

Thoughts on Reading Ron Mock and Robert Griswold

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Hubert's thoughts based on the reading of Ron Mock's "Friends' Struggles through the years", 2004, and Robert Griswold's "Quaker Peace Testimony in Times of Terrorism", 2003.

For Mock the struggle is for a proper and solid definition of the basis for the Quakers' dedication to Pacifism.

« So the key in the Old Testament is not foresight, or a commitment to make war or not make war. The key is a commitment to be radically obedient to God. This implies a sort of..... readiness to do **anything** but **only as God** commands...All the inner light and nothing but the inner light. What could be more Quakerly than that? » (Mock, page 1). I love that tongue in cheek poke at potential Quaker bigotry!

Very obviously we cannot go to the Old Testament to get answers for our Pacifism. We might act as brutally as the Islamic State, presumably on God's order, as Abraham was ready to do. In the newspaper *Le Monde*, a few years ago, a French Muslim repudiated that idea of blind obedience to a Scripture by suggesting that whenever the Koran conflicted with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that part of the Koran should be deleted.

With hope then Mock turns to the New Testament, again with little success to find an unambiguous clear answer.

Mock first discusses what he calls "Peter's dilemma". When Jesus was arrested should Peter have used his sword to oppose the arrest?

That event may never have happened and in addition it involves a miracle, the healing of the severed ear, which makes the story even less credible. Should it be discussed?

However, in my opinion, Bonhoeffer's dilemma is definitely worth discussing because it is historically factual. Contrary to Mock I believe that Bonhoeffer made the right and difficult decision. The attempted assassination (execution?) of Hitler on July 20, 1944 would have led to a change in German leadership, ended the war in Europe and saved a tremendous number of lives. (Though not directly involved in this attempt his clear support for the forceful overthrow of the Nazi regime led to his execution in 1945; similarly General Rommel was forced to commit suicide a few months after the assassination attempt failed because of his "defeatist" attitude). Mock's reservation is that nevertheless it is setting a precedent that killing a human being can be morally justifiable and that could lead to many unfortunate later justifications for murderous actions. That is correct but this should not have restrained Bonhoeffer. One cannot be responsible for the eventual immoral abuses of others, though one should be fully aware that such are very likely to occur. In the musical "The Sound of Music" a nun removes a part from the Nazi vehicle so that it cannot start and

pursue the fleeing family. Should the nun have refrained from that action because it would invalidate in the future the notion that nuns do not steal?

I find Mock less persuasive when he discusses: "The Good Samaritan vs. Saddam Hussein". May we not be willing, possibly, to support violent military actions against dictators to prevent the victimization of many?

« George Bush has eloquently argued that we can no longer tolerate either terrorism or tyranny, and that the two are intimately connected. He is right in his analysis, although his methods will create their own evils. » (page 8). Clearly Mock does not ultimately favor the use of violent actions but suggests that instead we should be fully aware of these victimizations and work incessantly to find ways to limit them even if that requires our own loss of comfort and some suffering. As Griswold states plainly indeed: «Peacemaking will, without a doubt, involve suffering. Suffering is a consequence of a world lost in the delusion of violence. This delusion surrounds us so we are not given the choice of suffering or not suffering. Those who think to choose nonviolence in hope of escaping pain are certain to be disappointed. Faith in nonviolence does not protect from violence any more than faith in violence protects against violence. » (page 14).

Personally I feel that sometimes forceful action may be necessary. However as Pascal put it « Il faut que ce qui est fort soit juste et que ce qui est juste soit fort ». (What is strong must be just and what is just must be strong). It would need the test that Martin Luther King asked of his supporters to meet before they would protest with civil disobedience. « King articulated several steps central to any act of civil disobedience.....The third step is "self-purification", that is, worshipfully examining one's own motives and seeing that one's own actions are not taken out of spite, greed or a desire for fame or vengeance. Only then is direct action appropriate.» (Abbott, page 15).

Finally Mock refers to Jesus' Dilemma. Should Jesus not have accepted Satan's 3 temptations that would have very clearly proven his divinity. But Jesus said "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." Mock then seems to think that "having a God that left nothing to faith would be worst of all.....By rejecting Satan's offers, Jesus put the success of his world-saving mission into the hands of others....He arranged things so they had to depend on the free-will decisions of millions of people, repeated every day of their lives. » (Mock, pages 10-11). First I wonder if Mock could have failed to read the story of the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoevsky's "The Brothers Karamazov" because the Grand Inquisitor makes the same reproach to Jesus. Yet there is no mention by Mock of that story that everyone would find extremely worth reading.

Mock adds « This does not sound like a good idea to me, but what do I know? ». It reminds me of the dialog between Job and God. When Job asked God why did you do that to me (his atrocious sufferings)? God does not answer but asks Job: what do you know? Were you there on the first day of creation? In a sense it is telling Job how can you, simple human being, dare question God? It must be a prerogative of God to hide behind a veil of secrecy.

What do I know, indeed? Whether Jesus has ever existed or not, this is our human condition. Indeed everything depends on the free-will decisions of millions of people, repeated every day of their lives. There are no recipes on how to make these decisions and yet we are fully responsible. "No excuse", as the existentialists would put it. « We are not totally guilty because we did not start history, but we are not totally innocent because we continue it.»

(Camus, in the *Myth of Sisyphus*, 1942). Certainly there are no recipes but as Griswold points out: « Only a spiritual conversion and discipline can make us fit to resist the violent forces within and without. And for spiritual discipline we need a spiritual community.» (page 13).

Mock's discussion of pacifism, at least in this pamphlet, only addresses the question of using or not violence to resolve conflicts, alleviate suffering and correct injustice. Pierre Sérésol, the eminent Swiss Quaker who initiated the International Relief Work Camps, said more or less in these words: "It maybe right to defend yourself when attacked but it is immoral to prepare for war". It takes \$ 16 billion to build each super high-tech aircraft carrier. The entire design of the ship is conceived to make murder and destruction more efficient. The missiles launched from that weapon of mass destruction will incinerate people alive. That ship is a high-tech floating Auschwitz. In a sense the Nazis were kinder (or at least less efficient). They killed their victims before they cremated them. "Americans" (?) are more efficient and do it with one strike.

Ron Mock. 2004. "Friends' Struggles through the Years" (It is about the Peace Testimony" Wider Quaker Fellowship. (11 pages)

Robert Griswold. 2003. "Quaker Peace Testimony in Times of Terrorism". Friends bulletin. (18 pages).

Margery Post Abbott. 2014: " A Theological Perspective on Quaker Lobbying". FCNL . (36 pages).

Albert Camus. 1942. "The Myth of Sisyphus".

Dostoievsky. "The Brothers Karamazov".