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Imagining American Religions

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Religious Event Paper: Political Activism as Religion

Event:

For my religious event, I researched and visited with members of the Finger Lakes Society of Friends, in the local community of Geneva, New York. On an overcast Sunday morning in March, Jessica Julius and I attended the Quaker meeting for worship held in the Fisher Center. Generally, the people in the group were very friendly and welcoming, and seemed concerned with environmental stewardship and living life through the dictates of conscience (much as Hammond explains and advocates) and in individual experience.

We met with a small group of six friendly people and sat in a circle in the Fisher Center to meditate. The morning was overcast to begin with, and the darkness of the room contributed to the sense of serenity among the people who attended. Two Caucasian men and four Caucasian women above forty years old were present. Everyone sat with his or her eyes closed; some of the women sat with their legs crossed at the ankles and held their hands clasped in their laps. An assortment of expressions crossed their faces; intense solemnity, quiet calculation, deep reflection. Others expressed silent joy and gratitude, but no one spoke for an hour. People were comfortably dressed, wearing casual clothes. As college students, Jessica and I did not stand out because of our sweatshirts and jeans, instead we were set apart because of our comparatively young age. For about an hour everyone reflected quietly on his or her life in private meditation.

By participating in the process of self-meditation, the Quakers are demonstrating their commitment to the idea of the immanent nature of the individual and the sacredness of each human life. According to the Friends, everyone is said to possess his or her own "light," of truth or connection to the divine. Therefore, every single person is entitled to his or her own interpretation of morality and understanding of what is right and ethical. Immanence, "associated with rejection of dogma judged to be rigid and unaccommodating to new information," is characteristic of American religious thought

(Bednarowski 49). Regarding interpretation as sacred is also an aspect of Puritan ideology, even though Puritan thought was “concerned about what it considered Quaker excess in the matter,” outlining a historical and ongoing tension (Bednarowski 49). This characteristic is reflective of the the movement to more pluralistic religious thought that is characteristic of America, since “immanent theologies are more likely to find meaning, even revelatory meaning, in aspects of culture rather than to see cultural forms as mostly adversarial to religion,” and therefore are welcome to the development of new technology and are open to the evolution of culture and society (Bednarowski 48). Individual freedom has been a crucial part of the Quaker faith since the early days of the colonies, in which the Quakers tried to create a society that was welcoming to everyone, where “Native Americans, Quakers, and anyone else would be free to follow the Spirit,” in the spirit of true democracy and the freedom that a country such as the United States claims to offer (Neusner 32).

Afterwards, the clerk, Jill McLellan, spoke about her reflections, and the fact that “she had just received a call from John, someone she had lived in a house with during college,” who she had not seen since the twenty- five year reunion of their UCI college house. Their children were there, and hers remarked that “she had gone to school with a bunch of old hippies.”

Later on, we all introduced ourselves and learned that most of the people were not from Geneva per se, but from the greater area. Everyone was quite helpful in explaining the different aspects of their religion, as well as handing out information. During the meeting, Jessica and I asked some questions of the few people present in the spirit of gaining insight into the Quaker Group. One of the questions we asked was whether the members were native to this area, or if they had moved here. I discovered that Jill McLellan, who was leading the meeting that day, had gone to school in Irvine, California, about an hour northwest of where I grew up in Murrieta. She shared some of her college experiences with us, mentioning that in her college years she had lived in a house with other conscientious objectors during the era of the Vietnam War.

I was lucky enough to attend the event on a day when there was a business meeting, and the friendly members invited Jessica and me to stay, so I was able to experience more than just the friendly exterior usually presented to new people. Before the business meeting, we were offered snacks – locally manufactured organic cheese and locally baked crackers. Jill McLellan remarked that she “tried to get as

much local food as possible,” because it was better for the local economy and the environment. Money was discussed during the business meeting. In a group existing within a society that values money as much as the capitalistic United States does, one of the fastest ways to learn about the values of a group is to observe how its money is spent. Funds were set aside for advertisement in the local Finger Lakes Times, for mailings to members of the group, and a miscellaneous fund, just in case someone needed help.

Because the group I attended was so small, I felt an immediate sense of familiarity and acceptance, despite the fact that we had just met. As I chatted with Dr. John Cooley, the treasurer of the group, I mentioned that I was an America Reads tutor. Later on during the meeting, the topic of a summer camp was brought up. The few established members declined because they were all middle-aged or above, and they didn't have children of the proper age to attend. Dr. Cooley teased that I could offer my services as a tutor and “Go and read with them.” It was the friendly type of banter one would expect from someone with whom one had spent more than a couple of hours with. This further demonstrates the Quaker concern with the well-being of the community and commitment to activism. After meeting with the Quakers, I was left with an overwhelming impression of their genuine sense of social responsibility and activism within the larger community. By far it was quite an interesting experience, and the group's low – key attitude towards issues that others often find highly stressful was a welcome surprise.

History of the Quakers:

During a period of religious diversification in England, the Society of Friends was created under the leadership of George Fox. Although the religion didn't begin in North America, the Quakers were among the original European immigrants to migrate to this continent. The religion of the Quakers is anti-hierarchical in that “there is no formal service or ordained minister,” demonstrating attempts toward equality among members of the institution (George 966). As the clerk, Jill McClellan led the meeting, but she did so in a very egalitarian manner. She was the one who spoke to us on behalf of the group, and who directed the business meeting, but otherwise there was no indication that anyone was a clear leader. Because the religion has been on this continent since the early years of European settlement, the ideals of the Quaker faith have helped to shape the ideas of civil disobedience as an expression of political activism, as well as the idea of equality in what is now the United States of America.

One thing that separates Quakers from other Christian religions common in the United States is their rejection of religious rituals. Rejecting liturgical traditions is a part of the American Way of Life, in the belief that “ethical behavior and a good life, rather than adherence to a specific creed,” but the Quakers are even more anti-liturgical than the typical Christian (Herberg 83). Information that was provided by the group explained why the Religious Society of Friends are anti-liturgical:

Because Friends seek inward reality, we practice only the spiritual sacraments and reject outward forms which too often become empty, meaningless religious rituals... since sacraments are outward signs of inward grace, Friends see that inner spiritual transformation leads all human experience to be rightly conducted as a sacrament

(Moehlman). I found this to be rather refreshing. As an outsider, it made it easier for me to participate, since I wasn't concerned with observing taboos, changes, or prayers.

In addition to rejecting ritual, Quakers reject the idea of a sacred text. They acknowledge that Hebrew and Christian scriptures “provide the foundation and basic principles of Quaker faith,” but that they mainly provide meaningful stories (Moehlman). Because the Friends “do not ascribe final authority to the Bible but rather to continuing revelation and direct divine guidance and inspiration,” they reject the idea of the Bible as the Final Word of God (Moehlman). No one carried a Bible or made references to it during the meeting. Since they hold no single religious text as sacred, the Quakers are open to the religious writings of other belief systems and religious leaders.

Because the Quaker faith does not revere the Bible the same way other American Protestant Christianities do, they have been portrayed as deviants from the social norm and have endured unfair punishments for their beliefs. Scripture – dependent Puritans whose main objection to the Anglican church was its emphasis on hierarchy and thus isolation of the common people from their religion might also object to the religion of the Quakers because of the lack of importance they place on the Bible. Although they have been persecuted, through their pacifist ways and determined insistence, the Friends have caused positive changes to society. In 1689, the peaceful and persistent nature of their civil disobedience resulted in the Toleration Act of 1689. Once it was passed by the English government, this measure “allowed Protestant nonconformists the right to practice in their own places of worship, and effectively brought to an end the persecution of Quakers,” and this proved to be a breakthrough in the struggle for religious freedom

in England (Toleration). Religious toleration, pluralism, and freedom then migrated to North America along with the European settlers.

This open-minded attitude demonstrates their ongoing commitment towards achieving an active religious pluralism that “goes beyond mere plurality or diversity,” since “pluralism is not a given but must be created... it requires participation, and attunement to the life and energies of one another,” and further demonstrates their active participation in creating a better type of pluralism within the U.S.A. (Eck 70). Through their involvement in developing a pluralistic stance towards other religions, the Quakers have helped to shape the definition of religious pluralism within the United States. They represent a welcoming group that is open to the ideas of other religions. This quest to create an environment that moves from tolerance to acceptance has been important to the Quakers as long as they have been in this country.

One of the first pluralistic initiatives in colonial America was taken by William Penn. By establishing Pennsylvania, he created a refuge for adherents of non-Protestant religions. Prior to the coalescence of the colonies into a nation, “William Penn and, later, the framers of the Constitution wanted to move beyond tolerance of religious difference to the free exercise of religion,” demonstrating one manner in which the Quakers have effectively impacted the expansion of religious pluralism within United States (Eck 70). Pennsylvania was founded as a commonwealth to provide a place of religious freedom for Quakers, Native Americans, and other religious dissenters. The establishment of Pennsylvania was a “decisive step beyond the climate of toleration for all religions toward freedom of religious practice,” quite important in the development of the concept of religious acceptance and pluralism the US is still working towards today (Eck 39). By establishing a colony specifically for the protection of religious freedom on North America, the Quakers played a huge role in creating the history which would eventually convince constitutional writers that religion was a big enough issue to warrant protection. When the founding fathers would later write the constitution, freedom of conscience and therefore religion would become an American value protected by the Bill of Rights. This is one example of the way the political development of America has been influenced by the Quaker faith. In this way, the Quakers have affected American understanding of religion.

How it is Religious:

According to Catherine Albanese, there are two systems of religion: ordinary and extraordinary. “Ordinary” religion is the type that affects us in our daily lives, whereas “extraordinary” religion refers to spiritual practices such as prayer, the state of ecstasy, and supernatural experiences (Albanese 8). Both ordinary and extraordinary religion can be divided up into the categories of “creed, code, cultus and community,” which she maintains “express the collection of related symbols that make up a religious system. Creed is concerned with explaining the meaning of life. By taking the stance that all individuals possess an inner light, and by allowing the individual to meditate on his or her own answer to their questions, the Quakers have established a structure in which the individual is free to define his or her interpretation of the meaning of life.

Codes are “rules that govern every day behavior,” and by maintaining a tradition of passivism and civil disobedience, the Quakers have demonstrated that their main concern with codes has to do with living up to one’s genuine interpretation of morality (Albanese 9). As a community, the Quakers share their common concern for peace, for justice, and for good stewardship of the environment. Cultus is the liturgical or ritualistic element of religion, and though the Quakers are largely anti-liturgical, they do have their rituals. They hold meetings once a week on Sundays, sitting in a circle in quiet meditation. Even though this may be a more subdued and less structured behavior in comparison to other forms of Protestantism, it is still a ritual. Communities are the groups of people who are connected through their shared creed, code, and cultus; the Quakers have truly committed themselves to the betterment of communities by founding programs like AVP. Therefore, the Quaker group certainly complies with Albanese’s definition of religion.

Connecting the realms of Albanese’s ordinary and extraordinary religion, Berger states that religion is “the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established,” and therefore implies that the concept of an extraordinary experience is a product of human creation, rather than an existing supernatural entity explained by religion (Berger 25). By placing emphasis on individual interpretation of religion, the Society of Friends should be able to maintain a diverse following. Members of this immanent group are more likely to feel empowered to have a positive impact on the world than members of a more transcendental and hierarchical religion. Because of its individuality, it might be assumed that the Quakers

would be a racially diverse church. However, at least as far as the group that met in Demarest went, members were mostly white, middle-aged, and of professional class. There was nearly an equal distribution of women and men. Perhaps the odds are not representative of the larger community because it was such a small sample, and the margin of error tends to increase as the size of the sample decreases. Perhaps the location of the meeting had something to do with the racial composition of the group. Christerson points out that one predominately white church became more diversified due to its “good location on cross streets in a diverse neighborhood” and HWS’s Fisher Center does not exactly meet these criteria. Some HWS students even have difficulty finding the place – and they live on campus for several years. Although “the racial composition of locally oriented congregations is dependent upon that of the surrounding community,” the small size of the group may have caused people of different ages, less-affluent social standing, or more diverse ethnic backgrounds to feel out – of – place (Christerson 163). There were no Hispanics, no African-Americans, no Native Americans, or any other type of visibly determinable minorities.

For some people, religion also has an aspect of practice associated with its definition. As a ritualistic element of their tradition, the Quakers maintain a high level of involvement within their community, similar to the way the Methodist tradition shown in *Protestant Spirit USA* place importance in living their religion through community service. By choosing to become involved “in the name of religion,” the experience of community service takes on a religious meaning to an individual. Bellah discusses this tradition in America, and concludes that that because it is believed that “Good Christian work... would not go unrewarded,” the act of helping others is has become incorporated into our society as a way to receive praise, attention, and honors (Bellah 65). Community service has become an aspect of the American Way of Life, the common belief that “ethical behavior and a good life, rather than adherence to a specific creed, earn a share in the heavenly kingdom,” through the transformation of Christian values into American values (Herberg 83). From what I could gather through my experiences and studies of the Religious Society of Friends, they are not involved just to earn Brownie points; their reasons for helping the community are more aligned with the attitude of the Methodist from *Protestant Spirit USA* than Herberg’s cynical definition. They truly believe that there are flaws in the American system, and through their involvement, they can help to fix those flaws and more closely align the reality of America with the

dream of the “other” America, the critical tradition discussed by Henry May, encompassing higher expectations and demanding a brighter future.

The inner, emotional element of religion that Bellah describes as a religious experience “of great joy” is a form of religious expression enjoyed by the Quakers (Bellah 62). Though it may have been more common in the religious fervor of the nineteenth century, one reason that the Religious Society of Friends acquired the name “Quakers” is that they would “quake” with joy during their ritual meditations. During the 1700s, the “early Quakers explained [the name] by the spiritual trembling sometimes experienced at their religious meetings” demonstrating their level of concentration reached during the meditation part of their meetings (Quaker 130).

In *America: Religions and Religion*, Catherine Albanese argues that religion is essentially the means by which people govern their lives. Religion, in this definition, is the value system by which one negotiates the boundaries of one’s life; a way of determining appropriate behavior. The importance of religion is that it functions as the way people “orient themselves,” and that “orientation means taking note of where the boundaries are and placing oneself in relation to them” to the point that “nobody lives without religion,” even if the individual believes in nihilism (Albanese 11). Because the Quakers individually interpret morality, they are expected to run their lives in compliance with their individual understanding. By living in a manner that is consistent with their individual values, the Society of Friends can be called religious.

Albanese’s claim that religion is the means by which people define their boundaries compares to the use of the term “conscience” in *Religion on Trial*. According to Hammond, religious beliefs are “seated in conscience,” and “religion is a language of conscience,” so any behavior compelled by one’s religion is therefore an expression of conscience (Hammond 98). Every time the behavior of a Quaker can be considered civil disobedience, the Religious Society of Friends is engaging in religious discourse because doing so upholds their understanding of boundaries and the conscience of morality.

Karl Marx calls religion the “opiate of the masses,” because it allows people to maintain hope despite living in a situation devoid of rights, wealth, or respect. Within a system that effectively explains suffering, demoralized people tend to comply rather than rebel. However, the legacy of the Quakers is not

one of compliance or accepting demoralized traditions. In these respects, their religion does not attempt to normalize the existence of suffering, as Berger claims religions do.

According to Berger, people crave meaning and culture to explain society. Legitimations “explain and justify the social order” and give people meaning in their lives (Berger 29). A theodicy is an explanation of the phenomena of “suffering, evil and death... in terms of religious legitimations,” (Berger 53). Theodicy is therefore a tool of an institution “to provide not happiness... but meaning,” and thus the function of a theodicy is its “explanation of the socially prevailing inequality of power and privilege,” which excuses the actions of the government, church, or society and maintains the institutions in place (Berger 58). One reason that the Quakers may have experienced so much persecution in their past is that their faith is one of individualism and not compliance, and instead of attempting to excuse or justify the actions of the government attempts to change those wrong actions. The Quaker faith is quite encouraging, then, since it differs from Berger’s cynical definition of religion by offering a means of changing reality and not just an explanation.

By offering an explanation for the suffering that people experience in life, a theodicy “locates the individual’s life in an all embracing fabric of meanings that transcends that life” and “bestows meaning on his life... and on painful aspects,” and therefore at least provides a reason for the suffering (Berger 54). Countless Quakers have suffered because they have stood up for their religious convictions in a world that demands conformance. Noncompliance in massive doses is a danger to the structure and sustainability of a societal system, because it makes it “difficult to discern, define, regulate, and control” the people of a society (Bednarowski 49). Even though society may have quieted the incorrigible insolence of Quakers by hanging them, the spirit of those sacrificed for their convictions remains an important aspect of the American tradition. Martyrs become holy by sacrificing themselves for the good of the group, and

parables of individualism explain how the group is advantaged by its fearless nonconformists. To defy convention, as individualists do, is to step across the border. Separation is a sacrificial move. A sign of submission, it designates the holy. The lonely hero volunteers to bear sacrificial burdens for the group indicating that these Quakers have become part of the totem of religion by self-sacrifice for the good of the group (Marvin 74). By being willing to die in the name of the veracity of his or her beliefs, an individual confirms his or her pact with society. Not only does he or she reinforce absolute devotion to the cause, but

through this action also expresses faith and hope that society will remember him or her and bestow meaning upon his or her principles and death.

Political Activism as American Civil Religion (i.e. How it is American):

Just as they read sacred texts with a critical eye and are careful not to read too much into them or accept someone else's interpretation of godliness, the Quakers are critical of the laws passed by the government. When such laws conflict directly with the dictates of their conscience, Quakers are willing to practice civil disobedience in order to live life as ethically as they understand. If they do not like something that the government is doing, Friends are certain to voice their demands for human rights.

Since political activism is a historical characteristic of their faith, the Quakers have contributed to the political development of this nation. Long before the protests of the 1960s, they would stand up for their beliefs and would accept the consequences of doing so. Their tendency to protest behaviors and actions which conflict with their sense of ethics can be seen in the larger tradition of American society. The Quakers' activism and political involvement has come to be the epitome of the liberal's American dream; American citizens are urged to become involved in the shaping of their nation through civic engagement. Although Bellah points out that "there is an old tradition of anti-radical violence in America," he seems to ignore the fact that the American Colonies established their sovereignty through radical violence against Britain (Bellah 113). Therefore, a tension exists between the spirit of activism that categorizes some American citizens, and the voice that demands conformity and non-radicalism. Because political activism is a historical aspect of American society, this value is shared among many American citizens. The Quakers also contribute to its sustenance through their religious activism.

Before the U.S. had ever written an amendment to protect the freedom of conscience, the Quakers were often engaged in civil disobedience. By refusing to comply with laws they find unjust, the Quakers have demonstrated that "the freedom of conscience- the freedom of the individual to decide for him or herself questions of morality, truth, and beauty ...is the source from which the freedoms of religion, speech, the press, and association are derived," and have therefore contributed to the future freedoms of people of the nation (Hammond 36). Their behavior demonstrated to the writers of the constitution that "one can disallow behavior expressive of a belief, but one cannot control belief itself," indicating to the

founding fathers that since they cannot control someone else's conscience, their efforts would be better spent elsewhere (Hammond 8).

Henry May reminds us that squabbles have often broken out over the protection of conscience, and "much of the origin of American dissent lies in the history of American religion," but this is only true because America is a religiously pluralistic society (May 61). At first, Henry May's quote may seem a bit shocking. After all, the United States prides itself on being a secular nation. Bellah, Berger, and Albanese say that it is impossible to have a society without some shared pact, and that this pact is a type of religion. If religion is the expression of an individual's understanding of the world, then it would make sense that he or she would be willing to take a risk to protect this understanding. Finding out that one's understanding is flawed is what Berger would call a destabilizing force, a threat to one's entire worldview. It is therefore understandable that people are willing to start wars and move to different continents in order to maintain the peace. As Berger points out, people seek to assign meaning to their lives. One's religious beliefs serve to "locate the individual's life in an all embracing fabric of meanings that transcends that life" and "bestows meaning on his life... and on painful aspects," therefore justifying the suffering of life (Berger 54). Religion is something that cannot be altered by outside sources – it cannot be taken away by the government or controlled threat of punishment. By listing conscience and religion as separate entities in the Bill of Rights, the United States has created an artificial belief among Americans that religion, an expression of conscience, can be separated from all other categories of secular society.

If religion offers the guidelines by which people run their lives, then whatever it is that gets people to obey society's codes would be religious. People are expected to follow the laws of the government and avoid certain behaviors to escape punishment. Those caught misbehaving will have to pay a fine or serve time in jail, and this punishment is expected to be sufficient to compel them into compliance. Jail time serves as an effective deterrent only if the individual being punished believes that he or she has erred, and feels remorse for doing so. In order for this to work, citizens need to be conditioned to believe that the law is correct and that transgression of the law is wrong. Socialization is the term Berger uses to describe the process of instilling values into new generations, noting that "society manifest itself by its coercive power," truly giving individuals little choice as to whether they are going to participate in society (Berger 11). Members of society who do not find the idea of imprisonment intimidating are not effectively controlled,

and are therefore marginalized, ostracized, and punished for their transgressions. Because the Quakers believe in evaluating the validity of laws compared to their own understanding of morality, they present a challenge to society. As a group, they have challenged its rules and at times have suffered for these actions. They do not find the idea of imprisonment intimidating, and so are not effectively controlled by the system.

Instead of getting angry while serving time, those sent to jail in 1975 chose to help the society that punished them by establishing the Alternatives to Violence Program. From the AVP website, I learned that

The AVP program began in 1975 when a group of inmates at Greenhaven Prison (NY) was working with youth coming into conflict with the law. They collaborated with the Quaker Project on Community Conflict, devising a prison workshop. The success of this workshop quickly generated requests for more, and AVP was born. The program quickly spread to many other prisons.

(Alternatives). AVP is staffed by volunteers and has grown from its inception, when it was aimed at targeting inmates in prisons and has been expanded to help “businesses, churches, community associations, street gangs, halfway houses, women's shelters, and many others,” indicating both the success and the need for a type of program that advocates non-violence in the United States (Alternatives). This is an example of a successful public outreach that has truly had a positive impact on the broader community.

Behavior is expressive of conscience, and complying with a law that an individual finds morally objectionable violates one's freedom of conscience. Since the First Amendment recognizes that the government cannot determine what people will find morally objectionable, the Quakers have used the protection of the first amendment to defend their civil disobedience. As a pacifist group of people, the Quakers find it morally objectionable to engage in or support any type of war. Faced with the difficult decision of violating their morals to comply with the law, or violating the law to live up to their morals, some have chosen to live according to the dictates of conscience. Because of their refusal to pay taxes supporting war or to join militias, “Friends were jailed and fined throughout America in the wars of 1755-1763 and 1812 and during the Revolution,” enduring persecution, incarceration, and wrongful death for their beliefs (Barbour 131). Throughout this ongoing struggle, some members of the government have been convinced that this type of behavior was a transgression of the First Amendment, and so Quakers and

other pacifist individuals were finally granted a Conscientious Objector exclusion from the draft laws. This represents one way that the Quakers have helped to shape the political freedom and to protect civil liberties of U.S. citizens through their determined political activism.

It was during the process of budget approval that the Society of Friends most clearly expressed the importance of pacifism and activism. Hammond points out that “Americans have always been quick to claim, but slow to understand their rights,” but this did not seem to be the case with the Quakers (Hammond 1). Instead, they accept full responsibility for what might happen as a result of political action on their part. Because they believe in pacifism, the Quakers find laws requiring taxes in support of the war and violence to be in violation of their first amendment rights. Therefore, a relief fund is reserved just in case a member of the group is incarcerated for his or her failure to comply with such laws. Jill McLellan mentioned that there is currently discussion among the Society of Friends across the country as to whether paying taxes to a government which is at war violates pacifist beliefs. Because tax dollars are used to fund the War on Terrorism, and the Quakers find war reprehensible as a pacifist, non-violent group, many also object to offering their tax dollars for such a cause. Historically, the Quakers were among “many of the first Europeans who came to the New World... to escape forced military service,” and still maintain the same values today (McNeill 73). Therefore, it is not surprising that this group was among the first to rally for protection of the right to individual conscience and that their efforts made it possible for pacifist, non-violent people to be granted conscientious objector status in the time of the draft.

Another aspect which surprised me about this group was the number of programs offered for what seemed to be such a small number of members. This demonstrates the strength of the wider Quaker community despite the immediate group’s small size. Although there were only 5 or 6 Friends at the meeting, the Bulletin handout offered a new activity nearly every weekend. As a historical aspect of the Quaker religion, the sense of pride in and involvement in the wider community has helped to shape what we know to be religion in the context of America. Will Herberg argues that activism is important to all religions within the United States because engaging in such behavior provides both immediate and eventual pay back. The Quakers’ level of public involvement goes beyond Herberg’s claim that people are only active because it makes the individual appear to be religious. By providing summer camps and creating

programs such as AVP, the Quakers have helped to create a more genuine, caring community that other limiting Christian religions should try to emulate.

Through their engagement in civil disobedience and community activism, the Quakers have underscored these as aspects of American Religion and have made them more important as values of American Society. Definitely a religion, the Quakers fall under the criteria of Albanese's ordinary religion and extraordinary religion. By sacrificing their lives and their liberty for the cause of pacifism, the Quakers have confirmed their status as a religion. Undoubtedly the United States of America would be more conservative than it is without the influence or the impact of the political activism of the Religious Society of Friends. Their continued political involvement provides an alternative voice and demonstrates the sustained plurality of the nation. By refusing to be hardened when serving time in jail and instead creating programs such as AVP, the Quakers have improved the society of the U.S.A. and have helped contribute to making it become the dream of the alternative American Tradition that Henry May discusses.

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