

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting *Faith and Practice* (1997): Extracts on the Arts

Extract #169:

We all know about the traditional antagonism between Quakerism and the arts. At Swarthmore College, when I was there in the forties, there was no studio art offered. The Quaker emphasis was definitely on the social sciences, and the feeling was strong that one should be expected to contribute to society in a social-activist kind of way. Nevertheless, I aspired to be an artist; I also joined the Quaker meeting there. That these two avenues were incompatible was obvious by the clichés that were then available concerning Art and Quakerism. The artist was a proverbially selfish person, bound to do his or her own thing at the expense, if necessary, of society. He or she was given to exhibitionist promotion and passionate emotional extremes, and offered a product that was suspiciously commercial or superfluously decorative.

The Quaker, on the other hand, was geared to the needs of society and ready to offer his or her own life for the good of others; was not going to waste time in trivial pursuits, and was solidly grounded, with an emotional and productive life very much under control.

Well, my ideas have come a long way since then. This was all a very exterior view of the outside from the outside. What I missed at that stage of my life was that the artist and the Quaker are on the same internal journey. Each is seeking a relationship with the Divine, and each is seeking a way to express that relationship. There are just many different ways of expressing it. For many, the path to the Self has to be entered by way of the arts, whether or not we are gifted in that field. That doesn't seem to matter. As St. Paul says: If we have not love, we are as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And for many of us, the pathway to love is through the arts.... The process of working with and forming material things can lead beyond them to the spiritual, and shape of clay or colors of paint can be a window into another world.

—Janet Mustin, 1992 (#169, not #240 as per the author index)

Extract #282:

There are few human activities in which perfection is possible; for in most things the human limitations of knowledge, time, energy, skill, and motive impede us; only in the arts do they work for us, so that we can truly say of certain works of music, poetry, painting, sculpture and architecture that we can neither wish nor imagine them otherwise. When we find this degree of perfection and are able to respond to it, they become in sober truth a revelation of the divine in the sense that Jesus was: human yet complete.

—John Ormerod Greenwood, 1978 (#282)

Types & Shadows

JOURNAL OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF QUAKERS IN THE ARTS

Issue #9, Spring 1998

Types & Shadows is published quarterly by the Fellowship of Quakers in the Arts. Subscriptions are available through membership in the FQA.

This page revised July 2001