable and practical basis for social reconstruction.

In a recent article in "Christendom," Dr. Gregory Vlastos of Queens University, Ontario, defines love as "mutuality," and admittedly derives the main lines of his thought from the pragmatic collectivist theories of John Dewey. Love in its truest and highest sense is not pure egotism intrinsically selfish in its motivation, as some of the modern mechanistic philosophers would have us believe. Neither is itself abnegating altruism as certain sentimental religionists would have us believe. It is best defined as "Mutuality," which represents a rational and

23

realistic combination of the natural instinct for self-fulfillment and the idealistic impulses of men to contribute to the welfare of other men so that all may live in a peaceful, just and well-ordered society. Love thus defined is the most realistic of all human concepts.

An analysis and definition of this kind is sorely needed by society in its present critical stage. I think it is entirely consistent if not synonymous with Jesus' conception of the idea. It utterly confirms our present thesis that the only adequate basis for reconstruction is the spiritual one.

But there is something lacking, I think, in this philosophy. It remains essentially philosophical and fails to include the religious element. And this is where the concept of the Inner Light enters in with greater validity than ever. We are back once again with the problem of a devitalized ethic. John Dewey defines God as *Idealism* supported by *Social Action*, but our whole civilized history has shown that Idealism, as a purely intellectual concept, is not in itself capable of translating hope into achievement. Action toward the attainment of rational ideals, in order to function at all, needs a propelling and motivating force. The philosophy of pragmatism, sound as it is in most other respects, does not provide that inner propulsion. Ethical systems generally are totally inadequate as practical agents for social reconstruction for the precise same reason. By their very unspiritual and unreligious nature they lack the inner drive without which no action can be developed. That is why religion is the indispensable foundation for any ethical philosophy.

Now the religious or spiritual basis upon which our Society is founded is represented completely in the concept of the Inner Light which provides the God-motivation and dynamic which alone can convert ethical idealism into practical fulfillment. The principle of the Inner Light is derived from the feelings as well as the mind, and therefore contains in its essence that all important emotional drive. It is the mystical force which translates idealism into specific action and execution. It stands for a faith, and not a mere intellectual affirmation; a faith in the reality of God as a living personal entity who is manifest in the spirit of every individual man. And it is faith, not mere belief, which has moved and will continue to move men and mountains.

Yes, as successors of George Fox, we as Friends need above all else, especially in the light of the spiritual poverty of our present world to re-examine, to re-cultivate and to re-affirm that testimony of the Inner Light. Such re-affirmation can become valid only through the renewed and conscientious application of discipline to our thought and conduct; through worship, public and private, through learning and intellectual growth, through absolute dedication to active concerns, through the development of an effective and functioning ministry, through the daily practice of the presence of God in all of our relationships to men, direct and indirect.

The Principle of the Concern Re-interpreted in the Light of Changing Conditions

Once the Inner Light begins to glow within us the vision and the drive for the dedication of ourselves and our Society to vital and active concerns will inevitably follow. For there is an inseparable dovetailing between these basic principles of our Friendly Testimony; the Inner Light, the Concern, the Free Ministry and the Discipline. No one of these can function without all of the others. When they do function they necessarily do so in unison. It is not within the province of this lecture to enumerate the possible concerns in this troubled day in which we live, to which our Society might dedicate itself. Their number is legion. It is not a question of finding them, but of finding the means and the people to serve them effectively. It is definitely within our province, however, to suggest the main lines along which present concerns must be pursued more zealously and new concerns developed if our Society is to assume its true share of responsibility to the modern world.

It is vitally important that we see anew the teachings and character of Jesus in all their fullness, and that we realize thereby that he revealed and appraised man's knowledge of God entirely in terms of man's relationship to other men. We are now living in a world in which applied and technical science within the past thirty years has knit us so closely together that we are forced as never before in history into relationship, direct or indirect with millions of our fellow men. And by the inescapable demands of our own Friendly testimony we are committed to a personal

responsibility to each and all of those with whom we have relationship. That fact tremendously complicates, in the light of changing conditions, our problem of social concern. But the complexity of the problem does not relieve us of the responsibility of meeting it.

Now it is my conviction that under the present organization of society the indirect or institutional concerns are more important than the direct or personal ones. I am my brother's keeper – and that applies to all of my brothers. I am not very fearful of the quality of the personal relationships of the members of our Society, or of Christian believers in general. I am confident of the personal integrity, honesty in private dealings, readiness to give aid to a beggar at the doorstep or a neighbor next-door, and straight-forwardness and righteousness in private business dealings, of most of our members. I am confident too of the relative purity and dignity of the moral character of the great majority of our constituency.

But there is a righteousness which for us must go beyond the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. What are we doing, individually or collectively about the institutional, the social, the political, the economic injustices which are being inflicted upon men in so many quarters of our world today? We have a concern about the man who is doomed to the butchery and savagery of war and we have been outspoken and unabashed in our testimony of it for nearly three hundred years. What is our concern for the millions of men who are doomed to die of slow starvation because of the flagrant injustices pressed upon them by other men? In what respects do we tacitly approve of the

persecutions, deprivations, injustices and the abrogation of all principles of human integrity, by our direct or indirect support of those institutions and forces which perpetrate them?

Just one case in point: if I buy a dress for my little girl because I can get it cheaply, and I know I can get it cheaply because it is made in a sweatshop, I am by my purchase helping to support the sweatshop and to condone the oppression it represents. Such is the nature of our indirect relationships to millions of other men. The implications of the spiritual reconstruction of society center definitely upon the social and economic disorders of modern society and devolve upon us the clear responsibility to dedicate ourselves unequivocally to a concern directed toward the uprooting of the fundamental evils creating these disorders.

Somehow, as a Society and as individual Friends we must get ourselves into the main stream of the currents of justice and righteousness and entirely out of the crosscurrents of selfishness and greed. And the pursuance of this major spiritual concern must be specific rather than general, active rather than passive. It cannot rest with the alleviation of suffering *after* it has been inflicted; it must work to the elimination of the basic causes of that suffering.

Specifically, the practical fulfillment of that concern may involve our active participation in such a challenging program as that presented by the Cooperative Movement which has so completely enlisted the support of that great Japanese Christian leader, Kagawa, and seems at the

present moment to be the one definite scheme for social and economic readjustment which is consistent with Christian idealism. It is at least our duty to learn more about it. Specifically again, it is our responsibility in the further pursuance of this larger social concern to keep alive the principles of political democracy and to commit ourselves to its preservation and ultimate fulfillment. Here again, in the light of our testimony for individual integrity, we must keep in the mainstream, and resist the forces which are seeking to destroy that principle. These are the main directions, it seems to me, in which our sense of concern and our ministry must be impelled if we are to advance the program of spiritual reconstruction.

IV

The Need for the Spirit of the Prophets

The road we have to travel if we are to remain faithful to our testimony and our heritage, will be at best a difficult one. We shall need the vision, the courage and the faith of the prophets – of the prophets who were “not without honor save in their own country.” We must develop the spiritual and moral strength to hold fast to our faith and testimony, though the heavens fall. “Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you.”

So persecuted they such undaunted spirits as Amos and Micah and Jeremiah and hosts of others of their spiritual strain. These men stood virtually alone in their respective times and places in their vision of the ultimate reality of spiritual experience and in their testimony of the truth they had to publish. Jeremiah, suspected and persecuted by all parties, accused of being a traitor to his nation because he remained steadfast in his insistence upon the necessity of spiritual reconstruction in the face of the degenerately materialistic temporal powers of the day, was cast into the dungeon. And still he held firm to his testimony of God against Mammon. From the beginning of his ministry to the end Jesus walked directly toward Calvary, and his faith in God and man waxed stronger as he neared the Cross.

Inevitably the clash between the sharply divided interests and forces so rapidly aligning themselves with growing hatred and intolerance will come. Whether that crisis will be accompanied by such violence and bloodshed as to completely disrupt our present civilization no one can say. It may be that the children of light will prevail over the children of darkness at least far enough to mitigate the force of the shock and to lessen the violence, the persecution and the oppression. It may even be that the forces of spiritual righteousness will muster, before it is too late, sufficient strength to achieve by peaceful and gradual steps, the reconstruction of the world in time to avert an intervening period of physical strife. Such an issue is devoutly to be wished for.

But if the crisis comes in our day, if violence and hate and falsehood surround us on every hand, what will be the measure of our spiritual stature? Will we be afraid of our isolation in the pronouncement of our testimony of Christian love? Will we fall victims to one or the other of the currents of mob hysteria eddying around us, lose our faith and our courage, and under pressure of incited prejudices, ourselves resort to measures which utterly betray our spiritual trust? Such is the test, in greater or less degree, which Friends must face within the next generation or two.

Among us there will be prophetic spirits who will grow in stature and in strength as the lines close in. And no matter what the price they have to pay in personal suffering, no matter how they are maligned and reviled, they will remain firm in the faith. For the race of the prophets is a

hardy one. Through every age and crisis of history they have prevailed. They represent the most real and solid substantiation of our faith, for their spirits and the truths they uttered still prevail over all other truths. Amid the changes and the disruptions of present institutions which the coming years will see, we must remain true to the conviction that this inexorable law of absolute love, this one fundamental truth of human experience transcends all other truths. *We must continue to affirm it, more insistently than ever, and to maintain that the spiritual reconstruction which proceeds from this basis must underlie and pervade every social or economic theory upon which any new society is built.*

The Renewal of Our Own Spiritual Vitality

As in the past, so in the future, though nations and peoples and kingdoms pass, the prophets will prevail. For us, as Friends, the simple question is: shall prophets spring from our midst? Have we sufficient spiritual vitality to produce them? We are faced with the challenge of a crucial test. It is wonderful to live in days which prove one's mettle. Let us "rejoice and be exceeding glad" that there is bequeathed to us that bold adventure of faith upon which we can set forth. Friends may be living in an age at this moment in which they will be put to the test of preserving their spiritual identity under conditions similar to those faced by the early Friends. We must gird our loins and put oil in our lamps. We are faced with the necessity, in this work of larger spiritual reconstruction, of reconstructing our own spiritual foundations, of finding anew the full meaning of the Inner Light as it applies to our own times,

of putting renewed emphasis upon our worship, of rededicating ourselves to our traditional concerns, of reaching untouched areas in our fulfillment of the free ministry, and of applying in our daily living, in all of our direct and indirect human relationships, the rigid discipline of personal righteousness, “to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.” And persistently we must ask ourselves this one question so profoundly challenging in our present world,

“What Think Ye of Christ?”

About the Author

Dr. Howard W. Hintz was pastor of the Old Spring Street Presbyterian Church on Varick Street from 1844 to 1952. As a clergyman, Dr., Hintz became well known here for his homiletic observations.

“Our complicated social structure is multiplying both the number and the variety of the demands being made on the time and interests of people,” he said while preaching at the Queens Baptist Church in Queens Village.

“The result is an increasingly apparent disintegration of individual personality. There are too many conflicting standards. In the incessant activity of modern life and in the complexity of that activity, men find themselves constantly running at; cross purposes. The consequence is a spiritual instability which thwarts the full development and expression of the personality.”

Dr. Hintz was one of the first Brooklyn directors of the National Conference of Christians and Jews.

He was the author of several books, among them “Religion and the Crisis of Democracy” (1938), “The Quaker Influence in American Literature” (1940), “Religion and Higher Education” (1955) and “Philosophy and the Social Order” (1960).

He also contributed to *The Journal of Philosophy*, *College English*, *The Journal of English and German Philology*, and *Christian Century*.

A native Brooklynite, Dr. Hintz graduated from City College in 1925, received an M.A. degree at Columbia University in 1928 and his Ph.D. at New York University nine years later. He also studied at the Yale Divinity School.

Ordained to the Presbyterian ministry in 1927, he was pastor at Queens Baptist before his assignment to the Spring Street church.

Dr. Hintz started his teaching career at Brooklyn College when the college was founded in 1930, as an English instructor. He was promoted through assistant and associate professor to full professor in 1951. Two years later he became professor of English and philosophy and was elected philosophy department chairman.

About the Lectures

The William Penn Lectures started as a ministry of the Young Friends' Movement of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. In the beginning of the last century, "Young Friends" was the community of young adults from both the Hicksite and the Orthodox Philadelphia Yearly Meetings, which reunited in 1955. The Young Friends Movement began the lecture series "for the purpose of closer fellowship; for the strengthening by such association and the interchange of experience, of loyalty to the ideals of the Society of Friends; and for the preparation by such common ideals for more effective work through the Society of Friends for the growth of the Kingdom of God on Earth." The name of William Penn was chosen because the Young Friends Movement found Penn to be "a Great Adventurer, who in fellowship with his friends started in his youth on the holy experiment of endeavoring 'To live out the laws of Christ in every thought, and word, and deed; and that these might become the laws and habits of the State.'"

The first run of William Penn Lectures were given between 1916 and 1966, and are warmly remembered by Friends who attended them as occasions to look forward to for fellowship with our community, inspiration, and a challenge to live into our faith. The lectures were published by the Book Committee of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting has granted Pendle Hill and Quaker Heron Press permission to reproduce the lectures as free ebooks.

Although it was [announced](#) in 1960 that the series would be discontinued several lectures were published in the early '60s. It appears that the lectures given between 1923 and 1931 were never published. If we come upon manuscripts of these lectures, we hope to publish them in future.

In 2010, the Young Adult Friends of PYM revived the series, officially launching the second run of the William Penn Lectures in 2011. [The series was renamed](#) the *Seeking Faithfulness* series in 2016, as part of the Young Adult Friends of PYM's concern for dismantling racism within the yearly meeting and the wider society. It no longer felt rightly ordered to have a major event named after a slaveholder. The [Seeking Faithfulness](#) series is hosted by the Young Adult Friends for the benefit of the whole yearly meeting community, and invites a Friend to challenge us all to explore new ways to practice our Quaker faith. The Seeking Faithfulness series seeks to nourish our spiritual lives and call us to faithful witness in our communities and throughout the world.