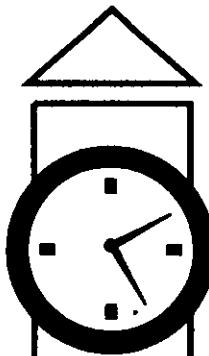


Quaker Contributions for the New Millenium



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Western Yearly Meeting
Quaker Lecture
August 1999
Plainfield, Indiana

I appreciate the opportunity to present remarks in this year's Quaker Lecture for Western Yearly Meeting. The list of those who have preceded me persuades me that this is an important feature of Yearly Meeting activities.

On this evening in August of 1999, we stare squarely into the eyes of a new millennium. Some anticipate catastrophes and Y2K meltdowns. I prefer to wonder about the future of the Religious Society of Friends in this next millennium. What, if anything, can we contribute to humanity as we live and proclaim our faith? What might "Quaker Contributions for the New Millennium" consist of? The topic presumes two things that are important: first, there is something in Quakerism that is of value and worth sharing; second, we intend to be around for the new millennium. I say the second rather jokingly. Yet, there are many dour forecasts regarding the future of Friends. There are certainly challenges on our horizon, as there are on the horizon of most every Christian group that can be cast toward the middle of mainline Protestant denominationalism. But I am an optimist on most days.

An important question to raise as we consider this topic is: "What does the world need from its religious communities?" You may have your own ideas. My short list includes: genuine love, proclaimed Truth, relevant faith, and someone who helps us recognize the Presence of God in our midst.

Sharing and communicating those items are a challenge in the best of situations, and we are not in the best of situations. We are in an era when one can no longer presume that a connection with an organized faith community is an expectation. The church has been moving toward the periphery of society for decades now. The result is that we are no longer given the benefit of the doubt in terms of: relevance, the need to belong, being the Guardian of Truth. We cannot assume people know our stories, speak our language, or agree with our presuppositions about God and about life. I share these things to make the point that even if we have something of value to say in the new millennium, there is no guarantee that we have an audience.

What do Friends have to offer in the next millennium? Let me make a statement that may shock you, but most days it reflects my heart. While I really want Friends as a religious group to survive and to thrive, if we were to disappear tomorrow, the world

would not necessarily miss one more peculiar religious group. Neither would people automatically be worse off for not knowing us. What they would miss, however, is this: those principles, testimonies, and manners of living that offer the best of what we are and what we have been. There are numerous groups to proclaim the gospel of Christ. There are not many who offer the emphases we offer. Let me name a few for you, and then we will spend some time unpacking each one. These are the things we have to offer as our contribution to the new millennium: We are able to connect the gospel with an understanding of a Present God as described in the Inner Light. That is a crucial piece of what we have to offer. Second, if we listen to our earliest ancestors and can disentangle ourselves from generations of Martin Luther's influence as it has been misinterpreted, we can present an understanding of Christianity that insists there is more to the good news proclamation than "sinner, sinner, sinner." Third, because of the first two, we have the natural ability to engage in a manner of prayer that begins with listening and ends with action. Fourth, as a long shot, in an age when more and more groups feel marginalized, our way of doing business could be useful to share. The goal would not be to require full agreement on all things, but to encourage a consultative way of doing business that invites the participation of all. So, here are four items for the day: Inner Light; positive Christianity; prayerfully updated testimonies; consensus building.

I. Inner Light

That this Inner Light is a critical feature of Quakerism worth sharing is something I am certain you already know, but it bears repeating. Using the language of light in connection with God talk is not a uniquely Quaker feature. Let me give you a thread running from Scripture through some well-known Quakers. "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made this light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." (II Corinthians 4:6) Here Paul connects the Creator of Natural Light with the one who has made the light of Truth visible in the face of Jesus.

From the letter of I John, we read these words: "This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light;

in God there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with God yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as God is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." (I John 1:5-7) This passage is significant for it identifies God as more than the Creator of Light. In fact, God is the Light, and not just in a physical way. God is light in a revealing way that highlights the pathway to Truth and Life.

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into this wonderful light." (I Peter 2:9) With these words from I Peter, light is more than an "out there" guide. We live in the Light. It is to be our home.

This Light, which is a prominent biblical theme, is also a strong Quaker theme. George Fox spoke of a time when he preached following the message of a priest in Covington, saying, "I spoke to him and the people the truth and the light which let them see all that ever they had done, and of their teacher himself..." The Light teaches us Truth about ourselves. Part of that truth is that God has become our teacher — our Light within.

From Isaac Pennington we hear, "O my Friend, mind this precious Truth inwardly, this precious grace inwardly, this precious life inwardly, this precious light inwardly, this precious power inwardly, this inward word of life, this inward voice of the Shepherd in the heart, this inward seed, this inward salt ... whereby Christ effects this." With Pennington, we take yet another step forward. The Light is not just an inward principle that exists and perhaps affects us the way radiation or heat affects its surroundings. Pennington invites us to "mind" the Light ... tend it. Thus, there is an attentiveness involved. With that recognition, we are on our way to a living relationship.

In Barclay's *Apology*, we find these words: "Properly speaking, the gospel is the inward power and life which preaches glad tidings in the hearts of all men, offering them salvation, and attempting to redeem them from their iniquities." There are many types of relationships. Barclay reminds us that this one revolves around power and redemption.

From there, it is a short jump to persons like Thomas Kelly who immerse us in language of an inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking voice, to which we may continuously return. Without much effort, we weave an understanding of the Light that is a source and a resource. More than a mere abstract concept, it has a transforming effect on those who tend it. This sketch of the Light should not be anything new to you. I offer it as a reminder of the support we have for this understanding. I believe this understanding of God is one of the most significant emphases we have to offer society.

Early in my move into theological circles, one of the things that impressed me most about Friends — and convinced me my future was with them — was the way in which the Spirit played a positive, constant role in the life of faith. That seemed to be a better way than many Christian groups where the Spirit was tacked on as the third part of the Trinity but without much practical role in day-to-day faith. And, I preferred it to the ecstatic, often irrational role that other less-inhibited groups gave the Spirit. Here was a group that understood the Spirit as a present reality that approached a New Testament description of a guide, comforter, and tester of Truth.

Later, I realized that while many contemporary Christians have rigid boundaries between God, Christ and Spirit to the point that they are three separate entities, the New Testament (especially Paul) spoke of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Christ in such similar ways that it seemed they could be used interchangeably. All of that is to say that while some may want to debate the identity of the Light — is it God, Christ or Spirit — for me the answer to all three is yes. All of that is to say that with the Inner Light, there is that of God, the power of God, within us. And, I do not think God went there to hibernate.

To speak of God in terms of Light is not unique to Friends. However, as we have developed this concept through the years, we are in a position to describe God in a way that could appeal to a society tired of living in darkness. In an era when people who do not know the Christian story or its faith language find a God who is "out there" and remote, we promote a God who is personal as well as powerful. In an era when many people possess a passive belief in the existence of God, we can describe God in a way that is dynamic. In an era when many who believe God exists

experience God as silent, our understanding of the Light offers an experience of God that cultivates listening which leads to relationship and to discernment. In an era when we have more confusion than clarity about the gray areas of life, Friends' experience of the Light within the inner sanctuary of the soul offers the ability to test ideas and truth. The Light is, without question in my mind, the most accurate guide available. A God like this cannot be contained in creeds. A Deity like this cannot be understood merely from an intellectual point of view. This is a God with whom we must live; this is a relationship that must be tended. We should expect it to be transforming.

II. An Optimistic View of Graced Humanity

A second contribution I hope we make to the next millennium is a Christian view of humanity that is positive and that believes in our potential as we live a new life in Christ, a life guided by the Inner Light, who is the Living Christ. Early Quakers began their theological understanding of humanity at much the same place as did other Christians. They saw a sinful humanity in need of redemption. What I appreciate is that while those Friends never forgot that starting place — not even the residual or continuing effect of being a part of sinful humanity — early Friends had a sense that each one could make real progress toward living a transformed life. They did not do it lightly or easily, but they expected to do it!

To me, that is the beginning of a tremendously different attitude about personal faith, other people and life in general. What breaks my heart and leaves me with little patience are those whose dominant version of the gospel is what I call "worm theology." Even great hymns fell prey to it, like "Amazing Grace" (that saved a wretch like me) and "At the Cross" (alas and did my savior bleed for such a worm as I?) Worm theology delights in reminding people of their shortcomings and uses guilt as a motivator. Worst of all, it holds out no hope that things can get any better. It leaves me asking: "Where is the power of God?"

Do not misunderstand my point. I know I am a "sinner saved by grace" to use the traditional language. I am not contesting that fact. The question is: "What next? What shall I become?" The traditional answer is: "You are a worm. A redeemed worm, mind

you, but a worm nonetheless. Try to live faithfully, but you will fail invariably and frequently. But it is okay, because grace saves you." That equates the faithful life, and "salvation, conversion, convincement" with a "get-out-of-hell-free" card. Faith is of no real value *here*, but it has a great retirement plan. My reaction to that is – what a disservice to God. I believe that faith of that persuasion has moved perilously close to Paul's description of a faith that has a form of godliness but denies the power thereof.

When I read George Fox, I hear something different than that approach to humanity. In a well-known Fox passage, he said,

"Now was I come up in spirit through the flaming sword into the paradise of God. All things were new, and all the creation gave another smell unto me than before, beyond what words can utter. I knew nothing but pureness, and innocency, and righteousness, being renewed up into the image of God by Christ Jesus, so that I say I was come up to the state of Adam which he was in before he fell. . . . But I was immediately taken up in a spirit to see into another or more steadfast state than Adam's in innocency, even unto a state in Christ Jesus, that should never fall. And the Lord showed me that such as were faithful to him in the power and light of Christ should come up into that state in which Adam was before he fell..."

Whereas other groups get locked in the mire of original sin, Fox dared to speak of original righteousness, believing that the power of God could actually free us and enable us to live righteous and pure lives. Some days I think Fox was too optimistic, but I appreciate the fact that he forces me to think about the possibility. If I really think God has a redeeming, reconciling, transformative power, then I should expect that it enables me to live successfully. Fox spoke of it as living up to the measure of light that is given. I like that description.

Another well-known place where we get a glimpse of the radical effect the power of God had on Fox's life and thinking is reflected in his words as he stood before Commissioners and soldiers who were questioning his loyalty to the government. Fox said "I live in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasions of all wars." We often point to that as the root of the

peace testimony, and it is. But if he really meant that, and succeeded at it, it is evidence of a life which has released the sinful nature that causes wars and which has managed to live in a different state.

The willingness to acknowledge that possibility opens the door for us to think about human potentiality. We have stepped beyond the worm who cannot, and entered the realm of the redeemed who do. Suddenly our life is full of potential and possibility. If it is true of me, it is also true of you.

This piece often lies unnoticed in our theology. More visible in most people's thinking is the Quaker phrase "that of God in all people." Fox used that statement, but probably in a way different than most of us use it. For him, "that of God in every person" was not a statement about some innate goodness of humanity. It was instead a belief about the possibility — the potentiality — that God's Truth could be recognized and responded to by anyone. God has already made known enough about God to be plain. We know it on some deep level, and we can recognize Truth when it encounters us. For Fox, "that of God in each person" was about the seed or voice of God that is both personal and within, yet transcendent and beyond us. If we are to be persons of faith, we must first answer to that of God within us.

According to Fox, that of God within other people may be answered in them when Christians preach with words, preach with lives, love one another, come into unity with one another, or correct false beliefs held by others.

That is a bit different than the phrase's common usage in the 20th century. Rufus Jones and others used the phrase to refer to the nature of humanity. It was connected to the Genesis 1 idea of humans created in the image of God and moved toward a belief that something of God, a tiny bit of something Divine, was in each human soul. We might even say that within each individual human person there is a seed which has a transformative effect on the substance containing or surrounding it. It is this evolved position that has become a central tenet of much Quaker Christian faith in our generation.

A move has been made from Fox's possibility that the voice of God can somehow be sounded and heard within the human heart, to Jones' use of it to describe a more positive position on human nature. As 20th century Friends, it would be wise to know in what sense we are using the term. Though there are some key differences in assumptions each part makes, I believe either takes us to a similar place in terms of how it affects our lives and our attitudes toward others.

In either school of thought, humanity has potential beyond the "worm's view" of the world. It has "that of God within it." Indeed, it is "that of God" which unleashes the human potential. In the Biblical witness, Paul reminded us that the body has this as one of its purposes — to house that indwelling spirit. These two realities: (a) the potential recognition of God's truth and (b) the presence of that of God within, lead to reassessment of human worth. Rather than despised, humans are valuable. In the words of the psalmist, we are "little less than the angels." In the vernacular of an old friend of mine, "God don't make no junk." His grammar may have been poor, but his theology was sound! Whichever vocabulary you choose, the point is that Friends have a theological foundation to reroute discussion of the human condition in a way that gives us more reason to hope for real change now!

We currently are left to deal with the effects of worm theology. The emphasis on unworthiness and hopelessness have become self-fulfilling prophecies in our congregations. "We can't help it. We can't change it. But God loves us anyway." That is a sick mentality. There is no Light in that position. There is no transformation in that theology. There is no reason to live differently. That is a small step away from apathy and indifference; it's just down the block from active participation in the powers and structures that oppress and harm.

Friends have a language to speak to that condition. We have an understanding of humanity that insists we can break those chains. Wherever we succeed in this regard, we will change the outlook of humanity. For people will not only begin to believe in their own worth as children of God, they will value others as well. As that occurs, we should reshape the manner in which people relate to one another. But I must say that given Friends' own history, this is a place where we must learn to practice it ourselves first!

III. Worship and Prayer as "Listening"

By tending the Light and viewing humans as having potential as graced individuals, Friends are in a position to think about how we answer God's call upon our lives and live as a result of those beliefs. It would be easy to rush in that direction once again. But I suggest that to do that with haste is not unlike answering before the other person in the conversation has completed his or her sentences.

One day, as I left the car to enter a convenience store, I asked my wife if she wanted me to get anything for her. She answered "yes", and requested a Diet Pepsi. I returned with a bottle of Diet Pepsi in hand and gave it to her. At that time Judi informed me she specifically asked for a can. (In fact, in her version, she specified "can" twice.) The fact that she *usually* preferred a bottle didn't matter. That her reasons this day for choosing a can instead of a bottle were illogical to me was unimportant. It did not ruin her day, but I spent a few moments in that marital purgatory affectionately known as "the doghouse." The words "Diet Pepsi" were so familiar to me that I assumed I knew the rest of the sentence. Had I listened to the entire request, I would have responded in the manner she desired.

Over the centuries, humanity has demonstrated a similar tendency, something akin to rushing like fools where angels fear to tread, frequently in the name of carrying out God's will or leading. Christians — and Friends — have occasionally rushed to *do* the right thing without always taking the time needed to hear from God about the things we should be doing. On occasions, history has proven us to be on target, however hasty our response; on other occasions, the results have not been so positive. In retrospect, we discover we should have listened —listened well, and listened deeply — prior to answering or rushing to action.

With our understanding of a Present God and with our knowledge that we are children of worth, with potential, who are invited into relationship with God, we need not fear or cower. Instead, we are free to enjoy and relish our Creator's company. We frequently refer to that time of "company keeping" as worship and prayer. I believe that Friends' manner of worship and prayer is yet another way we can contribute to the new millennium precisely because it ushers us toward a listening disposition.

In emphasizing that worship and prayer begin with "listening," I simply remind you of the obvious: an answer is, first and foremost, a reply. A reply is a response. One does not answer first, unless that person is the type who anticipates what others are thinking, and answers according to the anticipation. An answer or a response is the second piece of the conversation, preceded by a communication. That prior communication may be a question. It may be a command. It may be a summons. It may be a declarative statement. Whatever its form, some piece of communication precedes an answer. Consequently, an appropriate answer is almost always dependent on good listening.

In this Quaker context, I assume that the one to whom we listen is God. The biblical witness which undergirds the Jewish and Christian traditions rests upon a belief that God is one who communicates and desires to be understood. It is present in the story of Adam and Eve, as well as that of Noah. It is implicit in the covenant with Abraham. It is obvious in the covenant through Moses. It is incarnate in the life of Jesus. As those who hear are drawn into the faith (and one would hope, into a faith community of some sort such as Friends), that communication contains information regarding how to live because of our experience of God.

If we are to be serious about hearing God in order to know how to move beyond concepts of Inner Light and human potential — and especially if we're going to share this — then we as Friends will need to become committed, if we are not already, to the discipline of prayer. I recognize that prayer is, on the one hand, as simple as conversation. On the other hand, it is terribly complex as we wrestle with how God responds to multiple requests and contradictory petitions, especially on occasions when things do not go as we prayed they would. Plus, as human whim and emotion flow, there is something a bit disconcerting about the idea that we may actually influence the larger playing field of life.

A while ago, my wife, Judi and I dismantled an old, outdated laptop computer. It was like saying good-bye to an old friend who took research trips to the library with me, and stood by throughout the dissertation-writing process. But, it was outdated, reaching the point of being useless. Our goal was to remove every screw possible and to get an up-close view of its parts. Frankly, in most cases we did not know what we were looking at when we saw it,

but we can now say we've seen it, nonetheless. We decided to save a couple of keys as a memorial. I kept the "Escape" and "Delete" keys, in hopes of finding ways to connect them to reality. I hope to attach them to my desk. If someone comes in whom I do not want to see, I can hit the "Delete" key. If a situation occurs with which I don't want to deal, the "Escape" key will deliver me.

In my strangely connected mind I wondered: If this keyboard were the place where we typed our prayers, which keys would be most important, as evidenced by the greatest wear? "Delete" and "Escape" would probably be all but worn out for most of us. The "Control" key would get a lot of use, as prayer is often a means of trying to control situations by getting God to act on our behalf. The "Caps Lock" key would be used when the prayer was really urgent. "Home" is what we'd push when we were tired of it all and ready to go to a place of comfort. We would hope that the "Enter" key would be used often, as we enter God's Presence. And the "Insert" key could be handy, so we could insert a breath of fresh prayer into situations where it is most needed. The "Page Up" and "Page Down" keys would be used when we were ready to scroll and explore the world and the works of God around us.

If you can imagine your personal prayer keyboard, which keys receive the most use? I believe that the kind of prayer which recognizes the dynamic potential that the Inner Light of Christ brings to us emphasizes entering God's presence primarily to be where God is. It is there that we marinate (an image I like) in the love of God. We marinate. We soak. We absorb some of that Divine flavor, if you will. We begin to offer something to the world by inserting the transformed pieces of who we are into our surroundings, especially those that more obviously need to hear the Truth that is contained in the testimonies of faith.

Perhaps the greatest advantage of prayer which takes seriously the idea of entering God's Presence for the purpose of dwelling there is not that many of our petitions are answered, although that is a bonus. The greatest advantage is that it promotes our perpetual awareness of, and attentiveness to, the Divine Presence. Only as we become continuously aware of the communication can we consistently and effectively offer our Quaker treasures to a world that needs our assistance. Kenneth Leech, in *True Prayer*, delivers what I believe is a profound statement when he writes: "It is here, at the core, that one discovers that history is created, if not by the

spiritually mature, then by the spiritually deformed and degenerate..." Prayer with a focus on hearing what is to be answered is the first step of moving toward action. Now for the second step: thinking about the issues of life. This thinking should not be knee-jerk reactions. Nor should it be based on political loyalties. This is not action motivated by personal likes and dislikes. This is action, even ministry, that grows out of that seasoned time spent in the inner sanctuary. It is guided by the Light of Christ and directed in life-giving ways toward a world that, while still dominated by sin, has the potential respond to the seed of God.

Friends truly need that kind of Divine direction prior to marching out to make a difference. Not every trend is worth following. The ones that are usually need to be understood prior to following. Let me give you an example. One of the changes to occur in recent years is an emphasis on handicap accessibility. New structures, particularly public ones, must give thought to this issue prior to building facilities. Ramps, elevators, and wider doorways can be seen nearly everywhere one looks. In general, this movement is a good thing.

One day, as I was walking down a sidewalk of a Midwestern town, I passed one of the many churches that dot its streets. The first two spots of its parking lot were designated as handicap parking. They were right off the street, located at the corner of the building. They were the closest places to the front doors of the building. However, I noticed there were steps at the front entrance, so I looked a bit closer. The sign by the parking places instructed the handicapped individuals that their entrance was down the side of the building, in the opposite direction from the front door. So with my curiosity now raised, I followed the arrows. The next entrance, slightly over halfway down the side of the building, sat atop some steps. It was labeled, "Young Adult" entrance. In some ways, I'm sure this group qualifies as "handicapped," though they do not know it! But more to the point, they are generally not the intended group referred to by these signs. To reach the handicap entrance, a person had to go past the Young Adult entrance, all the way to the end of the building, turn the corner and eventually reach a ramp which led to a door located near ground level. Meanwhile, between this entrance and those prime, well-marked handicap spaces at the other end of the parking lot, there were several closer

parking spaces that would serve the handicapped individual better, given the actual location of the handicap entrance. What good are special parking places if, in fact, they are farthest away from the door and do not assist those for whom they are designed? What we have here is a good intention, an answer to the request for sensitivity to the needs of those who are physically challenged. Yet, it falls short of the goal.

Sometimes we respond to perceived needs with good ideas and good follow-through, but we lose something in the translation so that the end result does not speak to the needs expressed. If speaking to the issues and allowing our faith to bear testimony in appropriate places is the desired result, then we must not lose too much in the translation.

How do we move from a desire to speak Truth to the 21st Century to actually having an appropriate response? I have a hunch that process is as important as the content. Acts 15 gives us a nice model to use in reflecting and formulating our response to God's love. In a watershed moment in the life of the early church, a Jerusalem council wrestled with the place of Gentiles in the early church. To appreciate the work of this Jerusalem council, we need to understand how decidedly Jewish the early church had been up to this point. There were a few occasions when Gentiles caught sight of the truth or were included in the picture. But until this point, the early church was composed primarily of Jewish Christians. This means the law and tradition carried tremendous weight for them — even if they weren't sure why or how that influence should continue. As the weighty minds of the church gathered for this meeting, they had to grapple with an incredible piece of news. The Holy Spirit was working among the Gentiles. People with no Jewish heritage were beginning to believe in Jesus as the Christ. They were confessing the faith. They were repenting of sins. Most important of all, they were being baptized by the Holy Spirit, which in the New Testament is legitimate confirmation that God was moving in their midst. When God confirmed their faith, there could be no doubt about their salvation. There was no denying that Christ had touched the lives of the Gentiles.

As wonderful as this news was, it brought with it pressing questions. What do we do with these Gentiles? Where will they worship? The Jewish temple had included a "court of the Gentiles"

— equivalent to the "nosebleed section" at a stadium. You know what that is like. You can claim to have been at the big game, but just barely. Architecturally, you were in the same building, but the most action you saw was when the peanut vendor tripped while running up the steps. Where will the Gentiles worship within the young church? And what of the law?

There was a great debate that day. Some demanded that things be kept as in the past. Others noted it was ridiculous to saddle new converts with demands they themselves had been unable to observe. While some people probably thought he had lost his mind, James, the head of the council, listened to it all and then issued a minute releasing Gentiles from observing the Jewish law and rituals except for three things: associating with things polluted by idols, fornication, and eating meat that had been strangled. Each of these related to practices that were associated with pagan forms of worship. It turned out to be a great decision on the part of the council. It amounted to allowing grace and the Holy Spirit, rather than purely tradition, to spur the direction of the church. Under these guidelines, numerous Gentiles entered the church, and it exploded with growth. To me, that event in the life of the early church is not so far removed from what Friends call "the opening of the third way," wherein a dilemma is labored with in an attitude of worship and under the guidance of the Spirit, a new possibility emerges.

Historically, it was an important event in the life of the church. It also has value as a model for how we live the Truth with each other and for the world to see. As we reflect upon our experience of God, or as we consider where it seems God is working around us, or even where we sense God is calling us to insert those Truths to which we cling, we are continually presented with that same three-fold intersection as was the Jerusalem council: the intersection of traditional teaching, contemporary dilemmas, and the fresh movement of God. If we emphasize only the tradition, we can claim to be orthodox in our thinking to the core, maintaining testimonies that originated with the earliest of Friends, but we may seem irrelevant to the current generation. If we focus only on contemporary dilemmas, divorced from tradition, we may be involved on every cutting edge imaginable, but we will be blown in every possible direction like a Wal-Mart® bag on a windy day. We will have hardly a clue about how faith speaks to

the moment, even though we are certain it must. If we concentrate only upon the fresh movement of God, we will no doubt feel delightful, but we may well be so heavenly minded that we are of no earthly use. That three-fold intersection brings the best of our past into conversation with the Presence of God as we prepare to interact with the issues and dilemmas of our day. Our task is similar to that of an artist who knows the material, recognizes the canvas, and trusts his/her ability, yet it remains unclear what the art will look like until the work is completed.

What do Friends have to offer the new millennium so far? A personal understanding of God, a life-giving view of humanity in relation with God, a model of worship and prayer that allows us to draw on those two reservoirs, and a way of addressing contemporary challenges that brings important players into conversation with each other. If we do this well, we have the capacity to help society learn not only to have a deep relationship with God, but also to integrate the fruits of that relationship in the circles within which we travel.

IV. Consensus Building and Consultative Leadership

As one final piece of our potential contribution, let me simply note that we are in an era when some corporate groups are expressing interest in Quaker business process. In fact, Earlham College received a grant from the Kellogg Foundation to develop a manual and a program that could be used to teach Quaker process, minus its theological underpinnings, in a business setting.

Those of us who have lived with that process for a long time know that it can be painfully slow. However, in a world that is quick to marginalize and dismiss individuals for a variety of reasons, those who are left out lose their voice. They feel powerless. They eventually turn against the powers-that-be. This marginalization leads to splintered groups, divided loyalties, and often, reduced efficiency. At least some groups are recognizing there is value to a wider, more deliberative process. I am not suggesting that the world should be decided by the sense of the meeting. It would take far too long! But the two pieces that are valuable are: (a) a consultative style of operation that includes a wider array of voices while building a sense of inclusivity and personal involvement; and (b) the creation of a broad base of

support that unites groups while reducing the possibility of hostility and/or failure. It seems to me that those two items would be wonderful additions to almost any structure, assisting with making decisions, solving problems, and resolving conflicts. I doubt that we can offer this one item without the other three, though. The first three are the foundation and motivation that help this model of business succeed.

Do Friends have anything to offer the new millennium? I am certain that we do. And, in all probability, before we share these too broadly, we will need to reclaim some of these things ourselves!



About the Author

Jay Marshall is Dean of Earlham School of Religion, a graduate theological school in Richmond, Indiana. Originally from North Carolina Yearly Meeting (FUM), where he was recorded as a minister in 1985, Jay Marshall is currently a member of Indiana Yearly Meeting. A graduate of Guilford College, he also holds an M.Div. and a Ph.D. from Duke University. His doctoral work was in the area of Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Studies. He is the author of four books, and has served as a pastoral minister in North Carolina and Indiana Yearly Meetings. He lives in Cambridge City, Indiana with his wife, Judi.

About the Wider Quaker Fellowship

Friends World Committee for Consultation, Section of the Americas, works to facilitate loving understanding of diversities among Friends while we discover together, with God's help, our common spiritual ground, and to facilitate full expression of our Friends' testimonies in the world. Friends World Committee's Wider Quaker Fellowship program is a ministry of literature. Through our mailings of readings, we seek to lift up voices of Friends of different countries, languages and Quaker traditions, and invite all to enter into spiritual community with Friends.

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WIDER QUAKER FELLOWSHIP
a program of
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