

Reflections on Religion and Quakerism

Excerpts from the Writings of
Leonard S. Kenworthy

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Quaker Publications
Box 726
Kennett Square, Pa. 19348

About the Author

Leonard Kenworthy is a birthright (and a convinced) Friend who was born in Richmond, Indiana. After attending public schools, he graduated from Westtown School. His A.B. degree was from Earlham College and his M.A. and Ed. D. degrees from Columbia University.

As a young man he taught at the Friends Select and Friends Central schools in Philadelphia, and at the Brunswick School in Greenwich, Connecticut.

In 1940-1941 he was director of the Quaker International Center in Berlin, Germany, helping individuals named by the Nazis as Jews, to leave. During World War II he was in 10 camps and units of the Civilian Public Service, including work with mentally defective children and service in a human guinea pig experience for jaundice.

After three years as the director of the Division of Education for International Understanding of UNESCO in Paris, France, he returned to the United States, spending most of his professional life at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York. There he specialized in curriculum, social studies, and international education, speaking and writing widely in those fields.

Throughout his life he has been active in various Quaker groups, including membership on the committees of three Friends schools and work with the American Friends Service Committee, the Friends Council on Education, and the Friends World Committee. He has written or edited 13 books on Quakerism, plus numerous pamphlets and other publications.

He now lives at Kendal-at-Longwood, near Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, a retirement community administered by Friends.

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On God. . .

Just as the oceans feel the gravitational pull of the moon or flowers turn spontaneously to the sun, so we as human beings sense the need for something outside ourselves which can sustain us and assist us in our quest for fulfillment. We cannot explain that force adequately but we give it some special names: The Supreme One, The Creator, The Divine—God. Our search for contact with that force we often call prayer—in the broadest interpretation of that word.

Perhaps we need to change our concept of God as an old man somewhere in space to that of a companion, friend, or guide on life's long, hazardous, and sometimes thrilling journey.

For days I waited to see the Matterhorn in Switzerland but I was continually disappointed as it was hidden by the clouds. Then, early one morning, I was able to catch a quick glimpse of it. It was glorious, majestic, overpowering. Perhaps God is a little like that. We seldom have an experience of The Divine but we are aware that The Creator is always there.

On Jesus. . .

In Jesus we are able to see the revelation of the grandeur of God and the potentialities of human beings who live in The Light.

On the Message of Jesus. . .

Here, then, is my attempt to condense the teachings of Jesus into a brief, compact chart. I have not limited myself to one overall aim but have listed five similar statements. From them each person can select his or her favorite—or decide on an entirely new phrasing:

His Overall Aim: To Live and Promote

The Good News
Abundant Living
The Better Way
The Kingdom of God on Earth
(Within and Without)
The Transformation of Individuals and of Society

To Be Achieved Through

Caring or Compassion
Love

The Most Succinct Statements of the Ideals of Jesus

The Sermon on the Mount
The Two Commandments and the Lord's Prayer

On Jesus and the Kingdom of God. . .

What a baffling phrase that is. Therein may lie much of its merit. Instead of drafting a comprehensive and detailed plan, Jesus used that phrase and left it to others to embellish. Perhaps that was a stroke of genius or of divine revelation as individuals and groups then had to work out its meaning for themselves. Thus it is capable of interpretation by different people in different ways in different times and in different places.

Probably Jesus viewed that phrase as something basically personal. He must have felt that the qualities for creating such a kingdom were imbedded in each individual, ready and waiting to be developed. In one of the masterpieces of world literature Leo Tolstoy wrote on that idea in his brief account—*The Kingdom of God Is Within You*.

On Jesus and His Caring for Others. . .

Thus the circle of those he touched was tremendous and the people he aided included an astonishing array of diverse individuals. But he had compassion for all of them. He cared for them. He forgave them. He healed them. He raised their level of self-respect and released their potentialities.

On Jesus and Loving One's Enemies. . .

The culmination of all those suggestions is the statement by Jesus that "You have heard that it is said 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

But I say to you, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.'" Can you imagine the consternation of the disciples and others when that pronouncement was made? This was absolutely new, really radical; it sets the message of Jesus apart from all that had gone before.

On Jesus and "The Third Commandment". . .

How many sermons I have heard on the two Great Commandments—loving God and one's neighbors. Of course those messages are important as they constitute the heart of the teachings of Jesus.

But how few sermons I have heard on the third part of that injunction—to love God and your neighbors *as yourself*. Yet, counsellors, psychologists, psychiatrists and others are certain about the importance of respecting one's-self. Over and over they tell us that we cannot really respect others

unless we respect ourselves. That we cannot accept others until we have started, at least, to accept ourselves. That we cannot help release the potentialities in others unless we have begun to release the potentialities in ourselves.

On Jesus and Changing Society. . .

Coupled with the concern of Jesus to change the lives of individuals was his concern to change society—to create the Kingdom of God on earth. Those two concerns were not contradictory; they were complementary. He was interested in transforming individuals *and* in transforming society. In that respect he was a religious reformer, a religious revolutionary, a religious radical.

On Some of the Reforms Instituted by Christians. . .

First, there have been the reforms started by the Old Testament prophets and extended by Jesus and his followers, including the elimination of all kinds of sacrifices and the substitution of one God for many Gods—and a God of humanity rather than of one chosen people. Then there have been the many significant movements launched largely by his followers. Slavery has been abolished throughout the world. Hospitals have been erected and medical research conducted. Schools have been established and the education of all persons promoted. The position of women has been raised substantially. Aid has been given to the physically and mentally handicapped and protests raised against the treatment of prisoners. Some Christians have opposed all wars. To this brief list you can probably add others.

On Disregarding Jesus. . .

Despite the many horrible things committed in his name, it seems to me tragic that so many people, including some Quakers, have cut themselves off from the central figure of the centuries—the hinge on which the history of the world has swung.

On Prayer. . .

As a proponent of so-called liberal Christianity and so-called liberal Quakerism, I have long been distressed with the fact that many people in those movements have abandoned or downplayed prayer in public and probably, therefore, in private. While appreciating their misgivings, I believe that we as individuals and as adherents of important movements have thereby been deprived of one of the greatest potential sources of our strength.

Surely the belief of many of us in the centrality of prayer in lives worth living is so great that it demands frequent reflection, reappraisal, and reinterpretation.

In a sense prayer is petition, praise, psychological release, people, personal fulfillment, problem-solving, and preparation for action. It is also communion, commitment, creativity, challenge, and change.

No one can make us pray. To engage in this simple yet complex, understandable yet mysterious practice, we must want to do it. We must be ready for renewal, restoration, repair, renovation—and redemption (if you will accept that word). We need to acknowledge our dependence on a force known variously as The Creator, The Source, The Divine—God.

Mention the word prayer and people are likely to think of it as talking to God. But surely praying is a two-way process. We do talk *to* God but we should also talk *with* God. And we should learn to listen. How loath we are to do that.

Living without prayer is like playing the organ with the power turned off or like trying to irrigate a field with the waterline clogged.

Prayer is also basic. It is not something artificial or unnatural; it is real and natural. People everywhere and in all times have reached out to something called The Source. Hence prayer is not parochial; it is universal. Further it is

not dispensable; it is indispensable. It is not extrinsic; it is intrinsic; not unessential but essential. Our methods of praying may differ radically but our search is similar.

The agenda for prayer is therefore wide open and the persons, groups, and topics it can illuminate are endless.

Despite the wide range of possible prayers, depending on the needs of worshippers, four types may be singled out for emphasis. . . because they seem especially desirable. There are prayers of adoration, praise, and thanksgiving; prayers of self-examination, self-release, and self-fulfillment; prayers of right relationships; and prayers of action.

On Quakers and Prayer. . .

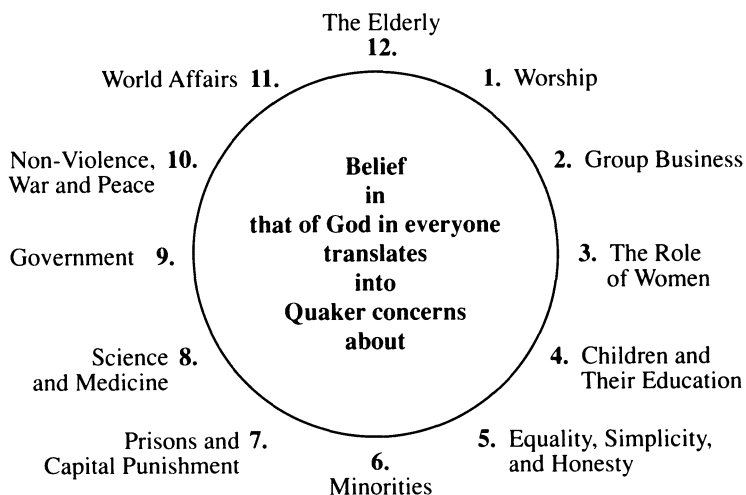
Of all the Christian groups, or even religious communities, Quakers should be the specialists in prayer. Three basic tenets of the Society seem to support that contention. One is the belief in the Divine in every human being which can communicate with the Divine outside. Second, there is the Meeting for Worship which is held not merely on the basis of silence, but of expectant silence because we feel that The Presence in the Midst or The Living Christ is there, ministering to all worshippers. The third is the Quaker insistence that revelation never stops and that creation continues. Prayer is an integral part of that on-going process. Are you and the members and attenders of your Meeting experts in prayer?

On the Messages of Friends Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow. . .

The message of early Friends was a many-sided one—and it is today—and will undoubtedly be tomorrow. At the center is the belief that something of God is implanted in every human being at birth. We may deny it. We may ignore it. We may by-pass it. But it is always there, ready to be renewed and utilized.

Such a belief may sound simple at first but it has tremendous implications. It does not ignore short-comings, sins, and suffering but it posits the belief that there are tremendous potentialities in every human being on our planet—regardless of sex, age, race, culture, ethnic background, religion, economic status, or education. We can all overcome; we can all grow by living in the Light.

That core or central belief of Quakers has enormous applications as seen in the chart below, showing twelve aspects of life which are effected. Thus:



On the Many Meanings of Quaker Meetings for Worship. . .

Reflecting on the many meanings of such periods of worship in expectant silence, I think of Quaker Meetings as:

- . . .a confessional. . .
- . . .a spiritual gymnasium. . .
- . . .a philosopher's study. . .
- . . .a nursery or garden. . .

- . . .an architect's studio. . .
- . . .a mapping station. . .
- . . .an accountant's office. . .
- . . .a vast mural. . .
- . . .an historical museum. . .
- . . .a stained-glass window. . .
- . . .an orchestra. . .
- . . .a launching pad. . .
- . . .a holy of holies. . .

Perhaps no one has caught the spirit of the Quaker Meeting better than the English painter, J. Doyle Penrose. In his painting, *The Presence in the Midst*, he portrays a Quaker Meeting of the early days, with the men in their broad-brummed hats on one side and the women in their plain bonnets on the other. Through the lattice windows between "the facing benches" streams the sunlight. In it appears a figure in dim outline—The Spirit of Christ. That is the essence of Quaker Meetings at their best.

Such worship is not silent worship. It is worship on the basis of silence or expectant waiting.

Such worship is unplanned, unprogrammed, unhurried, and spontaneous.

Such worship is a Quaker confessional, with God, rather than a priest, hearing our sins and shortcomings.

Such worship is direct communion with God—not just the symbolic act of the bread and the wine. It is not primarily thinking, cogitating, meditating. It combines the rational and the mystical—thinking and feeling.

Such worship is the recharging of our spiritual batteries, the refilling of our spiritual reservoirs with Living Water, the creation of spiritual power from The Eternal Source.

Such worship is carried on in a very simple environment so that the worshippers will not be diverted or distracted from direct communion with God by sermons or songs, responsive readings or set prayers, or by incense or stained-glassed windows.

As an individual meditates and prays, it should be remembered that worship is the meeting of the Divine and the human and it should be a dialogue rather than a monologue. In the silence one discovers that God speaks, too, if we are still and listen. . . When one has had the experience of hearing God speak, the worshipper has pushed aside the curtain and entered into the Holy of Holies, This is the height of spiritual experience, but a height everyone can attain.

Preparation for Meetings for Worship. . .

What carpenter would think of going into his workshop without tools and materials with which to work? What individuals would attempt to light a fire without kindling and matches? What cook would think of trying to prepare a meal without the proper ingredients? What artist would undertake to produce a painting without paper or canvas, or paints? Preposterous, you say. But so often we come to Meetings for Worship with little or no preparation. What indirect “preparation” do you make for Meetings?

On the Importance of the Vocal Ministry. . .

Our ideal of the vocal ministry as Friends is an incredible one. Far from abolishing the clergy, we have attempted to abolish the laity. In Quaker worship there is no division between pulpit and pew; we are all priests or ministers.

Many of us relish the silence but no Meeting lasts long without some messages. And there is surely something wrong if Friends are not occasionally inspired to share something with the group that they feel God has given them. Constantly we refer to God speaking *to* us; too seldom do we refer to God speaking *through* us.

What we need now more than anything else are more Friends who can articulate boldly, simply, and powerfully

the universal accessibility of God and the releasing power that can come from direct contact with the Divine, transforming our lives and giving us the power to work unceasingly for the creation of God's kingdom on earth.

We are relatively good on practicing what we preach; perhaps we need to learn to preach what we practice.

On the Importance of the Silence. . .

Just as important as the ministry of the spoken word and the ministry of vocal prayer is the ministry of silence. In such periods of expectant silence we are often restored and refreshed. In such periods of silence we are often caught short and purified. In such periods we are often shaken and disturbed in a healthy way. The ministry of silent seeking is something in which we can all share—weekly- or more often. And it is something from which we can all benefit.

On Quaker Meetings for Business. . .

The Meeting for Business is another of the unique contributions of Quakers to the world. Nothing like it exists anywhere in Christendom or in any other world religion. It is uncommon, unusual, unparalleled, unique. It is a rare form of democracy especially suited to a religious fellowship, based on the belief that Divine Guidance is as available in transacting the business of a group as it is in the worship of a group. It is a way of doing business in which the collective wisdom of the fellowship is illuminated by The Light.

The development of this simple structure for the Society of Friends probably saved it from extinction. Most of the sects which rose in 17th century England died; the Society of Friends survived because it had a special method of transacting business as well as a special message.

The Quaker Meeting for Business is as simple—and as difficult—as the Quaker Meeting for Worship. It is not a collection of methods or techniques; it is a mood, an atmosphere, a spirit. It is a quest for the Divine Will in reaching decisions. It is a Meeting for Worship—to do business. Whereas the Meeting for Worship tends to accent our aspirations; the Meeting for Business tends to accent our actions.

From the opening period of worship until the closing Minute and brief pause at the end, the meeting should move along on a conveyor belt of silence or float along on a stream of silence. Short periods of quiet waiting may be observed at various points, especially if the Meeting becomes tense or someone becomes contentious. There may even be a prayer or a brief message at some point.

In the Meeting for Business at its best, we do not eliminate the rational side of our lives but we do open the feeling aspects of our selves. We feel as well as think; we worship as well as ponder.

Just as the Meeting for Worship on the basis of expectant silence is shorn of the non-essentials of altar, sermons, choir and congregational singing, responsive readings, incense, candles, and stained-glass windows, so the Meeting for Business is shorn of the paraphernalia of legislative groups—lobbying, speeches and debate, applause, majorities and minorities, yeas and nays.

Nor is “the sense of the Meeting” consensus, a term used frequently these days by non-Friends, because that implies a purely intellectual exercise. “The sense of the Meeting” is a unique Quaker expression which means an agreement reached by nearly all members of a group in a spirit of searching for Divine Guidance. Hopefully the few who cannot go along with the group’s decisions will not stand in the way of its adoption.

On the Central Role of the Clerk or Clerks. . .

It is almost impossible to overstate the importance of the clerk or clerks in Quaker Meetings for Business. Much of the success or failure of such sessions depend upon their deftness, their sensitivity, their particular and “peculiar” qualifications. At their best they are wonderful to behold, a tribute to the possibilities in human beings. Fortunately there are many of them in the world-wide family of Friends and now might be a good time to praise such persons.

Perhaps it is symbolic that the clerk wields a pen or pencil rather than a gavel as Friends do business together.

On the Quaker Queries and Advices. . .

Many Friends and some non-Friends are aware of such unique Quaker contributions to the world as the Meeting for Worship, the Meeting for Business, and several testimonies—such as those on peace, prisons, intergroup relations, women’s rights, and education. But few Quakers and far fewer non-Quakers are aware of the significance of the Queries, the Advices, and the State of the Society reports in the life of the Religious Society of Friends. Taken collectively that cluster of practices are intended to encourage Friends, individually and as groups, to hold up their lives to The Light. They are meant to prick our consciences, to prod us in our day-to-day practices, and to promote the kind of God-directed lives worth living.

The Queries. . . are suited to the searching mood of Friends at their best, as they are broad, open-ended questions to promote self-examination under the leadership of the Spirit. They are non-dogmatic, non-hortatory, and non-threatening. They are not intended to discourage but to encourage, not meant to put down individuals and groups but to lift them to new levels of living. They are primarily positive rather than negative in tone.

Whereas the advices ask the persons to whom they are addressed, to listen; the queries ask them to act. The advices place a spiritual road in front of Friends; the queries urge them to find their way by consulting that map. The advices assert, “We say. . .,” whereas the queries ask, “What say you?”

There is value in writing queries and advices for almost any Quaker group. In fact, the process of doing so may be even more important than the end product.

On Quaker Concerns. . .

Every human group has some words that have special significance for it. For Quakers “concern” is such a word. Although used frequently by Friends to refer to some passing whim or fancy, it should be reserved for a powerfully-felt desire by an individual or a group to bring about a needed improvement in society—locally, nationally, or internationally. Hence Quakers have often felt moved by what they believed was a divinely-inspired concern. Usually they have acted upon that desire individually and have then attempted to enlist the support of other Quakers in that cause. If they have succeeded in persuading a local Meeting (or larger group) to endorse their cause, it becomes a collective concern.

In spite of the fact that there are only around 220,000 Quakers in the world (approximately 120,000 of them in the United States)—and even smaller numbers in the past, they have been- and still are—pioneers in many movements. Among them have been:

- . . .their concern for an authentic religion. . .
- . . .their concern for education. . .
- . . .their concern for peace. . .
- . . .their concern for minorities. . .
- . . .their concern for women’s rights. . .

- . . .their concern for the physically and mentally handicapped. . .
- . . .their concern for prisons and prisoners. . .
- . . .their concern for science and medicine. . .
- . . .their concern for government. . .
- . . .their concern for a more just and equitable social and economic order. . .
- . . .their concern for the written word. . .
- . . .their concern for the aged. . .
- . . .their concern for the environment. . .

On War and Peace. . .

One of the broadest, most powerful, and most revolutionary testimonies of the Religious Society of Friends has been—and is- its peace testimony, combining conscientious objections to war and other forms of violence, with conscientious affirmations of peace. This concern has been and still is- a central and primarily a spiritually-based belief. In every generation and in every part of the world where Friends have lived, individual Quakers and groups of Quakers have wrestled with the implications and applications of the peace testimony for their time and their locality.

On Education. . .

It is almost unbelievable that Quakers started schools in England in the 17th century and very early those schools were coeducational. As Friends moved to what is now the United States, they started schools there, too, often in the Meetinghouse or in a nearby building. In the 19th century there were scores of Quaker academies—before the start of public high schools. Then, as Quakers moved into other parts of the world, they started schools there, also. An outstanding example is in Kenya in East Africa.

Such schools often placed a strong emphasis upon individualization, nature study and science, physical work

by students, and moral or religious education (sometimes called today emphasis upon values).

In many places in the United States Quakers were leaders in the public education movement and many Friends today teach in public schools, serve on boards of education, or work with parent-teacher organizations.

In the United States today there are nearly 100 Quaker-administered schools, ranging from several pre-schools to 16 colleges or centers of adult learning.

On Quaker Concern for the Equality of Woman. . .

One of the most remarkable aspects of the Religious Society of Friends is its long and illustrious record of concern for the rights of women. That concern rose at the outset of the Quaker movement when women were granted equality or near-equality—in the 17th century. Actually that was so controversial a fact that one historian has asserted that it was the most important reason for the loss of adherents to the Society.

It was in large part the training Quaker women had in their separate business meetings that they became so prominent in the women's rights movement in the United States early in the 19th century—with such outstanding individuals as Lucretia Mott, Susan B. Anthony, the Grinke sisters, Anna Kelly Forster, and Sarah Pugh.

Since then Quaker women have pioneered in several fields, especially education and peace—such as their outstanding role in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

On the Lack of Concern Currently about Poverty. . .

With such an enviable record in so many fields, it is surprising, disappointing and humbling to realize that Friends have seldom grappled with the fundamental causes

of poverty. All too often we have been experts in applying band-aids where surgery was needed.

Surely it is time we became deeply concerned with the basic causes of the pervasive, persistent, and pernicious poverty which plagues so much of humanity. Hopefully we as Friends will soon begin to view poverty as one of our top-priority problems, eventually becoming pioneers in the struggle against poverty as well as pioneers in the struggle for peace.

On the Many Conspicuous Friends in Quaker History. . .

In the more than 300 years of its history, the Religious Society of Friends has helped to develop or has attracted an unusually large number of prominent people, many of them pioneers in one or more significant movements.

Some readers may wish to speculate on why that is so. My own surmise is that because Quakerism has stressed a highly personal approach to life and religion, it has helped to develop or has drawn to itself many individualists. However, Quakerism has also urged its members to translate into concrete action the commandment of Jesus to love your neighbors. Consequently many of its members have worked in a wide variety of movements to improve society. Furthermore, Quakerism has encouraged its adherents to pursue truth vigorously. Hence many Friends have been creative in their pioneering efforts. In addition, Quakerism has released the talents of women more than most groups and a high percentage of them have pioneered both within and without the Society of Friends.

Believing that each person is endowed with something of the Divine has therefore freed Quakers, at their best, from self-denigration and instilled in them a sense of self-esteem. Hence they have often seen in ordinary individuals (themselves and others) extraordinary potentialities.

On the Many Inconspicuous Friends in Quaker History. . .

To the long list of prominent Quakers many others should be added. They are the inconspicuous rather than the conspicuous—those who have helped to raise fine families, served on many committees, taught First-Day School or Sunday School, or served in many other ways. Their name is legion; they are spread throughout the length and breadth of Quakerdom.

On Realizing and Releasing Our Personal Potential. . .

Personal soul-searching and social change should be concerns of all of us—and should be considered complementary rather than contradictory. Alongside, or even ahead of our confrontation with the world should be our confrontation with ourselves. Perhaps our prayer should be, “Thy kingdom come, beginning with me.”

At the heart of the Quaker message is the belief of that of God in every individual. That belief carries with it tremendous implications and makes of our lives an effort to discover and to carry out the full meaning of the verb “to become.” If we do this, we can say with the great Danish philosopher—Soren Kierkegaard—“By the unspeakable grace of God, I have become myself,” meaning, of course, his best self.

Early Friends stressed their belief in the extraordinary possibilities in ordinary people. . . They were incorrigible idealists and yet incredible realists. . . Throughout Quaker history there have been an amazing number of such truly liberated people; Quaker literature abounds in accounts of many of them.

All of us are under tremendous pressures to conform to what is considered “normal” for our group or culture. Yet the true aim of life is certainly to be oneself— an original, being no man’s copy,” as William Penn said of George Fox.

How many demands there are on each of us. How crowded, cluttered, and chaotic our lives can become. Consequently all of us need to sort out our goals and priorities. . . . Some of those goals need to be for our entire life span. Others should be for the year ahead. Some should be for shorter periods, including plans for each day. In that regard it might be well for us to remember Rendal Harris' prayer—"Give us this day our daily discovery."

Our stay on earth is short. Sometimes it is a difficult and hazardous sojourn. But much of the time it is, or can be, exhilarating and rewarding. Our chief task is to love the Lord our God and our neighbors—as ourselves. Not self-love but recognition of the potential in ourselves under God's guidance, making us not ordinary but extraordinary Friends.

It is not always easy, but the opportunities for doing good in the office, factory, hospital, school, or elsewhere, are legion.

Many years ago Harry Overstreet wrote in a book *About Ourselves* that adults needed to get rid of their "grown-up rattles." Perhaps we need to examine our personal rattles—our shortcomings and our sins.

As I have recalled some of the extraordinary Friends of the 20th century I have known, I have been struck by one characteristic they had in common—their zest for life, their humor, their joy. How much we need to cultivate that, too. Perhaps that comes in part from being at peace with oneself inwardly.

Much has been said and written in the past about the need for education for living in one's community. Of course that is still true. But our community today encompasses the world and we need desperately to educate ourselves (and others) about living in that enlarged community—Our Global Village. We need to develop a Planetary Perspective.

On Current Holy Experiments. . .

Much has been made of the life of William Penn—and rightly so. He was a remarkable and many faceted man—as a politician, defender of civil rights, champion of minorities, city planner, environmentalist, educator, internationalist, writer, and spiritual leader. Undoubtedly he is the best know Quaker of all time.

But it has often puzzled me that people refer to The Holy Experiment in Pennsylvania as a part of the past and the idea of holy experiments as something from bygone days.

In reality isn't the life of each of us a holy experiment? Isn't the work of every Quaker institution and organization a holy experiment? Isn't the life of every Friends Meeting or Quaker Church also a Holy Experiment?

On Some Marks of a Vital Friends Meeting. . .

1. A place of spiritual growth and impact-on those within the group and those outside it.
2. With the Meeting for Worship central.
3. Composed of a diversity of seekers, but with some shared values.
4. Cultivating pride in its Quaker past but fostering a pioneering spirit.
5. Providing a broad and diversified program for people of all ages.
6. Promoting fun and fellowship.
7. Serving as a launching pad for relevant, spiritually-based social action.
8. Fostering broad participation and shared leadership.
9. Reaching out to other groups locally and in wider geographical areas.
10. Adequately housed and financed.

How does your Meeting rate on these important points?

On Friends in a Revolutionary World. . .

Indeed we do live in a revolutionary world. And it will probably be increasingly so. Asked once what the phrase, "The past is prologue," meant, Carl Sandburg replied, "It simply means you ain't seen nothin' yet."

Reviewing the more than 300 years of Quakerism, one realizes that the great contributions of the Society of Friends to humanity have come from revolutionary people, living in revolutionary times, and espousing revolutionary ideas—both religious and social.

How curious and how encouraging it is to note that when Friends have taken unpopular positions and stood by them faithfully, other people have been attracted to the Society.

Perhaps the Religious Society of Friends today is a little like a banked fire, with warm ashes, but in need of fresh kindling and some vigorous stirring. Possibly God, The Great Blacksmith, needs to use His bellows on us.

Despite the diversity in Quakerism today, there seem to me at least six ideas on which we generally agree:

1. The possibility of direct access to God by everyone.
2. The belief that something of the Divine is implanted in each of us at birth.
3. The undergirding of our lives individually, and collectively by our Judaic-Christian tradition, while reaching out to those of other faiths.
4. The conviction that creation continues and revelation never ceases.
5. Corporate openness to the leadings of the Spirit in all of our personal and Meeting activities.
6. An informed and passionate concern for helping to create a more peaceful, just, and humane world society.

Here are six possible goals for us in the coming years:

1. Increasingly a religious society with a many-sided message.

2. Increasingly an inclusive society.
3. Increasingly an articulate society.
4. Increasingly an adventurous society with spiritually motivated concerns.
5. Increasingly a diverse but united society.
6. Increasingly a world society.

Yes, the Religious Society of Friends is an infinitesimally small, fragile, fragmented group. But it has a remarkable message and a glorious history. Its future can be as great as its past—or even greater.

*On Some Meanings of Membership
in the Society of Friends. . .*

All people have to do is to look around them to realize that our Society is not one of saints but of seekers (and even sinners), yearning for Divine Guidance in their lives and in the world around us. Membership in the Religious Society of Friends brings no halos, no plaques for perfection, no passports to heaven. Perhaps membership comes closer to being a learner's permit for the lifelong journey towards truth and fulfillment.

Obviously one can lead a good life without being a member of any religious group. But for many of us it is easier to lead a fulfilled life if we are strengthened by the support of fellow-seekers. Membership often is a public affirmation of a private conviction; the outward sign of an inward commitment. It can be helpful to us, to our families—and especially our children, to the local group, and even to some outside our own circle.

On Some Hopes for Friends in the Foreseeable Future. . .

I wish Friends would:

- . . . realize the enormous potential in every human being who lives in the Light, and therefore work assidu-

- ously and creatively to release such possibilities in themselves and others. . .
- . . .consider seriously and prayerfully our desperate need for a vital vocal ministry. . .
- . . .experiment with ways of helping Quakers and non-Quakers to worship more effectively in silence. . .
- . . .recover our knowledge of the Bible, rediscover the centrality of the life and teachings of Jesus, and appreciate the power of prayer in their lives and the place of public prayer in Quaker Meetings for Worship. . .
- . . .provide a larger place for music, art, and drama in the lives of Friends and of Quaker Meetings. . .
- . . .concentrate on the revitalization of our local Meetings. . .
- . . .continue to examine the functions of Quarterly Meetings. . .
- . . .narrow the gap between the so-called Christocentric and Universalist Quakers.
- . . .reach out to other groups of Friends in the United States and abroad. . .
- . . .resist the temptation to create large and larger units. . .
- . . .increase our efforts to interpret Quakerism to a wider public than we have done in the recent past. . .
- . . .tackle realistically and creatively some of the major economic and social problems of our time. . .
- . . .recognize the diversity of sexual preference and apply the Quaker belief in that of God in every individual to people of divergent sexual lifestyles. . .
- . . .reflect in our outer lives as well as in our inner beings joy, humor, and a zest for living. . .

On An Invitation to Fellow-Seekers. . .

If you decry the secularism and materialism of our times, we encourage you to identify with us in our belief that purposeful living is fundamentally spiritual, permeating every aspect of our lives.

If you are distressed by the conformity of our age and the disregard for the precious nature of every individual, we welcome you as fellow seekers in a religious society which believes that something of the Divine is implanted in each of us at birth and which treasures individuality, but tempers it with the wisdom of the group—under Divine Guidance.

If you are disturbed by the frenetic pace of modern life with its attendant pressures, tensions, and anxieties, we invite you to our fellowship as we strive to simplify our lives and gain a sense of inner peace for times like this.

If you shudder at the military might of our own and other nations and at the threat of a nuclear holocaust, we urge you to join with us in finding ways to implement the historic peace testimony of Friends, opposing all wars and preparations for wars and seeking to remove the causes of conflicts.

If you are discouraged by your individual efforts to help create a better world, we would like to point to the many projects in which Quakers are involved—locally, nationally, and globally—in our attempts to bring freedom, justice, and creative living to people in many places. We encourage you to work with us on some of these important undertakings.

If you consider creeds archaic or even intellectually dishonest, Friends offer you the creedless church. We share many common beliefs and approaches to life, but we encourage individuals to develop their own beliefs and patterns of living. Hence you will find a great variety of viewpoints in our groups.

If you are put off by the paraphernalia and programs of most churches, Friends welcome you to our worship services where we wait upon God in expectant silence. We believe that in such periods of quiet we can tap the spiritual resources which will enable us to live more calmly, more compassionately, and more creatively in this chaotic age.

If you have been helped by some of the practices of Eastern religions but have felt that those faiths concentrate upon individual worship to the neglect of corporate waiting upon God, and bypass social action, we suggest that you explore the faith and practices of Friends as we stress individual *and* group worship and combine the vertical relationship to God with the horizontal relationships with other human beings.

If you are repelled by the practices of many Christians, we urge you to consider with us, ways in which we can reclaim the best in our Judaic-Christian tradition and re-discover Jesus as The Great Revealer of the grandeur of God and the potential greatness of human beings who live in The Light as well as try to ferret out with us the many truths of other world religions.

If you are disturbed by the loneliness in our large metropolitan areas, Friends point out that their Meetings are intended as homes away from home, caring communities, spiritual fellowships, religious societies of friends.

We welcome fellow-seekers in our fellowship as we all strive to live in The Light.

Today

Another day is dawning and we recall what Arnold Bennett said—"You wake up in the morning and lo, your purse is magically filled with twenty-four hours—the most precious of possessions." So we take a few moments for meditation and prayer to consider how we will spend those precious hours. We become our own personal accountants and we ask God, the Great Accountant, to help us budget that time.

Then we recall the words of the Psalmist (68:98) that "This is the day the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" and we enter into our mental account some of the reasons for our rejoicing.

We think about the words in Hebrews (3:13)—"Encourage one another every day" and we consider carefully how we can best carry out that important injunction.

Futhermore, we remember the words of George Fox—"You have no time but the present. Therefore prize your time for your soul's sake" and we resolve not to concentrate on the past or the furture, but on the present.

And the prayer of Rendel Harris comes to mind—"Lord, give us this day our daily discovery" and we pray for openness in the coming hours to fresh insights and new knowledge to make life more meaningful and creative.

One day is such a short time but we resolve to spend it wisely and well.

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Glance over our shoulder, oh God, and counsel us as we plan the creative use of the 24 hours given to us to spend. Amen.

My Boat And Thy Ocean

Several years ago when I was in Brazil I saw the tiny vessels in which some of their fishermen went out to sea. Made from burned logs and equipped with primitive sails, I was astounded that anyone would venture into the Atlantic Ocean in such fragile boats, often for days at a time, and frequently facing dangerous winds and turbulent waves.

As I was thinking of their courage under such conditions, I suddenly thought of the short but poignant prayer of the Breton fishermen "Help me, oh God. My boat is so tiny and Thy ocean so wide."

In very different, and yet somewhat similar ways, we in our older years may feel like those frightened fishermen. Our "boats" seem so tiny and so fragile. Often our eyesight or our hearing is declining. We have experienced a broken hip or some other physical infirmity. Our spouses have died and we have lost many of our relatives and friends. Loneliness we know. We worry about the decline in our memories or in our energy.

And the world seems so frightening at times. Crime and terrorism abound. Corruption in government continues. Sexual permissiveness scares us. The nuclear holocaust seems near.

So, almost in desperation, we often pray, "Help us, oh God. Our boats are so tiny and Thy ocean seems so wide." All our fears are not removed but we receive renewed power. We do not mount up like eagles and fly. Nor do we run. But we can walk again.

The Conspicuous and the Inconspicuous

On the eastern and western fringes of Richmond, Indiana, are two statues. They are very different in subject matter, yet each is unique.

On the campus of Earlham College, in West Richmond, is a replica of the statue by Sylvia Judson that was erected in 1959 on the south lawn of the Massachusetts State House, overlooking the Boston Common, as a tribute to Mary Dyer, the Quaker who was hanged on the Common in 1660 as a martyr to her faith. In that statue, Mary Dyer is sitting erect on a Meeting House bench, dressed in her simple 17th-century Quaker dress, blouse, and small cap.

On the eastern edge of that city, in the Glenn Miller Park, and within sight from the Old National Road, is a statue of a Pioneer Mother, similar to others located at various points along that famous roadway, and a tribute to the thousands of nameless women who made the trek to what is now the middle west. In the folds of her copious skirt and in her arms are a boy and a girl, reminding us of the children who made that long and hazardous journey.

Thus, one of those statues is to a conspicuous person; the other to an inconspicuous individual.

How appropriate that both are honored. How gratifying that these two statues in Richmond are to non-military persons, since so many of our civic tributes are to the military. How fitting that both are to women, since so few of our public statues are to representatives of that sex. And how proper it is to have two statues to women in the city of Richmond, founded by Quakers.

We praise the well-known, oh God. Help us also to praise the little-known and the unknown who have contributed to the life of our country and our world. Help us to pay tribute to the non-military whose contributions to our country have been so often neglected. Help us to cherish and extend the role of women in our beloved Religious Society of Friends. Amen.

Bridge-Builders

As I have criss-crossed the United States, I have seen a good many bridges, admiring many of them as monuments to the engineering genius of their designers and the careful work of their builders.

Some of those bridges are huge and often awe-inspiring—from the Verrazano and George Washington bridges on the east coast to the San Francisco-Oakland and Golden Gate bridges in the west.

But there are other bridges, too. Hundreds of them. Thousands of them. Old covered bridges which are still standing. Small bridges across rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds. And even tiny bridges which people have made by placing a log or plank across a narrow stream.

As I thought about bridges, I realized that we are all bridge-builders:

Bridge-builders in our families.

Bridge-builders in our friendship circle.

Bridge-builders in our neighborhoods and communities.

Bridge-builders in our Quaker Meetings and Friends Churches.

Bridge-builders in the world of nations.

And I wondered on which bridges I should be working now—and what materials I needed for such work.

We are aware, oh God, of the many crevasses and chasms which need to be bridged—from the rifts between family members to those between nations. Help us now to choose carefully the few bridges on which we should be working and to choose wisely the right materials to construct them. Give us patience and persistence and joy in our work. Amen.

Triumphing Over Tragedies: Growing Through Grief

How many tragedies we all experience in our lives!

The son of a friend is born blind and the daughter of another is born mentally retarded. The elderly mother of a relative burns to death in their home and a promising nephew is killed in an automobile accident. One colleague dies of shock treatment in a mental hospital and another dies shortly after he has finally conquered his alcoholism.

Those are some of the tragedies I have experienced in my life—and every reader can compile a similar list.

It is not easy to accept such tragedies but it does little good to fight them. Instead, we need to realize, as far as possible, that they are among the many mysteries of life, utterly inexplicable. And we need to draw upon all our spiritual resources to live through such experiences, realizing, also, that time helps to heal.

Fortunately we can draw, also, on the example of those persons who have triumphed over the tragedies in their lives and have often grown through grief.

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Help us, oh God, to face our own tragedies and the tragedies of those we know and love as realistically and calmly as possible. Help us to accept and act upon them as wisely as we can. Help us to dig deep to the sources of our spiritual strength to help tide us through such troubled times. In the name of Him whose tragic death brought eventual triumph. Amen.

Cathedral Windows

Shortly after the close of World War II, I was working in Paris and decided one Sunday to go to Rheims to see the famous cathedral. Many of the magnificent windows had been restored to their original places, but a few of them were still lying on the floor where passers-by could examine them closely. Seen in that way, the windows were not beautiful. They were merely tiny bits of glass, unevenly cut, and held together by molten lead, unevenly poured. At close range they seemed to have little pattern or design.

Yet there was a pattern to them and when the sun would shine through them again, they would reveal the artist's purpose as well as his expertise.

Perhaps the days of a year or the years of our lives are a little like those cathedral windows. Individually they are not especially significant. But when there is a pattern to all of them and the sun shines through, they reveal an overall design which is beautiful.

And perhaps the molten lead that binds them together is our meditation and prayer.

Similarly we may think of the members of a church or religious fellowship as tiny bits of glass which alone are not spectacular, but when fitted into a grand design mean much and are beautiful.

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Help us, oh God, to recognize the importance of the grand design in our lives and in the life of the religious fellowships to which we belong. Help us to realize how our prayers and worship can provide the element that binds these disparate pieces together into a glorious pattern. Amen.

Choosing Our Spiritual Ancestors

A favorite pastime of many older people is family genealogy. Often that hobby is carried on at the request of younger members of our families. So we turn over in our minds what we know. Then we search through the musty papers we have collected over the years, verifying our memories about people and events. If we are physically able, we may make trips to cemeteries, churches, and courthouses. In the process of assembling our family tree we often derive much personal pleasure.

Our physical ancestors we cannot choose, but our spiritual ancestors we can select, and we can gain much by becoming spiritual genealogists.

They may be persons we have known and who have served as models or guides in our lives.

They may be poets, dramatists, or novelists who have profoundly influenced us.

They may be commentators on the Bible or the Good Life, such as Harry Emerson Fosdick, Rufus Jones, William Temple, C.S. Lewis, or Carl Jung.

They may be saints of the Christian church, such as Francis, Augustine, or Francois de Sales; Catherine of Siena or Theresa of Avila.

Or they may be persons from the Bible: Peter or Paul; Jeremiah or Hosea. And certainly, Jesus.

Is this a hobby in which you are engaged or one which you could profitably undertake at this point in your life? It might be an interesting and worthwhile project.

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We are grateful, oh God, for the many individuals who have meant so much to us in our lives. We raise this prayer of thanksgiving today for our physical and our spiritual ancestors. Amen.

Receiving As Well As Giving, Graciously

During the Hitler regime in Germany, I spent a year (1940–1941) in Berlin, as director of the Quaker International Center, primarily assisting Jewish people to leave that hate-drenched nation.

For more than an hour one morning I sat and listened to a mother pour out her grief about her daughter's plight as a Jewess under the notorious Nuremburg laws. I was really of no help to her unless it was by serving as a patient and caring listener, a human wailing wall.

Yet she was extremely grateful and offered a generous sum of money for the work of the Center. Adhering to the agreement of our governing committee not to receive such gifts, I refused to accept her contribution.

But I learned a little later from a secretary that she had found the collection box in the Meeting Room nearby and had dropped her money into it.

Feeling I had been tricked by her, I told a colleague about that situation. That fellow-worker suggested I read the story of the woman who anointed Jesus' feet and head with oil and it dawned on me why he had permitted her to do so. He had learned a lesson I had not learned—that it is sometimes more blessed to receive than to give.

That is a difficult lesson for older people to learn. All our lives we have been giving generously and graciously. Now it is extremely difficult to learn to receive graciously. But it is an important lesson to learn in our later years.

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Help us, Thou Great Giver, to learn to receive as well as to give. Amen.

Facing Death

No matter how many acts or scenes there are in our lives, there is always that final scene—death.

To some it comes quickly and painlessly. To others it comes slowly—and often with pain and suffering. To a few it comes violently. In our lives we have probably witnessed it in all those variations. And we pray, ever so fervently, that we may die quickly and painlessly.

There are many ways of facing death. We can be terrorized by it and thereby increase our panic and bring harm to those who love us. We can put our heads in the sand and temporarily dismiss it, only postponing the need to face it. Or we can face it, read about it, discuss it with knowledgeable people and those we love, externalizing our fears and frustrations, our guilty feelings, and our unfinished business. And we can enjoy the moments that are left for us if we are still in our right minds. We may even provide for the termination of our lives legally if that is our wish.

Meanwhile we can draw upon the spiritual resources we have learned about in our lives and gain strength for whatever comes in that final period of our lives. And for some, the belief in a life after death proves comforting and strengthening.

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Sooner or later death will come. We know that intellectually. Help us to realize that truth emotionally and spiritually, drawing upon Thy strength in that critical time. Amen.