

Rootedness in Tradition and Global Spirituality*

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In a comprehensive survey of religion in today's world Frank Whaling has made much of growing global awareness as evidenced in: (1) a movement toward dialogue and inter-religious understanding; (2) inter-religious meetings to address wider global issues; (3) efforts to interpret different religious traditions as part of a wider whole, the earth; and (4) the emergence of a global spirituality "that uses the insights of the world's religious traditions to uncover the spiritual significance of the total fabric of human life—its rootedness in nature, its relation to other humans, and its openness to transcendence."¹ He has noted that different religious traditions have responded in diverse ways to the challenge of change. (A) Some have chosen not to respond. (B) Others have worked for a creative restoration of tradition. (C) Still others, such as the Roman Catholic Church in the Second Vatican Council, have undertaken to reform and to adjust old things and to appropriate new ones. (D) Others have chosen radical restatement and reinterpretation out of conviction that "Something deeper is needed in order to speak to new conditions of technological sophistication, medical ethics, ecological disaster, nuclear threat and global perspective than a restoration of tradition or reformation supported by a backward appeal to tradition."² (E) Still others have decided to abandon their religious tradition to form new religious movements.

In this essay I put in a favorable word for tradition in spirituality in this period of transition from modernity to postmodernity, what-

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1. Frank Whaling, "Religion in Today's World: An Introductory Survey," *Religion in Today's World*, ed. Frank Whaling (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1987) 41.

2. *Ibid.*, 45.

ever either of those terms may mean. For me to do this may seem a bit incongruous by virtue of the fact that my own Baptist tradition has taken a rather dim view of tradition, by which we usually mean convention or dead custom. I confess that I have had to learn to distinguish tradition as the essence of something from convention as the external form or condition. Viewing this challenge of change from that perspective, I would agree with Whaling that "In spite of the importance of change in today's religion, it is necessary to emphasize that change and continuity go hand in hand."³ But this is a judgment that I will not claim credit for or venture to advance on my own authority. It is an insight that I have gained, rather, from two persons who hail from rather different religious backgrounds than my own and who have cast their nets farther than I have—Thomas Merton and Douglas Steere. Both Merton and Steere have played significant roles in the development of what Ewert Cousins has labeled "global spirituality."

Professor Cousins, I think, has correctly connected the emergence of global spirituality with a religious "awakening" which has been taking place since the sixties. Like other "awakenings," this one began with a period of disorientation, confusion, and despair associated in the United States with the war in Vietnam, the Cold War, and growing societal problems. This was followed in the seventies and eighties with a period of deepened religious search as westerners floundered around trying to find answers to these problems in the East. In the last decade of the twentieth century we have begun to see emerging the change of consciousness which accompanies awakenings. As regards spirituality, Cousins has pointed out, "we can discern a process involving a spiritual awakening, a recovery of tradition, and a transformation of tradition—leading towards what can be called a global spirituality on the eve of the twenty-first century."⁴

On the Way to a Global Spirituality

Because Thomas Merton's perspectives and contributions have received ample treatment in many places, I will refer only incidentally to them here and concentrate instead on those of Douglas V. Steere,

3. *Ibid.*, 46.

4. Ewert Cousins, "Spirituality in Today's World," *Religion in Today's World*, ed. Frank Whaling, 307.

who had significant contact with Merton during the sixties and composed a foreword to Merton's *The Climate of Monastic Prayer* which was published also under the title *Contemplative Prayer*. Like Merton, Steere has drawn heavily from the contemplative tradition, especially of Benedict of Nursia.⁵

Douglas Steere started down the path toward a global spirituality early in his career. His study of the life and thought of Baron Friedrich von Hügel in writing a doctoral dissertation (Harvard, 1931) may have given him a shove in that direction, for von Hügel himself had a global outlook long before that could have been popular. Teaching at Haverford College from 1928 until his retirement in 1963 doubtless widened his horizons further, for he came under the tutelage of Rufus Jones, a Quaker scholar of exceptionally expansive outlook. The Quaker tradition, with which Douglas and Dorothy Steere formally identified themselves in 1932, is itself unusually well equipped to foster exchanges with persons of other faiths, to put it in words of Abraham J. Heschel, at "the level of fear and trembling, of humility and contrition, where our individual moments of faith are mere waves in the endless ocean of mankind's reaching out for God, where all formulations and articulations appear as understatements, where our souls are swept away by the awareness of the urgency of answering God's commandment, while stripped of pretension and conceit we sense the tragic insufficiency of human faith."⁶

The traumatic experience of the Second World War and the struggle to bring sanity and order into the horribly scarred world after it undoubtedly pushed Douglas Steere, just as it did many others, farther down the path toward a global spirituality. The war touched the lives of people everywhere, but none felt its stroke more powerfully than the Friends, one of the three "peace churches," and Douglas Steere. Steere had undertaken a mission in Europe for the American Friends Service Committee in 1937 where he witnessed close up the buildup of the Third Reich. He returned again to the Scandinavian countries and Germany in 1940 in a risky effort to encourage Friends as the guns and bombs of war already boomed. At the end of the war

5. Cf. E. Glenn Hinson, "Ecumenical Spirituality," *Ecumenical Trends* (July/September 1991) 97-104.

6. Abraham J. Heschel, "No Religion Is an Island," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* XXI (1961) 122.

he organized a relief effort to war-torn Finland, for which he was knighted in the Order of the White Rose in 1990.

The Second World War gave a new lease on life to ecumenism, broadening it immeasurably, as many discerned the urgency of reaching out not merely toward other Christians but toward the rest of the world's great religions. For Douglas Steere global spirituality involving persons of other faiths took shape swiftly as he shuttled back and forth to Europe and widened his contacts around the globe.

Early in the 1950s he brought Jewish scholars Martin Buber and Abraham J. Heschel and Buddhist interpreter Daisetz Suzuki, who was then teaching at Columbia University in New York City, to Haverford College to lecture, Buber and Suzuki in December 1951. In October 1954 he undertook his first journey to the East to Japan and India. In Japan he delivered the Nitobe Lecture on "The Quaker Message: Unique or Universal?" at the Yearly Meeting in Tokyo, already laying out the main lines for his brilliant paper on a Quaker view of ecumenism under the title *Mutual Irradiation*, the Richard Cary Lecture for 1968. In the significant Nitobe message he challenged Quakers to respond to the open door of religious and cultural interpenetration which stood before them, wherein "the Quaker form of the Christian religion finds itself queried by the deepest levels of Buddhism, of Hinduism, and even in rare cases of Islam."⁷ He urged fellow Friends to trust the universality of Christ which would enable them to reach out and engage persons of other faiths in the same way the author of the Fourth Gospel, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, or Origen once did. They must not insulate Christ "by placing a screen of uniqueness about Him instead of trusting Him to draw to Himself the categories and thought and cultural forms" of different societies and religions. The world does not need a "catacomb mentality" of an overly defensive Christian theology. To take this way is to become vulnerable, as Francis of Assisi did before the Sultan at Damietta, Ramon Lull trying to reach the Muslims of North Africa, or John Woolman going to the Indians to offer peace. All exhibited faith in the universal Christ "that has vanquished fear and defensiveness." The Quaker message fits into the tradition of those who have known the universal Christ and are unafraid of encounter with persons of other faiths or entrusting Christ

7. Douglas V. Steere, "The Quaker Message: Unique or Universal?" *The Friends' Quarterly* 9 (Paril, 1955) 49.

to others in the conviction that He is indeed the universal Man God has sent.

Shortly after giving this lecture, Douglas Steere spent some time with Suzuki, who had returned to Japan for a brief furlough from his teaching at Columbia, to secure names of Buddhists who could enter into the kind of give and take with Christians which would prove fruitful and beneficial to both groups. Suzuki wrote introductory notes for him to some of the leading Buddhists in Kyoto, where he hoped to get a feeling for "something of the vitality of its life in Japan at that time."⁸ He was not alone in this quest, however. The abbot of the monastery in Kyoto complained that "So many westerners were becoming interested in Buddhism that instead of the ancient promise that the meditation of the East would reach through the globe and shake the West, the reverse was happening."⁹

From Japan Douglas Steere headed to India, stopping en route in Thailand and Burma to get a whiff of Theravada Buddhism. In India he sought to answer a secret question: "What is the strength of her own spiritual forces in Hinduism and in Gandhi's heritage that would shape the India that is to be?"¹⁰ Out of his visit there came his proposal for a Quaker Ashram in India and a growing conviction that Quakers had a special responsibility for helping the West to understand the world's great religions.¹¹ The American Friends Service Committee, which had commissioned this visit, approved a Christmas visit to Katagiri in 1956 to explore the idea. Indicative of his advanced ecumenical outlook at this stage, Douglas Steere believed that Gurdial Malik, a Jesuit whom he had met at Barpali, was the right person to head the Ashram. Meantime, on his return from the orient, Douglas Steere electrified readers of the *Christian Century* with an article on "The Quaker Message," in which he called attention to the basic contradiction Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims found between Christian crusades and the message of Jesus' love and once again reiterated the call for an encounter with the other world religions.¹²

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), which he attended as an official Observer-Delegate for three sessions, injected new energy

8. Douglas V. Steere, *Unpublished Autobiography*, 656.

9. *Ibid.*, 657.

10. *Ibid.*, 672.

11. *Ibid.*, 782, and Travel Letters.

12. August 1955; *Unpublished Autobiography*, 734.

into the search for a global spirituality through dialogue between the world's major religious groups. He took special interest in the schema on Christianity and other religions, making a noteworthy intervention to underscore the importance of dialogue (November 17, 1963) and using the friendly auspices of Cardinal Augustin Bea to push for an international ecumenical effort. During the council, moreover, he and Fr. Godfrey Diekmann, O.S.B., organized the Ecumenical Institute of Spirituality, which held its first meeting at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota, in August 1965 on the eve of the final session of Vatican II. Thomas Merton would have participated in that gathering had Father Abbot James Fox given permission.¹³

Douglas Steere's vision of a genuinely global spirituality assumed more tangible shape in the convening of interfaith colloquia in Japan and India in late March and April 1967. Having retired from Haverford College after thirty-five years of teaching in order to become an Observer-Delegate at the last three sessions of the Second Vatican Council, he was elected chairperson of the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC), a body linking the diverse groups of Friends in common efforts around the world, and secured its endorsement and encouragement for the proposed colloquia. In Japan an ecumenical group of Christian and Buddhist scholars gathered at Oiso to discuss two topics of mutual interest—"the inward journey" and "social responsibility for ordering our world"—in a mostly informal and spontaneous way. This Steere-style meeting resulted in a remarkable amount of "self-disclosure," certainly more than one dependent on formal papers. In India a similar colloquy of Christian and Hindu scholars convened at Ootacamund to discuss only the first of these topics, also in an informal manner. Both Japanese and Indian colloquia planned further meetings, but Christian-Buddhist groups proved more adept at carrying through with the plan.

Mutual Irradiation

Douglas Steere's long years of ecumenical exchange ripened in the Richard Cary Lecture entitled "Mutual Irradiation," delivered at

13. Letter of Thomas Merton to Douglas V. Steere enclosed with a letter of Dorothy Steere dated Feb. 23, 1965; Letter of Thomas Merton to Douglas V. Steere dated Sept. 14, 1965.

the German Yearly Meeting in Bad Pyrmont in 1968. I use the word "ripened" because all of the basic ideas and even the phrase "mutual irradiation" had been hanging on the Steere tree for a long time. What I wish to underscore in looking at this concept of interreligious dialogue is not the dialogue per se but the importance of being rooted in one's tradition in the process. Tradition and dialogue go hand in hand; they are inseparable companions.

Douglas Steere discerned in "the ecumenical surge" among Protestants and Orthodox in the World Council of Churches, among Roman Catholics in the Second Vatican Council, and among Christians and representatives of the great world religions "a message of importance for us."¹⁴ He agreed with metahistorian Arnold Toynbee that what would interest historians a millennium hence would not be the "domestic quarrels" between communist and "free enterprise" systems but the mutual interpenetration of Buddhism and Christianity and, he would add, Hinduism and Christianity. Ecumenism means "world embracing," taking down fences and moving them out to embrace and assume responsibility for one another.

Eager as he was to see this mutual interpenetration of the world's great religions, however, he was not calling for the abandonment or loose handling of the Christian tradition. Quite to the contrary, "mutual irradiation" would require a far greater degree of rootedness than the alternatives: (1) destroying or burying the other religion, (2) syncretism, or (3) mere coexistence, for, in this approach, each religion must be "willing to expose itself with great openness to the inward message of the other, as well as to share its own experience, and to trust that whatever is the truth in each experience will irradiate and deepen the experience of the other."¹⁵ To expose oneself and one's religious experience to persons of other faiths would require real security in one's own faith, for what is called for is not a cosmetic approach but a meeting "at the level of fear and trembling" such as the colloquia in Japan and India tried to supply through deep personal sharing.

As a matter of fact, the colloquia between Christians and Buddhists and Christians and Hindus just prior to preparing the Richard Cary Lecture were doubtless fresh in mind as Douglas Steere elabo-

14. *Mutual Irradiation*. [Pendle Hill Pamphlet 175] (Lebanon, Penn.: Pendle Hill Publications, 1971) 5.

15. *Ibid.*, 8.

rated on his concept of "mutual irradiation." As he conceived it, "mutual irradiation" "would try to provide the most congenial setting possible for releasing the deepest witness that the Buddhist or Hindu or Muslim might make to his Christian companion, and that the Christian might in turn share with his non-Christian friend." It is an "existential" process "that goes beyond mere description and has to be experienced in order to be penetrated."¹⁶ The concern to go beyond observation was what prompted Douglas Steere to avoid formal papers, to spend much time in personal exchanges, and to make "the inward journey" the center of discussion. Personal interaction of that sort is possible only for persons well grounded in their own tradition, as one of the Hindu participants at Ootacamund astutely observed. The great Hindu religious thinker Ramanuja had insisted that he "get the best out of" his own tradition before he mingled too swiftly with other religious traditions, "that he "must have a center" from which he could determine "a circumference." "Only as I knew my own religion in its depths would I be able to understand the religion of others."¹⁷

"Mutual irradiation" would demand deeper rootedness than the alternatives, however, not only because of its experiential exactions but also because of its interpenetrating concern for the other. Truly global ecumenism of this kind "feels concern for the outcome of its fellow religionist's situation and can rejoice and find itself enriched when it produces an unmistakable saint, or a groundswell of holiness, and can feel as equally involved in its misfortunes and say, not 'There but for the grace of God go I' but rather, 'There go I.'"¹⁸ Rejoicing in the pains and the failures of the other and regretting the joys and the victories of the other point to an inadequate grasp of the deep things of God in Christianity itself such as the import of *agape*-love.

Douglas Steere ties "mutual irradiation" directly to the Quaker tradition. Conscious that many Friends have entertained serious doubts about the ecumenical movement, he assures them that this globally spiritual approach would not violate the deepest perceptions of their own heritage. He cites luminaries such as William Penn and John Wool-

16. *Ibid.*

17. Prof. M. Yamunacharya, cited by Douglas V. Steere in "Inter-faith Colloquia in Japan and India," circulated by Friends World Committee for Consultation, 15.

18. *Mutual Irradiation*, 9f.

man as witnesses of the spiritual principle uniting all humankind, common efforts of Friends with others in peacemaking, and participation of Quakers in the Life and Work movement to mobilize Protestant energies to address great social issues. Where they have balked is at efforts to formulate creedal statements or to find a formula for church government on which all could agree. Quakers have belonged, rather, to a "third stream," i.e., one neither Catholic nor Protestant, "but part of the Christian mystical stream that has nurtured them all" and which "might one day draw all back into its current, immersing them in a new dimension of concern for their fellows that would renew the life of both West and East."¹⁹ Quakers have always had "a slumbering revolutionary element" which looks askance at institutional Christianity and has thence suffered from a bit of "denominational egotism" connected with its mystical inclinations. The events of the period since John XXIII (1958–1963), however, force a thorough re-examination of the negative side, for he accentuated the universality of the love of God so starkly stated in John 3:16. The Pope called us "to witness to the operative presence, here and now, of this fathomless love and concern that is at the heart of things: a presence which is already actively at work in the unconscious life of every part of the creation." He articulated a vision which gives real hope to the world. "By more contemplation, more piercing communication and sharing, more costly undertakings of social concern, we might help to emerge above the world's consciousness."²⁰

"Mutual irradiation," Douglas Steere goes on to argue, fits the Quaker tradition in another important respect. It is a "functional ecumenism that begins with all of us encouraging each other to practice our own religious tradition to the hilt and to share our experiences with each other in every creative way we can devise."²¹ The goal is not monolithic mergers or wholesale syncretism or stealing one another's members but joining with others "in all kinds of common explorations and common tasks":²²

A truly functional ecumenism wants to witness to the world how much God cares, and if this means stopping a war; or trying

19. *Ibid.*, 12.
20. *Ibid.*, 15.
21. *Ibid.*, 15f.
22. *Ibid.*, 16.

to learn how to share more equitably the world's material resources; or meeting an emergency human need, or joining the poor; or sending brotherly teachers and companions to live and share with those in another area; or teaching one another how to meditate, or how to pray, or how to kindle our corporate adoration, or how to grow in the life of devotion, or how to use the lives of past saints and heroes to re-kindle our commitment; or how great art, painting, sculpture and music can expand the soul; or how personal guidance and therapy may release the deeper life in us; or how the world of plants and animals and water and wind can temper our souls; a functional ecumenism will open us in these and in other areas to the witness of our fellows, whether Christian or the adherents of other world religions.²³

He invokes the Zen Buddhist-Christian Colloquium at Oiso in Japan and the Hindu-Christian Colloquium at Ootacamund in India in 1967 as examples of the way in which such an ecumenism might work. He notes how natural it was for Quakers to turn to Zen Buddhists because of their "marked similarities to Quakers in the Christian community."²⁴ At the same time the Zen Buddhist insistence on "going to the mountain," that is to say, contemplation, as the first priority "searched" Quakers in their activism even as Quaker social endeavor "searches" Buddhists. Convened in "a season where our own and the world's spiritual need was acute," the Hindu-Christian Colloquy showed how "the intimate process of mutual irradiation" could perform a "miracle."

Douglas Steere's concluding appeal was to the peculiar role Friends could play in this venture. They are "naturally oriented to start at the right end of this ecumenical endeavor—namely to begin from within and to draw the whole ecumenical process in this direction." They have the proper balance of inward and outward.²⁵ Friends will probably not contribute much to the intellectual side of the task, as, for instance, Teilhard de Chardin did, but they have much to say about the experiential side, for they have felt "inwardly in the presence of the living Christ both the joy and the misery of the world and having felt our arms being opened to the whole creation, while we may not ourselves at this point be able adequately to formulate a view of the

23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, 18.
25. *Ibid.*, 27.

universal Christ, we can be among those who are most open to it."²⁶ Encounter with the living Christ in other religions may rob Christians of a conventional western picture, but it may also give them "a new sense of how little we yet know him, and of how much we have yet to learn perhaps through these very meetings with our brothers [and sisters] in other Christian faiths and in the world religions."²⁷ Christians have scarcely explored at all the "intellectual implications of the universal in this haunting figure of Christ. . . ." Quakers may render the service of providing a frank and open climate for sincere seeking.

Rooted in Tradition

Before attempting some application of this insight, I should like to demonstrate that concern for rootedness in tradition is not merely an afterthought to Douglas Steere in the context of ecumenical exchange but belongs to the center of his effort to guide the Society of Friends in this period of transition from modernity to postmodernity. The fact that the Friends have eschewed tradition in much the same way Baptists have and taken a critical stance toward institutions, emphasizing instead immediate experience of the Spirit or the living Christ, has made them more than a little vulnerable to major changes in society, especially as their numbers have dwindled steadily. Fascination with the mystical has lured many toward the facile syncretism of "New Age" and Oriental or quasi-Oriental cults. Consequently Douglas Steere has rendered a critical and salutary service in recalling the Friends to their roots and to an essential corporate task of representing the Quaker message to the world.

In a letter circulated to members of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) in February 1963, when he chaired the group, he made his perspective on rootedness crystal clear. Some had accused the IFOR of "Pharisaism" in confining its membership to Christians. Noting his own extensive efforts to bridge the gulf separating Christians from persons of other faiths, he proceeded to reply:

But my own slender experience would point to the fact that this can only be sincerely done by those who stand deeply and firmly

26. *Ibid.*, 29.

27. *Ibid.*, 30.

rooted in their own traditions that have plumbed them deeply enough to be driven out in profound respect and affection to come to know the brothers [and sisters] in the other faith.

He favored keeping out of the IFOR the syncretists, the Bahais, and "the nervous universalists." There are real differences between Christianity and other religions. Some kind of federation of Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims might form to engage in peace efforts, but the IFOR is Christian and should not be apologetic about that. It must not alter its requirements to be all-inclusive. "What we would seem to need, in the IFOR at least, is not to lower the qualifications, but to raise the performance." Creedalism is not desired, "but the witness and example of Jesus Christ must remain central for us."²⁸

In a letter to a Swedish Quaker, Sven Ryberg, dated April 2, 1973, Douglas Steere emphasized the essential locus of Quakers in the Christian tradition on christology. Acknowledging Quakers had often had a problem here throughout their history, he insisted, nonetheless, that they must keep their anchor in that tradition:

For me the Society of Friends is and must remain in the Christian stream, he said. This means that the Bible and especially the Gospels must be read continuously by Friends and crossed with their own inward experience. . . . To face the accounts given there of Jesus Christ and of his unerring caring and his pointing to the Father and his "love that will not let us go" is to feel indeed that "in Jesus Christ, God came all the way down stairs" to man and invites man to come all the way upstairs into his presence.

This ought not to cut one off from the Hindu and Muslim and Buddhist, for there is also the universal Christ who was before Abraham always at work,

and this for me must always be held together with the historical appearance of Jesus. For I find that the Trinity makes sense to me only in Meister Eckhart's terms of the Godhead as the unfathomable and mysterious ground of Being which out of sheer love poured himself out in creation as God the Father, shone forth in the Son as the disclosure of that love, and in the Holy Spirit as ever-present caring and availability of that love. These three streams

28. Letter of Douglas V. Steere to Members of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, Feb. 8, 1963; Quaker Collection, Haverford College.

of the Godhead's love did not operate once and then recede into the abyss of Being. They are happening now and they have been happening all through history.

This is how God now slips into the experience of people of other faiths.

In numerous addresses to Quaker gatherings Douglas Steere has consistently underlined the importance of securing their faith in their tradition. The "real function" of a convocation of "Quaker theologians," he judged,²⁹ was to "kindle one another and drive one another back to the root and encourage each one of us to write or preach or missionize or live out a fresh insight that has come from this root, . . ." Listing "Five Essentials of Quaker Faith Today," he stressed the need for "twin tempers of relentlessness and openness" as key characteristics. True to their tradition, Quaker scholars must never suppose that the disciplines of theology and philosophy create or take precedence over experience and commitment. "Only where a theologian is continually re-immersing this awkward structure in the living matrix of personal or corporate religious experience can it keep from becoming a 'notion,' a structure sundered from reality, a formula easily uttered, easily agreed to, easily passed on to others, and a poor Ersatz for the immersion itself" (4). Those were the very things George Fox was protesting in the Puritan groups of his day.

The five "essentials"—immediacy, Jesus Christ, "that of God" in every person, redeeming love operative in the whole order of things, and the structures of a waiting ministry and manner of conducting business with attention to the Light Within—will not surprise those who know the essence of the Quaker tradition, for Douglas Steere unabashedly explains and defends these here just as he does in many other writings. Indeed, those who know his role in his local Radnor Meeting in Philadelphia, at Pendle Hill, or as chairperson of the FWCC will discern an ardent apologist for the tradition which took its rise from George Fox. After describing the first essential—"a witness to the immediate presence, the inwardness, the accessibility, the utter simplicity of the relation of the living God to the soul of an ordinary man [or woman]"—he exclaims, "What stupendous news this is, if we lived in it and could share it with others!" (4, 5).

29. Unpublished Paper entitled "Five Essentials of Quaker Faith Today," Quaker Collection, Haverford College, 1. Hereafter pages cited in text.

Douglas Steere's christology, as should have become clear in the statement made above, is better grounded in traditional soil than that of many other Protestants, but he is quick to honor the accent of his own tradition on the living Christ of faith rather than the Jesus of history. Noting the criticism the Friends have experienced at this point for inadequate attention to the historical Jesus and the scriptural presentation of him, lack of clarity as to whether or not he was divine, and absence of creedal statements—he invokes one of the Friends' most honored saints, Isaac Pennington:

This is He, this is He, there is no other; this is He whom I have waited for and sought after from my childhood, who was always near me and had begotten life in my heart, but I knew Him not distinctly or how to receive Him or dwell with Him . . . I have met with my Saviour . . . I have felt the healing drop upon my soul from under His wings,

and asks, ". . . can there be any serious ground for doubt that he had known both God and the Elder Brother?" (6). Douglas Steere goes on to observe that Pennington needed scriptures to prepare him for this experience and warns Quakers not to skimp the Bible. Nevertheless, the chief concern of the Quaker tradition is *experience* rather than intellectual cognition or assent.

From these two basic convictions have arisen other distinctive Quaker emphases in anthropology, science, and worship and organization. It is well known that George Fox and the Friends held a much higher view of human nature and the natural order than the Calvinism of the Puritans allowed. Quakers could not imagine God consigning persons created in the divine "image and likeness" and redeemed by the Elder Brother (Christ), in every one of whom was "that of God," to depravity and doom. Not even the horrors of World War II sufficed to destroy or diminish Quaker confidence "in both the constancy of God's seige and in this reachable and reached center in people in their own company in the free type of worship and business meeting that they fashioned" (8). Friends, likewise, viewed nature "as open-ended, as neither automatically containing nor as utterly alien to a new order of redeeming love . . . [which] exists here and now and is operative in the hearts of men [and women], but in another sense it penetrates and shapes man's nature only when it is embodied" (9). Quaker awareness of humankind as a link in a great chain of being has made them

“strangely at home with scientific investigation.” This explains John Woolman’s “tenderness for all creation,” concern for blacks, and refusal to participate in war. It is also the reason Fox rejected the Fifth Monarchy Men and Quakers have chosen active roles in society, “seeking to answer to the unquenchable longing for this redemptive order in the place and generation in which they have lived” (10). When Douglas Steere comes to structures of a waiting ministry in worship and of the Quaker manner of seeking the counsel of the Spirit in conduct of business, he discloses vividly the strength of this commitment to and reliance on the Quaker tradition. Readers of his classic on Quaker worship, *On Listening to Another*, will easily detect his enthusiasm for silent worship and the serious doubts he has about the Midwestern evangelical style. “For me, this waiting type of worship is still a way of direct access to God. It is a means of respecting and encouraging this access in every person gathered. It is a corporate vehicle for gathering the group into an awareness of the Presence of Christ, of an inward sense of their membership in the redemptive community, and of ministry to one another out of this gathered power” (12).

Postscript

In many respects the Quaker tradition which Douglas Steere has eloquently explained, interpreted, and defended during his long career anticipated the global spirituality of this generation. Throughout their history the Friends have stressed the inner journey and the application of the contemplative way to the pressing issues of the day—violence, racism, collective irresponsibility and irrationality, and all the rest. Like Thomas Merton, Douglas Steere has grasped the wisdom of the tradition he represents and offered it to a world crying out for enlightenment. I believe he would agree with the mature Merton’s understanding of his own task as reflected in this journal note:

For myself, I am more and more convinced that my job is to clarify something of the tradition that lives in me, and in which I live: the tradition of wisdom and spirit that is found not only in Western Christendom but in Orthodoxy, and also, at least analogously, in Asia and Islam. Man’s sanity and balance and peace depend,

I think, on his keeping alive a continuous sense of what has been valid in his [or her] past.³⁰

Both Steere and Merton recognized the pitfalls of racing wildly after the latest fads in a time of rapid social change. Douglas Steere frequently threw up some caution flags to his fellow Quakers with their propensity for spontaneity, and Thomas Merton found that the true and tested needed to keep in check his own fascination with change itself. In *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* he remarked:

There is no real need for me to specialize, but I intend to keep to the writers of Christian Antiquity and those of the Middle Ages for a while, to defend myself against the levity of what happens at the moment to seem urgent just because it is popular. I can resist the general madness (not that the issues are not serious, but the madness about them is absurd), and I have done this lately by sticking to Migne’s Latin Fathers.³¹

Merton’s remedy for “levity” may seem a bit extreme, but it has in it an inescapable insight. What will offer some safeguard for us in a time of accelerated change of the magnitude suggested by the transition from modernity to postmodernity that we not lapse into the worst frivolity is tradition, the essence and not the external. It will be particularly important as we widen our perceptions and contacts on a global scale decreed by the present awakening. Being deeply rooted and grounded in our own tradition will give us sufficient assurances that we can allow ourselves to be irradiated by the light in persons of other religions.

All of this is to say, I suppose, that not many of us are ready for this transition from modernity to postmodernity. Indeed, not many are ready to be world citizens and to receive or to give light. The past generation has tried a variety of spiritualities—secular, charismatic, oriental and quasi-oriental, and variations on each of these—in hopes of finding one which could “speak to our condition” in a culture we have created with our technology which poses a threat to our very survival. What we have not tried sufficiently may be the very thing to which both Thomas Merton and Douglas Steere point us, namely, tra-

30. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1968) 194.

31. *Ibid.*, 248.

dition. Modernity has not held tradition in high esteem, and it may be the most pressing task of postmodernity to lay aside this disdain for the tested and tried and recover again the essence of things. In spirituality we are seeing some promising trends in that direction in the publication of sixty volumes of *Classics of Western Spirituality*, including Jewish and Muslim as well as Christian, and twenty-five volumes in the history of spirituality. The winds of change may not sweep us away after all.