Lecture 1937

William Penn

The Open Life

Douglas V. Steere

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by
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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.

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The Open Life

As I read the journals, the letters and the essays of men like George Fox, Isaac Penington and William Penn, there is only one phase that I find adequate to describe what I find there: *the power of an open life.* Their acts of boldness, their strength under persecution, their appalling disregard for convention; the clarity of their witness; even the very freshness of the speech they minted in order to describe their newfound life, all testify to these men's lives having been opened and held open to a power that shone through them.

Today the Society of Friends is happy to be known as an eminently respectable and sensible people. We are held in high esteem by nearly all. Someone recently noted how admirably we had adapted to our environment. Our actions are marked by caution. We are one of the "*historic* peace churches." We have a great name to keep unsoiled so that it is essential to consider and reconsider about giving offense to society at large, and to that considerable increment of society at large that lodges within our own lives, on anything except the century-old testimonies.

From time to time it is good to hear of the lives of early Friends, just as it is good to read over the Sermon on the Mount or Jesus' commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves. It heightens aspiration and is not unlike setting the clock a half-hour fast and then always making allowance for it. Above all we are determined to avoid being fanatical about religion. We know how to apply the brakes. Did not John Keble write, "no need for us to wind ourselves too high,

for sinful man beneath the sky"? If one stays within the bounds of a decent respectability in religion, we argue, one is at least preserved from a good deal of hypocrisy and many other of the dangers of zeal. It is true that not many of our members travel in the ministry any longer. Publishing truth is after all a pretension to certainty and a trespassing upon the personalities of others that is unbecoming to a generation that looks upon religion as a delicate matter of personal taste. On our lips there is the prayer: Oh God, teach us to do thy will – *to a certain extent.*

To a certain extent. Is this the inevitable result of these centuries of adaptation to our environment? Is this as near as we care to come to the power of the open life that laid hold of those early Friends' lives and that strikes out at us from them? In the first book of the *World as Will and Idea,* Arthur Schopenhauer is commenting on the way in which an orang-outang can be distinguished from a man. He notes that the orang-outang is so cunning that he knows enough to warm himself at a fire, but his cunning does not reach to the next stage. He does not know enough to put more wood on the fire to renew it. Do we in this generation know how to renew the fire of our great past or must it slowly die out among us? Are we to go on as the "Inheritors," living tamely off the principal that has been stored up for us; are we what Albert Schweitzer calls the *Epigone,* the pigmies who overrun the earth after the great ones have died and left it? Or are we aware enough of our impotency to be ready to be renewed, to come up into the beginning, to be laid hold of by that same power of the open life?

I am not ready to answer that question for the Society. It is your question to answer. I know how dangerous it is to seek radical change before there is a deep inner feeling of the need for that change. "If thou wilt receive the kingdom that cannot be shaken," wrote Penington, "thou must wait to have that discovered in thee which may be shaken." But that waiting can only be a passive waiting to one who is already content. If he is discontented, he is already seeking, and the discovery is already being made within him. I know a number of Young Friends, at least, in whom *that* in themselves which may be shaken has been discovered: *That* in themselves which is only the shell of our contemporary late Renaissance industrialized culture; *that* in themselves which is only their proud confidence in the self-sufficiency of their "vivid and persuasive personalities;" *that* in themselves which although spoken of as sensibleness and Christian caution turns out to be chiefly lack of faith, cowardice, sloth, and native inertia. For these seekers, at least, the search after the conditions of the power of the open life is imperative at this time.

What are the conditions of such an open life in our day? Because these early Friends have such a ring of the authentic about them I am drawn to search them for these conditions. But it is equally important that we see that these conditions be applicable to the life in which we stand today. There must of necessity, then, be a continual shuttling between their insights and our life situation.

The conditions that I find in these men of the open life are a sense of vocation, a living in the decision, a yielding to the *principle,* a coming under holy obedience or into devotion, a

life of practice in the presence of God. These are not really separable. They are all a part of a single response, a single condition. But we shall enter the temple by several gates.

The Sense of Vocation

Look at Fox, at Penington, at Penn. Each had a sense of vacation, of mission. They had a sense of having been called or drawn into a new life and of having received a charge for it; of having been set apart for use, and their lives and their work and their goods were all *available.* They were open to be used. Each of these men had found and been found by an order beyond themselves in whose service they revealed this power of the open life.

What did this sense of vocation mean to these men? I was forced to explain this as best I knew how before some seventy members of the Bruderhof near Fulda in west-central Germany three years ago. After the war these people lived in German cities, and like ourselves were seeking after a deeper visitation of the religious life. They reached the conclusion that it could not be found amid the compromises necessary to live in bourgeois society, and with their leader Eberhard Arnold, withdrew to a large farm which was later exchanged for the one they now occupy. They purchased the farm and the material for the buildings with their own joint resources which were assisted by considerable gifts from English Friends who were deeply interested in this venture. They have lived there since that time engaged in farming, handicrafts, writing and printing religious books, and in the education of their children.

Until 1933 they were nearly self-supporting. They insisted that only in such colonies, only in such withdrawal, could the religious vocation be pursued in our day, and urged me to explain how we could honestly believe to the contrary. Their life, with considerable liberating modifications is of course the pattern of the mediaeval monastic conception of the religious vocation, which if not for all, is at least for those who feel called to special dedication. The conventional Protestant pattern, for those who feel called to a special dedication, which may be regarded as something of an individualistic equivalent for this membership in a community set apart, is entrance into the professional ministry with its monasticism of the pastor's study. This has persisted up to our own day in Protestant circles. To a young man who has a deep sense of religious vocation it was assumed that he would prepare for the home or foreign ministry. Here, too, was a life apart. The usual compromises of existing society would be spared this man and the congregation would provide for him.

Early Friends refused to identify the religious vocation with either of these established patterns. They asserted their unity with all creation and except where ostracism and persecution drove them to withdraw into separate communities, they sought to live in the world and to bear their witness from within. Nor was there to be a single professional ministerial pattern for those who felt the call to special dedication. All useful work was an acceptable ministry to God and such vocal ministry as they had, sprang out of the corporate group, all members of which accepted this broader conception of the ministry. Yet by their vocation these

Friends did feel themselves knit to an inner community, to a new order, to a new unity with men that severely limited their conformity to the existing social practices of their time and yoked them to their transformation.

But consider the price of this continuing to live in an outward order whose many wrongs they were acutely aware of, and felt called upon to transform. Only by the most intensive cultivation of their lives within the *new order* was their any hope of resisting the pull of its contorted outer counterpart in the world about them. Yet they never tired of repeating that the ultimate blasphemy was to break the active bond between the two. While the decisive and costly action of the Bruderhof, as of every really sacrificial answer to a calling, cannot but challenge most of us in our complacent acceptance of our posts in the world, yet this withdrawal has not been, and unless I mistake the genius of our faith in the unity of creation, cannot be, our way. In spite of all the difficulties and complexities and dangers of being absorbed by the secular culture of our own day, I believe that this insight into the religious vocation as one to be planted squarely in the thick of the world is sound. John Locke declares that no democratic parliament should be allowed to be in continuous session. The legislators should be dismissed for a part of each year in order to return to their homes and to live under the laws they have enacted. This is not irrelevant to the religious vocation.

But if we do take this free conception of the religious vocation many believe that it is still to be proved in our generation whether the world will not in time wear down the religious sense of vocation unless the person be in some

special form of direct service to others like teaching, or social work, or medicine. The sense of purified isolation from the rest of the industrial and commercial life that those who make this assertion presume to exist in teaching, social work or medicine is not borne out in fact. Teachers, social workers and doctors are caught up in the same fabric of our contemporary life as others, they are paid from the same sources, live usually in the same communities, and read the same magazines and newspapers as others. Only as they are blind are they unaware of these connections. And the fact that they deal directly with people continually instead of with problems of organization, of commerce, or with animals, or with physical materials is no guarantee whatever of their persistence in the religious vocation. We all stand at the same frontier.

The early Friends, however, never confused the real vocation with the way a man earned his living. They placed only a single condition on the way of making a living. It was to be open, i.e., it was to be constructive and not destructive to our fellows. Given that, they were always clear that one's deep vocation could be lived in the midst of a wide variety of forms of bread-work; pencil-maker, lens-grinder, tailor, housewife, these were all possible vehicles. One's bread-work is related to one's true vocation as every detail of one's life is related to it, subject to it, and exalted by it. No more. Some seek to derive their validity in this world from the dignity of their profession. But not the person under a sense of religious vocation. He possesses his validity from the order that indwells him.

Today we see that the sense of religious vocation may not only work through and light up conventional forms of work. It may at times lead men to establish new patterns of work not yet envisaged by others. Pierre Ceresole's work in establishing the international labor camps, Kagawa's work, Grenfell's work, Gandhi's work, the work the Wilmer Young's are doing at Delta Farm, the work Richard Gregg is seeking in connection with reaching labor groups in this country with his nonviolent approach, the work of the "Friendly advisers" in the coal fields – these are all new forms of work that the deeper vocation of these men has helped them to create. Men and women of this kind can say with Unamuno, "Sow yourselves, sow the living part of you in the furrows of the world" because they have done it, and they have done it in fresh ways.

By none of these varying garments in which the real problem of vocation has sought to conceal itself: withdrawal from society; the professionalized ministerial pattern, the identification of the religious vocation with certain special forms of work, in none of these were the early Friends misled. Vocation, the real vocation is the yielding of a man's life, all of his life to an order beyond the self that unites all creation. It is a willingness to be used in its service no matter how obscure, or how prominent or how costly that service may be. What your vocation will lead you to, *you* must discover. What is important is, have you opened your life to this calling. The early Friends found a sense of vocation to be both a condition and a mark of the open life.

The Need of Decision

The second condition of the open life which is really inseparable from the sense of vocation is living in the decision. A life that is itself centered and is living, making the minor decisions in the life to which the major decision committed it, does something to the lives of others. Talk to a man who has yielded to his vocation. He is alive. He is teachable. Yet there is a sureness, there is a kind of authority, there is a clean, clear, frank ring to what he says and to what he leaves unsaid. When you speak, he listens and a conversation with him is two-sided. He speaks to what you have said and to you through what you have said. If you are not sincere, he is often silent and you do the talking. There is something divisive about his speech as there is about his silences. You feel it searching you and unsettling you toward inwardness. For his person is alive. He is under obedience to something.

I once had a two-hour conversation with Karl Barth at Bonn. After the first ten minutes we were in almost continuous disagreement, not about details, but about fundamentals. I remember walking up the street towards the trolley after I had left his house. I had a sense of having just come out of a cold bath and a hard rub with a rough towel. I knew what I believed more clearly than ever before as a result of this conversation with him in which he searched me and challenged me to the root. I knew that I had met someone who was alive. His way was not my way, but he was laid hold of by this

engagement, this calling. He had yielded to it and was alive. He made others alive and he made others decide.

In 1694, William Penn who had lived in many circles high and low, and had seen and had dealings with all types of men, wrote of George Fox, "Having been with him for weeks and months together on divers occasions, and those of the nearest and most exercising nature, and that by night and by day, by sea and by land, in this and in foreign countries: and I can say I never saw him out of his place or not a match for every service and occasion. For in all things he acquitted himself like a man, yea a strong man, a new and heavenly minded man; contented, modest, easy, steady, tender, it was a pleasure to be in his company." He is here describing a man who is alive. To have a friendship with such a man was costly and it was decisive – as Penn knew to his profit. It had cost him his former way of life. But it had been by Penn's own choice. He had worn the old ungrounded, undisciplined "free" life as long as he could and then by his own volition he had yielded it, not to Fox, but to the order with which Fox's life was engaged.

There is a clearness about such engaged lives that recognizes the price of all deepest friendships. John Reed once told one of the editors of the *Metropolitan,* "You and I call ourselves friends, but we are not really friends, because we don't believe in the same things." The pace at which that belief proceeds must be set by the believer, but the existence of all real friendship rests ultimately on both parties moving toward a fixed point beyond themselves. That inflexible loyalty to the order beyond himself may appear as a menace to friendship – as its enemy. Yes, it is an enemy to the soft

friendships, the gentle sentimental attachments that try to make each other their gods, but only succeed in a temporary form of idol-worship. But as Nietzsche saw so clearly, this enmity is the growing tip of real friendship: "In one's friend one shall have one's best enemy."

Penn's way, Penn's Holy Experiment in Government, Penn's connections in high places, Penn's witness, they were not for Fox. They were for William Penn. But to be livingly connected with a calling from the ground of life – to be subject to the root, to be convinced of its life and power – that was a lived point beyond either – and decision in regard to that was the enemy in Fox that Penn and all others who knew Fox recognized and felt until they yielded. For here was a man who saw that the Kingdom of God existed and who lived in it. And such a life was decisive. And decisive lives call for decision. And if men feel the axe of decision laid to the root of their lives they tremble and they burn.

We find that it is so much more pleasant to study the Bible as literature; to study the history of Christianity as a great seminal power that has laid hold of the western world and intertwined itself with so many of its institutions, tempering them for good; to study the great philosophical proofs for God and the theological systems that have borne the Christian revelation; or to study the varieties of interpretation of the Christian religion that have emerged in the Christian churches. This is all perfectly legitimate subject matter to engage the mind. There may come a time when belief will set men to pursue these studies.

But Penington's counsel is always well to remember, "Knowledge without life dulls the true appetite." And this knowledge is not to be confused with the religious category itself. For over the door of the religious category is written *"Decision."* "The glory of God's love," wrote George MacDonald, "lies in the inexorableness of his demands." And that means not a willingness to read of the revelations of others, or of the development of the church or of its intellectual defenses. It means a willingness to exist within the Kingdom of Heaven, a willingness to be laid hold of by the love of God, a willingness to be known of Him, a willingness to come and to remain under holy obedience, and a willingness to reweave the life in response to this power that you have discovered.

The gate into the open life is strait and the way is narrow. Like it or not, if you would come into the open life you cannot escape Decision. And after Decision there are continuous decisions. But Decision here does not mean a screwing up of will with tense fist-clinching heroics in favor of some noble resolution. It is unlikely to come at the end of an impressive syllogistic proof of God's existence. It probably will include no ravishing of the emotions. You have no doubt had excitations of all three of these functions to little subsequent effect. No, Decision, the Decision one sees in the lives of these early Friends came not from an effort on the part of these functions of will, reason, or affection, but by their yielding themselves to their *ground,* their *root,* the

principle of God in man, as Penington calls it, which is the abiding, ever-present, indwelling Christ.

Living from the Principle

Central in all sense of vocation, back of all need for Decision, lies the presence of the root or the principle of God in each man, that is not to be confused with his will, or his reason, or his feelings, yet which is their ground, their base, and longs to use them in its service. Nowhere can this distinction between the root and the functions be better illustrated than in the distinction between a genius and an apostle. A genius is a man natively endowed with a Herculean power of will, or a rare intelligence, or a set of feelings as sensitive as an Aeolian harp, or perhaps with some combination of these. An apostle may have none of these high native gifts, but all that he has has been yielded to the principle, the root, within him. The life of the genius is restricted to a few. The life of an apostle is open to all. A genius may be an apostle, but not as genius – only as man. And perhaps no group of men find it so difficult to live from this root as those whose native genius in any one of these ranges offers them the temporary consolations of brilliant self-sufficiency. William Penn knew this well enough.

As long as these functions rebelliously seek a pretentious self-sufficiency no matter how magnificent their effort, the life of the bearer can never be really open; nor can it open the lives of others; nor can it open the life of society.

Yet to yield all to this root is not, as the advocates of human depravity love to repeat, to strangle for once and for all the

native functions of will and intellect and feelings in man. Yielding to, and ever attentive to this center, these functions become for the first time really fruitful, really nurtured, and feel the sensitive reins of the divine leadings that exist for their guidance. Given this yielding, the root is related to the functions as the palm is to the fingers, and be these fingers long or short, tapering or blunt, strong or weak, by their native endowment, they are all open to connection with the palm. Given this yielding to the "Principle of God which lies hid in the hearts of man" so that it is "raised and come into dominion" Jacob Boehme can write of the will, "He hath given to the will an open gate in Christ"; Isaac Penington, of the reason, "Reason is not sin; but a deviating from that from which reason came is sin"; and John Woolman, of the feelings, "My heart was tender and often contrite and universal love to my fellow creatures increased in me."

It is, then, in this *principle* and in the dominion of this principle over all, that we have our true being. It is in this principle that we receive our inner education. It is in and through this principle that the persuasive love of a Father God moves: a God whose love is so great that it refuses to crush its child into dependent yielding, as all earthly power does, but will only persuade him, leaving him free to open and to share in this abiding Life in the world, or to remain closed. "Only the omnipotent," wrote Kierkegaard in his Journal, "could so restrain Himself. Any less power would press out its egotism at some point and make others dependent."

It is here at the ground of man's being, and in God's love for it, and in His longing for it to open into life within a man and

guide his every function, it is here and here alone that it is possible to locate any realistic basis of human equality. At this point the accomplishments, and the world's estimates and the unequal gifts of natural genius which we simply cannot deny, all of these drop away and all men are discovered of equal worth. For before God each bearer of the principle is of infinite concern.

It is in the *principle* that we have fellowship with the mystical body of Christ, here is the vine of which we are the branches. Here is the "Spring which has no commencement giving itself to all the rivers, never exhausted by what they take." Here is the *new order,* the *new community*. Here is the center out of which comes the enduring concern for cutting away those barriers to equality which warp the lives of God's loved ones, our brothers in the world. Here and not in some sociological or political doctrine is to be found the basis of any social reforms that Friends have ever undertaken. Here is a source of renewal in reverence for life and in fellowship with every man and every creature that never rests in one who yields to the principle. Here is a source that lets no natural barrier like tradition or custom or numbers or the supposed incorrigibility of human nature move it.

"Race discrimination has gone on forever," says the world. "Then it has gone on long enough," says the principle, and soon some daring director of a school announces that it will henceforth not exclude any qualified pupil on the ground of race. Here, in the principle, comes the courage to persist when the majority of the patrons of the school threaten to withdraw their children if racial discrimination is not

continued. Here, in the principle, comes the power to know the condition of those who resist the life and comes the direction to speak to that condition.

Is it any wonder that John Woolman was continually concerned to "keep close to the *root*" as he was drawn to bear witness against the want of loving unity that could permit slavery, ill-treatment of the Indians, overwork of the sailors and the post-boys. For it was from the *root* or principle that his concern sprang, it was from the *root* that he received the power and courage to continue his testimony against it, and from the *root* that there was discovered to him the condition of those with whom he must labour. Such a man, you can imprison or put to death. But while he is in the root, his life strikes at yours and even great rulers or those in positions of power are not immune from its influence.

The sense of vocation, the necessity for decision, the yielding to the *principle*, the *root*, are now before us as conditions of the open life.

Devotion and Holy Obedience

During the past thirty years much has been written about the mystical character both of our experience and of our forms of worship. That re-emphasis has been both sound and good. But the time has come when our generation must ask ourselves the eminently practical question: What is that single condition that underlies *my* entry into and *my* existing within that open life that we have sensed in the mystics? What is the single condition that can keep *me* renewed in my religious vocation while I live neck-deep in a world so much

of whose culture I have come to recognize as diametrically opposed to this life? What is the single condition in which saint, mystic, and simple peasant believer are all one? That condition is called either *devotion* or *holy obedience*. "We are not devout," wrote Jean Grou, "just because we are able to reason well about the things of God nor because we have grand ideas or fine imaginations about spiritual matters, nor because we are sometimes affected by tears. Devotion is not a thing which passes, which comes and goes as it were, but it is something habitual, fixed, permanent which extends over every instant of life and regulates all our conduct."

There have been so many haloes placed about the saints and so much reverence spun around our own men and women who have lived in the power of the open life that we are in danger of putting them in a class apart. The difference between one of them and most of us is not that he has had some mysterious experience, or that he possesses some natural genius or bent to sanctity or some obscure faculty of apprehension. The difference is simply a difference in the completeness of his abandonment to *the principle,* and the resulting influence of this on the simplification and ordering of his life. Such a man is "self-given without condition to the purposes of God." We are not. Jan Ruysbroeck put it simply to some fashionable young Brussel's priests who were visiting him: "Ye are as holy as ye wish to be." It is a difference of devotion. It is a difference of obedience. "It is easy to profess and make a show of truth but hard to come into it," wrote Penington.

Here is the fourth condition of the open life that we must learn, not with our minds alone, but with our beings. For

vocation, decision and life under the principle, the root, are all conditioned by devotion, by holy obedience, and for one who has given up the outward forms of the mediaeval religious vocation how carefully this obedience must be adhered to! Once more, however, the obedience, the devotion is not grim. It is glad. And it is prompt and spirited. Listen to two great guides of souls on the life of devotion: *It is glad*. "No one is so amiable in the ordinary intercourse of life as a really devout man. He is simple, straightforward, open as the day, unpretentious, gentle, solid and true. Whatever some persons may say, true devotion is never a melancholy thing either for itself or for others. How should the man who continually enjoys the truest happiness, the only happiness ever be sad? 'To serve God is to reign', even if it be in poverty, in humiliation, and in suffering," wrote Jean Grou.

And it is prompt and spirited: "Devotion", declared Francis de Sales, "Is simply the promptitude, fervour, affection, and agility which we have in the service of God: and there is a difference between a good man and a devout man; for he is a good man who keeps the commandments of God, although it be without great promptitude or fervour; but he is devout who not only observes them but does so willingly, promptly and with a good heart."

Here is the heart of the matter, and if it is grasped it throws all the practices connected with devotion into a fresh light. Prayer becomes a time of coming under obedience to the principle. It does not matter where we begin in prayer. We may begin with a petition, something we feel we must have. Demand that your dear one be saved. Soon you will find

yourself pleading that you be made worthy to have her saved to continue companionship with you, then you may begin to sense a longing to be used in God's service whatever the outcome, and you may conclude by rededicating both yourself and the one you love to God's love and get up from your prayer quiet and still. "Did thee yield?" is the real query to put to ourselves as to the outcome of prayer.

In intercessory prayer, it is good to "retire, sit awhile, and travail for them." We may also "feel how life will arise . . . and how mercy will reach towards them and how living words from the tender sense may be reached forth to their hearts deeply by the hand of the Lord for their good." Yet it may not be only a word, but a visit, and a frank talk, or a gift, or a position you could secure for them, or a basic change in your own manner of life that will be required of you as the result of your intercessory prayer. Unless you are ready for action under holy obedience, it would be well to abandon intercessory prayer. Ward Applegate once told me of how an uncle of his prayed for the *health* of a nephew who had just taken over a farm where the barnyard, through the spring months, was a wallow of mud. And the next day he delivered a pair of hip boots to the nephew.

When we grasp the real nature of prayer as an exercise of devotion we may then see why the man of devotion "has no need of a book or a method or of great efforts of the head or even of the will" in his prayer. The further a man goes in devotion the simpler the prayer may become until a Francis of Assisi may in the later years of his life murmur only, "My God, my all," and there is nothing more to say. The apparatus is wholly secondary. But the recovery of the root,

the being brought low, the being baptized into the condition of those in need, the yielding to the principle, the becoming subject to the root, coming into holy obedience, into devotion: that is the heart of prayer. And only the regular practice of that can hold a man in his vocation in the midst of the diversions of our day. George Fox has said all that is necessary: "Be still and cool in thy own mind and spirit from thy own thoughts, and then thou wilt feel the principle of God, to turn thy mind to the Lord, from whom life comes; whereby thou mayest receive His strength, and power to allay all blusterings, storms and tempests. That is it which works up into patience, into innocency, into soberness, into stillness, into staidness, into quietness, up to God with His Power.... Be staid in the principle of God in Thee that it may raise thy mind up to God . . . and thou wilt find strength from Him and find Him to be a God at hand."

The little things that become clear to us take on a new importance under holy obedience. "Take heed of despising the day of Small things, or the low voice of God in thy heart," said Penington. To the world that judges from without, these often seem trifles and irritating scruples. To one who comes under holy obedience it is not easy to learn to readjust one's sights and to realize that there is nothing either little or great when it is a question of the things of God. What bears His accent, however small it may seem in itself, becomes imperative. It is out of scrupulous regard for these gentle intimations that Fox was drawn to testify against oppressing the poor, against underpaying servants, against the death penalty for stealing, against Friends holding slaves in the Barbadoes. Here is the way the testimonies grew. Here

in these little intimations come the concerns that took Mrs. Noble to the Rhondda Valley in 1926 or Corder Catchpool to Lithuania ten years later. Here is the living bud out of which the valid new insights and patterns emerge.

I was lost in the woods a year ago and last summer I resolved to purchase a compass. I chose the one I wanted, and the keeper of the little hardware store in a small northern Michigan town threw in a piece of advice as he wrapped it up, "There's just one thing, son, you want to remember about this compass – *believe it*!" It is in the little things, in recognizing what William Blake calls "the holiness of Minute Particulars," in minding the ray of light we have, in believing the compass and following it, that we grow in holy obedience in devotion. "There is no safe dallying with truth." "He that condemneth small things shall fall by little and little."

Harold Gray who was a conscientious objector in the war and was imprisoned first at Leavenworth and then at Alcatraz, once said, "The world goes forward because in the beginning one man or a few were true to the light they saw, and by living by it, enabled others to see." It may all be summed up in a sentence that was used to describe the career of a woman who had lived in the power of the open life, "She started a great work by beginning small and promptly."

At Pendle Hill last summer, I received several lessons in weaving. One of the first things I had to learn was how to go back and correct a mistake I had made and then to go on. Mistakes scarcely mattered if one knew how to correct them and to go on. An important thing that must be learned in a

life under holy obedience is to learn how to take failures, to learn how to be patient with ourselves. We want to respond, to throw off all our faults at once. “We are vexed with ourselves, we are angry at having been angry. We are impatient at having been impatient.” When we fail we are discouraged and are tempted to give up altogether and to return to drifting again. Jean Grou suggests that a devout man “does not rely upon his good thoughts and resolutions, but simply upon the grace and goodness of God. If he were to fall a hundred times a day, he would not despair; but he would stretch out his hands lovingly to God and beg Him to lift him up. . . . It is not those who have the most courage, the most generosity, the most love who make the greatest efforts but those who are not afraid of falling and staining themselves a little provided they always advance.” I wish that Grou had mentioned a sense of humor here, for I believe God endowed us with this gift to help deflate us and make us at all bearable to others.

The dry times come, the plateaus in the curve of spiritual learning, the lean weeks and months. Then, as never before, do we come to recognize the preciousness of a life that is devoted to the principle in spite of all. It is in those times that we are schooled in patience. “There is a time to want as well as to abound while we are in this world. And the times of wanting, as well as abounding are greatly advantageous to us,” wrote Penington after he had known the most extreme worldly as well as inner privations. Von Hügel used to remind us of the way a desert traveler took a sandstorm. He would get his camel to lie down, lie down behind him, cover himself with his robe and quietly wait. When the storm had

ceased, he would rise, shake out the blanket, mount the camel, and ride on. Holy obedience, devotion, calls for patience with ourselves as we move in the vocation, in the decision, keeping close to the root.

Practice in the Presence of God

But there is a sense in which prayer, and the meticulous following of the "low voice of God in the heart," and the learning to be patient with ourselves are still incomplete. For there is still the life of action where we are planted in the center of a world which seldom recognizes our deeper vocation, which resists us, a world with which, if we are not to withdraw to a Bruderhof, we must engage. Here is the real test of the possibility of this open life in our present situation. Here often enough our prepared plans that came out of the silence may seem to be inadequate to meet a new exigency that has arisen. Here is the field of our bread-work, or here is the scene in which we must carry out our concern. And it is here that we meet the fifth condition and the privilege of the open life – *the practice* not only *of* but *in the presence of God.* Here is the inner activity of prayer and contemplation turned outward but retaining its center.

We have long been taught about entering the presence of God in prayer and there earning enough serenity to face a few hours of dispersion in outer activities. Fox was unwilling to stop here. He stood and acted in the presence and power of God when mobs were jostling and kicking and pounding him, and in this presence even his bruised body was renewed from within.

If we live close to the root, the root is as available in action as in contemplation. We must learn to act as well as to pray in the presence of God. That is the way of faith that is open to all. Meister Eckhart commented on the importance of learning to work "not as if one were running away from the inner contemplation ... but one should learn to work with this contemplation in him, with him, and emerging from him so that . . . one becomes accustomed to working collectedly ... for then he becomes a fellow workman with God." *Practice in the presence of God* means to "work collectedly" and to become "a fellow workman with God" – nothing less.

Is this kind of action in the presence of God a phantasy, or is it capable of being practiced in our hard-driven, highly technicized time? Here is the word of one man, Dr. Fritz Kunkel, a practicing psychotherapist in Berlin, who is known to some of you. I quote from a letter I received last month which was provoked by his recent reading of Isaac Penington : "Please imagine my work. I have to prepare myself in the morning, let us say by prayer, in silence or in words. Then the patient is coming. The battle between Light and Darkness has to be fought; thousands of words have to be said. The former preparation may be the most important thing. But how should or could it go on directing my words, forming my thoughts and influencing my work? This later influence of my former preparation may be unconscious. I may forget it. I may think only of my patient and his medical situation – and I may fail in my diagnosis. But suppose this influence works on by keeping me aware of the presence of God through all my words, decisions and actions: not only the line, connecting the patient and the psychologist, but also the

triangle: patient-psychologist-God, is effective in my conscious mind. Suppose every word is consciously spoken 'in the presence of God' – don't you think this would be the right way to act in difficult situations and even in all situations of our life? I am glad that the responsibility of my daily work forces me to seek this way of perpetual awareness and consciousness and aliveness. I shall understand gradually and slowly what is meant by the 'perpetual prayer' which is mentioned by so many religious people: the decision, the responsible action, performed by ourselves, and at the same time as much as possible not by ourselves but by the higher instance which uses us as its tools, that's what I mean." Fritz Kunkel has in essence written a telling modern commentary on Penington's line, "It is not the doing of things which is of value.... But it is the doing of things in the virtue, in the life, in the power . . ."

Here is practice in the presence of God. Is this easy working in the presence of God transferable to the assembly line of the Budd Manufacturing plant, or the Ford Motor Company, or to a coal mine, or to a household servant who is expected to stay on duty 14 hours a day? If it is not, it is a terrible indictment of the working conditions that so fatigue and draw the body's claims into the focus of attention that the ease and the collectedness are gone. Such stones of excessive fatigue must be lifted. But the open life is not content to stop at the removal of hindrances. It would draw all to this source of renewal that comes by action in the presence of God.

Given a man or a woman who has fulfilled these conditions: who has been found by a sense of vocation, who has entered into the decision, who keeps close to the root, who is under

holy obedience and who has learned to distinguish between "the doing of things" and *"the doing of things in the virtue, in the life, in the power"* and you have an open life, a cell of the *new order.* Here is a true revolutionary against which neither a false political or economic or social structure nor conventional religious profession can ultimately stand. "One – two – a hundred – a thousand – ten thousand disinterested men, men dedicated, men surrendered; men with the last dross of self burnt out of them; and the laws of economics begin to crack into fragments," wrote Middleton Murry. George Fox has added his word about the man grounded in the power of the open life: "The Lord said unto me that if but one man or woman were raised up by this power to stand and live in the same spirit that the prophets and apostles were in which gave forth the scriptures, that man or woman should shake all the country in their profession (Christianity) for ten miles around."

The need is here. The fellowship is here. The power is here. Are we willing to be laid hold of by the vocation, to enter into the decision, to live under the principle, the root, to come under holy obedience, to act in the presence of God, to be kneaded into the living cells of the new order? Are we ready to come up into the power of the open life?

For Reading

WORKS of Isaac Penington: *The Collected Letters* included in all standard editions of the Works are very important. Two little books of selections from Isaac Penington are useful, *Seeds of the Kingdom* and *The Name is Living,* but they are no substitute for the writings themselves.

JOURNAL of George Fox – The Everyman edition edited by Rufus M. Jones is recommended for its convenient size and inexpensiveness.

JOURNAL of John Woolman – The Gummere edition is the authentic source and has the added merit of containing the important essays of Woolman. The Whittier edition which does not use the 18th Century spelling is easier to read and very inexpensive.

RISE AND PROGRESS OF QUAKERISM – William Penn. This is an essay which William Penn in 1694 wrote in the form of a preface to the Journal of George Fox. It can be secured, bound separately, under the above title, and is indispensable to an understanding of the spiritual basis of the Society of Friends.

SERMONS – Meister Eckhart. Vol. I of C. de B. Evans' translation of Pfeiffer's edition, London, J. M. Watkins, 1924, is recommended.

INTRODUCTION TO THE DEVOUT LIFE – Francis de Sales.

MANUAL FOR INTERIOR SOULS – Jean Grou.

STUDIES IN MYSTICAL RELIGION and SPIRITUAL REFORMERS OF THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES – Rufus M. Jones. These books are important for a grasp of

the mystical stream of the Christian past of which the Society of Friends is an expression.

SELECTED LETTERS of Friedrich von Hügel – A rich treasury of spiritual insight poured out to his friends by one of the few great religious thinkers of the last fifty years.

THE GOLDEN SEQUENCE and MIXED PASTURE – Evelyn Underhill. These are essays not about religion but from within religion. They are for the nurture of religious practice.

FREEDOM IN THE MODERN WORLD and CREATIVE SOCIETY – John Mac Murray. One of the freshest of the critics of pseudo-religion in the interests of a sacrificial revolutionary Christian religion. His criticisms of communism and present Christianity spring out of his profound faith in Jesus and the Christian way.

LET'S BE NORMAL and WHAT IT MEANS TO GROW UP – Fritz Kunkel A modern psychology that shows perhaps the first signs of having diagnosed both the blight and the creative depths of the modern soul. Fritz Kunkel gave a course at Pendle Hill in the Summer of 1936 that was widely appreciated by Friends.

About the Author

Douglas Steere (1901-1995) was a professor emeritus of philosophy at Haverford College, where he taught from 1928 to 1964. He is a noted author whose books include *Prayer and Worship, On Beginning from Within, Work and Contemplation, Dimensions of Prayer,* and *Quaker Spirituality*. His contributions both to Quakerism and to the world at large have been many.

Long Clerk of the Pendle Hill Board of Managers, he has also headed the Friends World Committee for Consultation, and has carried out many missions in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, India, and Japan for the American Friends Service Committee. He represented the Religious Society of Friends as an observer-delegate at Vatican Council II, and has served both the National and the World Council of Churches.

His vision and faith helped establish Pendle Hill and Radnor Meeting in the 1930s. A life-long member of Radnor Meeting, Douglas gave of his heart and soul to many who came to know him through his writings, lectures, and the retreats he led with his wife, Dorothy.

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.