

Quakerism on Campus

Carter Delafield

At the recommendation of an ad hoc committee created out of the representatives to the Community Council to study the problems of student life, the *Guilfordian* undertook a project to assess the current attitudes toward Quaker "principles and practices" as part of the Guilford College experience.

With that in mind, the following question was addressed to a number of Guilford College faculty, staff, and administrators: How should

a member of the Guilford College Community relate him/herself to the principles and practices of Quakerism?

It was found to be, first of all, a difficult question to word and second, a most difficult question to respond to. The efforts of those who did submit responses is much appreciated by the staff of the *Guilfordian* and the College Community.

Ed. Note — Next week student responses will be published.

Ted Benfey

Friends are realists — they see man as seeking and needing a significant measure of self-fulfillment. However, they know this can only be accomplished without pain or suffering to others if man recognize himself also as part of a community whose well-being is his concern. For the Quaker, personal freedom and social harmony are not in conflict — each implies the other. It is the Quaker's basic faith that his own growth can be gained while the community of which he is a part gains in stature and quality also.

I myself find it hard to see why an academic community cannot organize itself so that its academic work is done superbly while its fun and relaxation restore and recreate — infused by the heightened skill and wit and ingenuity fostered by the academic environment.

Tom Bernard

I believe that the practice of any religion, including Quakerism, is primarily a personal matter. However, religious principles, if deeply held, will strongly influence the individual both in his relationships with other people, and in the social and political causes which he espouses. Thus, Quakers have traditionally been in the forefront of various social movements. Those who work for social change in this way are not attempting to impose their religious beliefs on others. Rather, they operate as individuals within a democratic society promoting a point of view which they believe is best for the society at large, regardless of religious beliefs.

These same principles, I believe, hold true at Guilford College. Belief in Quaker principles (or the principles of any other religion) should first of all influence the character of the relationships a person has with other individuals at the college. Secondly, these principles should guide and influence the person in working for the type of college which he believes will be best for all students, regardless of religious beliefs. For example, a committed Quaker might believe that the use of alcohol should be prohibited in the dorms. He might work for this rule because he believes that it will provide a better college for all students. However, I think it would be a mistake to work for this rule specifically because it may be a Quaker practice.

Guilford College should be first and foremost an academic institution, characterized by academic freedom and the pursuit of academic excellence. Within this context, the student should be exposed to the principles and practices of Quakerism through his exposure to the lives and concerns of the individual faculty members, administrators and students who believe in and live by these principles.

Dick Coe

It is my hope that an individual, in the process of selection of Guilford or upon entering the community would seek to acquaint him/herself with Quaker testimonies as they relate to life within the community. This knowledge can help to provide a basis for understanding some of the principles which underlie the college and the goals toward which the college strives.

I would note, however, that when dealing with relationships among the members of the Guilford community there are certain standards of mutual respect for the rights of others — both for work and for recreation — which are not necessarily particular to any religious faith. It is to the balancing of the rights of the individual with the rights of other members of the community and to the purposes of the community endeavors as a whole that we should be concerned.

I think immediately of an example which illustrates instantly the way I see Quakerism alive and functioning on this campus. I expect few undergraduates recognize this particular specialness because they haven't been to other schools and so don't bear the scars the rest of us carry from our experiences with college registrars.

Surely nobody goes through any college without finding himself at least once a special case where strict interpretation of the rules does violence to what is good for one's education. What happens is always the same: the registrar listens to the story, agrees that truth and justice are not being served, but adds, "I'm sorry. There is nothing I can do." And intuitively one knows that after this he goes home to sleep the sleep of the just because although human lives may be wrenched out of shape, square pegs are in square holes and all is well.

Not so here. Like other registrars, Mr. Reynolds has a strong sense of order, but respect for the individual and concern for what is good for the student are more important. When there is a conflict human values take priority over statistical ones. One doesn't always get what one wants, but round human beings are not bludgeoned into forms to fit square holes.

This consistent recognition of the sometimes annoying uniqueness of the individual is evident in many places. Women are treated as equals by men on this campus far more often than in other academic communities I've observed. Women students are taken seriously. Guilford education is not just academic training. Many teachers here try hard to help students confront the sometimes dreadful implications of the ideas they are dealing with and to share the confrontations. Guilford is a special place.

But something goes wrong at the point where the individual and his rights meet the rights of the group. Since I've been here, again and again students, staff, and faculty have given an astonishing amount of energy and time to writing, rewriting, revising rules for community life, to developing alternate plans for dormitory organization, trying to balance the varied needs of individuals in a diverse group against the needs of the community. Lifestyles change, but the complaints are the same — that the rights of the many are routinely violated by the few, that where the desires of one person conflict with the desires of another, too often the more authoritarian imposes his will rather than attempting compromise.

The individual questioned about either of these patterns of behavior often defends himself by citing Quaker concern for the individual. He is a round peg, he claims, resisting attempts to force him into a square hole. But isn't something more important left out? The situation is not the same as the one the student confronts at the registrar's office. Here the conflict is between human beings — a person and a group of persons, or a person and a person. To see only one's own humanity is to dehumanize the other.

This is a point I don't think any of us stresses nearly enough at Guilford. I think there are many students who don't even understand it. I don't believe we can look for much constructive change until we all take it more seriously.

There is a corollary that bears examination too: The individual who, either as a member of a group or as individual, allows himself to be imposed on by someone using force or threats is denying his own value and dehumanizing himself.

By these definitions, practically everybody is violating Quaker principles, as I understand them, left and right. I believe we all need some discussion about what Quaker concern for the individual really means. We need, too, some self-examination to see how we can learn to recognize and assume the personal responsibility that Quaker principles place on all individuals and without which we aren't going to learn much about the Quaker sense of community.

Don Gibbon

It is truly unfortunate that the entire campus community could not share in the ideas and discussions which centered around the visit of Dr. Jay Smith during the past four days. Even more is it unfortunate that we do not all have those ideas as a basis for reflection about life here on the Guilford campus. We have been asked to sum up our feelings about the role Quakerism should/could play in this community; this summation has every relevance to Dr. Smith's discussion of the sources of strength of the "New China."

First, for me, Quakerism is a shifting, hard-to-grasp, blend of stubborn sticking to principle, individual freedom, and social consciousness, all guided by a deep Christian faith. Most of the difficult situations which arise for non-Quakers in their attempts to deal with Quaker institutions come about because they forget one or more of these integral/non-separable parts of the Quaker beliefs.

Jay Smith's comments on China could, I believe, be summed up very briefly: Mao's success in changing the life of the Chinese people from one of degradation to one of corporate pride and hope is basically due to his