

WRESTLING WITH
OUR FAITH TRADITION



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LLOYD LEE WILSON

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Introduction

BY CAROLE EDGERTON TREADWAY

Considering the great diversity of belief among unprogrammed Friends as well as the historical and ongoing tensions over the relationship between faith and practice, can anything be said about Friends that is useful to all of us? Do we have anything to offer to the wider world? In his two-part essay “Wrestling with Our Faith Tradition,” Lloyd Lee Wilson describes what he calls “classic” Quakerism. The paradigms of Friends’ faith and practice that comprise “classic” Quakerism he claims “have particular relevance for the post-modern world in which we North Americans live.” Members of the Editorial Board of the Journal of North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) agree. The essay was offered as two lectures on successive evenings for Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association (SAYMA) at its sessions in Sixth month, 2003. The Editorial Board felt it was rightly ordered to make the essay available to a wider audience by offering it as the third issue of the Journal. Our hope is that the essay will offer encouragement to

Friends to live ever more deeply into the particular understanding of the Christian message given to the Religious Society of Friends and to the way of life to which it calls us. While deeply grounded in Christ, the message speaks to Friends in ways that may transcend our differences and call us into “. . . the unity of Spirit in the bond of Peace.”¹ If, by our faithfulness and God’s grace, we find ourselves in that condition of peace, perhaps we can be among those who create the conditions of peace on earth.

Lloyd Lee Wilson is an acknowledged minister of North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) and currently serves as clerk of the Yearly Meeting of Ministry and Oversight.

Wrestling With Our Faith Tradition

BY LLOYD LEE WILSON

PART I: FAITH

Dear Friends. We gather for these yearly meeting sessions in disheartening times. The broader North American culture in which we live appears in many ways to be falling apart at the seams. The Big Ideas that gave our culture a sense of order, stability, and meaning seem to be crumbling before our eyes, and the world is rapidly changing all around us – and seemingly not for the better.

The idea that humankind is inevitably progressing, evolving to a higher state, is denied daily by our inhumanity to one another. The moral authority of our institutions of religion and government and their ability to give order and meaning to our lives are undermined by the tragic flaws and blatant inconsistencies of those very institutions and the people who sustain them. The Enlightenment project to develop a coherent secular, humanistic moral code has collapsed into a simple me-first code of the jungle. At the same time we are semi-intentionally continuing an environmental catastrophe covering the entire planet. All of this is accompanied by the soundtrack of

the 21st century – an unceasing cacophony of images, sounds, and data which overwhelms our ability to make any sense of it all, or even to take it all in.

There are several Quaker responses possible to our circumstances. The hopeless sort of Quaker develops a kind of siege mentality: we can't win against these overpowering forces, but we'll hold out heroically till the bitter end. Similar to this is the "faithful remnant" mentality: we can't win, but we'll hold out heroically until God intervenes on our behalf and shows all those other folks we were right all along.

Other Quakers still hope to redeem the world around us, and some seek for a way to adapt the faith tradition to what they perceive as a changed world: to make Quakerism more palatable to non-Quakers, often by making it more familiar in various ways. If one considers membership as a measure of success in ministering to the hurts of the world, these Friends have enjoyed a certain measure of success.

It is my sense, however, that what is needed – what we need as a people of faith and what the world needs – is not to change our faith and practice to fit modern times and circumstances. What we need is to understand more clearly the ways in which our faith tradition speaks directly to our needs and the needs and desires of the people all around us. I suggest this because the faith tradition as it exists already offers healing and transformation in each of these areas. To paraphrase G. K. Chesterton's famous comment, "The problem with classic Quakerism is not that it has been tried and found wanting, but that it has been found difficult and therefore left untried." ¹

I believe that classic Quaker spirituality and Quaker practice have particular relevance to the post-modern world in which we North Americans live. All around us are people whose old structures of values and meaning for life are to a greater or lesser extent

inoperable. As a culture we no longer believe in absolute truth or ultimate meaning; we are suspicious of any central authority or institutional hierarchy that attempts to instruct us as to what is real or what we should believe. At the same time our hunger for God and our yearning to feel meaning and purpose in life are as strong as at any point in history.

Where there are no acceptable larger structures to which one can turn to find meaning, one will create meaning around oneself. This is happening to an unprecedented extent all around us, and the result is the rampant individualism that is so characteristic of our place and time. Even so, human beings understand at a very deep level that they need some larger truth, that putting themselves at the center of the story is ultimately dissatisfying. It is dissatisfying because eventually, no matter how important I consider myself to be or how many toys I accumulate, I die.

To these individuals seeking a larger truth, yet suspicious of institutional hierarchy or authority, Quakerism offers a spirituality that honors the unique worth and value of the individual as one in direct communion with the largest truth of all: God. In place of the authority of the institutional church, or of Holy Scripture or human reason, Quakerism offers the interpretive community as the place where truth is discerned, tested, and acted out. In place of the incessant cacophony of modern Western culture, Quakerism offers a spirituality of subtraction: a cultivation of the Great Silence in which the dialogue with our Creator can be heard and attended to. Like all great spiritual paths, Quakerism requires commitment and discipline – but it is a commitment to practices whose value have been discerned locally, by the individual in conjunction with the monthly meeting community, and a commitment to disciplines not enforced by outside authority, but inspired by one's Inner Guide.

I believe that if we can communicate the true nature of the Quaker path to seekers and others, and if we can educate them in the

true nature of the Quaker spiritual life, we will find a great many persons attracted to our meetings for worship. Some of them will taste and move on, but many of them will stay. Far from being an outmoded relic, our classic Quakerism is wonderfully constructed to speak to the condition of a great people yet to be gathered in the present day. The challenge facing us is not to modernize our faith tradition to meet a changing society, but to embody our faith tradition more fully so that we can be leavening and seasoning in that society.

Quakers have faced the challenges of a rapidly changing world before, and have had similar reactions. Friends gathered in North Carolina Yearly Meeting sessions some 130 years ago assessed the situation this way in an epistle to Dublin Yearly Meeting:

We have no new truths to offer, no new way to point out. We would advocate, rather, a very close and prayerful examination of the ground before we would give up the established landmarks as to Doctrine, Discipline, and Practice, living and acting under which our predecessors, those sons of the morning, were enabled to faithfully bear testimony not only to the outward coming of the Lord Jesus ... but that this same Jesus was the Word with God in the beginning, by whom the world was made, and that the same was the light and life of men. ...

While we wish not to fold our arms, sitting at ease in our ceiled houses, we feel assured that we are not to improve or leaven the world by assimilating our principles or practices to those of it.²

I agree. Let us therefore undertake a close and prayerful examination of the ground of classic Quakerism. The doctrine, discipline, and practice of Friends, not to mention their faith, is grounded in a corporate spirituality markedly different in nature from that of nearly all other Western Christians. This Quaker spirituality is the confluence of three great themes: an apophatic approach to God, an unmediated relationship with Jesus Christ that goes far beyond the traditional understanding of the priesthood of all believers, and an

understanding that these experiences are grounded in the faith community, not merely the individual.

Quakers have claimed apophatic spirituality – the path of spiritual subtraction – as their own. This is the first great theme. The great epiphany of George Fox, that Jesus Christ has come to teach his people himself, embodies the other two themes: that we each have a direct, unmediated relationship with the Divine in our present life, and that this relationship is grounded in our life together as God’s people. Weavers know the warp and the woof of a cloth are the threads that run through the cloth, and that the strength of the cloth depends on the strength of individual threads, how closely they are woven together, and the ways they are interwoven with threads running in a different direction. The spirituality of subtraction, the unmediated relationship with the living Christ, and the centrality of the faith community rather than the individual: these three great themes, and the interplay among them, make up the warp and woof of the whole cloth of the Quaker faith tradition.

I want to sketch each of these themes briefly and then consider how they work together to produce the integral whole that we know as Quakerism.

ONE: APOPHATIC SPIRITUALITY

The two great ways of knowing God are sometimes called apophatic theology and kataphatic theology. Apophatic theology can be described as knowing God by all the statements that can be made beginning “God is not ...”. This is also called the negative road, or the spirituality of subtraction. One approaches God by subtracting from one’s consciousness, from one’s entire life, everything that is not God. Classic Quaker spirituality is heavily apophatic.

Kataphatic theology, by far the most prevalent among Christians in the West, can be described as knowing God by all the

statements that can be made beginning “God is ...”. On this spiritual path, one seeks a deeper understanding of and relationship with God through positive images, symbols, and ideas: singing a hymn, preaching and hearing messages about God and God’s works in the world, responsive readings and vocal prayer in unison, and similar activities. It is the most common form of spirituality throughout the Christian church (Roman, Orthodox, and Protestant). Younger people typically start with a kataphatic spirituality, even if later in life they are drawn to an apophatic path. It is easier to learn about what and who God is, how God acts in the world, etc., than to start out by trying to grasp God by considering what God is not.

As Andrew Pritchard observes, kataphatic spirituality is a spirituality of immanence, of the Word made flesh, of God with us. It emphasizes God’s dominion in this world. Success, progress, overcoming and victory are highly valued.³

Andrew Pritchard describes apophatic spirituality as placing emphasis on the values of self-emptying or denial – on suffering, sacrifice, and serving.⁴ This sounds very much like the stories we’ve read of Quakers who speak of taking up the cross, of denying self, or overcoming their own will in order to be faithful, and for good reason. This is the signature Quaker spirituality. Scripture passages that illuminate this spirituality are familiar to us all: the suffering servant passage in Isaiah,⁵ the humility of Christ in Philippians,⁶ and those folks in Hebrews who are praised for acting in faith contrary to their own self-interest.⁷

TWO: UNMEDIATED RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST

In his search for a true knowledge of God and God’s desires for his own life, George Fox tried a series of paths to understanding, each of which he eventually rejected. He attended church services, but found them unsatisfying. He inquired of the priestly class, and found them unhelpful. He looked in the Scriptures,

but found them not sufficient by themselves. As he records in his Journal,

And when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, Oh then, I heard a voice which said, 'There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition', and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy.⁸

The second great theme of Quaker spirituality is that it is Jesus Christ who has come to teach us. Christ is here, with us in the present moment and our present circumstances; and Christ is here to teach us directly everything that it is important for us to know about God and God's desires for us and God's love for us. Our path to understanding these things does not lead only through the Holy Scriptures, and does not lead primarily through the accumulated teachings of the institutional church or through holy sacraments administered by a priestly class. Our path to understanding is not human reason, either. Our primary path to understanding is a direct, unfiltered and unmediated relationship with the risen Christ who is here with each of us and with all of us in community. Of course, we do value Scriptures and the accumulated wisdom of our yearly meetings and the rational thought processes that help us understand the consequences of our actions – it is simply that all these are of secondary value in the Quaker tradition.

It is the experienced reality of the inward encounter with the Divine that is the foundation stone and building block for everything else. In that encounter I discover the One who yearns to abide with me, and in me, to be my Companion, Comforter, Healer, and Guide. Others have had that experience, and have written and spoken about it eloquently. Because the One we encounter is the very nature of Truth, what these other people have said and written about their encounter with Truth gets my great respect, and is useful to me to help me understand my own relationship with Christ – but it can never be more important than the relationship itself.

THREE: COMMUNITY

The third theme is that of community. George Fox did not see a great crowd of individuals to be reached and taught individually. Fox knew that Jesus Christ had not come to teach him in isolation. His call was always to a people. He understood that Christ had come to teach his people – a great people yet to be gathered but whose gathering was beginning. It seems obvious in some ways: Christ was always talking about how we should relate to one another, and said that the way we treat one another is the true measure of how we feel about and treat God. There is something about the human condition, though, that keeps persuading us that we can be right with God by thinking primarily about ourselves. This is particularly seductive today, when the dominant culture all around us seeks to convince you and me that we are in fact at the center of our story – rampant individualism. Quakerism has always understood this to be untrue, and its emphasis on community is a great theme of the Quaker faith tradition.

THE DANCE OF THE THREE

Let us explore the ways these themes dance together. George Fox, of course, was practicing an apophatic spirituality when he had his epiphany. He tried all the conventional sources of spiritual wisdom and insight, but many of his signature insights came in times of retirement and solitude. He was walking in a field on a First Day morning when the Lord opened to him “that being bred at Oxford or Cambridge was not enough to fit and qualify men to be ministers of Christ”,⁹ and again when “at another time it was opened in me that God, who made the world, did not dwell in temples made with hands.”¹⁰ His Journal reports many times that he spent entire days and sometimes nights as well in solitary contemplation, often with his Bible but not always.

The outgrowth of this practice of solitude and negation was a direct experience of God and the clear instruction and guidance of God, independent of Scriptures, church teachers, or human reason. As Fox described it,

Now the Lord God hath opened to me by his invisible power how that every man was enlightened by the divine light of Christ; and I saw it shine through all, and that they that believed in it came out of condemnation to the Light of life, and became the children of it, This I saw in the pure openings of the Light without the help of any man; neither did I then know where to find it in the Scriptures; though afterwards, searching the Scriptures, I found it. For I saw, in that Light and Spirit that was before the Scriptures were given forth, and which led the holy men of God to give them forth, that all, if they were to know God or Christ, or the Scriptures aright, must come to that spirit by which they that gave them forth were led and taught.¹¹

This is a deeply packed statement. Fox is claiming direct inspired revelation, independent of human help or Scriptural guidance, which is in itself a remarkable claim. “God told me to ...” is a claim secular culture often associates with mental illness, not spiritual health. But Fox doesn’t stop there. He claims that the content of his revelation is that the same experience is available to everyone – not only is available, but must be availed of if any person is to understand Scripture rightly or to know God truly. (Remember, Barclay starts out the Apology with the proposition that “the height of all happiness is the true knowledge of God.”) Finally, he claims that Scripture itself supports these claims, though they were not the source of them. He came to these understandings not by adding to his rational knowledge or by formal religious study, but by subtracting from his life whatever proved itself not to be God.

This spirituality of subtraction is a spiritual gift, a charism, which Friends offer to the entire Christian church: modeling apophatic spirituality in all of life, and especially in worship. To follow this spirituality of subtraction with heart, one must be consistent in one’s

practice. One removes from the meeting-room decorations that might distract, and refrains from looking out the window to other possible sources of distraction. Some, like me, even keep our eyes closed to further protect. We do not speak unless directly moved to do so, and are careful even about our inward prayer. I try to take care of urgent prayer concerns early, while I am still “centering down” to worship. Later in meeting, if I find myself thinking, my practice is to repeat the Jesus Prayer a few times, until thought falls away again: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” If some distraction does intrude upon my consciousness, my desire is to treat it as a pebble falling into a still pond: the ripples expand and the pond returns to stillness.

This is a slow path to God. I can’t speak about other paths, but I know personally that this is a slow path. After more than three decades as a Friend, I still feel myself to be a beginner on this path. I am somewhat in awe of those more seasoned folks in my meeting who have incorporated this spirituality into every aspect of their lives so much more completely and apparently effortlessly than I have. It is a slow path, and paradoxically, anything one might do to help speed one’s way has just the opposite effect. There is nothing I can add to my practice that will help me make progress on the path of subtraction. I can understand why patience is a proverbial Quaker virtue – it takes great patience to devote oneself to this path, and to stick to it for years and years.

On the other hand, there is a temptation among some Friends, who are impatient with the process of subtraction or who do not fully understand Quaker spirituality, to fill in the empty spaces with some thing or activity: Scripture readings, or sweat lodges, or hymn singing or whatever. All these things have their value, and all can be helpful, but they are not in their essence part of Quaker spirituality. Quaker worship is something different – not sacrifice, not praise, not petition nor contrition, but “simple” receptivity. As one Friend

I know said recently to an attender considering membership, “it is fine to continue participating in Indian sweat lodge experiences after becoming a member, but thee cannot re-define Quakerism to include sweat lodges.”

Understand that I am not saying that these other types of spirituality are wrong, or not helpful – they can be exactly right, and can be quite helpful to one’s spiritual growth in the right contexts. They are not, however, part of that distinctive Quaker spirituality which is at the heart of our tradition. Nor am I praising silence in worship *per se*. To quote Job Scott:

*I know of nothing more acceptable to God, nor more useful, instructive, and strengthening to the souls of men, than true silent worship, and waiting on God for help immediately from his holy presence; nor of scarcely any thing more formal and lifeless, than that dull, unfeeling silence, which too many of our society are satisfying themselves with the year round, and from year to year.*¹²

Perhaps the most common practice among other Christians that is similar to Quaker spirituality is contemplative prayer. Quaker practice is very similar, yet distinct from contemplative prayer. It is not so much that we Quakers choose to contemplate the Divine as that we choose to receive – to hear and accept – what the Divine has to impart to us.

The spirituality of subtraction makes room in our lives for the type of direct interaction with the Divine that George Fox reported and that we wait for, expectantly, in meeting for worship. As it is hard to hear one another in a noisy room, it is hard to hear God in a noisy life. As our heart-longing for God grows, it is only natural that we should be continually simplifying our life, subtracting whatever is not God or not of God so that our awareness is single-pointed and competition for our attention is minimized. A noisy life not only competes with the Divine message, it distorts what it cannot drown out completely.

This admittedly large effort is worth our while because the dia-

logue it readies us for is in fact continuous. It may wax and wane, but seasoned Friends over the centuries have reported that God's presence is an ongoing personal conversation, not the intermittent and infrequent reception of a general broadcast. It is as if whenever we stop to listen, we discover that God is already speaking with us. As Carole Treadway of the School of the Spirit reports, an apt description of a Conservative Friend is one who seeks to live every moment under the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit.¹³

So far this seems to be a good system – a spirituality that enables direct revelation from God, some of which undoubtedly concerns how to adjust one's life – how to use subtraction – to enable more and clearer revelation. The danger is that there is no anchor here. It does not take much imagination to visualize how this might lead to insanity. The faith community provides the stability and groundedness needed but not supplied by either the spirituality of subtraction or the direct experience of Divine communion.

The faith community makes several needed – I would say necessary – contributions to this interplay between spirituality and revelation. Four of these are important to our conversation today.

First of all, there is a qualitative difference between corporate worship and individual worship. However sweet and authentic and powerful and whatever other adjective one might correctly apply to individual retirement, corporate worship is something else – a different kind of encounter with the Divine, for which there is no substitute. Christ made a specific promise, recorded in the scripture, to be with two or three gathered in his name; that promise is kept when we gather for corporate worship. In corporate worship we hear God differently, and I suggest more clearly, than in times of individual retirement.

An important example of this difference is the process of answering the Queries and, in the larger community, responding to the answers. The Queries are a unique form of interrogatory the-

ology,¹⁴ developed to facilitate spiritual formation in the context of a spirituality of subtraction and the reality of immediate divine guidance. The classic use of the Queries, still followed in my yearly meeting, is that they will be answered by the meeting community in a single voice.¹⁵ The answer to any given Query is not a summary of the insights and observations of various individual Friends, but something larger and more true: the discernment of the community, as a body, of its spiritual condition. The Queries are so important that the second issue of NCYM(C)'s Journal is devoted entirely to them.

The plan for third issue of the Journal is that it will be devoted to the Advices. [Ed. Note: It was subsequently decided to publish these lectures immediately, before the issue devoted to the Advices.] Many of us have a watered-down view of the Advices. Yearly meetings often quote a sentence of the famous letter from the Elders at Balby somewhere in their book of discipline or faith and practice:

*Dearly beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by; but that all, with a measure of the Light which is pure and holy, may be guided; and so in the Light walking and abiding, these things may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not in the letter; for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.*¹⁶

True enough; but what we forget, if we ever knew, is that this sentence comes at the end of a list of 20 specific directions, or Advices, on how Friends are to conduct their lives, ranging from where and how often to hold meetings for worship to relations between masters and servants, youth and their elders, and between husband and wife. All of which is given forth, as the sentence preceding our familiar quotation states, "that all in order may be kept in obedience, that he may be glorified, who is worthy over all, God blessed for ever."

A second contribution of the emphasis on community involves the Quaker insistence on a changed life as the consequence of a changed spirit. One is not justified or sanctified by works, but the

changed person will live a changed life, and the community is the first place we live out those changes. The faith community is the place we practice (in both senses of the word) the acts of mercy, the qualities of love, and the testimonies of a Christian life. We learn how to live up to the light we have been given by practicing on one another and with one another. What mounds of forgiveness we need to pour out to one another in the process – but what joy to experience the Holy Spirit changing one another’s lives, and knitting us together in Divine Love!

Thirdly, to the extent we are all faithful in that practice, the faith community becomes a witness to the world about how it should be ordered, and an instrument for God’s use in beginning that re-ordering process. Our belief is that the risen Christ makes it possible for ordinary humans to live in the Kingdom of God today. The faith community is the means by which we work to heal the world and model the present and coming Kingdom. Beyond work on social concerns, the faith community can model social order – the present possibility that individuals can experience a unity beyond words that leads to harmony and social justice.

The fourth contribution of the faith community involves discernment and interpretation. Paradoxically, our emphasis on the importance of the direct unmediated relationship of the individual with the Risen Christ leads to an increased importance of the faith community as the means of interpreting that relationship and its guidance for the individual. We believe, and know by experience, that the Holy Spirit with whom we commune inwardly is the infallible God of the universe. We know also that we are very fallible human beings. God may not be in error in instructing us, but we may very well be in error in understanding those directions. Hence the importance of the faith community as a locus of discernment and interpretation, balancing the insight of the individual with that of the group.

Community discernment is not the same thing as community decision-making on behalf of the individual. It is not making decisions for the individual. To borrow a phrase from Marty Grundy, “discernment is the way we tell what is from God from what is not.”¹⁷ Discernment is a prime task of the Religious Society of Friends – as a society, not as an assembly of individuals. To the extent that I am committed to this spiritual path and that I trust the discernment of the community, the community should never be in a position of making my decisions for me – only helping me tell what is from God from what is not.

To practice discernment, the members of a faith community must truly know each other – must be aware of, and in some ways participate in, the important aspects and developments in one another’s lives. This takes much more time and effort than the average members of the typical monthly meeting are accustomed to investing in their fellow Quakers. If we are to be agents of discernment for one another, our lives must be transparent to one another, and that can happen only when we spend time together. One or two hours together each week at meeting for business or meeting for worship won’t do it.

Be involved with one another economically: if there is a dentist in the meeting, that dentist should be the dentist of choice for the entire meeting. If there is an auto mechanic, everybody’s car should get serviced at that Friend’s shop. If I need to hire a baby-sitter, it should be a young Friend. We need to break bread with one another in our own homes, not just at the meetinghouse for monthly potluck. When we know one another deeply, our discernment will be easy and true. When I am with those persons who know me deeply, I often receive their discernment without saying a word.

For all this to work, of course, the individual must submit to the discernment of the community. How hard it is for us to deal with submission! Our individualistic culture fills us with thoughts about

our independent rights, and our faith tradition wants us to submit to these folks who don't even know us? Well, no. As I've been saying, our faith tradition wants us to submit to folks who know us very well, and love us, and have our best interests at heart.

When we practice submission, several things happen. One, we often learn that the community was right, for reasons we did not or could not see at the time. Second, we learn a lesson of humility that the larger secular culture is unlikely to teach us at any time. Thirdly, we give the community, of which we are a part, an opportunity to see what the implications and outcomes associated with its discernment are. By reflecting on these events, the community gets better at discernment, and we all become more faithful servants of the One Lord.

When we let go of ego and focus instead on God, we are (as one old Quaker said) gathered as in a net and drawn together as we are drawn closer to God, so that we look at one another and say "What?! Is the kingdom of heaven come among men?"¹⁸ (and women!)

GROWING THE FAITH TRADITION

A word may be appropriate here about how all this affects the faith tradition itself. A faith tradition is not unchanging through time. Like all living things, it must grow and change if it is to continue to be healthy. A faith community is the only place a faith tradition grows legs and walks around on this earth. When such a community sees the effects of its discernment and advices and reflects on them, it is inevitably changed, if even just a little bit.

So when I talk about the individual submitting to the community, and the community seriously caring about what the individual does, that is all true – but it is only part of the story. On another level, the individual and community – prophet and priest – are engaged in a spiritual wrestling match that will leave both

participants changed. The faith tradition is much larger than the individual, in many ways, so it will not change very dramatically from any one encounter. Over time, however, the ongoing wrestling matches between individuals and the tradition embodied by the community change the tradition itself, strengthening some parts and modifying others.

So no wonder we come back again and again to the same knotty problems – that’s how the tradition stays alive and grows into new understandings of Truth. John Woolman had to come back to his yearly meeting again and again to raise his concern about slavery (he was not alone of course) – but each year he was a little changed, and each year the yearly meeting was a little changed, until finally a tipping point was reached and the tradition began to interpret its own testimonies differently.

It is precisely that we have continued to submit our personal discernment to the guidance of the faith community that keeps the tradition alive and growing and relevant to our issues and concerns and discernments. When we decide the tradition is irrelevant, that the Queries can be left unanswered and the Advices ignored, when we don’t make the effort to test our discernment with the larger faith community, our actions themselves are self-fulfilling. When we don’t wrestle with the faith tradition, we rob it of the very thing it most needs to remain vital, alive and relevant: our deepest engagement.

The Quaker faith tradition is a body of experience and practice, and reflection on that practice and experience that interprets the Cosmic Big Story of God and Creation for those of us who commit ourselves to walk inside it. It is not the only authentic or true tradition, but it is authentic and true. One need not be a Quaker to reach the happiness of a true knowledge of God, but one needs some tradition greater than the individual, and the Quaker tradition is indeed greater than any one of us.

We need the faith tradition if we are to have individual spiritual growth. Otherwise, we are in the position of a swimmer dropped into the water at night, out of sight of land: we have no idea where land might be, no way to judge whether we're swimming in a straight line, no voice of encouragement when we get tired, and no advice on how to improve our stroke, so we can cover more ground with less effort. We have no guide, and no discipline to measure our strength against.

Beyond the importance of faith traditions in general, I believe that it is very important for an individual to choose a particular faith tradition to embrace and with which to wrestle. Eclectic and syncretic spiritualities, I believe, are dangerous because they encourage the individual to “dodge” the more challenging aspects of one tradition for an easier part of another – and by so doing, to avoid that hard spiritual work which may be necessary for spiritual growth.

How can one truly embrace any tradition, if one gives it only half-hearted allegiance? To God-wrestle, we must be fully committed – for our sake and for the sake of the faith tradition, which must wrestle with us and be changed by that wrestling, if it is to survive.

Brian Drayton, among others, has spoken of the Quaker faith tradition as a “whole cloth”. Just as warp and woof are interwoven to give a physical cloth its strength and durability, and removing threads from either warp or woof weakens the entire cloth and makes it less useful, so these themes discussed tonight are so interwoven that removing any one of them threatens the integrity and strength of the whole tradition. Before we discard any single aspect of the tradition, therefore, one should carefully examine the ways it is interwoven with and supports other aspects of the tradition that appear more useful or valuable.

Our challenge in the 21st century is to learn our own faith tradition in its fullness, and to find a way somehow to practice this tradition in the midst of a surrounding culture which honors very dif-

ferent values and activities. Our tradition requires our whole-hearted embrace, our single-minded commitment, and our faithful wrestling to grow and help us grow into a true knowledge of God. If we do these things, our meeting communities will indeed be a blessing and sweet savour to those who see us and interact with us, and our meetings for worship will see a steady increase in the numbers participating.

PART II: ... AND PRACTICE

Quakerism is eminently a path of praxis, that is of practice, not merely an intellectual paradigm for understanding the world. So how does one put the principles we discussed last night into practice? Can we put legs on these three principles of the spirituality of subtraction, the deep communion with Jesus Christ, and the central place of the faith community and see how they walk around on the ground? Yogi Berra is reported to have said that “In theory there’s no difference between theory and practice. In practice there’s a lot of difference.” If the experiences of our spiritual practice won’t support our theory, or our theology, the theology will have to change. If it does support it, we’ll have a starting point for a continuing cycle of practice and reflection that will keep our personal faith and our faith tradition alive and growing indefinitely.

Now these three principles interact with one another to produce something greater than their sum: a synergy that opens up a new way of looking at and being in the world. This is a new gestalt, a new vision of what might be called gospel order: how the Kingdom of God is even this moment breaking into and becoming real in our world. So as we talk tonight it will not be possible to take each principle and discuss it separately. Wherever we start the conversation, the other principles will inevitably involve themselves in the discussion.

Nevertheless, let’s start with the spirituality of subtraction, also known as apophatic spirituality. There is a story, perhaps apocryphal,

that a group or groups of Seekers in England, dissatisfied with the established public worship of the day, began to meet privately to worship among themselves. They began to delete from their worship everything that seemed to them not to be directly of God. Soon enough they were gathering in complete silence, having subtracted everything they knew how to subtract. Along came George Fox, the story goes, and showed them what was waiting for them in the silence: a deep and direct relationship with the Holy Spirit in many roles, or “offices”: Healer, Comforter, Priest, King, Guide, Companion, and others.

If there were no one waiting for us at the end of our journey, the spirituality of subtraction would leave Friends worship no different than numerous other meditation or mindfulness techniques: calming and simplifying our lives and minds so we can better deal with the stresses of the contemporary world. That in itself would be a good thing. But there is a Divine Other in the silence, and because of that we practice our subtraction in order to draw closer to that Other, to engage in an ongoing dialogue and communion.

Our experience is that the dialogue is indeed ongoing; that the Holy Spirit is speaking to us all the time, as we hear whenever we turn our attention to the conversation. Naturally, we want to order all our lives to be open to that conversation, not just the time we spend in meeting for worship. An attention to the spirituality of subtraction affects how we live each moment of each day. Our lives become simple – single-pointed – not because of economic doctrine, not so we can live simply on the earth, but so that we can attend to the Divine conversation. Simplicity becomes not a chore, but a joy.

As we attend to the Divine conversation, we are able to put more and more of our lives under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit. The more we open ourselves to receiving and following this guidance, the more there is. It turns out that God is interested in every aspect of our lives, and is constantly equipping and guiding us to live very

well – to live in harmony with the Creator and the creation.

My favorite example of this comes from a gathering of ministers in Ohio that I attended about a decade ago. In the course of the various discussions, some farmers in the group began to describe their practice of settling into the silence each morning, to be guided about what they should do and where they should go that day. Sometimes they felt no more than an affirmation of the tasks human reason would have recommended, but sometimes they received unexpected direction. One spoke of being directed away from a planned trip to town to buy feed and other supplies, and being sent instead to a distant pasture. When he got there, he discovered a very sick cow. His prompt arrival undoubtedly saved the animal's life. Ordinarily he might have gone a couple of days before going to that particular pasture.

Even those of us who work in offices rather than farms have a remarkable amount of discretion in our lives, both at work and at home. Making space for this sort of continuing guidance will produce a remarkable simplicity in one's life. Simplicity of this sort is more than a plainness of garb or a frugality in spending or consuming. It entails a re-ordering of life's activities so that they require less of our attention, thereby freeing up more of our attention to give to the Divine conversation. This is not a change in priorities alone, shifting our attention so that we can do more for the Lord. It is a recognition, as the gospel of John reminds us, that we can bear no fruit for the Lord at all unless we remain fundamentally united with God.¹⁹

Our faith community plays an integral part in this simplifying, subtracting process. Beyond the wonderful experience of corporate worship, we model the path for one another, and share the struggles as well as the joys along the way. It is as the writer of Ecclesiastes said,

*Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.*²⁰

Because the community is so important in this tradition, the work necessary to build and sustain community has a very high priority. I am talking about a community of faith: unity with the Holy Spirit of God, not just the fellowship of like-minded folks. As individuals and as a group, we need to devote time and energy continually to those practices that enable us “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of Peace”.²¹ This is hard work, and frankly many folks put more effort into sustaining community in their workplace or neighborhood than in their faith community.

Among the community building and sustaining processes that seem to me to be of highest importance are the Queries and Advices. The spirituality of subtraction and the reality of immediate divine guidance have posed difficult challenges for spiritual formation among Friends. How could Friends direct one another’s attention to what is spiritually important, and how could we pass on what we have learned to newcomers to the tradition? The answer discovered was unique and apropos to Friends: they developed an interrogatory theology, called Queries and their answers. There are Queries for individuals in my yearly meeting, and Queries for the meeting of ministry and oversight; but the Queries that seem most important to me are the Queries for monthly meetings. The corporate Queries are designed to direct one’s attention – more accurately, the meeting community’s attention – to the most important aspects of Quaker spirituality. Rather than making a declaration of the Truth, these questions are designed to engage Friends with important issues in such a way that the Truth becomes clear.

By Truth I mean Truth with a capital T, as it often appears in early Quaker writings. To paraphrase Douglas Adams, capital- T Truth means God, the Universe, and Everything, including how it all fits together and how each part relates to every other part - especially how God relates to thee and me. Friends have consistently held two things to be true about capital- T Truth that seem to be contradictory and certainly are in tension with one another. The first belief is that the Truth is both complete in itself and unchanging over eternity, as revealed by and through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ the Son of God. The second belief is that Truth is at the same time incomplete and constantly unfolding. The Divine is all and everything and always, but our understanding, our comprehension of the Divine is necessarily limited by our circumstances and spiritual maturity. This fits quite well with our apophatic understanding: the Truth is complete and perfect, but nothing we can think or say about it quite captures its fullness. “That’s not it.” However eloquent or beautiful the expression of Truth, some part of us must stand aside and say, “That’s not quite it – not entirely.”

The genius of the Queries is that they will engage us wherever we are, spiritually and physically. When properly engaged, the Queries will reveal that aspect of the total Truth that is appropriate to our condition. Of necessity Queries are stuck in the moment in time at which they were written down, and sometimes their wording seems archaic or the issues they address are not phrased as we would phrase them today. I would suggest that this is not a shortcoming, and that our efforts to wrap our understanding around the Queries and make them real to us in this moment and place are part of the process of revelation.

Our Discipline and our practice assume that the corporate Queries will be answered by the meeting community in a single voice,²² and this is an important function of the Query process. As the meeting for business builds a response to any Query, many Friends may offer insight or observation. The community’s answer, however, is not a

listing of these insights and observations, but a refining and development of these individual responses into a single community answer. This comes through the process of shifting one's perspective from what is true for oneself to what is true for the community. Often deep worship is necessary to integrate disparate or even conflicting individual statements into a transcendent response with which all may find unity. In that worship I may come to see a situation in a whole new light because the Query discussion opens new perspectives to my understanding; others may re-organize priorities as the whole community comes to a single response.

As the Queries act to elicit a single voice from the community in response, the tradition speaks to us in a single voice through the Advices, "to challenge and inspire Friends in their personal and social lives."²³ The Advices are indeed declarative statements of advice, rather than questions, and they are advice rather than doctrine, although most of the important doctrines of the faith are embedded there, explicitly or implicitly. The Advices are the voice of earlier generations of my faith community, passing on their wisdom to those embracing the faith in the present day. They inspire me because I know in my heart the effort these Friends made to live up to them in their day; they challenge me because they are an unambiguous declaration that our inward spiritual condition will inevitably shape and direct our outward lives. If I cannot live in harmony with any part of the Advices, I must undertake a serious self-examination to see whether I am straying from these underlying principles, or am lacking the courage to put my faith into action.

While no formal, corporate response to the Advices is expected, a continual engagement with them is an important part of "honestly examining [oneself] as to [one's] growth in grace."²⁴ Our discipline urges their "earnest and frequent consideration" by all members of the yearly meeting.²⁵ Applying the Advices to one's own life, and reflection on the places where the two do not seem to match very

well, does indeed challenge us to do better and inspire us to make that effort.

Of course, the Advices themselves change over time, as we wrestle with them in faith. We live in a larger social context, and as that context changes over years and decades, the pressures it places on faithful Friends also changes. An advice on ownership of slaves, for example, would have been relevant in the early 19th century but not 50 years later. This is one way the faith tradition evolves as we wrestle with it as individuals and as a community.

I have been spending some time recently with Robert Barclay, and in particular with his Apology. It is a remarkable document still, after several centuries. One of the strengths of Barclay's writing is his insistence that if experience contradicts theory, he must revise his theory – or his theology – to fit the facts. In the present day, we need to replace our theoretical insistence that everyone is identical with an acknowledgement that God loves diversity, and gifts each individual differently, in order to bring about the Kingdom of God. Beyond our call to membership in the Kingdom, there are those individuals among us who have heard and accepted a second calling, to re-order their entire lives around a particular service for God. When this happens, and in whatever form it takes, whether visiting those in prison or feeding the hungry or vocal ministry, the faith community needs to participate in recognizing and celebrating the work of God among us. Only as community can we provide the support and guidance these folks need in order to be faithful servants in these callings.

Recognizing God's gifts in various ministries and service does not create a Quaker hierarchy, or a "two-tiered system", as some have called it.²⁶ Neither does denying this diversity of gifts make them go away. Formal acknowledgement does enable the individual to make a fuller and proper use of the gift, as it involves the entire community in discernment of right action for the development and

exercise of the gift. The community can discern and remove obstacles to use of the gift and encourage the individual to be faithful. If the individual seems to outrun her Guide, the community that has already formally recognized the gift has a ready channel to provide additional discernment and guidance.

God bestows on the faith community those spiritual gifts it needs to carry out its part in bringing the Kingdom of God to fruition. Individuals become stewards of those gifts, but they are essentially the community's gifts. This mutual accountability of the individual and meeting for the proper development and use of spiritual gifts is a natural outgrowth of this reality.

Now some persons may and do bristle at the prospect of coming under the meeting's authority. Individual pride and a sense of "I know what is best for me" get in the way of a right relationship. If we are serious about spiritual growth, however, we will welcome the oversight and guidance of others. To the objection that "the meeting members don't know me well enough to know what is best," my response is that it is our responsibility as individual members to live transparent lives, so the rest of the meeting community can know us, and to make the effort to build and sustain community which is the means of knowing one another.

There is an even more fundamental truth here. One makes spiritual growth only in the context of a faith community and faith tradition, as I mentioned last night. It is only in the context of a community that we are equipped and enabled to dig our wells deep in one place, to find the Living Water. Community gives me location – gives me my bearings – so that I know where I am. Community interprets and provides context for understanding my spiritual experiences. I discover that other Friends, in my meeting or in earlier generations, have had similar experiences that had certain effects on their lives, and from that information I am enabled to understand my own experience more fully.

My faith community also holds my feet to the fire: holds me accountable for doing the hard spiritual work of our tradition, not just the “fun stuff.” Without this accountability any person, Friend or not, is susceptible to a sort of eclectic, “salad bar” spirituality that allows one to pick and choose among spiritual exercises, avoiding those things that are difficult or seem like less fun. Of course, it is those difficult things that more times than not are exactly what we need to be doing and experiencing.

OUTWARD WITNESS AND TESTIMONY

Walking this peculiar Quaker spiritual path brings one into increasing harmony: harmony with God, harmony with oneself, harmony with other human beings, and harmony with all the rest of creation. The fruits of this harmony are among the strongest and clearest witnesses which we Quakers have to make to the rest of the world. If we are clear about the source of these witnesses, I believe they will be more effective than heretofore in transforming the world.

Perhaps the clearest example of this involves an aspect of the larger testimony of harmony, called the Peace Testimony. When I was a young man, I had to write a couple of faith statements for CO applications – one to the Air Force, and then another to Selective Service. My argument was, I believe, typical for most liberal Quakers: There is that of God in every one, so every human life is of infinite value, and attacking another human being is the same as attacking God. The Air Force and the Selective Service System found this to be a sound argument, at least for their purposes, and I was allowed to separate from the Air Force and avoid being drafted by Selective Service.

Having spent the following 30 years engaged in peace work in various ways, I have come to see two problems in my original position of basing a peace witness on that of God in every one, or the inherent goodness of human beings. The first problem is related to

the need for a religious witness to be persuasive to its audience – to those not yet in agreement. A witness based on that of God in every person is not persuasive because the untransformed person maintains that the argument doesn't apply. An important part of any war effort is to portray the "enemy" as evil. From this perspective, there is no visible "that of God" in this person or these people, so it is OK to make war on them – perhaps even a moral necessity. I say there is that of God in the stranger at the gates, they say there is not, and very little dialogue is possible, except to agree to disagree.

The second problem is that it does not address the roots of war in me: the reasons I am drawn to make war in the first place. An effective peace witness needs to do more than underscore the worth and dignity of each human being; it needs to address the things in me that lead me to contemplate making war on my fellow human beings. We may agree that human beings should not have war waged on them, because they have that of God in them or whatever, but that does not help much if I can't resist the urge to wage war.

A stronger witness, articulated by Fox and inherently wrapped up in the principles we have been discussing, is that I have been changed by my encounter with the Divine, and therefore it is neither necessary nor appropriate for me to wage war: "I told them I lived in that life and virtue that takes away the occasion of all war."²⁷ My current pacifist position does not depend on the good or evil in another person, or the presence of the Divine in them, but in my own condition. By the grace of God I have been freed from bondage to the lusts and desires which the Epistle of James says are at the heart of wars and conflicts.²⁸ By grace I have been enabled to abide by the precept and example of Christ, who did not fight when he would have been justified to do so, and who ordered the disciple to put up his sword.

I believe lives that embody this new life in the Holy Spirit are the strongest possible peace witness – a witness that cannot be undermined by the apparent evil in other persons or by its apparent

“success” or “failure”. George Fox’s metaphor was that he had been brought through the flaming sword and returned to that state that Adam was in before the fall, and even beyond that to another more steadfast state in Christ Jesus.²⁹ The peace witness arising out of a transformed life will be persuasive because of the invitation it offers to others to be transformed themselves, not because it does or does not promise the defeat of apparent evil in other persons. I can urge the cause of peace as a realistic option for others because I know experientially that peace is possible in me.

Arguments such as Scott Simon’s that war is not moral but at times a necessity, because the other side is truly evil,³⁰ are pushed aside by this new reality. The other side may or not be evil – what is important is that I am not evil – I am God’s new creation, no longer a slave to the forces that impel human beings to war. And I know from experience, as Friends have witnessed and testified for over three centuries, that God does not ever present us with circumstances in which we must choose between two evils. There is always a third way. There may be indeed a great cloud of darkness that seems at times to cover the earth – but I can testify that there is a greater cloud of light, which will overcome the darkness as we are faithful to our Guide.

In the Great Silence we taste the Gospel Order of which George Fox spoke, the harmony that was in all creation before the Fall from Eden. In that communion we learn how to live all of life more nearly in that Gospel Order. We can witness for peace among human beings not merely because it is rational, spares innocent lives, and makes better use of finances – although all those things are true. We can witness for peace because we know experientially that peace is God’s will and peace is possible – for us, in the present day.

Based on our experience as a community of faith, Friends can testify that the Kingdom of God is indeed both becoming in the present moment and not yet here in its fullness. In the words of the theme of NYYM a couple of decades ago, we are indeed “trapped

between two worlds: one dying and one struggling to be born.” What we can witness to the world is the extent to which it is possible to live in the Kingdom in the present moment.

There is a risk in peacework, to which some Quakers from time to time fall prey, and that is to begin considering the peace witness anti-war work. When this happens our focus is on stopping the next weapons system, or preventing the outbreak of the next imminent conflict, or opposing the latest outrageous policy or plan from the Pentagon. The risk is that one becomes what one fights against. Victory over war, or the makers of war, can never be our goal. Richard Rohr of the Center for Action and Contemplation in New Mexico has expressed this well:

You cannot build on death. You can only build on life. We must be sustained by a sense of what we are for and not just what we are against.

Our work can never be merely anti-war, or the replacement of one set of national leaders – in any nation – by another. Our goal, as seen by those who signed the declaration of 1660, must be the transformation of society, so that all governments are God’s. This is not the work of a year or even a lifetime. We must be like those persons described by the writers of Hebrews, who acted in faith even though they were never to see the goal. We do not know the day nor the hour when the Kingdom of God will arrive in its fullness, but we can be assured that our faithfulness speeds that day.

The emphasis on the local faith community as the focus of discernment and interpretation lends itself to a circle of action and reflection that, if followed faithfully, will continually re-shape and hone the actions and witness of the community. Unfortunately, we do not spend as much time as would be helpful in reflecting on the fruits of recent actions. If we sent another letter last month to the President about this policy decision or that, what effect did it have? What can we learn from that? What should we do differently next time, or what else should we try?

Many Friends meetings do not adequately close the circle of action and reflection. I believe we do an adequate job of discernment before taking action, and work hard to implement that discernment faithfully. Where we fall short is in corporate reflection on the outcomes or consequences of our actions: an intentional corporate review of what happened, why, and what we should consider doing differently as a result. Friends have a bias toward precedent – we do what we did last time this situation presented itself. This is by and large a good thing, in my opinion. If we were to shift the focus slightly, from what we did last time in this situation to what happened as a result of what we did, it would be a better thing. Local meetings would soon discern more effective and appropriate actions to interpret and support our inward practice and outward testimonies.

We Friends can be comfortable with this local discernment and interpretation precisely because we believe, based on our experience, that there is indeed one Truth which informs us all, and that as each community draws nearer to that Truth it comes closer to every other community making that same spiritual effort. Our human faculties cannot express the wholeness of the Truth in any word or action constrained by our limited vocabularies and our boundedness in space and time, but that does not mean Truth – with a capital T – does not exist, or that we should not strive to understand it more completely.

In the same way, our experience in the Great Silence leads to an environmental witness that is beyond rational argument. Carl Magruder, among other Friends, argues that environmental concerns should be, and must be, the pre-eminent witness of Friends in this century. This may be so. I am not yet fully persuaded, but Carl and these other Friends are having their effect on me.

What I do know is that the harmony that builds in us as a result of our encounter in the Great Silence extends to non-human creation, also. Not only does it lead one away from the idea of having dominion over the earth toward being the steward or caretaker of the earth,

but it leads us toward a style of stewardship, if you will: stewardship from within the existing harmony of creation. We can aspire to this relationship because we are enabled and equipped through our communion with the Creator: brought back into the gospel order that was and is the intended state of all creation.

We cannot live in peace with our fellow human beings and at the same time continue to wreck havoc on the environment. The same transforming experience with God that enables and equips us to be at peace with humans enables us to see that the same harmony with the rest of the creation is also God's will. If we are truly to be witnesses to the Divine possibilities of peace, we must be searching out and implementing projects and policies that address our growing environmental problems with the same energy and intensity that we search out and implement projects that promote human peace. No Friendly activity should be undertaken without, at some level, a consideration of its impact on the divine creation. Our underlying assumption is that continued environmental degradation is not inevitable, that we are called not simply to lives of neutral impact on the environment, but to active restoration of what has been damaged. Our understanding is that "all God's critters got a place in the choir" indeed. The assumption that human interests always outweigh those of the rest of creation must be abandoned.

This will take a great effort, expended over a very long period of time. The human impact on the planet is like a large ocean-going vessel: it has massive momentum, and can change its direction only a few degrees at a time. However, it can turn, and humans can change, to regain that harmony that was always the Divine intention. Action will be required at every level: global, national, and local. It will be the local faith community – the monthly meeting – that is the primary locus for these efforts because it is the local community that can best discern what actions should be undertaken, and how to educate its own membership about relevant issues.

There is a potential for unified witness on a number of public issues that modern Friends have not begun to realize. We admire the Friends of Reading, who survived the arrest of all their adult males, the arrest of all adult females, and the burning of the meetinghouse – which left the children, who continued to meet in the ashes! What would be the effect if whole meetings began to adopt a particular witness in a similar fashion? Suppose a meeting community of say, 100 persons all stopped paying war taxes as part of a community-discerned peace witness? I think the effects would be profound.

CONCLUSION

I began last night by outlining some of the important issues facing people of faith in the present, post-modern world, and made the claim that classic Quakerism is well-suited to address these issues. In a society where social norms and moral values that seem essential to a well-ordered life and even to physical survival are crumbling rapidly, Quakerism offers a way of life that promises wholeness and integrity, and also an accessible and acceptable basis for adopting that way of life and the associated norms and values. The local faith community can communicate and interpret right action and its application to specific local circumstances successfully when the methods of central authority, whether located in church organization or Holy Scripture, cannot. The gathered meeting can achieve insights that will remain forever out of reach to unaided human reason. In Quaker community, we can perceive and model a way of life that offers not only life and dignity to every human being, but works to restore the proper and divinely intended harmony between human beings and the rest of creation.

A final word of caution: there can be at times a sort of spiritual elitism that creeps into our thinking about reaching out to non-Quakers. Not everyone is amenable to this quietness, we say, and so we don't share our good news very widely or loudly. As a result,

our meetings have a certain white-bread homogeneity that does not reflect either the Kingdom or our cities and towns. In this age of ecumenism, not many Friends cling to the vision that the entire world will become Quaker. Nonetheless, every person is equipped and enabled to partake of the divine relationship that is at the heart of our faith, and every person is capable of beginning the path of spiritual subtraction. There is no reason why our meetings should not be much more broadly representative of their surrounding populations than they are now.

Friends, let us not be slow to give an account of the joy that we feel.³¹ There is a world of difference between proselytizing and witnessing. While I share some of the reservations many folks have about proselytizing in an ecumenical world, it builds unnecessary barriers between us all if we fail to share what is moving and wonderful about our faith experience. I am convinced that if we are faithful in our witness, verbal and nonverbal, and faithful in our praxis, some will be moved to join us in our embrace of this peculiar faith tradition. Just as importantly, our faithful witness and praxis will challenge and inspire others who share the same taproot of faith to look inwardly to see what their own tradition has to say.

By grace we have stumbled onto this pearl of great price.³² Let us indeed sell everything else and embrace the pearl wholeheartedly. Indeed, the stronger our embrace, the more nearly we are completely committed to preserving and sustaining and nurturing and keeping this faith tradition alive and growing, the better able it will be to guide and nurture us into becoming the persons who God has always intended us to become.

FOOTNOTES

INTRODUCTION

- 1 *Faith and Practice: Book of Discipline of the North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) of the Religious Society of Friends*. 1983 ed. This is the conclusion of the last sentence of our Advices, quoting from Ephesians 4:3.

WRESTLING WITH OUR FAITH TRADITION

- 1 G. K. Chesterton said, “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried.” Chapter 5, *What’s Wrong with the World*, 1910.
- 2 Extract from an epistle of North Carolina Yearly Meeting to Dublin Yearly Meeting, 1873, as quoted in *Rules of Discipline of the Yearly Meeting of Friends of North Carolina*, 1908 edition, printed by William H. Pile’s Sons, Philadelphia, 1910, p. 18.
- 3 “Your Church’s Personality, Andrew Pritchard,” Reality Magazine Issue 45, <http://www.reality.org.nz/articles/45/45-pritchard.html>
- 4 “Your Church’s Personality,” Andrew Pritchard, Reality Magazine Issue 45, <http://www.reality.org.nz/articles/45/45-pritchard.html>
- 5 *Isaiah 53*
- 6 *Philippians 2:5-11*
- 7 *Hebrews 11:35-39*
- 8 George Fox, *Journal*, Nickalls ed., p. 11.
- 9 *Journal of George Fox*, Nickalls edition, p. 7.
- 10 *Journal of George Fox*, Nickalls edition, p. 8.
- 11 *Autobiography of George Fox*, Rufus Jones edition, electronic version, chapter 2.
- 12 Job Scott, *Works*, Vol I, 1831, p. 76.
- 13 Carole Treadway, personal communication, c. 2000.
- 14 Ched Myers, private communication, 7/98.
- 15 Cf *Who Will Roll Away the Stone*, Ched Myers, Orbis Books, 1995, pp. 37-38
- 16 Advices from a General Meeting held at Balby, Yorkshire (1656), published by Licia Kuenning and Quaker Heritage Press.

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- 17 Marty Grundy, TMP Retreat, 11/02, Sixth Day evening.
- 18 Francis Howgill's "Testimony" in the preface to Edward Burrough's
Works, 1672. Quoted in NEYM Faith and Practice, 1966, p. 44.
- 19 *John 15:4*
- 20 *Ecclesiastes 4:9-12*, NRSV.
- 21 *Discipline*, NCYM(C), 1983 edition, p. 3
- 22 Cf *Who Will Roll Away the Stone*, Ched Myers, Orbis Books, 1995, pp. 37-
38
- 23 *Discipline*, NCYM(C), 1983 edition, p. 1
- 24 *Discipline*, NCYM(C), 1983 edition, p. 1
- 25 *Discipline*, NCYM(C), 1983 edition, p. 1
- 26 Chuck Fager, private communication, 2003.
- 27 George Fox, Journal of George Fox, Nickalls ed., p65
- 28 *James 4:1*
- 29 George Fox, Journal, Nickalls ed., p. 27
- 30 A Response, by Scott Simon, Friends Journal 5/03, pp.18-21
- 31 *I Peter 3:15*
- 32 *Matthew 13:45-46*

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