

## **The Quaker Way Notes & [Comments](#)**

### **Introduction**

21-22 Feb, 2018

1. The aim of the book—and our series—is to give participants opportunities to experience the Quaker way. There will be reading and discussion and verbal sharing of experiences. However, this is not to be an intellectual "course" but, rather, a shared experience.

*The Quaker way...is based on a practice of silence, the deliberate letting go of words and ideas. It is an attempt to get beyond all the things we say and write about our life to a direct experience of it....*

*And we Quakers are confident that everyone has some awareness, some inkling, of the experience we take most seriously, the experience that takes us beyond all words to an encounter with life in the silence. But how to evoke that experience? (3)*

Ambler identifies three audiences:

- People interested in Quakerism
- Quakers who "have still not found that depth themselves"
- Quakers who have found what they seek but are "lost for words when asked to explain." (4)

2. The Quaker way is very different than other religious paths.

a. A practical yet hard to grasp practice:

*The Quaker way of life, the Quaker way to life, is essentially practical. Whatever else we do as Quakers...we come back to the practice again and again. That attitude itself needs some explaining.... But notice here the difficulty it creates.*

*The Quaker way of life is very simple, once you grasp it, but actually grasping it may not be so easy. It is so different from other ways of doing things.... (5)*

*When Quakers do engage with the world they take an awful long time to find out what to do.... The actions themselves...are so gentle, so benign, that we may wonder how they could ever make any difference. (6)*

b. No official teaching—and a problem:

*The Quaker way is not based on an official teaching, a doctrine. There is no creed, or statement of belief. Quakers haven't first worked out what they believe, or ought to believe, and then attempted to put it into practice. They start at the other end....*

*It they've learnt from the practice, they know it in their hearts. And if it works in practice, why bother with formulation in words?*

*Such an idea could backfire. They could become so occupied with the doing that they don't bother even with the understanding. They may then soon find that they don't really understand what they are doing, and why! This is something of a problem for Quakers today. (6)*

c. Ambler's challenge, and ours:

*The explanation may not...be an account of what most Quakers today consciously do as Quakers. It is more probing, more searching, and therefore...more challenging. It is asking the underlying meaning of our practice.... It is...an invitation to recover the original version, but in a way that answers the needs and possibilities of our own generation. (8)*

### 3. The Practice

#### a. Brief description

- Sitting in and speaking out of silence
- Putting insights into practice & being faithful to what we learn
- Decision-making through silent discernment
- Live according to the "light" & bear "testimony" to what others need to know.

*Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Trust them as the leadings of God, whose Light shows us our darkness and leads us to new life. (9)*

#### b. Seeming danger

*[That] we follow our hearts instead of our heads, and, even worse, that we treat our own inner promptings as the voice of God.*

1662 *Book of Common Prayer* warning against such practice: These people...

- are self-centered and irresponsible, indifferent to the public good
- driven by "fancies"
- indifferent to rules laid down by authority
- a threat to the establishment.

25 years of persecution by the State.

#### c. Friends have a case to answer today:

- seen as relying on inner impulses supposedly taken as an infallible guide to life
- living against the grain of society

*Modern society is upfront, rational and devoted to common sense. Friends, by contrast, seem to be relying on impulses that moderns can only regard with suspicion. (10)*

### 4. Ambler's core statement:

*Quakers sit in silence because they want to know something that words cannot tell them. They want to feel something or become aware of something that they can really make connection with. It is something fundamental to their life, they know that, indeed it is the underlying reality of their life, but they are not normally aware of it.*

*They are preoccupied with other things. They are taken up, like others, with the relatively shallow things of life, encouraged by the media and contemporary culture generally, and they hardly feel the depth of it all. So they feel the loss, the distance, and want somehow to get close to this deeper reality.*

*They want to become "the Friends of Truth," as they liked to call themselves at the beginning. Not any truth, but a truth that relates specifically to their deepest felt needs, and to the needs of the world. They are looking for a truth by which to live, that is, a sense of reality that tells them who they are and how they should live.*

*Part of the reality of their life, of course, is their relationship with one another and with other people, both near and far. So they want to "discern" what happens between people, what makes for a good life together, and what makes for a bad one.*

*They want to learn in their own experience how relationships that are broken can be mended, how conflicts can be resolved, and how "the Friends of Truth" can work together to make these things happen in the world. (11)*

5. Why Friends use this different approach:

*Like many other people, they experience life as disconnected, broken, at odds. They feel basically dissatisfied with life as it is generally lived, unhappy with themselves. But they know intuitively that it doesn't have to be like this, that there is an underlying unity and meaning in life, if only they could find it.*

*They don't want to give in to the pessimism that says this is all it ever can be, yet on the other hand they can't accept the optimism that pretends that life is other than it is. They want the truth about life.*

*Risky as it may be, they want to find out how things really are, because they sense, they hope, that the truth will give meaning to their lives and make them whole.*

*But what is meant by truth here? It doesn't seem to mean what we normally mean by it. (10-11)*

## Comments from 3/9/2018

### Introduction

2.b. No official teaching—and a problem:

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*It they've learnt from the practice, they know it in their hearts. And if it works in practice, why bother with formulation in words?*

*Such an idea could backfire. They could become so occupied with the doing that they don't bother even with the understanding. They may then soon find that they don't really understand what they are doing, and why! This is something of a problem for Quakers today. (6)*

Comment: Ambler focuses on the practice but not on the faith; i.e., he doesn't address the "divine" aspect. There are mystics who come to Quakerism who want the experience he describes and who choose it.

3.a. The practice

*Modern society is upfront, rational and devoted to common sense. Friends, by contrast, seem to be relying on impulses that moderns can only regard with suspicion. (10)*

Ambler says Quakers live according to the "light" & bear "testimony" to what others need to know.

Comment: Better to say "what we know to be true" rather than "what others need to know."

3.b. Key passage: critics of Quakerism allege that...

*we follow our hearts instead of our heads, and, even worse, that we treat our own inner promptings as the voice of God.*

3.c. Friends have a case to answer today:

- seen as relying on inner impulses supposedly taken as an infallible guide to life
- living against the grain of society

*Modern society is upfront, rational and devoted to common sense. Friends, by contrast, seem to be relying on impulses that moderns can only regard with suspicion. (10)*

Comment: Again Ambler leaves out "the divine" in his discussion.

Comment: It will be important to advise participants that Ambler is a Quaker, not *the* Quaker. Nor is Fox, or Penn...or any of us...*the* Quaker.