

# **Beyond Uneasy Tolerance**

## **The saga of Quakers and the arts in 100 quotations**

Compiled and chronologically arranged by Esther Greenleaf Mürer

### **Fellowship of Quakers in the Arts**

Published 2000 by the Fellowship of Quakers in the Arts;  
reprinted, 2018

Revised (Quotation 24A added), 2024

FQA is an arts ministry for Quakers and others; FQA is under  
the care of Trenton [New Jersey] Monthly Meeting

For more information about FQA, go to: [www.fqaquaker.org](http://www.fqaquaker.org)

Original publication of this pamphlet was made possible by a  
grant from the Publications Grants Group of Philadelphia  
Yearly Meeting.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This pamphlet tells the dramatic and little-known story of the  
evolution of Quaker attitudes toward the arts from antipathy  
to acceptance. The story is presented in the form of brief  
quotations from Quaker writings on the arts, arranged  
chronologically from the 1650s to 1995. Extracts from

corporate documents, such as epistles of yearly meetings, are in italics.

Frederick J. Nicholson provided a detailed history of British Friends' relation to the arts up to 1960 in his groundbreaking survey *Quakers and the Arts* (London: FHSC, 1968). Ten years later John Ormerod Greenwood's Swarthmore Lecture, *Signs of Life: Art and Religious Experience* (London: FHSC, 1978) caused such a stir that the following year both *Friends Journal* and *Quaker Life* published their first special issues on the arts.

Both Greenwood's and Nicholson's books are now out of print. They have been an invaluable resource for compiling the present pamphlet, and the reader wishing to know more is advised to consult them. *Beyond Uneasy Tolerance* adds more recent material, as well as more quotations illustrating attitudes to the arts among unprogrammed Friends in the United States.

Elizabeth Gray Vining, in her 1939 Pendle Hill pamphlet, *Contributions of the Quakers*, begins her discussion of the arts with the words: "This section, unfortunately, might almost be entitled: What the Friends Have Not Given." Positive Quaker contributions to the arts are indeed few compared to contributions in other areas.

Friends of the past produced a wealth of Quaker journals, some of which have become classics of world literature. Religious poetry was tolerated more than most other literary forms; first-generation Friends who wrote poetry included Thomas Ellwood, Thomas Story, and Margaret Fell.

Quakers also evolved a distinctive style, marked by fine craftsmanship of an austere beauty, in practical arts such as architecture, carpentry, quilting and embroidery, and nature-related arts such as garden design and botanical drawing.

However, the Society of Friends has been hostile to music, the visual and performing arts, and most literary genres perhaps longer and more consistently than any other religious group. In the climate of seventeenth-century England the arts were perceived by religious reformers as serving the purposes of the apostate church and the decadent aristocracy. Early Friends saw them as carnal and self-intoxicating. Indulgence in sensory gratification, "vain imaginings" and useless

ornamentation were distractions from attending to the pure Life. It was untruthful to tell a story that never happened, paint an imaginary scene, play a role on the stage, or sing songs (including psalms) expressing what one did not feel. Music and the theater were regarded as particularly corrupting.

The taboo continued through the eighteenth century, but was challenged with increasing frequency in the nineteenth. The first guarded hint of a corporate recognition that the arts might have a place in Quakerism came in London Yearly Meeting's discipline of 1925 (Quote #31).

In the past fifty years the arts have played an increasing role among Friends. A challenge from Vera Brittain, the pacifist and feminist writer who declined to join the Society because she found it artistically inhospitable, led British Friends to the form the Quaker Fellowship of the Arts in the 1950s. The QFA currently publishes an annual magazine, *Reynard*, and a newsletter, *Foxtrot*.

The history of arts organizations among unprogrammed Friends in North America more complex. A group of Quaker writers published a literary quarterly, *Approach*, from 1947 to 1967. Local and regional arts groups have existed for some time, as have specialized networks for songwriters, folk dancers and the like. In the early 1990s Minnie Jane, a visual artist from Trenton (NJ) Monthly Meeting, began trying to build a continental network which would span all artistic media. The Fellowship of Quakers in the Arts currently publishes a quarterly newsletter, *Types & Shadows*; maintains a web site; and is an increasingly visible presence at the annual gathering of Friends General Conference.

In a recent Pendle Hill Pamphlet, Martha Paxton Grundy writes: "The more critical gifts of ministry . . . include such things as the ability to speak from the Witness-within-the-minister to the Witness-within-someone else. . . . Another gift is to raise a prophetic voice against the evils of the day, and to hold up a contrasting vision of God's realm, of Gospel Order, and its present possibility and even its present reality."\*

Clearly both gifts abound among Friends who are called to minister through the arts. The quotations from recent decades present heartening evidence that Quaker artists are moving

beyond a need to justify their art, and are exploring the deeper synergy between the arts and Quaker spirituality and witness.

It is our hope that this collection will spur new interest in fostering arts ministry among Friends. We offer it as a resource for reflection and discussion, and—not least—for Faith and Practice revision committees wishing to expand their horizon to include the arts.

Esther Greenleaf Mürer

April 2000

\*Martha Paxton Grundy, *Tall Poppies*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet 347 (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1999), 6.

-1-

All ye Poets, Jesters, rhimers, makers of Verses and Ballads, who bend your wits to please novelties, light minds, who delights in jests and toyes, more than in the simple naked truth which you should be united to, you are for the undoing of many poor souls, it is your work to tickle up the ears of people with your jests and toyes; this proceeds from a wrong heart where dwells the lust, and feeds the wrong heart and mind and wits, which brings them to the grave and dust, and there buries the minds and clogs the nature, which is a shame to all that be in the modesty and pure sincerity & truth and cleanness of mind. . . .

— George Fox, 1658

-2-

Musician. Truly, me thinks when I go to Church, and hear the Organs, and Voyces, and the Discords, and Concords, I am even ravished to hear, and I can praise the Lord with them, and tis to me as the joys of Heaven.

Quaker. That Heaven will be shaken, and thy Song will be turned into howling; for such Musick and Singing was never set up of God, but of men; and it takes with that part of man that serves not God aright, but is for wrath and judgement.

— Solomon Eccles, 1667<sup>[SEP]</sup>

-3-

And therefore, all friends and people, pluck down your images; I say, pluck them out of your houses, walls, and

signs, or other places, that none of you be found imitators of his Creator, whom you should serve and worship; and not observe the idle lazy mind, that would go invent and make things like a Creator and Maker. . . .

— George Fox, ca. 1670

-4-

It is not lawful for Christians to use games, sports, plays, comedies, or other recreations which are inconsistent with Christian silence, gravity, or sobriety. Laughter, sports, games, mockery, or jests, useless conversation, and similar matters are neither Christian liberty nor harmless mirth.

— Robert Barclay, 1676

-5-

How many plays did Jesus Christ and His Apostles recreate themselves at? What poets, romances, comedies, and the like did the Apostles and Saints make, or use to pass away their time withal? I know, they did redeem their time, to avoid foolish talking, vain jesting, profane babblings, and fabulous stories.

William Penn, 1682

-6-

I was moved to cry also against all sorts of Musick, and against the Mountebanks playing tricks on their Stages, for they burdened the pure Life, and stirred up people's minds to Vanity.

George Fox, 1694

-7-

Christ Jesus bids us consider the lilies how they grow, in more royalty than Solomon. But contrary to this, we must look at no colours, nor make anything that is changeable colours as the hills are, nor sell them, nor wear them; but we must be all in one dress and one colour; this is a silly poor Gospel. It is more fit for us, to be covered with God's Eternal Spirit, and clothed with his Eternal Light, which leads us and guides us into Righteousness.

— Margaret Fell, 1700

-8-

Avoid sports, plays, and all such diversions as tending to alienate the mind from God. . . . It is apparent, to our very great grief, that the simplicity and distinguishing plainness of our profession respecting language, apparel and behaviour is too much departed from by many among us.

— London Yearly Meeting, 1738

-9-

There came a man to Mount Holly who had previously published a printed advertisement that at a certain public-house he would show many wonderful operations, which were therein enumerated. At the appointed time he did, by sleight of hand, perform sundry things which appeared strange to the spectators. Understanding that the show was to be repeated the next night, and that the people were to meet about sunset, I felt an exercise on that account. So I went to the public-house in the evening, and told the man of the house that I had an inclination to spend a part of the evening there; with which he signified that he was content. Then, sitting down by the door, I spoke to the people in the fear of the Lord, as they came together, concerning this show, and laboured to convince them that their thus assembling to see these sleight-of-hand tricks, and bestowing their money to support men who, in that capacity, were of no use to the world, was contrary to the nature of the Christian religion. One of the company endeavoured to show by arguments the reasonableness of their proceedings herein; but after considering some texts of Scripture and calmly debating the matter he gave up the point. After spending about an hour among them, and feeling my mind easy, I departed.

— John Woolman, 1763

– 10 –

Carefully shun the vain, unprofitable amusements, as well as the corrupt conversation of the world; all being earnestly admonished to avoid everything in their dress and address which might have the least tendency to render them unsuitable for an intercourse, league or amity with the children of the land, or of a depraved degenerate world that wallows in pollution and great defilements.

— John Griffith, 1779

– 11 –

These poems are written by a Quaker; a circumstance rather extraordinary in the world of letters, rhyming being a sin which gentlemen of that fraternity are seldom guilty of.

— 1782, Critical review on John Scott of Amwell's *Poetical Works*

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Frequent and earnest have been the Advices of former Yearly Meetings, that all under our name may avoid the attendance of vain sports, and places of amusement, which divert the mind from serious reflection, and incline it to wantonness and vanity. Understanding that diversions of this kind are spreading, and playhouses increasing in various places, we are concerned to renew a caution on this subject: being clearly convinced of the pernicious effects of these evil practices, the inventions of degenerate man.

— London Yearly Meeting, 1785

– 13 –

Soon after I appeared in the ministry, I dropped my pen in regard to verses. I do not say it was a sacrifice required; but the continuing of the practice might have proved a snare some way: it might have engaged my attention too much, or tended to make me popular, which I have ever guarded against, perhaps too much so in some points.

— Catherine Phillips, 1798

– 14 –

As our time passeth swiftly away, and our delight ought to be in the law of the Lord; it is advised that a watchful care be exercised over our youth, to prevent their going to stage-plays, horse-races, music, dancing, or any such vain sports and pastimes. ...

— Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1806

– 15 –

When poring over light and trifling publications, with which the present age abounds, or when using the pencil or needle merely to amuse, think whether your time might not be more profitably spent in reading the Scriptures, with other pious writings or useful publications.

— Henry Hull, 1812

– 16 –

The experience of Quaker poet Bernard Barton upon introducing himself to a visiting minister:

“Barton? Barton? That’s a name I don’t recollect. (pause) What, art thou the versifying man?” On my replying with a gravity that I really think was heroic that I was called such, he looked at me again, I thought, more in sorrow than in anger, and observed: “Ah, that is a thing quite out of my way.” I dare say the good soul may have thought of me, if at all, with much the same feelings as if I had been bitten by a mad dog.

— Bernard Barton, 1830s?

– 17 –

Ungrateful man! to error prone;  
Why thus thy Maker’s goodness wrong?  
And deem a Luxury alone,  
His great and noble gift of song.  
Hast thou not known, or felt, or heard,  
How oft the poet’s heav’n-born art,  
Feeling and thought afresh have stirr’d,  
To touch, and purify the heart?

— Bernard Barton, 1832

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My observation of human nature and the different things that affect it frequently leads me to regret that we as a Society so wholly give up delighting the ear by sound. Surely He who



formed the ear and the heart would not have given these tastes and powers without some purpose for them.

— Elizabeth Fry, 1833

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Banish poetry and allow no scope for the imagination and men would be, what it is indeed needless that they should be, much more essentially selfish than they are at present.

— Richard Batt, 1836

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‘We believe [music] to be both in its acquisition and its practice, unfavourable to the health of the soul. . . . Serious is the waste of time of those who give themselves up to it. . . . It not unfrequently leads into unprofitable, and even pernicious associations, and in some instances to a general indulgence in the vain amusements of the world.

— London Yearly Meeting, 1846

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Sorrowful it is, that even some in conspicuous and influential stations, have actually “sat” for their portraits; and this, not for the hasty moment of the Daguerreotypist (questionable as even this prevalent indulgence is), but patiently awaiting the slow business of the limner. Shallow indeed must be the religion of him who knows not that in himself, as a man, dwelleth no good thing. . . . We cannot suppose that our primitive Friends would for a moment have sanctioned so vain and weak an indulgence.

— The Friend (Philadelphia), 1848?

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If the Christian world was in the real spirit of Christ, I do not believe there would be such a thing as a fine painter in Christendom. It appears clearly to me to be one of those trifling, insignificant arts, which has never been of any substantial advantage to mankind. But as the inseparable companion of voluptuousness and pride, it has presaged the downfall of empires and kingdoms; and in my view stands

now enrolled among the premonitory symptoms of the rapid decline of the American Republic.

— Edward Hicks, 1851

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But there is something of importance in the example of the primitive Christians and primitive Quakers, to mind their callings or business, and work with their own hands at such business as they are capable of, avoiding idleness and fanaticism. Had I my time to go over again I think I would take the advice given me by my old friend Abraham Chapman, a shrewd, sensible lawyer that lived with me about the time I was quitting painting: “Edward, thee has now the source of independence within thyself in thy peculiar talent for painting. Keep to it, within the bounds of innocence and usefulness, and thee can always be comfortable.”

. . . And from my own observation and experience, I am rather disposed to believe that too many of those conscientious difficulties about our outward calling or business that we have learned as a trade . . . which are in themselves honest and innocent, have originated more in fanaticism than the law of the spirit of life in CHRIST JESUS.

— Edward Hicks, 1851

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Thou shalt rob me no more of sweet silence and rest, For I’ve proved thee a trap, a seducer at best.

— Amelia Opie, Farewell to Music, 1854

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An American Turning Point—

From “AMUSEMENTS—THEIR USES AND ABUSES”

AMUSEMENTS are rarely spoken of in religious assemblies, except to be deprecated and denounced. The sects, with scarcely an exception, regard them with a suspicious and

unfriendly eye, as beneath the dignity of man, at war with piety, and perilous to the soul. . . .

Whence arises this hostility to amusements? Is it founded in reason, or is it, like many other prevailing ideas and customs, the result of a misconception of the nature of man and of religion . . . If amusements are sinful, tending to undermine the foundations of religion and good morals, the Progressive Friends should promptly unite with other religious bodies in discountenancing them. If, on the other hand, they are not only innocent in themselves, but conducive to man's happiness and normal development, we ought to encourage them among ourselves, and labor in all proper ways to avert from them the hostility of others.

. . . The gallows and the Fugitive Slave law find the most bitter and unscrupulous advocates among those who take the lead in placing the seal of condemnation upon "worldly amusements." The slave-hunt wakens hardly a throb of virtuous indignation in their bosoms . . . but show them a company of men and maidens, or merry-voiced and rosy-cheeked children, moving joyously in the dance, and forthwith a scowl is on their brows and earnest dehortations leap from their tongues!

From a religion so revolting to their noblest instincts the young turn away in perplexity and disgust, and, in the absence of that healthful restraint which a purer faith would supply, they too often resort to amusements vicious in themselves, or that have been made so through unnecessary abuses. . . .

In the light of the principles now stated, let us consider briefly three special forms or sources of amusement, the general prevalence of which forces them upon our attention, and which, in view of their importance and the diversity of opinion that they have caused, we could not avoid without imputations upon our frankness if not upon our courage.

Music.—The Quakers, we believe, are the only class among us who deny or doubt that the capacity for making music, and the susceptibility to enjoyment through it, is the gift of God to man, not to be despised and stifled, but gratefully accepted and cultivated. The early Friends found music so intermixed with the superstitious formalities of a corrupt Church, and so perverted by frivolity and passion, that they mistook it for an evil; and the Quakers of the present day are hugging with blind pertinacity the mistake of their fathers. Would to God that they clung with equal tenacity to the great radical truths enunciated by the founders of their Society!

We have never read or listened to any thing in the form of an argument against music that would not have been equally good if urged against literature, eloquence, conversation, or even speech itself; all which are constantly and hourly employed in the service of falsehood, oppression, and crime. . . . Are speech and conversation to be proscribed and the human family condemned to perpetual taciturnity, because multitudes make their tongues the vehicles of slander and defamation? No more is music to be ranked among things forbidden, merely because it is perverted by the thoughtless reveller, or made to do service on the field of battle.

Music is the delight of children. It soothes them in moments of fretfulness and passion, it diverts them in hours of suffering and pain. Even Quaker mothers know by experience the magic potency of the cradle-song. In after life it has great power over man's emotional nature. . . . There is no more inspiring stimulus for man's highest faculties, nothing better adapted to raise him above all that is low and grovelling than the delights of music, especially when they mingle with or flow through the charmed language of poetry. . . .

We do not hesitate to advise parents to cultivate in their children the faculty of music. It is the gift of a beneficent Creator, and, like the faculty of speech, it should be trained and developed, not alone for purposes of amusement, but as a

potent instrumentality in the work of human progress and elevation . . . .

Dancing.—The prejudice against this form of amusement, in the minds of serious persons, is exceedingly strong, having been fostered by abuses of long standing, which must be admitted to be exceedingly pernicious in their effects. But we must discriminate between the amusement itself and those abuses which do not necessarily grow out of it. The most inveterate opponents of dancing at the present day are found among those most strict in their veneration for the authority of the Scriptures. They believe that the Jews received their social, political, and religious institutions through the direct inspiration of God, and not a few of them profess to find in the system of Jewish servitude a Divine warrant for the chattel slavery of the present day.

How, then, can they reconcile their hostility to dancing with the admitted fact, that the custom was intermingled not only with the social habits, but even the religious rites of the Jews, “the peculiar people of God?” The escape of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, how was it celebrated? By fasting and prayer? Nay, but by festive rejoicing and boundless exultation; Miriam, the prophetess, and sister of Aaron, leading out “all the women,” who followed her “with timbrels and with dances.” Solomon tells us, with whatever of inspiration belonged to him, that “there is a time to dance” . . . .

The Drama.—Of this form of amusement it becomes us to speak with greater reserve, inasmuch as many, perhaps a majority . . . of us have heretofore shared, in a greater or less degree, the sentiment which has long prevailed among serious-minded persons of almost every class, that the theatre was hopelessly identified with various immoralities; while others, having given the subject a somewhat careful consideration, are of the opinion that it not only ought to be, but may be reformed, and made the ally of virtue and religion. We know that in France and Spain the theatre had its origin in exhibitions intended to impress upon the people the great facts of religious

history, and the leading doctrines of Christianity, as anciently understood; but like Christianity itself; it was soon perverted. Conceding that, as hitherto conducted, its influence has been, in many respects, exceedingly pernicious, many enlightened persons yet believe that, as the taste for dramatic representation is deeply imbedded in human nature, the effort to destroy the institution must necessarily fail, while the same energy and zeal, if directed to the reform of those abuses which have given it so bad a name, would be attended with marked success.

They affirm that, in some places, this reform has actually begun . . . . “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” they tell us, has been played for weeks and months together, in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, drawing immense crowds, and thus presenting anti-slavery truth, in the most impressive manner, to thousands who were not likely to hear it in any other place. It is alleged by intelligent persons that the spirit of mobocracy in New York and Philadelphia was sensibly checked by this means, and the tone of public sentiment greatly changed for the better. . . .

We might speak, too, of intellectual culture, which, in whatever field of science, literature or art, it may be pursued, opens at every step sources of amusement at once elevated, refined, and inexhaustible. We might rejoice in the multiplication of lyceums, which offer a healthful stimulus not only to the intellect but to the social feelings; and also in the institution of libraries in our villages and neighborhoods, by means of which good books are made accessible to all classes, the mists of ignorance and prejudice dispelled, and society redeemed from the blighting influence of gossip, tale-bearing and detraction, and bound together by ties of amity, affection, and good-fellowship. These are fruitful and inviting themes, but these brief allusions must suffice.

We have now uttered our convictions frankly, earnestly, sincerely . . . . God forbid that, in our anxiety to sever the unnatural connection between religion and asceticism, we should even seem, for a moment, to offer a license to sensual

pleasure, unseemly levity, scoffing irreverence, or untimely mirth. In our efforts to deliver mankind from the indurating power of superstition and fanaticism, we would not make them triflers, forgetful of their immortal destiny . . . .

— Excerpts from a “Testimony” drafted by Oliver Johnson and a Committee on Amusements, approved by the Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends, and The Waterloo [New York] Yearly Meeting of Friends of Human Progress, then published and widely distributed as a religious tract, 1856.

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The attitude assumed by the Friends towards the fine arts, furnishes another evidence (as it appears to the writer) of their imperfect apprehension of the dignity of all the feelings and emotions, originally implanted by the Creator in the constitution of man. . . .

Whilst the primitive Quakers did not purpose absolutely to banish these pursuits from the homes of themselves and their successors, they so far restrained the development of the aesthetic element, that acting in conjunction with the general subjective character of the system, Quakerism became (what the French denominate) a *spécialité*, without the elastic, adaptive qualities, which fit Christianity for every tribe of men. . . . Here, we imagine, lies the secret why Quakerism has made no progress amongst the aboriginal tribes it has befriended—amongst the Negroes whose liberties it has struggled for—or (with trivial exceptions) anywhere beyond the limits of the Anglo-Saxon family; and also why it has not proved a congenial home to that large class of persons whose characters are rather emotional, than intellectual or reflective.

— John Stephenson Rowntree, 1859

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Call it by what name you will, mysticism, spiritualism, transcendentalism, it will scarcely be going beyond what history warrants to affirm that every writer or thinker who has taken deep hold of the hearts, not of the intellects, of

mankind, has been a teacher of the doctrine of the “Divine Principle in man,” of the “enthusiasm (vergötterung) of humanity.” An illustration of the same truth will be furnished by every poet who has touched the deepest sympathies of the heart, whether he write in prose or verse. . . . He that dishonoureth the creature dishonoureth the Creator.

— Alfred W. Bennett, 1867

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We would renewedly caution all our members against indulging in music, or having instruments of music in their houses, believing that the practice tends to promote a light and vain mind. . . . It becomes us to be living as strangers and pilgrims on earth, seeking a better country, and to be diligently using [our time] for the great end for which it is lent to us . . . , and not in vain amusements or corrupting pleasures, but striving that “whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we may do all to the glory of God. . . .”

— Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (Orthodox), 1873

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It needs to be recognised that our Society has not escaped the tendency to narrow down spiritual action to certain prescribed ways as a substitute for the reality of the spiritual life. For example, while Friends have been among the pioneers of modern science they have, until recent years, repressed all taste for the Fine Arts. These, at their greatest, always contain some revelation of the Spirit of God, which is in the fullest harmony with our spiritual faith. In the fields of music, art, and literature, as in others, Friends may witness to the glory of God and advance that glory by their service. The “fulness of the whole earth is His glory,” and we mar the beauty of this message by every limitation we set upon it.

— William Charles Braithwaite, 1895

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For human conduct and human happiness, it is far safer to ignore Art altogether, than it is to accept her as the sole guide and arbiter of human life. . . . Now Art threatens to become



Religion in another sense, obliterating all the old landmarks of morality, and deciding by herself, and with reference to artistic considerations alone, what is fitting and becoming in human life.

— Thomas Hodgkin, 1895

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This Quaker denial of the beauty of colour was pointed out to me thirty-five years ago by John Ruskin as the cause of the decay of the Society. “Your early Friends,” he said, “would have carried all before them if they had not been false to that which is obeyed by the whole of the animal creation, the love of colour.” Allowing for exaggeration there is much in it, especially if we extend “colour,” metaphorically, to cover music, dancing, and the theatre.

— John Wilhelm Graham, 1920

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There are many voices today which call us to enjoyment, to self-expression, or to contemplate and share in the beauty of creative art. These things need to be subordinated to the service of the Highest, and sometimes in that service they must be given up. There are some too who, listening to the still small voice, which makes clear to them a duty that may not rest upon all, will forgo pleasures and activities in themselves good, for the sake of other claims. We would not narrow unduly for any of our members the opportunities for sharing in the joys and activities of life, but in the midst of all we must hold fast the thought of God’s Kingdom, of which we are called to be part, and which we have to make real to others by our lives.

—London Yearly Meeting, 1925

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The conventional distinction between “sacred” and “secular” art is indeed misleading and harmful to both art and religion. Men have come to speak of sacred music, sacred pictures, or sacred verse merely because the subject matter is connected with a world of religion which they have previously separated

from the world of ordinary life. But the more fruitful distinction is between inspired art and uninspired art. The former may be, whatever its ostensible occasion or subject, essentially religious; the latter cannot be made so by any selection of a so-called “religious” subject. . . . It is men and women in the first instance who are inspired and are thus able to produce inspired speech and writing, music and painting; and because the springs of inspiration are never dry the book of revelation is not closed. . . . It may be suggested that the test of the quality of such deliverances—whether in art or in religious speech or writing—will be found in their capacity in turn to inspire, to find an answering echo in the minds and lives of others, and to become a perpetual fount of inspiration. This is the immortality of the great inspirations of the prophets and artists—they continue to inspire because they have in them eternal life. “The words that I speak unto you they are spirit and they are life.” These are the undying words—inspired and inspiring still.

— A. Barratt Brown & John W. Harvey, 1929

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We look back with mild pity on the generations of Haverford students who were deprived of the joy of music and art. The strong anti-aesthetic bias in the minds of the Quaker founders and the early managers was, I think, an unmitigated disaster.

— Rufus Jones, 1933

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Art is no adornment of life, no amusement or relaxation for energies that are weary of the serious work of civilisation, no “purgation of pity and fear,” no safety-valve for an excess of emotion, no laboratory for the sublimation of dangerous passions. It is the spontaneity of the personal, the expression of the self, the creation of the vision of what might be real, and therefore the architect of the future. We have to build the future. But it is mere insanity to build without an architect—even with a completed science to fetch and carry for us.

— John Macmurray, 1935

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To identify religious practice with social reform may easily prove disastrous, for we may drive out the devils of inequality and unemployment and war, and yet suffer the fate of the tenant of the “empty, swept and garnished house.” The arts of peace must be guarded meantime by each of us. For to all those in the full stream of social and religious work there may come the temptation to undervalue the cultural activities which they have given up. The tone in which the often-heard words, “Oh, we haven’t time for that,” are said sometimes betrays an underground censor, a suggestion that such interests, if not actually frivolous, are somehow inferior. The up-and-doing Christian has often been impatient of the apparent supineness of the artist, his need . . . to be receptive before he is active. Yet the zealous worker in a social campaign has peculiar need of the recreation and refreshment which cultural interests may bring. Fanaticism, as well as indifference, may defeat its own end.

— Caroline Graveson, 1937

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God is in all beauty, not only in the natural beauty of earth and sky, but in all fitness of language and rhythm, whether it describe a heavenly vision or a street fight, a Hamlet or a Falstaff, a philosophy or a joke; in all fitness of line and colour and shade, whether seen in the Sistine Madonna or a child’s knitted frock; in all fitness of sound and beat and measure, whether the result be Bach’s Passion music or a child’s nursery jingle. The quantity of God, so to speak, varies in the different examples, but His quality of beauty in fitness remains the same.

— Caroline Graveson, 1937

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Symbols are stationary, frozen, unchanging, while the Life of the Spirit which they symbolize is flowing, growing, changing, ever becoming richer. If we were successful, in any moment, in devising a symbolic expression absolutely adequate to represent the richness of our soul’s experience of the Divine Life, then the next moment, and certainly the next

day and the next year will find that symbol to be in some degree inadequate, antiquated, obsolete. For the Spirit's working, if we keep alive and sensitive to Him, is ever leading us into new vistas of truth. . . .

The tension between the static symbol and the dynamic flow of religious experience, mild at first, becomes acute and disastrous. . . . The confining skin [of the moulting insect or snake] at one time fitted the animal nicely—was in fact in exact conformity to its latest stage of development. But life, insistent, sinuous, expanding, makes the waistcoat grow tighter, and kindly nature provides that the encompassing shell shall not grow so strong as to restrain forever the pressure toward revision of form.

The postulate, and the experience which underlies the tension between symbol and the Reality symbolized, is that of growing religious life. Were life to cease at the point of symbolic creation, no tension would arise at all. In him for whom the fires of faith have turned to embers there is no chill in religious symbols—for him they suggest muffled reverberations of sweet footsteps once present, but long since passed away in fading echoes.

— Thomas Kelly, 1938

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[Contributions of the Quakers :] THE ARTS

This section, unfortunately, might almost be entitled: What the Friends Have Not Given. When they ruled music and decoration out of their meeting houses, the Quakers, being a consistent people, put music and art out of their lives too. So intent were they on worshipping God and helping man that they overlooked the healing and inspiring power of great music and great art. . . .

Quakerism has produced scientists, as you would expect, for a scientist is one who gives his life to the search for truth. . . .

Quakerism also produced saints, philosophers, philanthropists, reformers, prophets. Perhaps that is enough. Perhaps we should not ask for artists, too.

— Elizabeth Gray Vining, 1939

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[The artist] brings something to religion which is essential to the life of man if that life is to reach up to God by every way that is open. What the artists can express of truth and beauty through the symbols of art may have an exact and abiding quality which may not be found by some earnest souls in such symbols of religion as they can use. . . . For fresh vision and new growth man needs imagination—and so, too, needs the arts in which imagination is expressed. Along the path of the imagination the artist and the mystic may make contact. The revelations of God are not all of one kind. Always the search in art, as in religion, is for the rhythm of relationships, for the unity, the urge, the mystery, the wonder of life that is presented in great art and true religion.

— Horace B. Pointing, 1944

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An artist (even a tenth-rate one) in the Society of Friends tends to have a split personality. The emphasis on “works” is such that the artist feels torn between spending his time and thought on activities in and for the Meeting, and on the other hand separating himself from such activities and expressing his faith in the particular creative way natural to him. When such work—regarded usually as play—has no place in the corporate life of the Meeting, and very little in the personal life of most Friends, he has to seek patronage and informed criticism outside the Society.

— Ann Gillie, 1954

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The real artist knows beauty as the form of truth. One does not exist without the other in the perfection to which he is dedicated. The kind of receptivity needed for an art is akin to the receptivity needed in Meeting for Worship, as the inspiration of the artist is akin to the inspiration of ministry. It is when we limit what von Hügel called “material for grace to work in” that we commit that offense against the spirit which impoverishes us. The brain has been regarded as respectable material but not the senses. The spirit needs both, and both need the spirit and each other.

— Agnes Yendell, 1954

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It seems to me that neither religion nor art can be had without a price. If the indifference of his fellow-Quakers is the price the Quaker artist must pay for both, should he not find compensation in the fact that his faithfulness in his art can speak of his religion to non-Friends? I myself came into the Society through the example of a Quaker fellow-actor working with imperturbable good-humor, reliability and patience under very trying conditions.

— Beatrice Saxon Snell, 1954

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The vigorous correspondence on Friends and the Arts is a sign of health just as the rarity of such discussions in the past was a sign of disease. But the letters should not make comfortable reading. We ought to be wincing constantly, as the writers prick home to one tender nerve after another through the thick skin of indifference which we have allowed to grow over them. If it is true that we have closed our eyes to one of God's greatest glories, and to those through whom it shines, how can we call to those who have seen that light and not ours? How, even, can we ourselves claim to be seeking God in his fulness?

— Editorial, *The Friend*, 1954

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Where [the London YM quote, #31 above] might well be amended is in the implied suggestion that some men may be called to abandon art in the interest of some other service to God and man, but never the reverse. It may be that some Friend will be called to abandon his painting in order to identify himself with the people of Africa. But it may be that another is doing right when he resigns from certain important committees in order to devote himself more completely to his art. . . . The “good” is often the enemy of the “best;” but we must not conclude that the “best” is necessarily to be

identified with moral reform, while creative art is merely “the good.”

— Horace Alexander, 1954

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The same subtle tendency by which a testimony for simplicity narrows into a rigidity of outlook affected for many years the attitude of Quakerism toward the arts. . . . When I first began to practice as a writer, I still encountered a certain amount of prejudice in that some Friends regarded the first duty of a Quaker writer to be the conveying of a “message,” whereas obviously the first duty of a writer, Quaker or otherwise, is to maintain the artistic integrity which is part of the integrity of the human soul.

— Elfrida Vipont Foulds, 1955

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Art is a facet of the diamond of life. Have the laws governing our service to God and man in this facet of life any relevance to the laws which govern our service in the Kingdom? . . . Can artistic discipline tell us anything about Christian discipline? —that discipline which must be accepted before we can live in the Kingdom? Surely the answer is yes, because they are part of the same thing. The Light Within, or the Seed of God in the heart, is as common to us all as the aesthetic experience, the inspiration we have shared. Only this time the field of expression knows no limit, for it is that of human life and human experience. And to give that expression calls for no miracle; it calls for Christian discipline—hard work, self-sacrifice, a sense of balance, the humility to learn from our mistakes, courage and the heroic quality of meekness.

— Elfrida Vipont Foulds, 1955

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Generally speaking, the arts are now accepted as good leisure- time pursuits and entertainments and suitable subjects for the school curriculum. But the willing leap to accept them as a genuine spiritual experience for the artist and a means of

spiritual strengthening for the “onlooker” has not been taken by Quakers as a whole. And it probably will not be taken until we refuse to tolerate in our religion . . . the divorce between “man’s spiritual integrity and his inspiration to creative art.” An acceptance of art as being of spiritual significance is but one aspect of the Quaker faith that all life is sacramental.

— David Griffiths, 1956

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The poet does not need to be told “what to think.” Nevertheless, he needs the help of his whole society, of all of his companions, if he is to be a bard rather than a babbler, if he is to escape rebellion, alienation and the growing unintelligibility of the outsider.

— Sam Bradley, 1958

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Music and drama, painting and sculpture all help to develop our perception, our enjoyment of life and our search for truth and fulfilment. We must recognise that the inner and outer world must be made one; this involves the creation and enjoyment of beauty, in the things that are nearest to us, in our homes and schools and as far afield as we care to go. Understanding cannot come through a narrow approach to knowledge. . . . It must not be thought of as necessarily only intellectual. For some it will come through a feeling for imaginative and artistic expression; for some through the inheritance of a traditional standard of craftsmanship.

— London Yearly Meeting, 1959

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I have a fear that Quakerism does not naturally turn to poetry. Quakerism is serious, concerned, moral, more concerned with lines than colors—yet Quakerism is poetic. It too often forgets that the poet is one of God’s true servants. The Friend sees the Deed as more solid than the Word: he may forget that In the Beginning is the Word.

— E. Merrill Root, 1959



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Do Friends have a concern to seek out and nurture the flame of creativity that burns in all men? Do we provide an atmosphere in our Meetings for Worship, and in our schools, which helps us to discover our creative abilities, and discipline them, and exercise them to the fullest power God has given us?

Do we set aside a time every day for the reading of poetry, for listening to music, for looking at painting? By our own work is a vision of the Truth advanced among us, and let to shine before all men so that they may be led to a clearer knowledge of their Father?

— Queries proposed by Barbara Hinchcliffe, 1959

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Friends often enough refer to spiritual joy in their ministry, but it is a pity that there is not more outward expression of it. . . . We ought to be joyful, not in a mysterious inward sense only, but in a way that everyone can recognize. If we have discovered the water of life we ought to be exuberant; whereas in fact we often seem too serious and apprehensive. It may be that we are still suffering from the legacy of the period in the Society's history when it tragically misunderstood the world of art, and could not distinguish gaiety and exuberance from worldly extravagance and indulgence. This deprived us of one of the greatest sources of religious experience and one of its most potent expressions; it has left our imagination dim.

— Kenneth Barnes, 1960

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Not all modern art or literature is unifying and exuberant; much of it merely reflects the bewilderment, frustration and fragmentation of our culture. The task of a religious society is to find a way through—to overcome fear and frustration, to bring the fragments of culture together into a new synthesis. How do the arts stand in relation to this? Artistic activity must not be thought of as the deliberate instrument of social

change, to be used for that purpose and then set aside; it is an expression of truth, of a sincere relation between the creator and his world, something he must immerse himself in, irrespective of consequences. In this it is not different from what is called pure science and like science it is inevitably an instrument of change, and indispensable. We are nourished by art and poetry, and our constructive task is ill-informed, our vision unclear, and our effectiveness reduced if we deny their part in our lives.

— Kenneth Barnes, 1960

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The image educates emotion where reason never reaches. The significant image held, recalled, has the power to transform. No one knows why this is so. One can only know that it works. A trust of this practice is one of the most liberating factors for spiritual growth. A great artist holds to an image until depth of feeling knows and understands what mind alone cannot know. How the community needs its image makers!

— Dorothea Blom, 1963

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In all of history, for each person who left a record of having generated new vision, there have been thousands of anonymous ones who achieved a good connection between inner and outer worlds, leavening the community. If it were not so, the world would never have survived.

— Dorothea Blom, 1963

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Art fails when either brain, or emotion, or technique gets the upper hand. It succeeds when all three are highly developed but are subservient to the shaping spirit. The same principle applies to education and to the art of living.

— Clive Sansom, 1965

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There are many, including a goodly number within the Society of Friends, who find that the insights and experiences of the arts are perhaps the clearest manifestations of spirituality in everyday existence. Nevertheless Friends have not identified their attitudes toward the arts with much precision. And this doubtless reflects a fair amount of indecision as to the validity of the attitudes of earlier Friends in these matters, for the arts appear to have been definitely relegated to the pastimes called frivolities, and treated with uneasy tolerance if not the more usual outright condemnation.

— Ben Norris, 1965

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We must beware of falling into the wishful thinking which declares that “all life is sacramental.” God is not the bread, the wine, the picture, the symphony, the drama; they are forms of life through which He offers Himself to the world; sometimes the form is distorted by convention, by the cult of unconventionality, by lack of standards, by laziness, by ignorance, and hides rather than reveals Him. The recipient, too, his response distorted by convention [etc.], may fail to perceive them. But when integrity meets integrity a sacramental experience can transfigure the aesthetic one. The main thing is for creator, interpreter and recipient to keep the channels free, and to thank God when communion is added to appreciation, tragic participation, and ordinary human enjoyment.

— Beatrice Saxon Snell, 1965

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The history of the protest of early Friends against excess and ostentatious superfluity is fascinating. It is easy to ridicule their apparent denial of the Arts; yet it must be admitted that, certainly visually, out of it there was born an austere, spare, refreshingly simple beauty. . . . What is hopeful is that in the Society there is no finality; we can laugh at ourselves and go on learning. As long as we are given to constant revision there is hope for us. Special pleading for the Arts is no longer needed. They are not viewed, as they once were, as a

distraction from God. Rather they are seen as a manifestation of God.

— Robin Tanner, 1966

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Religion has infinite meanings, covering also those who say they have none. But any artist worthy of the name will follow his vision even when it seems to clash with his creed. I say “seems” deliberately, giving the Almighty greater credit for subtlety, wisdom and complexity than do many of his devotees. Quakerism is a religion I have found closest to my needs. Certainly it influences my life, and therefore my work. I rest in its silences, am taught to look within myself for my own answer. That the answer is sometimes at variance with an aspect of Quakerism is also meaningful. God created thorns on the stems of his roses.

— Jean Stubbs, 1967

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Simplicity directs the individual to choose those forms of recreation that rest and build up the body, that refresh and enrich mind and spirit. One should consider the proper expenditure of time, money and strength, the moral and physical welfare of others as well as oneself. Healthful recreation includes games, sports and other physical exercise; gardening and the study and enjoyment of nature; travel; books; the fellowship of friends and family; and the arts and handicrafts which bring creative self-expression and appreciation of beauty. Recreations in which one is a participant rather than merely a spectator are particularly beneficial.

— Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1972

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There is much need to restore—or create—a healthy balance between action and contemplation, means and ends. To create this balance may well be an important function of both art and religion today. Faith and works—good works must be the

fruit of true worship. Good artifacts must be fruits of contemplation, i.e. of feeling-intellect.

And this, as anyone who has essayed to create soon learns, means suffering, patience, “wise passiveness.” An artist cannot be hustled into action; he is no fool of time; must wait for the “ripe moment,” the coming of the Wayshower. He must then follow the Wayshower into the dark unknown; only thus may he catch a glimpse of his Eurydice or the mysterious god in the vast temple of the universe.

— Fred J. Nicholson, 1972

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For an artist to grow productively in his work he needs a market and/or an audience for his output, a way of supporting himself. Most important of all, he needs to be confirmed in his talent by others. The Society of Friends has provided none of these in the past, for “plain” or doctrinal reasons, and is not providing them today for her creative artists. We who write, paint, sing, compose, act are obliged to take our wares elsewhere, receiving possibly marginal recognition from our meetings if we are lucky, while there is rarely a shortage of flak. A queasy “tolerance” has become the hallmark today.

— Candida Palmer, 1972

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Perhaps the artist more clearly than others explores and utilizes the creative possibilities of tension—the necessity and desirability of conflict, which are the warp and woof of his work, his matrix. Take the painter who depends on dramatic contrast in color values; the sculptor who physically “fights” his hard medium; the poet who has available to him the all-too-leaden images of words with which to transmit the ephemeral; the writer of fiction who truly loves his impaired characters and is forever raw through living their woundedness. All this is conflict in creative tension. This is dialogue. This is the “mismatched” human condition where not every faculty of reason and sense and body performs in a perfectly orchestrated symphony.

— Candida Palmer, 1972

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At first there was almost no Quaker art because of the Society's anti-esthetic bias; now there is hardly any Quaker art because there is so little identification of the Society as the community about whom or for whom one writes. Indeed, for very few contemporary Friends is there much appreciation of the communal aspect of faith, much response to Fox's call to us to become the people of God. The absence of Quaker art has the paradoxical consequence that though today individual Friends may be sensitively appreciative of the esthetic dimension, our group life is still ascetic, indeed an-esthetic: unresponsive to the sensuous, to the emotions (the latter reflected in our fear of conflict and tension) and to the humorous.

— Christine Downing, 1972

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I care more that the poetry is good poetry than that it is Quaker poetry; the latter question only becomes relevant if the answer to the first is affirmative. For I believe that any question about the moral value of art is worth asking about art whose formal embodiment of its vision helps us to see newly, freshly, more subtly, and doesn't simply confirm us in our prior prejudices.

— Christine Downing, 1972

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The best poetry and the deepest unifying worship demand the loss of selfhood. The Kingdom is only revealed through mental tensions and struggles. The poet must step aside from his shadow to see the created thing afresh and in its own light. He has to have courage to break out of inhibiting conceptions and fears. So too with worship. We must let go of our assertive, self-seeking egotism before we can participate in the large Good.

— Charles Kohler, 1972

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Few Friends would regard poetry as I do, as a form of revelation, an imaginative interpretation of reality that cannot be expressed in any other way. It can be a part of the spiritual life, even when the poem is not concerned with religion. . . . To me the study and composition of poetry and the struggle to gain technical control of the medium, is worth the dedication of a life.

— Clive Sansom, 1973

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Are poets nearer to the truth than “other people”? Not necessarily. We are, perhaps, more conscious of the need to find it. Those who are not so troubled may already have found it; they may possess it without knowing they do. They may live it. All hail to them, if they do. But it is we who must search, and who must put our journey and our findings into words: words which we hope will have a kind of universality as well as uniqueness. The poem is unique because I have written it; of my own shadowy labyrinth it has come. But I hope very much that it is not merely “self-expression.” If it is a real poem, it must be a good deal more than that. It must speak to all men, and for those who cannot speak. The lonely, the lost, the exhausted, the stricken, the dumb. And sometimes it voices not the suffering of humanity but its exultation; the poem is a paean, an act of worship, an explosion of joy. A recognition which can only be brief because so overpowering; until, as in Elgar’s *Dream of Gerontius*, at last we come to the place where no words are, and can only plead, “Take me away. . . .”

— Jean Kenward, 1974

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Quite simply (but so mysteriously!) a work of art redeems the commonplace. By lifting, if only for a fleeting moment, the “veil from the hidden beauty of the world” a work of art compels us to see. And how rarely do most of us really see! Even the surface loveliness of things:

The beauty and the wonder and the power  
The shapes of things, their colours, light and shade,  
Changes, surprises. . . .

And rarer, but more precious still, the moment of recognition,  
when we see “into the life of things” and glimpse “a world in  
a grain of sand.” And the word which the artist says to his  
object is the same word that the religious man says to  
Creation: THOU.

— Fred J. Nicholson, 1974

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On the evidence we have, it seems to me that in some ways,  
in spite of their asceticism, our ancestors were closer to the  
artistic experience than we are: that is, to the beauty and  
mystery revealed by the imagination. They built finer  
meeting-houses. . . .

— John Ormerod Greenwood, 1978

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The ministers of that time had a startling phrase for the  
validation of their “openings”: I saw it in that which does not  
lie. What a wonderful, daring claim! The only field of vision  
where I would ever expect to find it made today would be in  
the arts: I saw it in that which does not lie. Once a work has  
that quality it will not fade, whether it was made thirty  
thousand years ago or yesterday: its age, background,  
language, symbols are immaterial; it is permanent.

For us, in theory, the canon of scripture is never closed. We  
could have made more of that precious truth. “A masterpiece  
is part of the conscience of mankind.”

— John Ormerod Greenwood, 1978

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I want to share with you that sense of the importance of bad  
art as well as good. Art as an activity matters, however the  
product be judged. I am for ephemeral art—for the song of  
the moment, for all that comforts and entertains, for doggerel



birthday wishes, for the skit at the summer school social, and for the touching memorial verses at the back of the local paper, made by the family so that Gran may go with dignity, and the deep feeling find some memorial beyond a bunch of flowers.

— John Ormerod Greenwood, 1978

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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

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I shall not believe that the arts are finally accepted by our Society until we can claim at least one masterpiece, fostered by us, by our discriminating love and knowledgeable enthusiasm—I need hardly say that I do not expect it to bear the label “Quaker” or even “religious” art; it may, indeed, if it is the bearer of new vision, be deplored as “irreligious.”

— John Ormerod Greenwood, 1978

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It is hard, even today, for many Friends to give up the long-held conviction that creative work in the arts is inferior to social concern. Social concerns deal with people, here and now encased in a plight before our very eyes, while art seems ephemeral. These Friends, in their desire to serve, which I deeply respect, simply have not known that many a hungry soul has found God in an art form. And if you really find God it will take you out into concern for another, but, for the art-hungry, it may not be in the exact same way that the socially concerned person is led. Rather than taking you to a particular

social cause dealing with peace or human rights, it may take you in the direction of a new image of man, a new concept of the responsibility we must have today for the human race as a whole.

— Virginia Hyde Davis, 1979

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Can't we see that the essence of art is a source of life renewing itself in every act of creation? The same should hold true for a spiritual movement such as the Society of Friends, which needs constant renewal. Without the arts we lose our youth—without our youth we lose our Society.

— Fritz Eichenberg, 1979

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The exact relation between one's beliefs and one's art is a difficult question. Disregarding the externals of illustrating or using typical, traditional religious subject matter, one creates with one's entire being and even if the subjects are totally unrelated to Quaker concepts, a certain quality of feeling will make itself felt. We become slowly what we believe in, and tend to express it; therefore, "beauty," in St. Augustine's extraordinary phrase, "is the radiance of truth." The rightness of the truth, as we perceive it, will manifest itself as beauty in the arts, and with non-artists, as beauty of their lives.

— Peter Fingesten, 1979

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Quakerism has attuned me more to humanity and increased my sensitivity. It has strengthened my faith in faith, in myself, and in my art. To what degree this can be perceived in my work is not for me to say, because when I draw I give myself over to the process and the only objectivity toward my work is in its aesthetic control during the execution. Interestingly enough, my style of thinking, writing, and speaking have become similar to my style in art—except that the media are different. Quakerism led me to self-discovery, self-motivation, and inner freedom. In my life it has been like the

organ tone in Baroque music, the sustaining deep note which gives the melody above it body and support.

—Peter Fingesten, 1979

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Both writing poetry and being a Friend imply an act of trust in the nature of Reality. If there is a dimension of our individual beings which is psychical and spiritual, and which in some mysterious way is open-ended and linked to a reservoir of creative energy beyond ourselves, then perhaps the Quaker “Inward Light” and what some poets have termed “inspiration” are two manifestations of the same Source.

— Winifred Rawlins, 1979

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I do not believe that the function of art is to reflect life as we experience it, including all its physical grossness and negation of human and spiritual values, but rather that poetry should afford glimpses into another dimension of reality than that of the everyday. It is open windows through which a sunlight strange to our usual awareness illuminates the dark places and gives an experience of delight and hope. A poem is an act of love for the universe.

— Winifred Rawlins, 1979

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A well-known psychologist once observed, “The mindset that the great artist struggles to achieve, most children possess naturally.” The artist’s sense of wonder, the wonder of a small child, can be found where painters translate shafts of wheat and golden sunsets into canvas and where poets, like priests who join lovers together in marriage, join words and ideas together for eternity. Cultivate that sense of wonder. You can follow it to a direct encounter with God.

— Jack Kirk, 1979

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The important reason why Friends resist symbols is that they know symbols are not the real thing. To settle for the symbol instead of the substance is delusion, is infidelity to truth. The traditional Quaker skepticism about symbols is akin to the skepticism about music: the religious fervor engendered by man-made art is not to be substituted for the work of God.

Friends who now endorse the arts and glorify the senses would do well to consider the religious world-view their lifestyle implies, and what it must imply about their form of silent worship, about which they are often very dogmatic. The Quaker resistance to symbols can then be seen either as a Quaker gloss on the Second Commandment or as the Quaker realization of what Johann Scheffler, a Roman Catholic contemporary of Fox who wrote under the name of Angelus Silesius, expressed something like this:

“Should Christ be born a thousand times anew, Despair, O man, unless he’s born in you!”

— Ruth M. Pitman, 1980

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It is . . . open to us to believe that a meeting for worship may be a work of art. Cooperative art, like a folk-song with recurrent refrains and rhythmic patterns—sometimes naive, sometimes profound and moving. Cooperative, like a play which employs many talents and demands a listening, looking, participating audience as well as the writer, actor, designer, technician and director. Made out of words and silence, as music is from notes and rests. Made, like a poem, from personal and communal experience at its deepest level, rejecting the worn, the slurred and the second-hand. . . .

The French poet, Paul Valéry, when asked how he wrote poems, replied “There are some lines which I am given; the rest I have to make.” This sounds to me like a perfect recipe for meeting for worship also. It has to be created with a sense of shape and pattern: only certain things belong in a particular meeting. It has to be “numinous,” infused with the sense of “otherness,” of something coming from beyond ourselves. This has to be united with the deepest that we can (at the moment) find within ourselves. It needs the earthiness and grit of ordinariness . . . , and the sense of extraordinariness which illumines the ordinary. When with sensitiveness,

discipline and skill we work at a meeting for worship, we can sometimes receive that sense of perfect satisfaction which we find in great art, and know we are at home.

— John Ormerod Greenwood, 1980

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What might be called “classical Quakerism” up to the 20th century represented a kind of Franciscan voluntary poverty in the arts, inspired by a vision of a divine community of love and simplicity. In the 20th century comes liberation from these older taboos and an embracing of a vast, expanded complexity and richness of human experience. . . . How do we preserve that simplicity and at the same time enjoy our new-found riches? How do we break out from what was perhaps a cultural prison without falling into the hands of the world, the flesh, and the devil, the hell on earth that seems to follow so many liberations—political, economic, sexual, cultural?

— Kenneth Boulding, 1983

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Quakers should enter the world of the arts with humility and courage: courage because it is a risk of our certainties. A religion unwilling to take risks shuts out what is creative. Preoccupation with moral integrity is likely to assume that life can be tidied up: that is its goal. In fact, it is because life is essentially untidy that it can be creative.

— Kenneth Barnes, 1983

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I have never wanted to be a “Quaker artist.” Heaven preserve me from that! There is no place now for “The Presence in the Midst.” Nor is there any place for “poetry” that puts Quaker sentiment into versified form, however modern the metre or lack of it—no place except the dustbin. Our art must make sectarian boundaries irrelevant, must concern itself with experiences common to all people everywhere. All religious associations—if they are not keenly aware of the danger—become incestuous, and their members tend to feed each other

with familiar and appropriate emotions. The only way to health in a religious community is by sending out roots into earth far beyond its own little patch.

— Kenneth Barnes, 1984

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Artists are witnesses of their time. They reflect the events swirling around them. Their work is formed in the labors of giving birth—a mixed blessing of joy and suffering, of the ecstasy and agony of forging out of the artists' substance an image that mirrors their existence against the background of their time, our time.

— Fritz Eichenberg, 1984

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Art is a magnificent obsession. It requires tenacity, an almost monastic devotion that keeps you engaged on all levels of your existence, day in and day out. You follow a distant star—directed by some great mind infinitely wiser than you.

— Fritz Eichenberg, 1984

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I am pleading for art with a conscience, for art as a witness, for using the gifts we have received by a higher dispensation for mankind's benefit.

At best the artist has always been considered God's Fool, and treated accordingly with condescension, indifference or neglect. No matter. Art has survived the cavemen, the Pharaohs, the princes and the popes; it will survive the computer—if we care enough.

An artist with a social conscience walks a thorny path. Sensitive to the illnesses of his time and giving expression to his concern in any medium he is bound to run up against the guardians of the status quo. Art is not a popularity contest nor is it apt to make you rich, as history records. Your conscience and the strength of your convictions must back you up.

— Fritz Eichenberg, 1984

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Is art “the sole guide and arbiter” for me? Certainly my most profound experiences of losing myself have always been connected with music. When I think back on all the crises of my life at which art came to my rescue, it seems that far from being a seducer, art in some way recalls me to my truest self. Art for me is a guide, or at any rate a mouthpiece for that Guide; and when it speaks with urgency, I have learned to listen.

— Esther Greenleaf Mürer, 1984

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Artists are always defeated either by the limitations of their vision or by the medium itself. There is no way to replicate reality. We are ultimately going to be frustrated if we try, for at the deepest level, this is trespassing on holy ground, presuming on God. Certainly we can gain deep insight into aspects of reality by our art, for interpretation is a continual process of uncovering the possibilities inherent in the vision. But what we cannot do is to produce a synoptic vision that will adequately express the glory we know. If we are to avoid a corroding frustration, we have to learn a resignation of spirit when we have given what we can and simply accept what is. In the art of prayer this resignation is called reverence—the admission of our creatureliness.

— John Punshon, 1987

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Ikons and idols can have a physical shape, but they are actually symbols in the mind. They stand at opposite ends of the spectrum. An ikon is so close to the divine truth it represents that the worshipper can see right through it. It becomes, so to speak, invisible, for it shows us God. An idol draws our attention away from divine truth by substituting the plausible and acceptable for the challenging and transforming.

We all work with images because we have a pictorial way of thinking. In religion our images can go one way or another. We can use a spiritual discipline to make ikons of them, or we can allow them to degenerate into idols. Originally, Friends

were so afraid of the latter course that they tried to root all outward symbolism out of their religious lives. . . .

It is likely that most of us today will be aware of the importance of symbolism in our lives and appreciate rather better the way in which imagery is essential to our ability to cope successfully with the demands the world makes on us. The power of myth is often the key to understanding. Notwithstanding the fact that they can be manipulated and debased, the literary and visual arts can be among the most ennobling influences on our lives.

— John Punshon, 1987

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The artist and the maker in search of truth venture deeper than most of us dare to into the paradoxes and mysteries of human experience—joy, pain, our delicate and now threatened relationship with the natural world, our fraught and miraculous relationships with each other and with God. Artists make the journey into that interior deliberately, regarding it as their calling to discover and reveal inner pattern and meaning, or warn us when these things are fractured or even missing. They often do this without counting the cost to themselves; and in the apparently inchoate darkness or blinding light of that experience they create a new way of communicating their unique vision.

This can be compared with the utterances of the prophets, the mystics and other great leaders whom we recognize as being empowered, as being channels for the Spirit. From their insight succeeding generations can draw sustenance. . . . These artists and mystics take risks in exploring the dark, strange places, and they return with images for our transformation.

— Brenda Clift Heales and Chris Cook, 1992

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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

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When belief seems impossible, it is the poets who help us to be aware of those experiences of healing and forgiveness which seem to come from outside ourselves—or from places so deep within us that we are not usually conscious of them. It is these encounters which lie at the center of our religious experience, whether it is then shaped by a formal creed or not.

— John Lampen, 1993

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Any doctrine, any church, any poem can be a container of the truth; but if we come to value it for itself, and not for the reality that it contains, the life drains out of it, the angel departs, and the form becomes empty. To worship it is idolatry, as the first Quakers tried to convince the world. Eternal truth comes to humankind like a tide flowing in; as it ebbs, the ridges on the sand show us the action of the water. But when it comes in again, the shapes it creates and abandons are different. That is why I believe that it is to modern poetry, rather than the masterpieces of the past, that we must look for witnesses to the holy spirit at work in our desperate times.

— John Lampen, 1993

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The Holy Spirit can indeed restore us to health (or stimulate us to work well) through the medium of music as well as prayer or antibiotics! And why, indeed, should I be surprised that this is so? Creativity is the gift that we were given on the eighth day of creation. In naming and re-making the world we

are co-workers with God, and whether we are making a garden or a meal, a painting or a piece of furniture or a computer program, we are sharing in an ongoing act of creation through which the world is constantly re-made.

— Jo Farrow, 1994

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If I can get past the desire to have my work admired because it's mine;

If I can write to heal and not to impress;

If I can serve the work by rigorously attending to what it wants to be rather than imposing my will on it;

If I can resist pressures to do what's fashionable or politically correct and stick to minding my call;

If I can trust my religious community to uphold me without expecting them to promote my work;

If I can trust that Providence will send me as much recognition as is spiritually good for me—

—Then I've found the link between art and attending to the pure Life.

— Esther Greenleaf Mürer, 1994

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Be aware of the spirit of God at work in the ordinary activities and experience of your daily life. Spiritual learning continues throughout life, and often in unexpected ways.

There is inspiration to be found all around us, in the natural world, in the sciences and arts, in our work and friendships, in our sorrows as well as in our joys.

Are you open to new light, from whatever source it may come? Do you approach new ideas with discernment?

— Britain Yearly Meeting, 1995

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