

Gospel Order: Exploring Some Challenging Issues in Quaker Faith & Practice

A six week course in advanced topics in the life of the meeting, also known in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting at the time as Quakerism 301.

Week 1 – Cultivating Spirit-led Worship in the Meeting

Week 2 – Corporate Discernment: Hearing God’s voice in Meeting for Business

Week 3 – Gospel Order: A vision of a faith community under God’s leadership

Week 4 – Ways of Connecting within the Meeting Community

Week 5 – Membership: Exploring the Boundary around the Faith Family (Why have membership? Membership as the spiritual equivalent of marriage. Should Friends require a form of confirmation of membership for child members at maturity? How to get beyond paper membership, the lost art of Quaker eldering, etc.)

Week 6 - The Inward Christ: Understanding & using Quakerism’s unique theology

Week 7 - Hiding Our Light Under a Bushel: Exploring our barriers to outreach

WEEK ONE – The Missing 2nd Query!

Cultivating Spirit-led ministry in the Meeting

Meeting for worship in unprogrammed Friends Meetings offers a unique way for a group of people to be present with God. Such gatherings have the potential to be infused and guided by the Holy Spirit. A number of factors contribute to the power and depth of such worship.

1. **The Meeting Culture.** Do Meeting members have a living experiential sense of what a gathered meeting is? Of spirit-led vocal ministry? Does the Ministry & Worship committee feel empowered to take active responsibility for the quality of worship in the Meeting? What activities does the Meeting engage in (meeting retreats, Quakerism classes, guidance to new members, etc.) that may have an impact on the quality of worship?
2. **Individual / family preparation during the week** (Tabor's First Door, the "Door Before", in his *Four Doors to Meeting for Worship*.) Do meeting families/members engage in any spiritual practices (bible study, personal meditation or prayer, etc.) during the week?
3. **How Friends move into worship** (Tabor's "Door Inward"). How does what you do on Sunday morning and as you enter worship impact on your ability to enter into a deep sense of communion with God quickly in meeting? What does Radnor Meeting do which helps or hinders this process? (e.g. "greeters", handling of latecomers, timing of children being in meeting, physical layout, etc.)
4. **"Gathered worship"**. This is the term Friends use for when a number of people feel spiritually knit together in closeness to God during meeting for worship. The term "covered" meeting is also used. It is a wonderful and sometimes an upsetting experience. I have heard a number of Friends say that they feel they have never experienced this in their meeting.
5. **Vocal ministry.** Being "led" to speak in meeting used to be an awesome even watershed event in the lives of many Friends in the past. Friends wrote about becoming seriously ill because of failing to respond to a call to speak **or** speaking when they were not led.

Many Friends are attracted to the theory that in some sense the "Spirit" guides the ministry but are very uncomfortable with the idea of "judging" whether specific speaking in meeting is or isn't "led". Different Friends often respond very differently to specific offerings – a given ministry may well "speak to the condition" of some present but not to others. Is there a way the Ministry and Worship committee can prayerfully reflect on the extent to which ministry in the meeting is directed by the spirit without becoming involved in judgmentalism towards individual offerings? How does the meeting address a persistent personal pattern of ministry that deviates from this goal?

6. **The Door Beyond.** How does meeting draw to a close? What is the impact of introductions, announcements, or forms of sharing such as reading and addressing queries, "twilight meeting" or "joys & sorrows" at the end of meeting? How does Meeting for Worship spill over into the life of the meeting and the lives of its members through out the week?

Reflection questions

1. What practice of "centering" or moving from regular thoughts/concerns into deeper worship do you use?
2. Do you feel that you have experienced deeply "gathered worship"?
3. Have you experienced a similar sense of the tangible presence of God in settings other than Meeting for Worship such as during personal prayer, in nature, a cathedral, a concert, a wedding or funeral?
4. To what extent do you experience vocal ministry in the meetings you have attended as being spirit-led?
5. Have you ever felt "called by the Holy Spirit" to speak? How did you respond?

Faith & Practice: pp. 17-21. Extracts # 45-93, 138-50 (on p. 100ff.), Query #1 (p. 206)

Excerpts from various YM disciplines on the subject of Spirit-led Vocal Ministry (on reverse)

Further reading: Bill Taber: *Four Doors to Meeting for Worship* (PH pamphlet #306)

Excerpts from various YM disciplines on the subject of SPIRIT-LED VOCAL MINISTRY

THE EARLY DISCIPLINES of American YM's (those written before the 1827 schism) have a great deal in common in structure and language. The issue of spirit-led ministry is addressed in sections specifically addressed to the meeting's ministers & elders, as these are considered the members with special responsibility for this area of meeting life.

Philadelphia YM: "Ministers and elders watch over one another for good, to help those who are exercised in the ministry in the right line, discouraging forward spirits that run into words without life and power, advising against affectation in tones and gestures."

Each of these early American disciplines had special queries that were to be answered by the committee of ministers and elders, such as these:

Baltimore YM & New England YM: "Are ministers, in the exercise of their gifts, careful to wait for divine ability and thereby preserved from being burthensome?" ["Divine ability" is a term frequently used to refer to the specific calling from God to speak during meeting.]

NYYM [Do ministers & elders] "discourage forward persons whose communications do not proceed from the right authority?" [Are the mtg's ministers] "careful to minister in the ability which truth gives?"

Later, perhaps in response to the concerns generated by the Hicksite-Orthodox split, the emphasis seems to shift from divine ability or leading to asking whether ministry is "sound in word and doctrine".

I particularly like this version from **Virginia YM's** 1814 discipline: [Ministers and elders should exhort the meeting's ministers to] "earnestly seek the mind of the spirit of truth to open the mysteries thereof, that abiding in a simple and patient submission to the divine will, and keeping down to its opening of love and life in themselves, they may witness a gradual growth in their gifts, and be preserved from extending their declarations further than the power of truth shall be experienced to accompany them."

Here are three fine excerpts from **MODERN DISCIPLINES**

Pacific YM (1985) and **North Pacific** (1993) include the query: "Is the vocal ministry exercised under the divine leading of the Holy Spirit without pre-arrangement and in the simplicity and sincerity of truth?"

NYYM (1998) asks: "Are we careful that our ministry is under the leading of the Holy Spirit?" Direction is also offered: "Friends are advised to observe our Christian testimony for a faithful ministry of the gospel under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Members are reminded that all have a responsibility in ministry."

A very similar query was among the queries adopted jointly for use by the Hicksite and Orthodox YM's of **Philadelphia** in 1948 but was dropped from our most recent 1997 revision. This same query was strengthened in the most recent revision of **New England's** discipline. **Britain YM** does not appear to address the issue directly in its discipline.

Although **Ohio YM** still has committees of ministers & elders, its 1992 discipline no longer has specific queries for ministers & elders. Ohio's general queries do not really address the quality of vocal ministry directly. The following instruction is provided, however, in the section on Meeting for Worship: "Though the nearness to God may result in spoken ministry or vocal prayer, the distinctive excellence of heavenly favor consists in the direct communication with the Heavenly Father by the inward revelation of the Spirit of Christ." The same message is reinforced later: "Vocal service in such a meeting, whether prayer or exhortation or teaching, should be uttered under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit."

(collected by Peter Blood-Patterson, September 2000)

WEEK TWO – Corporate Discernment: Hearing God’s voice in Meeting for Business

Quaker decision-making is a form of corporate discernment of God’s will for the faith community. Most decision-making for religious groups has been done in one of two ways characteristic of human societies in general, namely:

1. Top down hierarchical decision-making (e.g. Pope over archbishop over bishop over priest/ over laity in the Catholic Church, military, most businesses) or
2. Some form of “majority rule” (e.g. in many Protestant denominations, the congregation votes on important questions, including selection of a new pastor.)

Quakers developed over the past 300 years a unique form of decision-making that is radically egalitarian not only in that each participant has an equal voice, but in that small minorities are honored and listened to and even given the power to stand in the way of decisions in many instances. It is **not**, however, the same as consensual decision-making which involves a horizontal attempt to find agreement among those that make up the group. Instead it is an egalitarian & participatory method by which a group can discover or hear what God is saying to them.

This a fragile enterprise. It can deteriorate into gridlock, inefficiency, “tyranny of the articulate” and even schism. Some of the components necessary for success include:

1. A culture in the meeting in which members understand the purpose of the process
2. Careful preparation of items in advance of business meeting including sorting out which items really need to come to the meeting for decisions. This makes it possible to move more slowly and prayerfully through the really important issues before the meeting.
3. An atmosphere of expectant waiting upon God during the meeting for business. (It may be referred to as a “meeting for worship for the purpose of decision-making.”)
4. A willingness of those present to share their own sense of what God is asking the group to do in a manner that allows and respects differing discernments of this from other members of the group.
5. A skilled and assertive clerk (facilitator of the meeting for business) able to discern the “sense of the meeting” (or what God appears to be asking the group to do) through the different expressions from the membership. This is a challenging and powerful form of spiritual leadership.
6. Patience and a sense of confidence that the process can work well as intended.

It is interesting that in some spiritual communities the “highest office” is that of priest (one who is permitted to carry out special religious rites or ceremonies. In others it is a person skilled at preaching. In nonpastoral Quaker meetings today, our highest “office” is a person charged with helping us to discover God’s voice for the group in meeting for business.

Reflection questions:

1. To what extent have you experienced Quaker business or committee meetings as a form of worshipful waiting upon Divine Guidance in Radnor Meeting? In Philadelphia Yearly Meeting?
2. What do you see as some of the major roadblocks to this form of decision-making working as it is intended?
3. What do you see as possible barriers in your self to your own fruitful and prayerful participation in this process?
4. Are good clerks born or made? If they are made, what do or could our meetings do to help nurture the skill of clerking as a key form of spiritual leadership?

Faith & Practice: pp. 21-28. Extracts # 1, 5, 126-37. Query #2 (p. 206)

Further reading: Michael Sheeran, *Beyond Majority Rule: Voteless Decisions in the Religious Society of Friends* (Part II, chaps 1, 2, 3, 5) – this was in depth study of Quaker business process by a Jesuit priest.

WEEK THREE – Gospel Order: The Quaker Vision of the Meeting Community

“Gospel Order” is an old-fashioned Quaker term for the radical transformation and re-ordering of lives and relationships that results from the relationship between the Quaker community and the Living God.

“**Order**” refers to the many concrete changes that are made in lives and relationships. Not just an inward feeling but a way of life expressed in virtually every area of living.

“**Gospel**” refers not to a creed or dogma, but to a real living relationship with God. The central focus is not right beliefs or right actions but life and power in God. As Fox says: “Many have had the letter but lost the life, the notion but lost the possession, the profession but lost the substance, Christ Jesus.” This is the “true sap” which Jesus describes so vividly in John 15 (which, significantly, is also the chapter from which “Friends” took their name for themselves.)

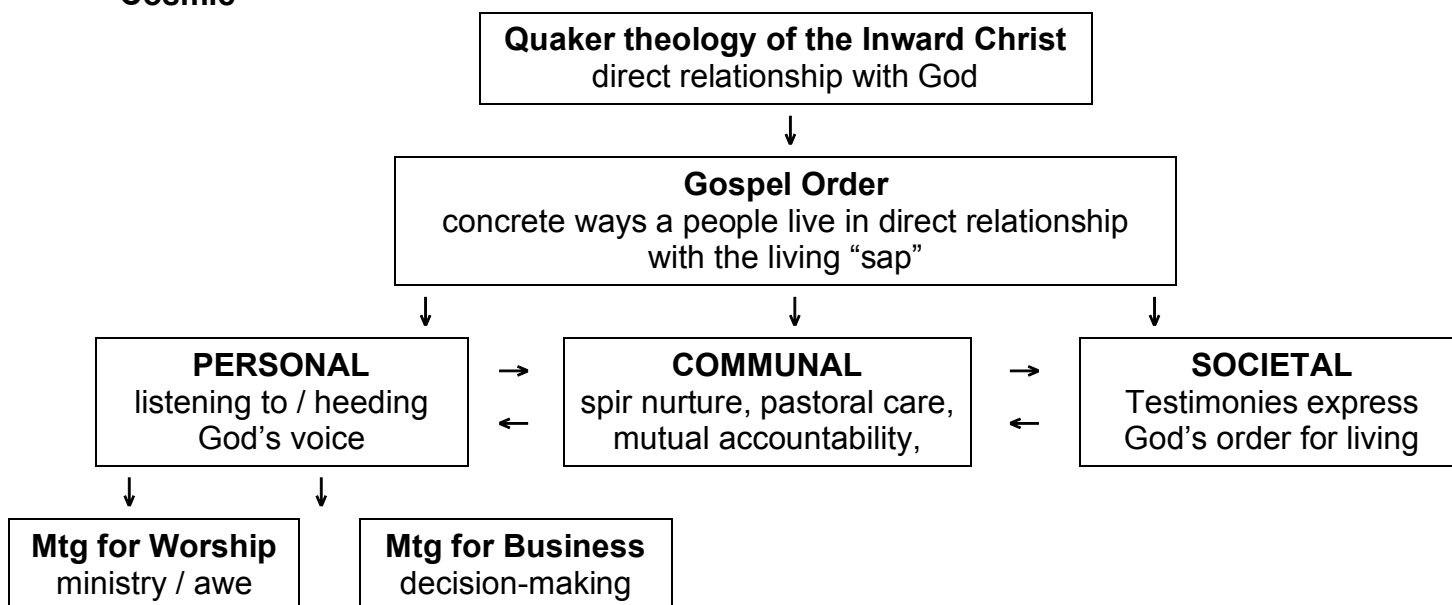
This radical re-ordering happens on four different levels:

Personal –the ongoing hearing & obeying relationship with Christ, our inward teacher. This is the heart of Meeting for Worship and Meeting for Church Government.

Communal / ecclesiastical – the transformed meeting community. Mutual spiritual nurture, care & support. But also involves mutual accountability. “Eldering”. Uncomfortable for many Friends today.

Societal – The “Testimonies” were originally seen as inextricably tied to transformed relationship with God. Fox: “Therefore take heed of the world’s fashions, lest ye be moulded up into their spirit, and that will bring you to slight truth, and lift up the wrong eye, and wrong mind, and wrong spirit, and hurt and blind the pure eye, and pure mind, and quench the holy spirit.”

Cosmic



This is a convenantal relationship between a community and God – it can’t be done individually.

The “Offices of Christ” refers to the many specific ways in which God relates to people (eg. As teacher, shepherd, healer, parent). The two most important ones early Friends focus on are:

Christ as prophet –

- Direct unmediated revelation in the believer’s heart

- Challenges separation from God while also offering the promise of transformation/reconciliation

- Challenges the way social order is separate from God’s way

Christ as priestly king

Leading / requiring obedience to righteousness

But a very different kind of King (cf. Isaiah's radically new kind of Messiah as suffering servant)
Also based on humility, transformation through willingness to take on suffering

Cronk's account of two Chester County Quaker neighbors in 18th century (pp. 27-29)

The Meeting Community – the family is seen in same way

Helping one another out – care for material & emotional needs

Spiritual nurture/support

Mutual accountability

Hard for Friends today to swallow

Reaction to past abuses

Sectarianism / history of schisms

Individualism of our culture today

Matthew 18 must be looked at as a whole – not just the model for admonition

Humility – being as children

Parable involving forgiveness

Goal is not judgment or even (primarily) change in behavior but on mending relationships

- Between members of the community and between believers and God
- Emphasize helping each other to hear & respond to God's call
- Helping each other recognize our gifts and find courage to exercise them
- See and understand broken places in our lives
- Overcome fears
- Discern leadings
- Let go of any behaviors that are blocking a deeper relationship with God
- Courage to follow through on a ministry or service
- Outrunning or lagging behind our inner guide

Role of elders (later some of these roles passed over to overseers - or to a "pastor")

Overseeing quality of worship and encouraging vocal ministry

Spiritual nurture

Care of members

Admonition / accountability

Disownment – avoids trap of "cheap grace" –some boundaries to community

Main reading assignment: Sandra Cronk (founder of the "School of the Spirit"), *Gospel Order: A Quaker Understanding of the Faithful Quaker Community*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet #297, 1991.

Biblical readings: John Ch. 15, Matthew Ch. 18

Supplemental readings: Faith & Practice Readings # 9, 10, 13, 15, 114, 118-20.

Lloyd Lee Wilson, *Essays on the Quaker Vision of Gospel Order*, Celo Valley Books, 1993.

Doug Gwyn, *Apocalypse of the Word: The Life & Message of George Fox (1624-1691)*, pp. 73-5 & 109-12, FUM Press, 1986.

Lewis Benson, "The Quaker Conception of Christian Community & Church Order", in *Catholic Quakerism: A Vision for All Men*, pp. 43-59, PYM Book & Publications Comm., 1968.

John Punshon, *Portrait in Grey: A Short History of the Quakers*, pp. 53-79, Quaker Home Service, 1984.

Week Four: Ways of Connecting within The Meeting Community

In previous centuries, Quakers were sharply “set apart” from the surrounding community by clothing, language, celebration of holidays, recreational pursuits, etc. The meeting community actively intervened to maintain the distinctiveness and cohesion of the meeting family.

Today, we are far less set apart from our neighbors, at least in outward things. Many of us would be unwilling for the meeting to intervene in matters which we consider our own private concerns. For better or for worse, Friends place a high value today on individualism. Nonetheless, the pendulum has swung back somewhat in recent years, with Friends more willing to engage with each other actively around critical issues of belief and lifestyle. Here are some examples.

Clearness committees. Many meetings take very seriously their role in testing the rightness of decisions for marriage or membership. Friends also have begun to ask that clearness committees be set up to assist them in hearing God’s voice regarding other personal decisions such as around education, jobs, or a leading to carry out a form of ministry.

Sexuality. Friends used to hold to traditional values that sex should be limited to traditional monogamous heterosexual marriage. There is significantly less consensus on this today, at least in liberal unprogrammed meetings. Many meetings have offered support to committed gay couples through holding weddings or “ceremonies of commitment”. Others feel that Friends need to offer more active guidance towards our members regarding sexual ethics (premarital sex, fidelity to marriage, pornography, etc.)

Nurturance of gifts. In the past meeting elders had a special ability for recognizing and supporting individual members who had a gift for vocal ministry. Some meetings have gone through a process for identifying and supporting a variety of gifts in their members.

Spiritual formation. A variety of approaches are available for deepening the spiritual life of members. These include meeting retreats, ongoing spiritual formation groups, spiritual direction and developing one-to-one spiritual friendships with another Friend.

Membership. Membership does not seem to mean a great deal in many meetings. The Meeting may have a number of members on its rolls who have minimal involvement in the life of the meeting. On the other hand, there may be individuals who are extremely active in the life of the meeting who have never joined. What is the impact of parents enrolling their children as full members of the meeting – under a system where such members are never required to take an affirmative action of choosing to be members on their own when they reach maturity?

Accountability groups. This is a modern version of the old-fashioned Quaker meeting in which members took spiritual responsibility for each others’ lives. This is often done in smaller groups than a whole meeting.

Reflection questions:

1. What are you looking for from the meeting?
2. Are there areas in which you would like the meeting to be more involved in your personal or family life?
Less involved?
3. Do you feel that the meeting is doing everything it can to support and nurture the spiritual development of the membership? How could this go further?

Readings: *Faith & Practice*: on membership pp 34-43, clearness committees p 29, minutes of travel p 57
Queries # 3 & 4A (on p. 207ff.)

Further reading: *Faith & Practice* section of extracts on religious experience (#151-94 on pp. 129-44).
Patricia Loring, *Spiritual Discernment: the context & goal of clearness committees* (PH pamphlet #305)

WEEK FIVE - CHALLENGES AROUND MEMBERSHIP

What does membership in a meeting or in Friends actually mean?

The term “member” refers literally to an arm or a leg. Relates to being “members of one body”
What does it mean when people refer to the “church as Christ’s body”?
Being connected to each other via the vine of the Spirit (John 15)

Spiritual gifts. Paul’s passage on gifts. Church of the Savior (a highly innovative approach to Christian community in Washington DC pioneered by Gordon Cosby, Elizabeth O’Connor & others) has a specific process for naming and nurturing the gifts of members. (See Elizabeth’s book *The Eighth Day of Creation*.) This process has been used by quite a few Quaker meetings as well.

Membership is the equivalent form of commitment to marriage vows in relation to the faith community. Quakers in theory make a lifetime vow to the faith community. Some groups (Church of the Savior, Iona Community in Scotland) take annual vows to each other.

Early practices in Quaker movement. Initial Impetus for identifying members was associated with:

- Whom to provide material support to in relation to sufferings
- Accountability in terms of rightly ordered behavior (Meeting oversight of witness. etc.)

Initially merely recorded who was seen by meeting as functioning as members – no real process (as today) or ritual (as in most of Christian church – i.e. water baptism)

Paper membership

In many of our meetings many active participants are not members and many members are not active. As a result the list of official members tells you little about who is actually sharing a life together in the Spirit.

- What are the costs of the official list and the “real” body of members being very different?
- Would it make a difference if the official membership was those really connected to “one body”?
- What would the meeting need to do to have a real (ie. reflecting active participation) list of members?

Membership is always in a local meeting. Standards are basically set by the monthly meeting. Phila. YM discipline does not allow dual membership (in 2 faith traditions) tho some mtgs ignore this rule.

Joining the faith community

What is the difference betw “convincement” versus “conversion” (the term used by most faith communities)?
In each generation over the past 300 years, a larger % of Quakers have entered community via convincement rather than via birth as in most faith traditions.

The process:

- The letter of application
- The meeting for clearness. (Sometimes this is a superficial step – sometimes one of real discernment of God’s intentions.)
- Review by Overseers
- Approval by monthly meeting

How high is the bar? – meeting expectations of new members in terms of

- theology (e.g. beliefs about God)
- lifestyle choices
- Testimonies
- Familiarity with Quaker practice

“Expedited process”: Meetings ordinarily bypass this process in two circumstances

1. Recording membership of the children of members
2. Transfers of membership from other meetings
3. Should a similar expedited process be used when a monthly meeting feels it would be right to record (i.e. officially acknowledge as being a member) an active attender of many years?

Child membership

Birthright membership vs. membership by parental request. The 1997 discipline abolished birthright membership (automatic recording into membership of the children of members) but continues to permit parents to record permanently their children under the age of 12 as members of the Meeting.

Adult baptism. Baptism is how one becomes a member in most Christian denominations. The Anabaptists broke with national churches by their central insistence on membership requiring adult choice to become part of the church community and all that that entails in terms of discipleship.

Confirmation is the process by which churches enrolling (ie. baptizing) children at infancy insure that adult members understand and choose to take on full participation in the church community.

The Quaker equivalent in our discipline is called “**Associate membership**”. When parents choose to enroll their children as associate members, the child member is required to make a personal choice at time of reaching adulthood to remain a Quaker.

- What are the pros & cons of recording members as children versus associate membership requiring explicit decision to continue as a Quaker upon maturity?
- What are the causes of the chronic weakness in terms of “keeping” our children as Friends?

Discipline of members

The meeting used to enforce lifestyle standards via process called “eldering” Today it is usually limited to very disruptive role in worship and/or community life or other severe violations of community role (e.g. sexual abuse or harassment). This subject is discussed in some depth in Sondra Cronk’s pamphlet.

Flip side: How do we **support** each other? (emotionally, financially, clearness, support for ministries, etc.)

Separation from membership

Three very different actions which the church community may choose to take when a member is separated from the community:

1. Roman Catholics practice **excommunication** (refusal of sacraments with wayward ex-member).
2. Anabaptists & Jehovah’s Witnesses use **shunning** (barring of social contact with offending member).
3. **Disownment** is the meeting’s action of clarifying for those outside the Quaker community that a given individual has been separated from membership to avoid public confusion about what it means to be a Quaker. The example of Richard Nixon.

Up until around 1900, the most common reason for “reading members out” was for “marrying out” (i.e. marrying a non-Friend who was not willing to become a Quaker.)

Requests to terminate membership today are in most meetings limited to near total inactivity including refusal to respond to letters and longstanding financial non-participation. In the past, at least, this action was often linked to meeting’s financial obligation to YM (the “quota”)

They are almost never related today to either theology, lifestyle, or disagreement with the Testimonies.

Nostalgic membership – Should Friends establish a new category of “affiliate member”?

Reading: Sondra Cronk, *Gospel Order : A Quaker Understanding of the Faithful Church Community* (PH Pamphlet # 297) – if you haven’t already read it...

Further readings: *Faith & Practice*: on membership pp 34-43, clearness committees p 29, minutes of travel p 57, Queries # 3 & 4A (on p. 207ff.)

Patricia Loring, *Spiritual Discernment: the context & goal of clearness committees* (PH pamphlet #305)

WEEK SIX - "The Inward Christ":

Understanding Quakerism's unique theology & its importance in Quaker faith & practice

We are exploring this week special ways Quakers think about God & Christ. Central to Quaker practice is the idea that every human being has direct access to God in a living, intimate way. This direct ongoing connection is not dependent on special religious offices (i.e. a priesthood), rituals or creedal correctness.

Here are some terms used by Friends to talk about this experience of God:

The Inward Christ, The Inner Light, The Seed, Leadings / being led by God

"The Light of Christ that enlightens every one who comes into this world" (Fox's expression)

Christ who has come to teach His people Himself

Is this the same as Christian beliefs about the Holy Spirit, continuing revelation & spiritual discernment?

Some New Testament expressions:

The Word (John 1:1-18), Emmanuel (means "God-with-us"),

The Comforter that God will send after Jesus' death. "I shall always be w/ you, even to the end of time."

Living Water (John 4:10), "I am the Light of the World", Jesus as the True Vine (John 15).

The word Christ is the Greek word for the "messiah", or savior in Jewish messianic tradition, a human leader who is specially chosen by God and who may be seen as having supernatural qualities who will liberate the Jewish people from their oppressors and restore the Kingdom of Israel.

Early Quakers believed that The Christ was one with God from the beginning of time and still present in their midst in the present – teaching, healing, transforming, liberating, and leading the Quaker community (see Cronk pamphlet pp. 17-20, also Benson). They saw no distinction between the historical Jesus and the present moment inward Christ whom they encountered at the heart of their own religious experience.

Friends sometimes draw a distinction between: Spiritual vs. political, Inner life vs. outward action, Christ-centered vs. universalist, Historical vs. Inward Christ

Bill Tabor (among others) has suggested that a living present-day relationship with God or Christ breaks down these distinctions. Do you experience this as being true?

Reflection questions:

1. In your experience of other faith communities besides Friends, how do you feel this idea of the Inward Christ is similar to or different from the ideas about God at the heart of those other faiths?
2. When (if ever) have you experienced God touching you or speaking to you directly? Was this a comforting experience or a disturbing one?
3. Some have suggested that the Inward Christ is at the heart of all Quaker practice (e.g. Meeting for Worship, Meeting for Business, Testimonies). Do you see this as being true in your experience of Quaker practice in London Grove Meeting? Philadelphia YM?

Readings: Sondra Cronk's *Gospel Order* pamphlet (espec the section on offices of Christ, pp. 17-20)

Faith & Practice pp. 16-17. Extracts # 3, 17-27 (on p. 87ff.). #94-125 if you have time.

Further reading: Lewis Benson: *Catholic Quakerism: A Vision for All Men*.

Lewis Benson, *What Did George Fox Teach about Christ?* (New Foundations publics #1, 1976.)

Eleanor Price Mather: *Barclay in Brief* (a condensation of Robert Barclay's *Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (first published in 1676, a PH publication sadly out of print.

Samuel Caldwell, *The Inward Light: How Quakerism Unites Universalism & Christianity*. (PYM Relig Ed Comm, 1997.)

Thomas Kelly: *A Testament of Devotion* (section on Inward Light).

Patricia Loring, *Spiritual Discernment: the context & goal of clearness committees* (PH pamphlet #305)

WEEK SEVEN – Hiding Our Lamps under a Bushel: *Exploring barriers to sharing our faith with others*

First Generation Friends. The Quaker movement grew exponentially in the first generation or two. There was a realistic fear on the part of their opponents that all England would become Quaker. Certainly if the growth had continued very much longer, Quakerism would have become a major denomination. The first generation of Quakers never doubted:

1. That the faith they discovered was right for all people
2. The imperative laid upon them to communicate their own religious experience widely to others and to encourage others to join the Quaker movement.

Although Quaker theology acknowledged the possibility that there were hidden people of faith in other faith communities whom God was working through, they aggressively asserted Quaker theology and testimonies and aggressively argued against other non-Quaker viewpoints on these issues.

Quakers were deeply involved in spreading their message via:

- Preaching in other faith communities' religious services
- Preaching in the streets and other public places
- Using trials as opportunities for witness
- Writing tracts, epistles, books, etc. to communicate what they were experiencing to non-Friends
- Visiting and writing to judges, magistrates, and rulers
- Talking to people one to one.

The Quietist Period. Although rapid growth was replaced by gradual decline, Quakers continued to promote their ideas to non-Friends at least until the mid-19th century. Methods of sharing their ideas with others included:

- Holding public meetings for non-Friends when outstanding Quaker preachers came to the area
- Writing letters to newspapers
- Public criticism of other branches of Quakers as not being "true Friends"
- Distinctive dress and speech.

Liberal Friends today. Although many pastoral Friends continue to engage in evangelism, particularly in Third World countries, most unprogrammed Friends have become remarkably reluctant to share their beliefs with others during this century. Friends are often glad to share their beliefs about political and economic issues (e.g. our positions that derive from our Testimonies) but not the spiritual foundation from which those social concerns spring. Some of the reasons include:

1. Pluralism/universalism – the conviction that many paths are equally valid in the journey to God
2. Cultural emphases – secularism, individualism
3. Reactions against judgmental evangelical Christianity
4. Personal discomfort with being too "pushy" towards others

Reflection questions

- If you are a convinced Friends, how did you find out about Quakerism?
- Over your entire life, roughly how many non-Friends (other than relatives) have you talked about your faith to?
- Do you like to share things that have meant a lot to you (movies, ideas, places to visit) with others?
- Have you ever been moved/helped by someone sharing about their beliefs with you? What is helpful or unhelpful about the way in which others have shared about their beliefs with you?
- Do you think there are lots of people today he could benefit from Quakerism or only very few?
- What would happen if we had powerfully charismatic Quaker leaders of the caliber of Fox, Burroughs, Fell, the Penningtons, and Naylor today empowered to carry our message to the wider world?

Faith & Practice: Query #9 (p. 212)

Please read or re-read some of the extracts from writings on Belief (p. 86 ff.) and on Experience (p. 129 ff.)