

Mrs Rogers, members of the Houston Board of Education, ladies and gentlemen;

If any of you were standing here in my shoes at this moment, I feel sure your thrill would be the same as mine; I refer to the honor bestowed on me by the Houston Friends' Meeting - Quakers - in asking me to present to you some idea of our deep convictions and concerns on the vital problem of the integration of Houston public Schools?

We all agree, I am sure, on the need to find a wise- not an emotionalized and tradition bound - solution to this problem. We all desire to act, at this great turning point in our history, with such foresight and righteousness, that all the children involved in it will look back in times to come and call us blessed.

The Quaker approach to such a problem as ours has proved workable through three hundred years of a profound, yet practical religious experience. Expressing their simple Christian faith in action, both historical and currently, they have steadfastly refused to commit violence, to use physical force, or resort to high-powered pressure. Rather they turn to Truth, seek to learn just what it may be and let it speak, as it always does when we seek it humbly. They acknowledge God as the inner Light, the Love, which alone can exercise true power, and which unites "that of God" in us all within a universal brotherhood.

Thus, as I am sure you know from your American history, William Penn one of the earliest Quakers, saw "that of God" in the Indians, whom other colonists regarded as only wild savages? So Pennsylvania was settled with honesty, justice and brotherly love toward these natives and was free from the Indian wars that harassed the other settlements.

Elizabeth Fry, beholding "that of God" in the miserable inmates of the London debtors prisons which she visited, refused to remove the watch pinned to her dress. Not only was the watch never touched, but many found new life and hope through her ministry, and great reforms took place in prison management both in England and America. The work of the Religious Society of Friends has been felt in the abolition of slavery, treatment of the insane, handling of prisoners of war and in many other fields of human relationship.

In more recent years, The American Friends' Service Committee has been very active, sending groups of dedicated men and women all over the world to help heal the ravages of war in Europe and Asia and to build great bulwarks of brotherly love for peace. The Quakers have proved through many years that when you hold out a brotherly hand toward another, the hand you clasp is stretched out not only to get but to give.

Continually, we in the United States of America stand before the tribunal of the judgment of other nations. When they read in their newspapers, -as they certainly will, if we do it- that we discriminate against our national minorities for purely racial reasons, immediately our Christian democracy loses its influence abroad. In many instances, they are more tolerant than we.

But we have another reason, much closer to home, to urge that integration in our Houston schools shall go forward in a quiet, orderly manner in full cooperation with the decision of the Supreme Court- without undue delay and without friction. This reason is the strength it will give our nation and its children, if the adults in all the sections of the country will unite in a progressive inter-racial policy. We believe it is

the right of white children as well as colored, to grow up in a natural, normal association with the children from all the differing, racial and ethnical groups. How can they possibly benefit from being isolated from life as it really ought to be - in the give and take of wholesome activities together during the "Golden Rule days" of school days?

May I conclude with two personal observations? Although I am the daughter of a southerner, I attended grade school college and many graduate courses at Universities with Negro students. I value all these contacts very highly. Not a single regrettable incident ever occurred, but the experiences have enriched my life. (added under the spur of a heckler, I know of no case of Intermarriage among all these students).

Last year I was invited to give the address in a Houston Negro Jr. High School, when the annual prizes for outside reading were awarded? Approximately a thousand teen-agers put on a program for our entertainment, which equaled many professional shows I have seen. Just before my talk, the entire school stood and repeated in unison The Lord's Prayer. As I listened to that mighty blend of those beautiful young voices, an intensely fervent prayer welled up in my heart that neither you, nor I, nor any other person shall ever cast a shadow on these young Americans' lives, but that all the children of all the people may be encouraged to go, just as far as their several abilities will permit, to the very summit of achievement and service to their nation.

This is Essentially the prayer of the Houston Friends Meeting; Won't you join us in this prayer and its answer?

Myra Whitson

February 27, 1956