THE QUAKER FIGURES’ EFFORTS IN ACKNOWLEDGING THE INDIANS’ HUMAN RIGHTS AS REFLECTED IN THEIR WORKS

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Abstract:
This paper intends to discuss the performance of the Quakers represented by three prominent figures, William Penn, John Woolman and Elizabeth Chandler, in acknowledging human rights specifically for the Indians or Native Americans in the seventeenth century. Those human rights exist when equality, liberty, and non-discrimination are demonstrated. Thus, through an interdisciplinary approach, this paper focuses on scrutinizing some personal or literary works such as, letters, journals, and poems written by those Quakers related to human rights. The Quakers took at least two efforts concerning their attentions to Indians’ rights; they developed the equality in friendship and respected the Indians’ life and freedom. Because of these efforts, the Quakers could be easily welcomed by the Indians, unlike other groups of white men, and in that way the Quakers befriended the Indians. Their humanitarian efforts were a result of their Quakerism.

Keywords: Quakers, human rights, equality, life, freedom, interdisciplinary.

I. Introduction

Human rights are the rights that are believed to be universal, borderless of space and time, and inherent for each person regardless of any differences such as ethnicity, race, sex, color of skin, religion, language, status, position, occupation, etc (Moyn, 2010: 12; Effendi, 1993: 15). These rights are actually bestowed by God and are self-evident to all human beings since they were born. The rights are therefore natural. It means that human beings are taken to possess them prior to and independent of formal as well as informal governmental or societal recognition. As such, they are “the products of neither legislative nor customary practices” (Darby,

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1 This paper is part of the on-going research dissertation the writer is currently undertaking at American Studies Program, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Gadjah Mada University.
2009: 39). Human rights can also sometimes be said as the natural rights, basic rights, and moral rights. Those rights, as Thomas Jefferson said, comprise the right of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness (Hollinger and Capper, 2001: 134). Then, human rights have become the foremost concern of the world and have started to be officially formulated since the United Nation declared its *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in 1948.

Meanwhile, the Quaker is one of the Christian denominations having been developed in the United States ever since the first periods of the permanent settlement existing in the seventeenth century. Or, it had exactly existed in America since 1656. This denomination was founded by George Fox in England in the early years of the seventeenth century. The person was known one of the “seekers” (i.e. people seeking for God’s revelation) in that era that tried to obtain an alternative way on religiosity. This happened because the Christianity at that time, as perceived by most of the seekers, could not really satisfy and fulfill the inner sides of men or the religious voids suffered by them (Bacon, 1969: 10). In other words, the religion presided by the Anglican Church tended to be a political institution which hand in hand with the government and the Parliament wholly served in governmental affairs of the country. Besides, the political upheaval undeniably occurred, through which the Civil War broke up between Charles I and Mary, triggered by the difference of religion embracement – Charles was Catholic and Mary Protestant (Hamm, 2003: 13).

This denomination, however, has got its ultimate popularity and development since it has already existed in the United States. To say it straightforwardly, it firstly appeared in the United States, as the New World for the Europeans, in 1655 as represented by the presence of Elizabeth Harris, a Quaker minister, and a year after followed by Mary Fisher and Austin. Starting from that year, the de facto existence of the Quakers in the land had been recognizable and its salient existence came into being when William Penn factually founded Pennsylvania colony as his Holy Experiment in which the Quakerism was the ultimate principles of governmental practices. Related to this fact, the Indians tend to be a bit relief due to the fact that
William Penn and his government through the First Frame of Government started to accommodate and honor the Indians’ existence. Moreover, not only Penn, some other Quaker figures in the next period also followed to recognize the Natives’ rights as true human beings since they also convinced that the recognition of the Indians’ rights is the form of their pivotal belief, namely all human beings actually have the same potency to have contact with God as known with the Inner or Inward Light, or the Christ Within. The implication of this belief is then that all human beings are equal regardless of the differences such as race, sex, ethnicity, status, color of skin, occupation, religion, region, etc.

Therefore, in short, this paper intends to dig out and/or depict some views and or efforts coming from American Quakers as, in this case, represented by several figures toward the issue on human rights of the Indians, as one of the allegedly alienated races in the United States. The figures are William Penn, John Woolman, and Elizabeth Chandler. Here, the efforts to the human rights principles are inferred from their personal or literary works such as letter, journal, and poem.

II. Theoretical Approach

This study is conducted in the framework of American Studies. According to Henry Nash Smith, one of the prominent figures in Myth and Symbol School, American Studies has been characterized so far with the interdisciplinary approach. In here, he formulated it by saying namely:

The best thing we can do, in my opinion, is to conceive American Studies as a collaboration among men working from within existing academic disciplines but attempting to widen the boundaries imposed by conventional methods of inquiry. This implied a sustained effort of the student of literature to take account of sociological, historical, and anthropological data and methods, and of the sociologist or the historian to take account of the data and methods of scholarship in the fields of the arts (Kwiat and Turpie, 1980: 14).

Referring to the quotation, the interdisciplinary approach provides a huge space for a researcher to utilize several perspectives in his/her study. Those
perspectives, in this case, are collaborated so as to obtain a comprehensive and holistic finding. With this respect, therefore, this paper is going to take historical and literary approaches in sense of disclosing the Quaker figures’ efforts in acknowledging the Indians’ human rights in the colonial era of the United States.

III. The Quakers’ Efforts to Acknowledge Human Rights

3.1. Developing Equality Through Friendship

Reading the facts happened to the Indians as the race victimized by the most of Europeans in the New World, the position of the Quakers was somewhat unique, if it is not allowed to say that the Quakers were the sole exceptional group of people among those existing the United States in the seventeenth century. Why so? When most of Europeans looked the Indians as the race that needed to be vanished, conquered, and annexed, the Quakers looked them as a race of having been civilized and honorable one so that they did not need to be vanished but acknowledged. The Quakers in this case took a very moderate way in really approaching them; that is, they offered a friendship or brotherhood to the Indians.

The Quakers’ view as a friend to the Indians implies a form of recognition to the Indians’ existence that the Indians are equal, not inferior, in front of the Quakers in particular and in all nations in general. Logically, it is quite difficult to present a kind of friendship between two sides when one of the sides is looked inferior while the other is superior in the sense of the position, attitude, and treatment. This view or thought was initiated by William Penn, the first prominent figure of American Quakers. Through his two letters, namely, a letter that was written in London, 18th of 8th Month (August) in 1681 and the letter that was written 1683 entitling Letter from William Penn to the Committee of the Free Society of Traders, the thought of equality is vividly seen and henceforth he really tried to apply it when he made a contact with the Indians.
In his first letter, Penn offered a personal commitment truly based on his conviction to Quakerism to those native people. His personal commitment can be traced in his statement in the following quotation:

"My Friends, There is one great God and power that hath made the world and all things therein, to whom you and I, and all people owe their being and well being, and to whom you and I one day give an account for all that we don in the world...Now this great God hath been pleased to make me concerned in your parts of the world, and the king of the country where I live hath given me a great province, but I desire to enjoy it with your love and consent, that we may always live together as neighbors and friends, else what would the great God say to us, who hath made us not to devour and destroy one another..." (Gaustad and Noll, 2003: 86)

The commitment offered by Penn, in this case, is expressed through an invitation to the Indians to live together, side by side, as a friend and or as a neighbor as quoted: "I desire to enjoy it with your love and consent, that we may always live together as neighbors and friends...". In other words, the equal relation between both sides will be conducted in the sense of friendship in which there is a spirit of friendliness, mutual respect, and mutual trust of their position and life, so it is not allowed to harm and destroy one another. This could certainly happen, as Penn said, when the relation is going on the base of Love and Consent illumined by God’s power.

When they really had relation physically, the commitment was simply undergone especially shown by William Penn as the proprietor of Pennsylvania colony. The spirit of friendship even brought Penn to come to the Indians’ sites so as to re-confirm his above-mentioned commitment expressed through the letter. The fact of how both sides’ physical contact was is vividly depicted by Elizabeth Chandler through her poem entitled The Treaty of Penn. In this poem, both William Penn and Indian Chief did an intensive dialogue just for the sake of obtaining an agreement related to the former commitment.
At the first stanza, Indian Chief starts his dialogue by asking Penn, as a representative of the white men in general, whether Penn has the same attitude and character with the former white men, who once also stated a commitment to have a good friendship and brotherhood, but in the end they broke the commitment and did massive murders to the Indians.

I have seen the white chieftains, but proudly they stood;
Though they call’d us their brethren, they thirsts for our blood:
With the peace-belt of wampum they stretch’d forth one one,
With the other they wielded the death-doing brand.
On their lip was calumet – war on their brow;
But thine scowls not with hatred – a chieftain art thou? --
(Lundy, 1836: 137).

Second stanza is the answer of the Chief’s question at the first one. Penn’s answer is very firm that he is much different from the former white people and he, together with his people, will not repeat what the former ones did to the Indians. Penn was not hypocrite in the sense that in one side he offered a friendship, but on the other side he murdered the Indians. Such hypocrisy was actually common to be done by the white people at that time, as what is said in the line: “They call’d us their brethren, they thirsts for our blood”. In this case, Penn confirmed his own commitment to build up his government based on the Love which implicated to the presence of friendship in the social life without any intention to dominate the powerless side. To be clearer, here is the following quotation of the second stanza, as Penn’s answer:

My friends, whom I govern with fatherly hand;
We worship the spirit who rules from above,
Our watchword is peace, and our motto is love,
We fight not, we war not, for life or for land
And the weapons of death never darken our hand.

....

Will we, for our friends and our brethren receive;
But we will not deprive you, by force or by fraud,
Of the land that yourselves and your fathers have trod.
(Lundy, 1836: 137).
Interestingly, something needs to be noted here in relation to the writing of the poem by its poet, Elizabeth Chandler, is that this poem does not merely express or describe the fact being already occurred, experienced, and conducted by William Penn along with the chief of Indians, but this poem deals with more than that matter. Outspokenly, this poem is an expression of the poet’s admiration the figure of William Penn, either as a man or as a Quaker who was in this case her predecessor in the previous era. Also, still related to her admiration, this poem implicitly serves as the expression of the poet’s recognition and or agreement as a Quaker toward any idea and conduct shown by William Penn to the Indians. Why so? This happens because, as Elizabeth Chandler senses, the contact is persistently enhanced due to the spirit of humanism, egalitarianism, and universalism. This spirit appears just because of the Quakers’ spiritual belief that is known as Quakerism. In other words, the equality is a part of Quakerism visions and in line with the concepts of human rights which have been quite well-known in the last decades.

Of the expression about the equality, besides William Penn, John Woolman in the next era or exactly in the eighteenth century also did perform the same idea with Penn’s. Still in the sense of the equal relation, Woolman conducted the relation in informal matter with the Indians. The informal relation means the friendship where there is equality in there. The fact about this informal relation is clearly shown through his journal entitling *The Journal of John Woolman* in Chapter 5. He told how he did contact with the Indians as though there were no difference between both sides. Woolman could share whatever he could share with the Indians without any suspicion unless the open-heartedness and trustfulness. The following is the quotation showing Woolman’s contact in the sense of friendship with the Indians:

> Here we met an Indian, and had some friendly conversation with him and gave him some biscuit; and he having killed a deer, gave the Indians with us some of it...and going to settle at another place, we made them some small presents, and, some of them understanding English, I told them my motive in coming into their country with which they appeared satisfied....(Pearce, 1965: 496).
It is necessary to be explained further relating with what the quotation shows up that the sense of the equality manifested through the friendship-sensed contact between Woolman and the Indian people can actually be traced through several facts; namely: firstly, through the communicative process of both sides, in which they made a dialogue in friendly conversation; secondly, through their ability and/or willingness to mutually share, namely, Woolman shared biscuits and small presents to the Indians and the Indians gave meat of deer; and thirdly, through their attitude of ‘openness’ so that between both sides, there was a mutual trust and understanding about each own condition and differences.

The efforts shown either by William Penn or by John Woolman and reconfirmed by Elizabeth Chandler are the expressions of the Quakers’ view upon the Indians’ existence. The conduct is believed to be the expression of system of knowledge or way of thinking embedded in the minds of such Quaker figures. Such is an ideational culture which is shown through their principles and conviction, the Quakerism. In other words, the equality through friendship is actually an expression of the Quakerism because, as mentioned above, it teaches that all human beings are equal to have contact with God.

3.2. Showing Respect for Right to Life and Freedom

As what has been proposed before, the right to life and freedom are two kinds of the basic rights, besides the right to pursuit of happiness. These rights, according to Thomas Jefferson when framing the Declaration of Independence, are called as the ‘unalienable rights’. These rights are said so because they are believed to have existed self-evidently when the human beings are present or born into the world no matter of the differences existing in him/her such as the difference of color of skin, sex, ethnicity or race, status, language, religion, etc. Due to this fact, the rights are then convinced to be universal, unchangeable, and limitless of time and space. The universal feature of the rights is then recognized officially and internationally by the
United Nations through the declaration of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* on December 10, 1948.

More concretely, the universal declaration upon the right to life and freedom/liberty is clearly shown in the Article 2 and 3 of that declaration. Article 2 says: “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms...without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status”. Then, more succinctly but firmly, Article 3 says: “Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person” (Nickel, 1987). In both articles, once again, the right to life and liberty or freedom is owned by all persons living in this world; it is not only for the white people.

In sense of the emergence of human rights, a Quaker named William Penn had already been aware of this matter ever since he reigned and became the proprietor of Pennsylvania colony along with the vision of his Holy Experiment in the seventeenth century in the United States. It means that afar from the time when the universal declaration be formulated, William Penn had already seen and formulated it. The vision was concretely and officially expressed in the first constitution of Pennsylvania colony, acknowledged as Penn's own formulation. The constitution is known as *The First Frame of Government*. It is written there as follows:

...I, the said William Penn, have declared, granted, and confirmed, and by these presents, for me, my heirs and assigns, do declare, grant, and confirm unto all the freemen, planters and adventures of, in and to the said province, these liberties, franchises, and properties, to be held, enjoyed and kept by the freemen, planters, and inhabitants of the said province of Pennsylvania for ever...(Penn, 1682: 1).

So, the right to life and freedom owned by all people can be enjoyed and enhanced in the territory of Pennsylvania where Penn took in charge with. One of which is the freedom of religion or conscience as William Penn formally stated in the constitution, saying: “That all persons living in this Province,...shall in no ways be molested or prejudiced for their Religious Persuasion or Practice in matters of Faith and Worship...” (Penn, 1682: 11). In this case, it can then be said that William Penn may
become a pioneer to the presence of the human rights concept or principle in such constitution entitling *The First Frame of the Government*. Penn had built up his government in the sense of ideal vision where humanism serves as its pivot. Besides, such ideal vision might be fully inspired by his own faith on Quakerism, since he was a very pious person, teaching him that all human beings are actually the same in getting the Inner Light or the Living God.

Hence along with this humanistic policy, Penn could then be easily accepted by other different races living in that territory. William Penn, open-mindedly, faced them as his friends, and so did they. They could build a good contact and relation. The fact showing how far William Penn could be accepted as a friend by the Indians, in particular, can also be traced through his own letter entitling *Letter from William Penn to the Committee of the Free Society of Traders* (1683). In this letter, he vividly told how culture and character owned by the Indians were. From this point, it can be inferred that the man who are able to figure out clearly about certain fact is the one that really knows much about it and one of the most effective ways to know and talk much about it is by directly intermingling with such certain thing. This is what Penn did in this case. Then the intermingling conducted by Penn is a special one that is with feeling of love and peace. Here is his recognition:

> When the Purchase was agreed, great Promises past between us of Kindness and good Neighbourhood, and that the Indians and English must live in Love, as long as the Sun gave light. Which done, another made a Speech to the Indians, in the Name of all the Sachamakers or kings, first to tell them what was done; next, to charge and command them. To Love the Christians, and particularly live in Peace with me... (Pearce, 1965: 477).

Furthermore, as the concrete form of the respect toward the Indians’ life and freedom, Penn then said outspokenly that he really honored and appreciated any modes of life and freedom the Indians had. Besides, any difference coming from both sides became no more an obstacle to live together in peace. It means that it is not allowed to challenge and hinder the presence of those differences as he said: “We
agreed that in all differences between us...". To be clearer, the following is the complete quotation: "We have agreed, that in all Differences between us, six of each side shall end the matter: Don't abuse them, but let them have Justice, and you win them..." (Pearce, 1965: 478). Consequently, as a concrete form of his commitment, William Penn really acknowledged the freedom of conscience in the colony since he thought this was really one of the individual rights owned by any person, including the Indians in Pennsylvania.

What Penn showed in this case is also recognized as a democratic attitude. It means that this attitude, again, stems on the humanitarian principle where he or she acknowledges others' individual rights and freedom. Such democratic attitude as well as spirit shown by William Penn regarding his own respect to the Indians’ life and freedom is also portrayed by Elizabeth Chandler in her poem entitled The Treaty of Penn. Here is the quotation:

O'er the land that I purchase ye free may rove;
We will dwell in the spirit of brotherly love —
By mutual kindness we both shall be blest,
(Lundy, 1836: 137).

Even, the protection and formal guarantee to the life and freedom owned by all people including the Indians in the colony is also officially shown through the Constitution so called The First Frame of Government; it is the one that William Penn wrote by himself. Certainly, this frame serves as the legal basis or rule of law or supreme law for any policy and term done by the government and the governed in the colony. Here is the quotation showing that guarantee:

And lastly, that I, the said William Penn, for myself, my heirs and assigns, have solemnly declared, granted and confirmed, and do hereby solemnly declare, grant and confirm, that neither I, my heirs, nor assigns, shall procure or do one thing or things whereby liberties, in this charter contained and expressed, shall be infringed or broken;...
(Penn, 1682: 6).

Up to this point, it is very clear about how far the efforts were done by William Penn, as a representative of the American Quakers as well as a formal leader
of a colony, in order to guarantee the full human rights of the Indians, as an alienated race in the early times or in the colonial times in the United States. Along with the efforts, the Indians certainly could enjoy their rights either in the form of life or of freedom for the sake of their endeavors to pursue of their happiness. They are in short equal to the white people. In this sense, William Penn had contributed to develop, aware or not, the Western concept, especially the European concept, about the natural rights or the human rights that have been planted since the Greece and Rome empires; namely, the significance of the existence for each individual. The existence refers to extent of right and freedom for each person to determine his or her own destiny by his or herself, and the existence referring to the sense of the right and freedom for each person to have equality or equal treatment before the law (Zakaria, 2003: 25). The life and freedom had by the Indians are then as likely depicted by Elizabeth Chandler in one of stanzas of her poem entitled *The Confession of the Year*, as follows:

The Indian, by his forest streams,
Still chased the good red deer,
Or turn’d away to kneel and pray
With the Christian’s faith and fear;
The hunting-knife he flung aside,
He dropp’d the warrior blade,
And delved for bread the soil o’er which
His father idly stray’d.

Based on the quotation above, the mode of the right to life and freedom owned by the Indians is the right to live continuously in the jungles or forests, as their homes as well as their source of life by, for instance, catching ‘the good red deer’, a metaphor of their way of life in that place. Meanwhile, the right to have freedom is shown through the fact that their freedom to choose any kind of religion, for example, they can also embrace Christianity without any compel and pressure from the external sides. It is the same like the fact that if they remain to embrace their ancestors’ beliefs. Here in this case, the Quakers did not intend to insert or insist them to do what the white men mostly insisted. Quakers remained to look at such difference as a
domain of the right and freedom of the Indians. Indeed what the Quakers, represented by Penn, really concerned was that the effort to persuade them to wish to learn and to be open-minded, so that they would be not assumed any longer as the inferior and uncivilized people only due to the illiteracy and inability to cope with the progress of civilization. Of course the intention of the ‘enlightenment’ is not in force but in the persuasive mood and also highlighted by “one spirit we worship, though different our creed”. In relation to this, William Penn, from the very beginning of his contact with the Indians, had already discussed it with the Indian Chief. To make it clearer, the following is the Penn’s vision depicted in one of the stanzas of The Treaty of Penn:

We teach you with justice, our knowledge impart,
And teach you each useful and civilized art.
We extend you, in truth and in friendship, our hand,
We will turn to the plough-share the death-dealing brand.
One hand hath created the white man and red;
One spirit we worship, though different our creed;
....
(Lundy, 1836: 137).

In relation this fact, any intention driving people to be more enlightened is looked as a very decent effort insofar as such intention or the effort does not really break and destroy the others’ rights of life and freedom. This is a sort of an awareness belong to the Quakers in the process of being close to the Indians. This awareness, in the next stage, is then recognized to be their strategic method to get along with the natives, so that the Quakers appeared to be a more distinguished even unique group of people, compared to the others, in the United States.

IV. Conclusion

It can be concluded that, in spite of its minority in quantity, the Quakers had started to show their significant role in the New World in colonial era. This happened because there were some efforts which were done by some of their prominent figures ever since they existed in the United States. The figures are William Penn, John Woolman and Elizabeth Chandler as recorded through their personal works. The
efforts are referred to the acknowledgement of human rights owned by the Indians. Those efforts are i.e. they developed an equal treatment and perception through a sincere friendship and they respected to the different life and freedom owned by the Indians. These efforts are persistently demonstrated due to the influence of the Quakerism; or, they serve as a form of spiritual manifestation where they essentially believe that all men have the same potencies to contact with the Inner Light. Consequently, the above-mentioned facts confirm that human rights principles had somewhat existed and been enforced since in the colonial era, far from the time it officially burgeoned in the United States and the world.

Bibliography


