

Toward a Quaker Renaissance

by Richard J. Foster

What is needed for a Quaker Renaissance today?

I. We need a great new experience of God. George Fox declared, "When all my hopes in them and in all people were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do,

Editor's Note: Richard Foster burst upon the religious literary scene in North America like a bright shining nova in 1978 with the publication of his *Celebration of Discipline* for which he was honored as Writer of the Year. Like Thomas Kelly before him, he called the Church to passionate commitment and to deepen its roots in the life of the Spirit. He told Christians how to intentionally journey in the way of authentic discipleship. On May 5, 1985, he stood in front of an auditorium filled with Friends ministers in Chicago and challenged us to do the things that would lead to Friends Renaissance. It was a high moment for all! We are pleased to be able to share a major portion of his address in this issue of *Quaker Life*. May it and Arturo Carranza's message kindle us to a blazing and vital new Friends witness in our time. **Richard will lead gathered Friends in the Great Celebration at 11:00 a.m., Thursday, June 18, at the 1987 FUM Triennial at Guilford College.**

then, oh then, I heard a voice which said, 'There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition,' and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy." He knew by experience that Jesus Christ is alive and here to teach his people himself.

But what do we do? We debate if the cosmic Christ is the same as the historical Jesus. We weave erudite speeches about him in our heads. We worry about whether meetings should be programed or unprogramed. We debate whether "open worship" should be programed or semiprogramed, or we make sure that it is kept to seven and one-half minutes. God forgive us! God save us! God heal us!

Where is our hunger and passion to come into an experience of God? "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants

for you, oh God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." (Psalm 42:1-2, NIV) Do we thirst for God? Is there within us that longing, that hungering, that great, awful, wonderful ache to know God? Frederick Faber declared, "Only to sit and think of God. Oh what a joy it is. To think the thought, to breathe the name. Earth has no higher bliss."

We are the pastors, the elders, the leaders. People don't want to know what great organization people we are. People don't care about our wonderful sermons. People aren't impressed with our heavy workloads or our counseling skills. They want to know if we know God. They want to know if we have experienced Jesus Christ as our Present Teacher. They want to know if we have been in the presence of the Holy. They want to

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know if we know something of the life of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. They want to know if we have been on our faces before the shekinah glory of God.

When we experience God we swing like a needle to the pole star of the Spirit. We discover serenity, unshakeableness, firmness of life orientation. We enter the subterranean sanctuary of the soul where we hear the Kol Yahweh, the voice of the Lord. These experiences put fire into our words and compassion into our spirits. They fill our walk and our talk with new life and light. We come to live out the demands of our day perpetually bowed in worship and adoration, and people can see this and they can feel it and they are drawn into the joy of it. Without the experience of the life of God our exegesis may be impeccable, our rhetoric may be magnetic, but we will be dry, empty, hollow.

Frank Laubach, when he was on the tiny island of Mindanao, had a marvelous experience: "You must hear more of this sacred evening. The day had been rich but strenuous, so I climbed 'Signal Hill' back of my house talking and listening to God all the way up, all the way back, all the lovely half hour on the top. And God talked back! I let my tongue go loose and from it there flowed poetry far more beautiful than any I ever composed. It flowed without pausing and without ever a failing syllable for a half hour. I listened astonished and full of joy and gratitude. I wanted a dictaphone for I knew that I should not be able to remember it — and now I cannot. 'Why,' someone may ask, 'did God waste his poetry on you alone, when you could not carry it home.' You will have to ask God that question. I only know He did and I am happy in the memory."

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Isn't that wonderful! That was Laubach's experience. Your experience will be different and my experience will be different, but we all need that experience of God. There is a tiny little chorus being sung these days, the first line of which states, "In a new and living way Jesus comes to us today." We must be open and receptive and anxious and prayerful that he will come today in a new and living way.

Our experience of God also needs a new sense of worship. Why are our gatherings so dead, so dry, so dull? It is because *we* are dead, dry and dull. Oh, we must come alive to God!

Today there is a great hunger for worship. I see it everywhere I go. This hunger is expressing itself in an incredible revival of liturgy, the likes of which we have not seen for a long time. I believe history will record it as the great phenomenon of the 1980s. Everywhere and among everyone — Pentecostals, evangelicals, Baptist — all are longing for liturgy: the prayer book, the altar, the creeds. This is not dead and dull formalism. There is a keen desire to connect liturgy with warm devotion. It is very amazing.

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At first glance we might think, "Oh, this is terrible! The Quaker approach to worship is completely out of step. We don't have a chance." However, let us probe a little deeper and I think we will see that there is an important point of contact with what is happening — so much so that Quakers may be in the best position of any group in any place to respond to this longing for worship.

The longing for liturgy has come about because people are sick and tired of human-centered worship. They are sick of preachers that run a circus — a one-man show (never a one-woman show!) — an egotistical, fleshly, one-man show. People want Christ as the center of

worship. They want to see God, not human personalities, high and lifted up. And that is what high church liturgy tries to do. The altar is at the center. The focus is on Christ and his sacrifice for us. Human instrumentality is there, to be sure, but it is always subordinated to the deeds of God and the work of God and the love of God. Liturgical worship tries to make Christ the center of the worship experience.

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What does this trend mean to us as Quakers? Historically, Quakers are the ones par excellence who have a tradition of seeking to make Christ the center of worship. He is the Real Presence, as we say. Christ is in our midst. And we must not think of this new wave of interest in liturgy as an enemy, but as a friend. People are hungry. They are longing for an experience of the Real Presence.

Let us make Christ the center of our worship. He is alive and here to teach us himself. He is our Priest to forgive us, our Prophet to teach us, our Bishop to guide us, our King to rule us. People hunger for this experience of God and we can lead the way, but only if we have known him by experience ourselves.

But how do we come into the experience of God? Oh, in a million different ways and in a million different places. Who can confine the Spirit of God? Let me suggest two tiny disciplines. First, in the next month or so set aside twenty-four hours for a private retreat and solitude. Most of us are so caught up in what Thomas Kelly called "that intolerable scramble of panting feverishness" that we cannot possibly hear God, even if he used a public address system. So we need time when we can quiet ourselves, settle ourselves, orient ourselves to this new, living center of reference. It is a time that we waste for God, that we give to God. We create an open, empty

space where God can meet us. We listen. We invite him to speak to us in his wondrous, terrible, all-embracing silence.

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Second, as we begin to become more oriented to the presence of God, we seek to discover him in the events of daily experience. Every task is a holy sacrament before God, every interruption an appointment with God. The crabby janitor is an appointment with God. The bruised, the broken, the weeping are appointments with God. The silly, the naive, the superficial are appointments with God. These people are the manifestation of Christ to us. We discover God by paying attention to them. God can bless us and reach us only where we are because that is the only place we are. We want to throw that away but it is the most profound truth that we will ever know on a practical level of experiencing God. We all remember Moses at the burning bush — God had to tell him to take off his shoes. He didn't know it was holy ground. We must experience where we are as holy ground — the jobs we are in, the people we are with, the families and friends that make up our lives. We need a great new experience of God.

A GREAT NEW PASSION FOR PURITY.

II. What is needed for a Quaker renaissance today? We need a great new passion for purity. Surely the experience of God will do for us what it did for Isaiah when he cried out, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." (Isaiah 6:5)

Quakers have always been known for being on the forefront of ethical concerns but we need a whole new movement in this direction. We must stop resting on the achievements of the past and once again begin to pioneer in the ethical imperatives of the faith. We must call for holiness of life in new and

vigorous ways in both the private and public spheres.



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On the personal level we need to help people understand the place of the spiritual disciplines in transforming human life. Disciplines like meditation, prayer, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude, service, submission, confession, guidance, worship, and celebration are instruments of God. They place us before him so that he can work the transformation that is so desperately needed in each of us. Our lives are then taken over by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Over a process of time and in a process of experience involving both individual and group life the fruit of the Spirit comes into our lives.

We need by experience to have our affections transformed. It isn't just enough to make some commitment at a Billy Graham Crusade. We are a bundle of affections and emotions and will; things like hate and grief and love and zeal and sorrow and gratitude. These need

to be transformed by the power of God. We really do need a tremendous upheaval of the human heart so that we love different things, we hate different things, we delight in different things, we are afraid of different things, we are made guilty by different things. We are a bundle of hopes and desires and dreams, all of which need to be revolutionized.

Also, we need to recover a true *doctrine of the saints* in the sense of having models of holiness. We need examples who show us how to live and call us to the holy life. In 1493 Savonarola was preaching against the evils of the papacy which had become quite immoral. He spoke about the early church as having *chalices of wood* and *prelates of gold*; that is, wonderful, beautiful pastors and leaders that were great models of holiness. And then he said, "but *now* we have *chalices of gold* and *prelates of wood*." This, of course, is the great danger if there is not within us, in our own hearts, a new passion for purity. We will get so caught up in the organizational structure, in the wonder of our sermons, in the beauty of our counseling ability, that we have chalices of gold but we are prelates of wood. Oh, may we be prelates of gold and not wood.

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In the social arena of life we need to recover again our sense of ethical purity. If we do not have a deep passion for the poor, for simplicity, for the ways of peace we are not being faithful to the Gospel. These are not just little "Testimonies" that we tack on if we think it is a good idea. They are categorical imperatives we must obey.

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If we are to follow Jesus Christ, we must stand in opposition to the prevailing mood of modern society and challenge and confront its idolatry. In obedience to Christ we must say "no" to the greed and

avarice that guarantees the poverty of others. In obedience to Christ we must say "no" to the little tin gods of our modern nation-states that call us into their blasphemous intertribal wars. In obedience to Christ we must say "no" to the racism and sexism that dehumanizes those for whom Christ died.

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We also must speak a positive word. In obedience to Christ we must say "yes" to the bruised and the broken and the poor. In obedience to Christ we must say "yes" to the sanctity of life. We must be consistently pro-life. Abortion is a pro-life issue. Peace is a pro-life issue. First World greed that guarantees Third World starvation is a pro-life issue. We need a great new passion for purity.

A GREAT NEW BAPTISM OF POWER.

III. What is needed for a Quaker renaissance today? We need a great new baptism of power. After all, we are Quakers and it is high time we deserved the name. We need to shake and tremble before God, and we need

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to see others tremble because God's power has come upon them. The apostle Paul said that the Kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. We need power so that when we speak people are changed. We need power so that when we are silent people are changed. We need power so that when we pray people are changed. We need power so that when God speaks to us we are changed.

We all remember that the early Quakers testified that all that happened in the book of Acts was happening among them.

Now, what does this mean? Should we see signs and wonders? Should there be healings and miracles and visions and dreams? Yes, that is exactly what it means. Now is the time for a far greater outpouring of God's power upon us. We all remember that the early Quakers testified that all that happened in the book of Acts was happening among them. **Robert Barclay testified, "When I came into the silent assemblies of God's people, I felt a secret power among them which touched my heart. And as I gave way to it, I found the evil in me weakening and the good lifted up. Thus it was that I was knit into them and united with them. And I hungered more and more for the increase of this power and life until I could feel myself perfectly redeemed."**



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However, we must remember that power demands a sufficiently prepared people. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely, so we need people who are willing to learn to walk with God, to become God's friends, to engage in the ministry of small things, because these things are prior to, and in one sense more important than, the work of power. Certainly they are an essential preparation so that it is love that motivates us and not egomania. We need a great new baptism of power. Q