

Conscience, Casuistry, and Quakerism

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The 1961 Jonathan Plummer Lecture
Presented at
Illinois Yearly Meeting
of the
Religious Society of Friends
McNabb, Illinois

Introduction

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Perhaps the most difficult of all our tasks as human beings is that of deciding what is "right" and then doing it. The problem does not exist for God, presumably, for He can be identified with Good itself and with the Will for Good. He knows the Good because he is God and is (as the Scriptures of all great religions seem to testify), the Truth. On the other hand, the problem of the Good or the Right presumably does not exist for the beasts, for they (so Scripture and our own inferences tell us), are guided directly and usually in detail by instinctual tendencies which lead them to go South in winter or to reproduce or make nests or go about in herds. Man-like creatures alone are left puzzled about the problem of the ought and in many respects we are no more certain today than we were when ethical speculation began, perhaps some three thousand or more years ago.

It was in part this problem of the *ought* which must have puzzled Alexander Pope in those familiar lines from his *Essay on Man* which deals with man's dilemmas about himself. Man was, Pope says:

Placed on this isthmus of the middle state,
A being darkly proud and rudely great,
With too much knowledge for the Sceptic side
And too much weakness for the Stoic's pride:
He hangs between, in doubt to act or rest
In doubt to deem himself a god or beast--
In doubt his mind or body to prefer
Born but to die and reasoning but to err.
Created half to rise and half to fall,
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all.
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurled,
The glory, jest, and riddle of the World.

The problem of the Good was an issue from the very dawn of human thought. On ancient Egyptian monuments one will find it posed (and such Egyptian rulers as Ikhnoton were much concerned with it). The ancient Hebrew found the Good in obedience to the laws of Moses, which were themselves presumably matters of Revelation. In classical Greece, broadly speaking, it was assumed that the Good for an individual and the Good for the *polis* were obverse sides of the same coin; and thus ethics and politics were almost inseparable.

However, the problem of conscience as such was perhaps not raised in its full implications until after the intimate life of the ancient *polis* had given way to empire as a political form. Men now found themselves remote from the centers of political power both geographically and psychologically. The result was a turning inward of consciousness which hitherto had been oriented in the outward direction. In a world where the individual was more and more alienated - - as we can perhaps put it - the question became increasingly one of whether the Good could in some sense be pursued apart from the life of the political society. Long ago, of course, the problem had been posed dramatically in *Antigone*, but the full implications of the issue of "conscience" were not realized until just before New Testament times. Stoicism gave one answer in terms of the "self-sufficiency" of the Wise Man. The Mystery Religions provided yet other responses, in their rites which provided vehicles -- including the shedding of animal blood -- whereby the individual could be purified and his restlessness about the Good quieted.

Historically, of course, what came to be called Christianity was from one point of view another mystery religion. The union of the individual with Christ through the church and the conception of the kingdom of God, in which all were citizens, provided schemes very analogous to those of certain other cults of the time. While the ethical teaching of Jesus does not mention the term "conscience," it was probably true that the intent was to provide a revelation of the Good in the acts of a person, just as the Revelation of Good for the Jew was through the Law. "Conscience," in one sense of the term, could thus be aroused when the teaching of either the person or the Law was violated. At the same time, the apparent purpose of Jesus was to make "good" action so habitual that the details of law would be irrelevant.

In a recent book, C. A. Pierce argues forcefully¹ that it was in the letters of St. Paul to the Corinthians that the Greek term for "conscience" was first used. On the whole, argues Pierce, Paul employed the term very much as it was currently used in Greek culture, both at the popular and at the academic level. This usage made "conscience" that within man which gave him pain when he had performed a "wrong" action. It did not refer to future action but always to the past. In the New Testament, Pierce therefore concludes, there is no example in which "conscience" is used as that which can help give us a clue as to what future action ought to be, except perhaps by warning us about actions which it has adjudged "wrong" in the past.

If one accepts this viewpoint - and there is strong evidence for it - the broader use of "conscience" appeared only after New Testament times, perhaps when the Greek word [reference missing], with its narrower connotations, gave place to the Latin *conscientia*, which did have the broader meaning which we associate with the word today. At any rate, the purely negative meaning was left behind and it became common to identify *conscientia* not merely with the pain which condemns past acts but also with a kind of voice which helps guide us to the future Good.

Certainly in the Middle Ages, the broader meaning is to be found. But the great problem of the medieval moral theologians - as, indeed, it was of later Jewish thinkers as well - was not merely identifying what was good in general but also applying ethical principles to particular *cases*. (There was a real attempt to take the general principles inherited from Jewish, early Christian, and Greek thought and to work them into a systematic scheme from which one could derive guides as to particular actions.) The acid test of every general principle, the medieval moralists held, was how it was applied to particular cases. Thus in the great days of scholasticism, an elaborate body of rules was worked out dealing with possible conflicts. Not only were the overall principles developed in greater detail, in other words, but there was a general code for the guidance of priest and people in the so-called "cases of conscience."

Now it was against this "legalization" of morality that the so-called Protestants revolted. Right and wrong, they seemed to agree, cannot be reduced to a law code; nor can the spirit of Christian love be imprisoned within a closely-knit casuistry. (Casuistry is application of general principles to individual cases, thus producing a "Conscience.") An appeal was made to St. Paul as well as to the Gospels in defense of this attack on medieval legalism. The spirit must be freed from priestcraft, said Lutheran doctrine and initially Calvinism, too, set for itself the task of underlining the authority of the Church in general and the elaborate medieval moral scholasticism in particular.

Unfortunately or fortunately, however, so-called Protestantism was not united on the way in which the spirit of the New Testament could once more be revived. Luther's very reluctance to resort to authoritative church statements (lest they lead to a resumption of medieval legalism) tended to throw him into the arms of the State; and thus there was a very early tendency in Lutheranism to exalt the authority of the secular ruler. Calvinism quite soon began to rely on Old Testament law for its standard of Christian Morals. And both Lutheranism and Calvinism professed to see in the Bible the final authority for right action. The Bible was somehow the Word of God and Luther seemed to think, at least in the beginning, that its teaching about human conduct was clear and unambiguous.

But in the revolt against medieval ecclesiasticism, there was yet a third tendency, repudiated by both Protestantism and Catholicism, which rejected both the central authority of the Church and the final authority of the Scriptures. Many of the Anabaptists fell into this category and it is small wonder, therefore, that they found themselves under bitter attack both from those who sustained ecclesiastical authority and from those who somehow believed the Bible to be final. This tendency maintained that both Catholicism and Protestantism were falling into the errors attributed to the medieval scholastic attitude. Both, it was alleged, forgot the living "experience" of men in pursuit of the Good and sought to imprison it once more. Catholics endeavored to tie it to Church authority and the tradition of Reason in Natural Law; Protestants - Lutherans and Calvinists - freed it to subordinate it to a body of writings whose interpretation was by no means uniform or clear.

Now Quakerism, it seems to me, clearly belonged historically to this third tendency in the revolt against medieval legalism in morals. Here we are not concerned to trace out the origins of Quakerism in detail but rather to draw out what was implicit in its original attitudes. Then we shall suggest certain important questions which would seem to be perennial in the Quaker attitude both to religious authority and to the problem of right and wrong in human conduct. We shall deal with the first question in this section.

Implicit in early Quakerism's position, it would appear to me, were the following affirmations:

1. **It regarded itself as "Christian" in religious outlook and morality.** I emphasize this facet of the question because it would appear to me that implicitly, in the long run, Quakerism has no necessary connection with what I should call "Christianity." But in the beginning, at least, there were few if any Quakers who thought of themselves as divorced from what they called "christianity." At least Christian terminology was constantly used in their writings. In fact, they claimed to be restoring Christian teaching; to be rescuing it from the corrupting influences to which it had been subjected by both Catholicism and Protestantism.

2. **Right Action was in considerable measure, simply a matter of direct revelation.** It pushed to extremes, in other words, the rejection of the "legalism" associated with late medieval scholasticism. One is impressed, in reading the *Journal* of George Fox, for example, by the many instances in which Fox claimed to have direct revelations telling him to pursue or not to pursue given courses of action. Thus in the famous Lichfield episode he heard a voice telling him to go to Lichfield and walk through the streets crying "woe to you, bloody Lichfield." He did not question the "voice" or its "wisdom." Instead, he went to Lichfield, shouted his "woe," and, when he felt the mission of the voice had been carried out, shook the dust of the town from his feet. Only later did he ask himself *why* it was his duty to go to Lichfield and shout the slogan through the streets. At first, he thought that he had been asked to go that Lichfield might be chastised for the blood shed there during the English Civil War. But then he remembered that other towns had been equally guilty of shedding human blood and yet he had not been asked to visit them. Finally, he concluded -- rather lamely, it seems to me -- that he had been commanded to go to Lichfield to remind the town that in Roman times many Christian martyrs had suffered there.

The point I wish to stress about this whole Lichfield episode is that he had the vision first and he began to ask questions later. This, in a sense, is almost the polar opposite of the method which

reasons out from certain general principles (which perhaps are themselves intuitively apprehended) the course of conduct which one should pursue. It will also be noted that Fox did not ask himself beforehand what the possible consequences of his going to Lichfield might be: the act, apparently, was the "right" one to perform in itself.

3. Insight into the Good and the Will to Perform it could be gained in Meeting. This is, of course, a fundamental attitude of early Quakerism. Whatever it was, it was not the highly "individualistic" thing it is so often portrayed as being. The New Testament, of course, always constitutes the background of the Meeting and presumably its ethical teaching is the point of departure for the Meeting. But it is not difficult to infer that the New Testament's meaning is not always perfectly evident to early Friends: if it were clear at all points, they would not have to search their souls so thoroughly to discover the meaning. And the Nayler episode shows that there could be vast differences. Thus the "peace testimony" in its classical form is not untraced [sic] until 1660, in which might be called the second phase of Quaker history. True, the "peace testimony" is closely related, in the minds of its formulators, to "Christian" attitudes; but it should always be remembered that most careful Catholic thinkers did not reach the conclusions of the Quakers on "wars and fightings" and yet purported to follow the New Testament. There was nothing about the New Testament which was "self-executing" or "self-explanatory," in other words.

Moreover, Quakers evidently believed that one could pick and choose as between and among various admonitions of the New Testament. Thus while the testimony against war was ascribed to it, Quakers from the very beginning completely disregarded the apparent command to baptize. What should one observe, in other words, and what should one disregard? The answer seemed to lie here, as elsewhere, in the Meeting's experience of the Holy Spirit and of the Light Within.

I should express the implicit attitude of early Quakers, therefore, to the New Testament, as one which used Scripture as the point of departure for ethical and religious teaching but which did not regard it as necessarily the point of destination.

Here again, however, we are not entirely clear as to the respective roles of "Revelation" and "reason" in the Meeting for Worship. It would seem that the former was pre-eminent, at least in the beginning; and that Reason, as in the Lichfield incident with Fox personally, entered only later. Yet it is obvious, in reading both Fox and Penn, that reason played a considerable role and that it was never entirely absent.

We might sum up the general attitude of early Quakerism to our problem by saying that it thought of itself as Christian but that it used the New Testament selectively and relied ultimately for its guidance as to right or wrong on Revelation either to an individual or, preferably, to the Meeting as a whole. Since the final authority, in religious and moral matters, was the Light Within, neither the New Testament nor Christianity could be regarded as more than points of departure for moral and religious questions. Implicitly, it seems to me, while Quakerism was undoubtedly born into a Christian tradition and used Christian doctrine as its "working hypothesis," its theory of the final authority of the Inner Light made it potentially something not necessarily identifiable with either Christian doctrine (whatever that may be) or with Christian tradition. Its theory of the Christ within emancipated it from any necessary guidance, in matters

of right or wrong, by an historic Christ. Another way of putting it is to say that while Quakerism uses traditional moral teaching as a platform, it is a platform from which one enters a train which may and probably will take one far from the platform.

But this leads me directly to my second point about Quakerism and the problem of the Good. Its flexible attitude to all traditional doctrines of morality and its determination to be guided only by the Light Within is an enormous advantage in that it forces Quakerism, if it is to be true to its genius, to be always seeking both for the content of the Good and for the will to do it. Theoretically, it is immune from all legalisms, all imprisonings of the spirit within set formulae, all rigidities which would serve to quiet the Light Within.

Yet the very virtues of its position carry with them certain perils that are equally real. On the one hand, there is the peril of a tradition which freezes conceptions of Right and Good held in one generation. The basis for the original action is forgotten and only the form remains. Abiding by the Tradition becomes the test of Goodness. This is, of course, true of all groups and particularly of religious groups. But Quakerism is peculiarly subject to it since the very absence of closely knit organization tends to make it seek a unifying force in Tradition. Thus in the period of quietism Quakers tended to set as the standard of the Right and the Good the norms discovered by the seventeenth century. New applications and new insights were frowned upon and relatively secondary principles were preserved as if they were primary -- in fact, we tended never to ask whether they were primary. The Conscience of a previous age came to be confined, in some measure, to the specific practices of that age. Thus the principle of simplicity was held to require, under entirely different circumstances, the use of "plain dress" and "plain speech," when these had ceased to be far from plain and far from simple. And we still find Friends today who, when we ask about the Right and the Good, refer to seventeenth century practices as if they established the norm for all times.

But there is a second peril which is equally great. I refer to the fear of casuistry - the use of reason to develop rules for application of principles to particular cases - which often tends to characterize us. We may not pickle our moral beliefs in the brine of Tradition. But we may leave them rather vague and may not inquire as to the possible incompatibility between or among different principles when applied to given cases. So fearful are we of legalism and casuistry that we fail often to recognize that in fact every Conscience must have some kind of casuistry and that if the casuistry is not adopted specifically, it will appear rather irresponsibly through the back door. Quakers, perhaps more than any religious group, are loath to admit that between the general principle of action presumably discovered by insight or intuition and the specific action, rationality of some kind must intervene if the general principle is to be applied responsibly to the specific case. On the one side is the Inner Light, on the other, Reason. Between is Conscience. To introduce casuistry, of course, is always very perilous in itself: (i) When we develop rules for application of principles to particular cases we run into the danger of forgetting the ultimate principle. (ii) We also are forced to make fine distinctions between acts which on the surface may seem to be alike. (iii) Finally, we must take account of consequences, which to the religious mentality is always a disagreeable task.

The General Principle Forgotten or Distorted. The general principle tends to be forgotten or distorted the more elaborate the rules of casuistry become. It was this, supposedly, which led

early Protestants to be so bitter against the Jesuits, who seemed, in process of making the fine distinctions always implied in casuistry, to forget the general principle of morality which they were supposedly upholding. In the Middle Ages, the clergy were forbidden to shed blood and this principle was a heritage of the early Christian prohibition on the taking of life. But, it was asked by the casuists, suppose that a Bishop is also a feudal lord and must go out to battle? How can he avoid the shedding of blood? The answer of some of the moral theologians was that if he wielded a club instead of a sword he might still uphold the no blood shedding principle. For a club would beat the opponent into a kind of pulp and this, in a literal sense, not shed blood. The fact that the opponent might die seemed to be irrelevant.

This is perhaps an example of how we get so lost in the means of implementing a general principle that we forget the end to be achieved.

Fine Distinctions Between Acts. Any system of casuistry, secondly, is forced to make very fine distinctions. The line must be drawn somewhere but to draw it at all often seems to be a distinction without a difference. Thus during the evolution of the criminal law, the distinctions between various kinds of killing have been elaborated at great length, until today we frequently have murder in the first, second, and third degrees, and also manslaughter. The particular classification depends on the circumstances of the case. But it is evident that these distinctions are often very difficult to make in concrete individual cases and that the act, in any event, is one of taking human life. It is also evident that the proliferation of classifications makes for the very legalistic spirit against which Quakerism is in some sense a protest.

Taking Account of the Consequences. One of the most repugnant aspects of any elaborate casuistry to the "religious" mind is perhaps the indispensable requirement that we take into account the possible consequences of given acts before adjudging whether or not they conform to the Right or the Good. Max Weber has suggested that there are two "ideal type" ways of looking at morality: one he calls the "ethic of absolute ends" and the other the "ethic of responsibility."

The first he identifies with the "religious" mentality; the second, as it were, with the "political." That is to say, the first pole thinks of acts as "right" or "wrong" in themselves and is unconcerned with consequences. Its watchword is "I will do right though the heavens fall." Taken literally, of course, this would imply that even if one could reasonably predict that the result of the act would lead to universal destruction, one must nevertheless perform it if it is "right." Here the notion of morality would seem to be that the act can somehow be divorced both from its context and its consequences.

The "ethic of responsibility," on the other hand, is deeply aware of the consequences likely to follow the performance of particular acts. It sometimes becomes so involved in speculating about predictable and unpredictable consequences, in fact, that it fails to see how precarious is any judgment of consequences and that, moreover, mere judgment of consequences is never enough. One must always have a standard by which to judge the consequences and this standard can never be thrown up, so to speak, by the consequences themselves.

The "ethic of responsibility" tends to make for a cautious attitude to life. All the "evidence" on which to base decisions about right and wrong is never in, so that the effect of this attitude is to

induce postponement of decisions. Moreover, the cautious perspective is associated with a careful weighing of contingencies and an acute awareness of the ways in which well-motivated actions may in fact have the reverse effect from that which was intended.

All these considerations, then, quite naturally lead the "religious" moralist to become impatient with the ethic of responsibility. Perhaps this is why some Quakers think -- and I have heard them say so -- that any judgment about right or wrong in which "reason" plays a part cannot be a matter of "conscience." The assumption here seems to be that a decision according to "conscience" must not be tainted by the ethic of responsibility. One Quaker I know even goes so far as to say that if his motivation is "pure" and "right," a man can drop an atomic [bomb] on a city without having to be concerned about consequences. If his intentions are "good" -- as I understand my friend -- the bomber is doing "right."

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These, then, are some of the reasons Quakers might be suspicious of casuistry just as they are rightly suspicious of theology. They can, with some justification, point to the dangers of forgetting the general principle, to the sophistries often present in making fine or calculated distinctions, and to the complexities involved in an ethic of responsibility as contrasted with an ethic of absolute ends.

But while there is some considerable basis for sharing the "religious" mind's doubt, it would seem to me that in the modern world the danger to Quakerism is in the tendency for many of us to be content with general principles and to spurn the casuistical. We do not give enough attention to the "hard" cases in which apparent conflict of principles must somehow be resolved and in which some principles must apparently (at least from the human point of view) give way in favor of others. An honest casuistry will admit its dilemmas but at the same time will insist that it is better to have certain rules (however tentative) for guidance prior to confronting a specific case than to trust only in the insight which may be vouchsafed at the time. I sense in Quakers a tendency to assert that, because they realize that each "case" is unique, any body of rules thought out beforehand is unhelpful and perhaps dangerous; instead, they appear to argue, prayerful consideration at the time will furnish guidance to perplexed souls.

Now there is no doubt much to be said for this attitude and it reflects the authentic spirit of much seventeenth century Quakerism. As we have seen, Fox apparently relied in considerable degree on "voices" which might be heard on specific occasions and only later asked himself why his "voice" had instructed him to do as he did. And we have admitted that the perils of any elaborate casuistry are real. Nevertheless, most Quakers are not George Foxes; and we may even venture to suggest that Fox, for all his spiritual genius, might have benefited from greater concern with casuistry. Moreover, the view which would spurn casuistry forgets that "reason" and the ability to make distinctions between kinds and qualities of acts are as much "gifts of God" as revelation and intuition. True, the perils attached to casuistry are real, as we have seen. But the dangers of an uncritical reliance on revelation and intuition are equally great.

In fact, a good case can be made for the contention that a failure to utilize human reason is as blasphemous as insensitivity to the Light Within. An attitude which identifies the Good simply

with good intentions or which attempts to divorce acts from their consequences can be charged with the offense of irresponsibility. If one has the good intention of benefiting mankind by the production of figs and then, through ignorance or carelessness, plants thistle bushes, it is probably that God will not hold one blameless, despite good intentions. Interpreted in one way, the statement "I will do right though the heavens fall" is an utterly callous counsel of immorality; for it seems to assure that an act can be "right" though it leads to results which most would term contrary to the Good.

There is a passage in the New Testament which sum up what it seems to me should be the ideal of Quakers with respect to problems of morality. "Be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves," said Jesus on one occasion. (Matt. X, 16.) While this is subject to varying interpretations, the one which would seem to me to do most justice to its meaning is the identification of "harmlessness" with "good intentions" and "a right value system or hierarchy" and the "wisdom" of serpents with what might be called "worldly" knowledge. "Harmlessness" implies non-violence, good-will, and a sensitivity to those overall insights which we sometimes call "revelation" or "intuition;" "wisdom" embraces human reason, technical understanding, a consciousness of contingency, and an awareness that acts cannot be divorced from their consequences. In one sense, the harmlessness of the dove is the general principle behind "conscience" and the "wisdom" of the serpent is the "casuistry" which must accompany it by shaping the conscience to act in a given contingent situation.

Following this interpretation, the task of the religious man who has rejected the final authority of any book, ecclesiastical authority, or tradition is to search for overall insights into Value within himself and within the community of Seekers. So soon, however, as he seeks to put these insights into words, he must inevitably, if he is aware of the implications, attempt to apply the verbal formulae to concrete situations. This will lead him to make verbal distinctions, to utilize logic, and to predict consequences of given acts. He will be aware that the process is a continuous one: the casuistry is implicit in every Conscience and the general principles or insights must permeate the casuistry if the latter is to be subordinate to the Good.

If we assume Quakerism to be aware of these two aspects of the quest for the Good and its implementation, then it would be primarily in the Meeting that the "harmlessness" would have its home. The insights of one Friend would be checked against those of others. Underlying the whole adventure, of course, is the faith that moral Good or Value can be recognized when seen and that somehow the Light Within can be distinguished from the Darkness Within. Obviously, a quest of this kind is always subject to the hazard that the recognition may not be clear or that we could be mistaken. There is no guarantee that what we take to be a voice from God may not in fact be a voice from that which has fallen away from God. But as Quakers we cannot, it seems to me, check the Voice against any other authority - whether of New Testament, Old Testament, President of the United States, Church, or individual. There is, I suppose, a certain sense in which tradition must be assumed to be the guide unless and until there is a clear deliverance controverting it. But at best, tradition is but a point of departure, or occasionally a stopping place; and it can never be definitive.

In translating the insights of the Meeting into words, we have already begun the process of casuistry, whether we like it or not. For words have different significations; and the implications

of our words cannot be fully understood unless we examine the words carefully and relate the thoughts which they express to other deliverances. Past formulae inherited from the past may or may not have meaning for us: whether they do or not will depend on whether we constantly question them and re-examine their meaning in the light of the empirical world of our own generation. This, too, is an aspect of casuistry. Implicit in the idea of the Meeting as the inspiration for Conscience and its Casuistry is the notion that purely individual insights and reasonings are apt to go astray and that even the most dedicated and intelligent of souls is likely to be caught up in mistaking the Inner Darkness for the Inner Light and rationalization for reasoning. Moreover, each person brings different experiences to the Meeting and moral insight depends in part on an appreciation of diverse experience. Of course, there is no guarantee that the Meeting will develop a "better" Conscience-Casuistry complex than any one individual; and in the end, it would seem to me, Quakerism implies that if the Meeting's insight does not freely and spontaneously become that of the individual, the latter is obliged to follow his own Conscience-Casuistry Complex wherever it may lead. This makes for what some might call a kind of "anarchy" and it is not surprising that early Quakers were often accused of "antinomianism" or that a modern writer can denounce viewpoints of this kind as destructive of all moral order (Pierce). In the end, the individual Quaker may have to stand not only against the outside world but also against his own Meeting.

But to return to the problem of casuistry. The weak point in modern Quakerism, as we have suggested earlier, is its reluctance to pursue questions of morality in concrete detail and to confront in all their ramifications the issues of applying general principles to situations in which those principles may conflict with others or may not themselves be clear. Quite often we fall back on traditional answers or familiar formulae or seem to evade the political realities of a world characterized by hypothetical imperatives. Perhaps this is one reason Reinhold Niebuhr has criticized modern Quakerism so severely: it is, he argues, characterized by "soft utopianism" and by an unwillingness to come to grips with the problem of applying general principles to concrete and complex situations.

While in many respects Niebuhr may be exaggerating, there is something to what he says. In conclusion, therefore, I should like to raise a number of questions regarding typical testimonies of Friends when applied to possible cases. The "testimonies" we can equate roughly with general principles of the Quaker "conscience," although, as we have seen, no conscience, at least when reduced to words, can ever be sharply separated from the problems of "casuistry."

Testimonies versus Conscience. One of the primary or underlying problems involving "conscience" and "casuistry" for Friends would seem to be that of the authority of the "testimonies" (assuming them still to be testimonies of current Meetings) as against the authority of individual conscience and its casuistry. Suppose, for example, a case in which the Conscience-Casuistry complex of a given individual tells him that it is his bounden [sic] obligation to assassinate a high public official -- the President of the United States, for example. The Friend involved has taken as his highest value the welfare of the human race and has regarded the President's acts as inimical to that welfare. He has seen no other way out except an act of assassination. Of course, he takes his concern to his Meeting, the Meeting sits in silence on the problem, and advises him that in its judgment such an act would violate Friends' testimony against taking of human life. He reconsiders the whole issue but after much silence and no little

fasting comes to the original conclusion. He contends, let us say, that the taking of the President's life will preserve hundreds of lives which in the absence of his act, would in all probability be taken due to the President's intention to make war. Hence the act of taking one life, while superficially against the Testimony, is in the long run favorable to it; by the test of long-run consequences, in other words, the Friend thinks he is fulfilling the testimony better than the Meeting would do through its advice.

In one sense this case raises the question as to what is the "conscience" of Quakerism about authority in the Religious Society. Is it the careful judgment of the Meeting or is it the conclusion of the individual who, after consulting both his own inner voice and the "outer" voice of the Meeting has concluded that he must perform the act? If the judgment of the Meeting is authoritative, then we must conclude that the admonition "to follow Conscience" (which runs through Friends literature) ranks lower on the scale of values than the authority of the Meeting. If, on the other hand, we say that the Friend must follow his own Conscience, and its accompanying casuistry (always assuring that beforehand he has carefully weighed the advice of Meeting), then we are in effect denying the authoritative nature of Friends' testimony as interpreted by the Meeting. And it will be noted that the "conscience" of each position is informed by a casuistry; that of the Meeting by the notion that there is a difference between going to war and killing a President (for in the former case, Friends almost always say that the individual must follow his "conscience" despite the "testimony" to the contrary); that of the latter by the interpretation of the testimony against the taking of human life in such a way as to give it a quantitative twist.

I once posed this question before a Friends school audience and I am told that the students were shocked by my answer: that the Friend, providing that his Conscience was informed and his casuistry made subject to the criticism of the Meeting, must do as his conscience and accompanying casuistry bade him. This assumes, of course, that he has given careful consideration to both short-run and long-run consequences and has imaginatively related his proposed act to the whole complex of acts and events of which it would be only one. If we reach a conclusion other than this, it seems to me, we are asserting the proposition that Friends ought sometimes to act contrary to their consciences or at least to ignore the deliverances of their consciences. But if we accept this proposition, we are denying the central testimony of Quakerism itself.

Testimonies of Truth versus Non-Violence. Oases of conscience can arise in which the testimony for Truth can apparently conflict with the testimony for Non-Violence. I stress the "apparently" because it can usually be argued that it is only lack of perspective or knowledge which puts "truth" into conflict with "non-violence." Nevertheless, we have to act on the basis of the perspectives and knowledge of the moment and there is no doubt that there have been cases in which this conflict has arisen in acute form. What kind of casuistry should we use? And how would this casuistry help enlighten our Conscience?

One of the most dramatic historical instances with which I am familiar is the case of M. André Trocmé in wartime France. Many have heard him recount his experiences and the ultimate conclusion which he found himself obliged to adopt. He had been rescuing Jews from the Nazis and secluding them in his attic preparatory to assisting them to escape. Not infrequently the

Nazi-controlled police would pass by his house and ask questions of his children. M. Trocmé decided that his children must be trained to give answers which would seem plausible and yet would not reveal the fact that Jews were in the house. In effect, I have heard André Trocmé's children say, that they were taught how to lie effectively. Any mere evasion would not have been enough. Trocmé's reasoning was that the truth, or even a semblance of the truth, would have led to capture of the Jews and that capture would lead to probable death in a concentration camp. He would, he thought, be an accessory to that death if he and his children did not learn to lie effectively and plausibly. He reached this conclusion reluctantly, it is true, for after all he was a pastor who was as interested in maintaining the habit of truth-telling as anyone. Yet he concluded that the value of the preservation of human life was greater than the value of truth-telling where to all appearances they could not be reconciled.

It will be noted, too, that M. Trocmé had to take other factors into consideration. What would be the effect of training to lie on his children, particularly since they were at a very impressionable age? An evaluation of the total consequences of his act in inculcating deception was difficult, especially since it is never easy to forecast consequences beyond the very immediate future. Yet without some effort to weigh consequences, he felt he would be acting irresponsibly. How would the principle "I will do right though the heavens fall" have helped him at this point? How, indeed, could he have searched the Scripture to find a definite answer? Almost any decision he might make would be unsatisfactory in some respects. Yet he had to act; he could not postpone a decision.

Trocmé's dilemma illustrates a point which advocates of a systematic casuistry often make: that a frank recognition beforehand of the possibility of conflict in moral principles and a development of rough guides for a resolution of those conflicts would help us immeasurably if and when the crisis should come. We develop casuistical rules at our peril, it is true; but without them, the pathway is even more perilous.

Meaning of the Testimony Against "Outward Wars and Strife." Problems of conscience bristle when we consider our last illustration of the relation of Quakerism to casuistry. The famous 1660 declaration "from the harmless and innocent people of God, called Quakers" states: "All bloody principles and practices ... we utterly deny; with all outward wars and strife, and fightings with outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretense whatsoever; this is our testimony to the whole world."² The declaration was originally issued to deny rumors that Quakers were involved in an alleged Fifth Monarchy uprising just after the return of Charles II. Obviously, therefore, it would seem to exclude civil war. On the basis of early Quaker attitudes, it would appear also to be a "testimony" against foreign war.

But beyond that we are at a loss as to how it shall be interpreted. What, for example, is an "outward war"? Are we to take the term literally and apply it only to military conflicts declared by governments? And if not, what is "war"? These may seem picayunish questions but we must remember that one of Gandhi's leading disciples has described his technique as a different kind of "war."³ Does the Quaker testimony against "outward wars and strife" embrace in its prohibitions the "strife" connected with satyagraha?

And what of "fightings with outward weapons"? What is a weapon and what is "outward"? Is a boycott an "outward" or an "inward" weapon? Suppose there is a good probability that an industrial slowdown would so weaken a country's military defenses that it would not dare to go to war? Would Quakers advocate such a slowdown (a form of sabotage) on the ground that it would achieve the objective of preventing "outward wars"? Would the slowdown itself be an "outward weapon"?

And how does the 1660 declaration bear on what is usually called "police work"? Is a policeman on patrol, armed only with a night stick, bearing an "outward weapon"? Suppose he uses his night stick to break up a fight between brawling drunks. Is he fighting with "outward weapons" against the "testimony"? Certainly William Penn did not think so, for in Pennsylvania there was a police system and there were also prisons. There was even a death penalty. The modern Quaker casuist, of course, is not bound by William Penn, but, what is his answer to these questions?

The 1660 declaration is prefaced, of course, by reference to "bloody principles and practices." Perhaps this will give us a clue as to how we can distinguish permitted strife and struggle from unpermitted conflict. Boycotts, let us say, do not usually lead to a literal shedding of blood; wars do. Does this imply that any strife which does not lead to literal bloodshed is permissible? But surely this is to take us back to the medieval casuists with their distinction between clubs and swords. The shedding of blood, surely, cannot be the central test.

In a literal sense, too, all political struggle, all contests of parties, all efforts to defeat social evils involve the "outward weapons" of political organization, power structure, and "outward ... strife." Are those excluded to the Quaker? How can the manipulations connected with all social organization, which always include conflict, be regarded as "inward ... strife"? Yet if we exclude these activities to the Quaker, how is he to act in social matters at all?

Perhaps all questions of this kind can be neatly illustrated if we examine the problem of a world "police force." Already we have a kind of police force patrolling in the Middle East and it has been proposed by some that the United Nations establish a permanent force of some kind. What attitude should a Quaker take to the matter, given his general testimony against "outward ... strife" and "fightings with outward weapons"? If we say simply that the purpose of the police force is to preserve "peace," even though it possesses "outward weapons," we must change our testimony against "outward weapons" in some manner -- or at least re-define them in a radical manner. The existence of any kind of a police force implies the possibility -- indeed, the probability -- of "outward strife" between the police and recalcitrant law violators. If we accept the notion of police at all, we must either redefine "outward strife" in a peculiar way or else admit frankly that some kinds of "outward strife" under certain circumstances and given conditions are permissible and indeed morally desirable. In considerable degree, however, Quakers have shied away from such complex casuistry.

In part, the casuistry involved in the "peace testimony" turns on the role, if any, we assign to "physical force." Some might say that use or threat of physical force is never permissible, while such non-physical pressures as boycotts, strikes, and freedom riders are compatible with the testimony. But the casuist will ask why physical force per se should be excluded and other forms of pressure permitted. If the test be one of consequences, for example, many psychologists

believe that immediate and quick administration of physical force in connection with the rearing of children may not only be an effective and necessary means of discipline, but may be far preferable to the psychological tensions which, in certain circumstances, might be the probable alternative. The physical force, moreover, would leave far fewer scars and have far milder traumatic effects. From a religious point of view, it might be asked whether God did not intend us to use our bodies as well as our minds and spirits in the struggles apparently inevitable in human life. Why should "physical force" always be evil? To identify the use of the body with "evil" would seem to imply a dangerous dualism between the physical and non-physical and to deny the intimate connection between soul and body.

Implicit in the whole discussion, too, is the problem of the legitimate use of "force" and the possible distinction between "force" and "violence." We often use the latter term rather glibly, without attempting, to state what we mean by it. Sometimes Quakers identify "violence" with "physical force" and at other times make it embrace both certain types of physical force and some varieties of non-physical pressures. A casuistry adequate for our day must make precision in the use of terms one of its goals. "Good intentions," as we have suggested earlier, are not enough if our consciences are to be enlightened, clear, and aware of the casuistical problems in all moral reasoning.

Finally one might ask whether the distinction between "inner" and "outer" is itself a meaningful dichotomy.

In conclusion, we might suggest that if the tone of this paper has seemed to be critical, it is not because the writer doubts that Quakerism has an important contribution to make in the modern discussion of religious and moral issues. On the contrary, it is precisely because he values the potential in the Quaker spirit that he has raised some of the questions which Friends must ask themselves if they are to be true to one of their strongest empha [sic] -- that of plain speaking or frankness.

Many individual Friends, it is true, have faced up to the problems of casuistry and are even now attempting to give answers to some of the questions we have raised. In the past, too, Friends have not been unaware that answers to questions of morality are not easy to discover if we are honest with ourselves. While recognizing all this, the writer would still call for a much greater consciousness of these problems. Painful as the development of a casuistry must be, the price of its absence is even greater.

And the assets which Quakerism brings to the task are not inconsiderable. It is not imprisoned within a rigid tradition which would tend to discourage the asking of questions. While the note of mysticism which has insisted that direct experience of God is not a method of escaping the world but rather a way whereby divine inspiration can be brought to bear on the problems of conduct which the world confronts [sic]. And although Friends have rightly questioned the sufficiency of "reason" in dealing with issues of conduct, there has also been a recognition by many that rationality is indispensable. Finally, we are for the most part not encumbered with an hierarchial structure which cuts off discussion and new experiences; and the fact that our source of authority is no man, book, or organization should provide the stimulus for each of us to think frankly about problems of conscience and its casuistry.

These are assets which provide the foundations through which we could indeed cherish and encourage the harmlessness of doves while yet acquiring and developing the wisdom of serpents. Though the combination is a difficult one to maintain, it is one of our major tasks in the modern world to attempt it.

¹ Conscience in the New Testament -- Studies in Biblical Theology, No. 15, London SCM Press, 1955

²Journal of George Fox, I., 494-495

³K. Shridharani, *War Without Violence*