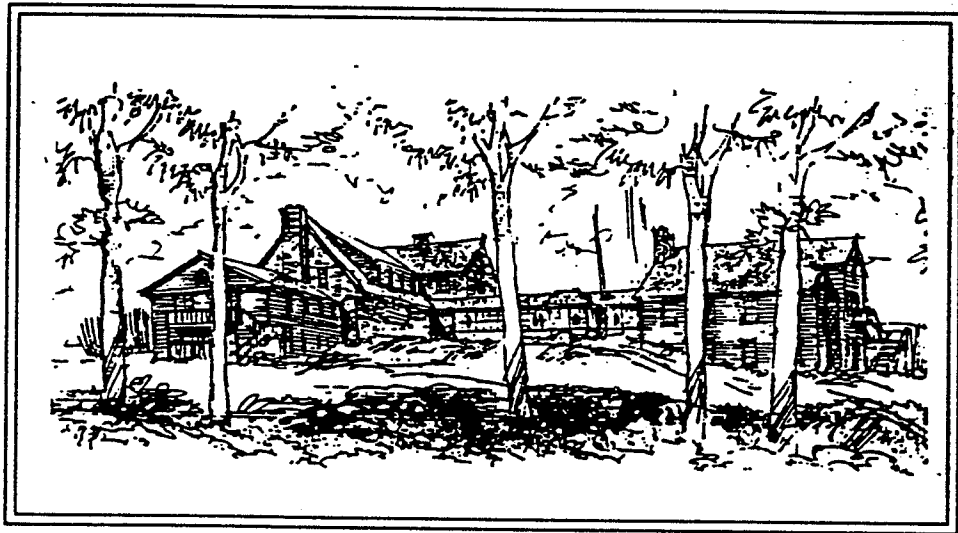


FRIENDS IN DEED!

A reflection on the significance of the
lives of Douglas and Dorothy Steere
for Pendle Hill, the Religious Society of Friends,
and all people of faith.

Offered on the occasion
of the opening of the Steere Wing,
a new facility at Pendle Hill for retreatants and conferees,
by Daniel A. Seeger, Pendle Hill Executive Secretary.
Wallingford, Pennsylvania
October 19, 1991



Psalm 139

O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me!
Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up;
thou discernest my thoughts from afar.
Thou searchest out my path and my lying down,
and art acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.
Thou dost beset me behind and before,
and layest thy hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high, I cannot attain it.

Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?
Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
If I ascend to heaven, thou art there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!
If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there thy hand shall lead me,
and thy right hand shall hold me.
If I say, "Let only darkness cover me,
and the light about me be night."
even the darkness is not dark to thee,
the night is as bright as day;
for darkness is as light with thee.

(. . . continued)

*For thou didst form my inward parts,
thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise thee, for thou art fearful and wonderful.
Wonderful are thy works!
Thou knowest me right well;
my frame was not hidden from thee,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately wrought in the depths of the earth.
Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance;
in thy book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them!
How precious to me are thy thoughts, O God!
How vast the sum of them!
If I would count them, they are more than the sand.
When I awake, I am still with thee.*

(Verses 1-18)

**This Psalm is known to be a favorite
of Dorothy Steere's.**

(Silent Worship)

Welcome, Friends! Thank you for coming to share with us this time of rejoicing and celebration as we officially open Pendle Hill's new facility, the Steere Wing. But we are here not only to celebrate a new physical plant, but also to celebrate the many gifts which the lives and activities of Douglas and Dorothy Steere have brought to Pendle Hill, to the Religious Society of Friends, and to people of faith everywhere.

While we will probably spend most of our time together celebrating and giving thanks for what Douglas and Dorothy have meant to Pendle Hill and to Quakerism, we should, nevertheless, remind ourselves at the outset that the scope of their activities has been very much broader than this. For example, Douglas was the official Quaker observer at the Second Vatican Council, and out of that experience initiated and inspired the formation of the Ecumenical Institute of Spirituality. He also organized the Zen-Christian Colloquium of Japan in 1967, and is credited with winning such whole-hearted approval by Zen and Christian leaders in Japan that the Colloquium continues to meet annually. He has served on many committees of the National and the World Council of Churches. An accomplished writer, Douglas has made major contributions in the field of religion and spirituality through his books on prayer, contemplation, worship and the inner life. He translated and made famous Soren Kierkegaard's *Purity of Heart*. The scope of Douglas' influence is reflected in the fact that his writings have been published by Harper and Row, the Paulist Press, The Methodist Church, Allen and Unwin, the National Council of the Churches of Christ, and other publishers serving wide constituencies outside of the Religious Society of Friends.

In addition to acknowledging this scope of activity, there is one other thing we should do at the outset. As we have planned this occasion, Dorothy and Douglas have expressed their concern that we not focus overly much on them. After all, they said, the contributions of money, time and energy on the part of many people have gone into making the Steere Wing possible. Please, they said, do not dwell unduly on us; this would be untrue and embarrassing.

My colleagues and I, in response to this, began assembling a list of all the people who have contributed one way or the other to making the erection of this building and its opening today possible. The idea was that I would offer a public acknowledgement of all these Friends. We came up with an impossibly long list! So Dorothy and Douglas have pointed us to an important truth. There is probably no one here present who has not made a substantial contribution to the opening we are celebrating today, either directly to the Steere Wing itself, or indirectly through your general support to Pendle Hill over the years. There are many more people who are not present today who have participated in a like way.

And so, just to acknowledge this important truth of which Dorothy and Douglas are very aware and which they emphasized to us during the preparations for today, and to honor our promise that we would not focus exclusively on them, I would like to invite you all to turn to your nearest neighbors and shake their hands as if we were closing a meeting for worship, and offer each of them some words of thanks.

(Pause for handshakes)

(More intervisitation than expected)

Let's not get carried away!

In order to focus clearly on what Dorothy and Douglas have meant to us here at Pendle Hill, it will be useful, I think, to reflect for a minute or two about Pendle Hill's work. And in thinking about this, some words I once read by Mohandas K. Gandhi, the great leader of the nonviolent Indian independence movement, came to mind. Gandhi wrote that "People tend to become what they think themselves to be."

This sentence of Gandhi's underscores the importance of the conceptions about our human nature that we carry about with us in our minds and our hearts. It calls our attention to the dangers of the many false images of human nature that are thrust upon us by contemporary culture, from the worlds of advertising and entertainment in particular. The other day I read that an *average* American child who watches an *average* amount of television sees the depiction of 3,000 murders by the time he or she is twelve years old. From everywhere, it seems, we are bombarded with the idea that human nature is innately violent, that our main preoccupation is with our sexuality, and that our chief purpose in life is the consumption of ever more nifty possessions.

Even religion often reinforces these negative concepts of our true nature. Although in the opening verses of the Book of Genesis we are told not once, but repeatedly, that God saw that the Creation he had made was good, we are asked to believe by some that in this great banquet of rivers and lakes, of rain and sunshine, of the beasts of the field, of the rich earth and the amazing flowers, humankind, rather than being an ultimate achievement which partakes of this great goodness, is rather the one significant blot, the cosmic disappointment.

If we examine contemporary life closely and with real attention we will see that behind the massive problems of our era lies a profound confusion about the great question, "What are we?" "What does it mean to be a human being?" "How should we behave in order to live in a fully human way?" While the rationalist claims "I think, therefore I am," the spiritually aware person asks: "I am *what*?" As human beings, both individually

and collectively, we are subjects seeking a predicate. Failure to come to grips with truth in relation to this great question of what it means to be a human being is to live a kind of twilight existence, is to perish even while alive.

Pendle Hill is a place where we come to discover our true human nature. It is a school of meaning and purpose, a place where we can deepen our appreciation of what it means to live in a fully human way. Here we find that we are not bound by the circumstances of our lives, not defined by the world of advertisements, not determined by history, nor by some mythical idea of "human nature." We find that we need not be governed by the errors of our parents, nor need we be molded by the faults and flaws of the spiritual landscape in which we live.

Here, through the practice of a deep inner silence, we let the false images of human nature fall away. Through inner silence we make a space where the Seed of eternal things which is already within us can begin to be heard. Out of this inner silence our hearts are touched by something deeper than all our reasoning, something more comprehensive than all contradictions, something that can support all problems without the need of humanly designed solutions. We discover that one moment of true listening will yield what no amount of grappling can wrestle from life. When we drop our questions, paradoxically, we find the answers, almost as if the answers had been waiting for us to discover them but had been drowned out by the noise of our questions. The more profound possibilities of our human nature become visible to us, and gradually we are enabled to grow into what we know we are meant to be.

Thus, the thing being made at Pendle Hill is humanity itself.

Learning in this sense is a process both great and subtle. Much occurs by indirection, rather than by lectures on the good life. Our goal, or vision, is one to which we can only be drawn by love, by enthusiasm. Great spirits, like Douglas and Dorothy Steere, hold up for us our good possibilities, showing us their nobility and attractiveness, drawing us to them.

Study at Pendle Hill also consists of searching dialogue--of speaking the truth as we understand it, and of listening as others speak the truth that is given to them. When love performs these two offices--speaking and listening--education and community happen. One of the things we appreciate about the appointed teachers at Pendle Hill is that, in addition to sharing their special knowledge and skill with the members of the community, they are also willing to enter into the kind of searching dialogue which makes it clear that Pendle Hill is a place where this deeper kind of truth is revered and sought.

Although Pendle Hill is a Center for Study and Contemplation, it is not a cloister.

Quaker spirituality is a spirituality of engagement, not of reclusiveness. The spiritual preparation we do here is indeed just that--preparation. In fact, it is preparation for service in the world. In his introduction to the book *Quaker Spirituality*, Douglas reminds us that early Friends regarded their unprogrammed meetings for worship to be based on "silence and obedience." We seem to honor the silence readily enough in modern times; obedience is a word which seems to have fallen out of favor. But Douglas goes on to say in his introduction that in employing the phrase silence and obedience, early Friends were not adding the term obedience merely as an ornament. George Fox thought that the Spirit that moved so fiercely in his heart did not stop at giving him some bracing feeling of spiritual uplift, or some sort of merely comforting inner consolation. Rather, it went further and laid upon him things that were to be done. Thus, silence and obedience are linked. The silence is not only a releasing, a letting go, a centering down, but it is also an opening to the Guide which lays upon us changes in our priorities, and tells us of things to be done.

The inner silence that we practice, the calming of our hearts and minds of all that is stubborn and grasping, is essentially an expression of the love of Truth. To be dispassionate, not to let one's own needs, emotions or prejudices color one's actions, is essentially to put Truth before everything else. To love Truth in this way is to love God, who is Truth. Thus, the practice of inner silence is the same as the love of God. To practice it successfully, if we can, means that we can participate in political and social life in the fullest sense without demanding anything for ourselves, without there being any pettiness or narrowness to poison our work. It is to establish an inner peace and inner harmony which will allow us authentically to contribute to an outer peace and an outer harmony in the world at large. We find the way to carry out with simple and quiet dignity whatever the situation we are in requires of us.

Douglas and Dorothy have been models of the kind of servant leadership which grows out of silence. They have not been ones to seek a merely private island of spiritual comfort in the midst of public calamity. Douglas and Dorothy have travelled extensively on behalf of the American Friends Service Committee. They organized Quaker Relief work in Finland after the Second World War, and were awarded a highly esteemed award, the Decoration of Knight First Class of the White Rose, by the president of the Republic of Finland. They helped the AFSC administer relief work in Poland and Norway by making field visits to work sites there. They visited South Africa on behalf of the AFSC and Douglas wrote a report which, in terms of its spiritual insight, reads as validly today as it did twenty years ago. Dorothy served on the AFSC personnel committee for many years. Any of you who know Quaker organizations know what a key committee the personnel committee is, in terms of its awesome task of dealing with all the human problems organizations of people undertaking vast and difficult works must face. Dorothy and Douglas, through the years, hosted newly appointed staff members before they

departed for challenging assignments abroad, and met with people returning after difficult labors, bringing healing and renewal to them.

Douglas Steere has always emphasized that Quaker silence, the silence that we practice here at Pendle Hill, is a preparation for communication and action, rather than a way of avoiding them. From a silent place we prudently watch for leadings as to what, in existing circumstances, must unfailingly be done. In his book *Dimensions of Prayer* he notes that in spite of a fierce realism about the human propensity for sin, Friends are optimists. They experience a steadying sense that in whatever work they are called to do they do not work at alone, but with divine assistance. Quoting G. K. Chesterton, Douglas observes that such genuinely led social reformers, even in the face of overwhelming odds, practice an "asceticism of cheerfulness in contrast to the easier asceticism of melancholy."

Such service is rooted first and foremost in self-discovery, in knowing what it is we are meant to be. It is perhaps our paradoxical duty to affirm, even in the face of so much that seems unforgivable in Twentieth Century history, the innate blessedness of our God-given human nature. For there exists within each one of us, and within every human being ever called to life, something which is buried beneath the husk of the false personality induced into us by the spiritual disorders among which we live, something pure, perfect and complete, something which corresponds to the highest levels of Truth in the Creation, something which, once we get in touch with it, restores us to our own true nature and enables us to live in a new and different way. That this is possible is demonstrated again and again with every act of service, of witness, or of social change through which the divine order is affirmed and extended in human life.

But we must be aware that the origins of our capacity to render authentic service are as mysterious and as awesome as the generation of the universe itself--it is part and parcel of the same cosmic miracle. As soon as we claim this miracle as our own doing, as our *own* creation, we have lost the track. We are simply increasing the disorder. Our personal egos are not miracle workers! What both liberal reformers and radical revolutionaries have in common is a tendency to believe that human beings can be exalted through their own self-creating acts, without the aid of a divine source. Pride can thus assume grandiose and enthralling proportions, yet seem selfless.

True wisdom is from the Lord, a wisdom which we are told was created from eternity in the beginning, and which will remain until eternity at the end. It is a wisdom, scripture also tells us, which the Lord has poured out on all his works to be with humankind forever as his gift. This eternal wisdom is not something we know with our minds. It is something we are, a quality of our being. It was formed in us when we were knit together in our mother's womb. Precious and vast is the sum of the mysteries of the realm of God. More abundant than the grains of sand, our minds cannot contain nor

comprehend this wisdom, for we cannot contain what contains us nor comprehend what comprehends us. Yet we do find the answer to the question : "What am I?" Each of us has a true self, a self that has been searched and known by the Lord. Getting just a glimpse of this true self drawn by the Lord out of our unformed substance, we find ourselves seized with meaning. The more profound possibilities of our human nature become visible to us, enabling us to grow into what we were meant to be. And in the same measure that we come alive to our own possibilities, we become alive and alert as well to the needs of others. Thus we discover a way of life worthy of our profoundest enthusiasm, and by living it faithfully and fully, we do not labor for ourselves alone. For so to live is to let our lives pour out teaching like prophecy; so to live is to prepare on this earth a place where future generations can make their home.

(Pause for choral number:
Musical setting of Psalm 139)

The Pendle Hill Choir which you have just heard was only organized earlier this month, and has had only three rehearsals. Our leader is Jackie Coren, who, among many claims to fame, as a former Pendle Hill student and staff member. We are grateful for her help, and for the way she made rehearsals occasions both of musical professionalism and joy.

It is time to conclude, and there is no way to do so with a simple summary of the meaning of everything Douglas and Dorothy have done for Pendle Hill. They were with us at the very beginning, back in the early 1930's, teaching summer school. Throughout the years they have led innumerable retreats, conferences and other programs here. Over the years Dorothy became particularly appreciated as a creative listener. Retreatants who found an hour to seek counsel from her invariably commented after it that it seemed as if she had known them all their lives.

Douglas and Dorothy have served on our Executive and General Boards and on various committees. Douglas was Clerk of the General Board for many years. Dorothy still serves on our Extension Committee.

You see behind us a beautiful building, their contribution to which is only the latest manifestation of years of caring and generosity. Douglas and Dorothy gave us the challenge grant, the financial contribution which did the most to make this building possible. This challenge grant has helped buy the concrete, the wood and the glass that you see. But the true foundation of this building is not wood, or glass, or concrete; its true foundation is a handful of spiritual ideas. This building is held up by Quaker spirituality, by Pendle Hill spirituality, a spirituality which Douglas and Dorothy have done so much to upbuild through their teaching, their writing, their wise counsel, and most

of all, through their enactment of it before our very eyes.

We are going to conclude this part of our time together with a little ceremony. As you know, we Friends have a few problems with rituals and ceremonies! My proposal that we string a white ribbon across the door and let Douglas and Dorothy cut it was quickly vetoed by almost everybody as entirely too prosaic. Instead we are going to do two things. We have calligraphed a small plaque with some verses from the prophet Isaiah which we hope will be a kind of farewell wish or prayer for retreatants to see as they leave after a time spiritual renewal in the Steere Wing. The plaque reads: "For you shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." To inaugurate the Steere Wing we are going to ask Dorothy to hang this plaque just inside the main entrance. Second, we are going to establish a Steere bookshelf on which Douglas' writings will be kept available to all who use the Steere Wing. To officially inaugurate the Steere Wing we will ask Douglas to emplace these volumes he has written or edited on the Steere bookshelf. You all are invited to follow us as we approach the building to do this, after which you are invited to see the building and have dinner.

Thank you all very much for being with us.

Before we proceed, let us pause for a few minutes of silent worship.

Daniel A. Seeger
Wallingford, Pennsylvania

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