

## Study notes on Amber's Chapter 5: "Living Faithfully" "The Quaker way of living" (pp.82-86)

### A. Introduction

1. Quakers rely first of all on the resources we each have within us..., or rather, on the deep resource within us we call 'the light' and 'the spirit.'
2. No priests or ordained ministers, no official teaching or creed, and no sacred books that we regard as finally authoritative, all of which presuppose that the truth or strength we need in life is outside us.
3. In this respect we are unlike every other Christian group, and unlike most other religious groups around the world.
4. Foolish or not, Christian or not, this is the fact about Quakers we most need to understand.

### B. The Quaker way of living

1. This then provides the background for understanding how Quakers live their lives. *They live their lives, their practical, everyday lives, as they are led by the Spirit within them.*
2. Does not mean...that Quakers live just as they wish to.... *The 'Spirit' that leads has nothing to do with the whim of the moment; it is not itself a feeling or an emotion.*
  - a. It is deep down within us, and manifests itself only as we let go the claims of the ego....
  - b. The voice within 'speaks to our condition', and the light shows us the truth of our life....
  - c. When we say we are 'led by the Spirit', we mean that we live in response to the reality of our life as the Spirit shows it to us.
  - d. This can often be quite challenging
    - i. we might not want to face the reality of our life
    - ii. or do the kind of thing it seems to require.
    - iii. Our desire may conflict with what the Spirit requires.
3. *'Being led by the Spirit' does not mean following a strict code of ethics, not even the code of 'Quaker values'.*
  - a. All religious and philosophical groups are supposedly based on a set of beliefs and values, that is, things which could be written down on paper as representing what is true and good.
  - b. That *couldn't* be what Quakers do, not really. They accept as their basic truth what is not and cannot be written on a piece of paper.
  - c. It is a truth that each of them has to see for themselves. In fact, *knowing how to live is precisely a matter of seeing for oneself and responding to the truth of what one sees with an open heart.*

### C. Reply to critics

A lot of people will object that living without rules or 'standards' is irresponsible and dangerous and could lead to anarchy.... They deserve a reply. Three things, I think, can be said:

1. As we have seen..., when we open ourselves to the truth of our life
  - a. our self-deceptions and denials are revealed, including the false image we have of ourselves
  - b. at the same time we discover the true self that lies behind these images.

- i. We discover who we really are, not isolated and apart from others, but one with them, and with life itself.
    - ii. This awareness awakens a great feeling for life, and for others, that we can only call love.
    - iii. As we hold on to that truth we find love growing within us, until it overcomes the feelings of fear and anxiety that might have motivated us before.
    - iv. We are able to act out of love, that is, out of warm respect for other people and other creatures, so that we want spontaneously to help them and not harm them.
  - c. Now with that feeling, we do not need laws and commandments to tell us what to do.
    - i. 'Love is the fulfilment of the law', as Paul the Apostle said, so we don't have to try to fulfil the law, which we will never do anyway, not completely and wholeheartedly (see Romans 13,1 Corinthians 13).
    - ii. Love and mercy are spontaneous responses of the heart to a world in pain, a world in God. What holds us back is not a lack of effort or education, but fear and the false sense of self.
- 2. We can prepare the way for this opening of the heart and we can guard against the temptation to close it again.
  - a. When the early Friends said they could be 'perfect'
    - i. they didn't have in mind what we mean by the term, free from all fault and blemish, perfect in every respect.
    - ii. They meant they had the power to act rightly and to resist the temptation to put self first.
  - b. But they had to exercise that power.
    - i. They had to be watchful, and when they fell down they had to pick themselves up again. None of it could be taken for granted.
    - ii. But if they put their mind to it, they found, they could live as they really wanted to live. And we could have that confidence too, if we continue to let the light show us the truth.
  - c. That commitment to truth is our core discipline, and it's that that ensures that the love will flow.... As Gandhi said: 'Love and truth are two sides of the same coin'.
- 3. We can also commit ourselves to the path of truth and love even when we don't feel like it.
  - a. Our deeper feelings can be clouded over by the anxieties of the moment, by tiredness or disappointment.
  - b. We then have to trust that the deeper feeling is still there...and act on that trust.
  - c. We don't always understand very well the situation we are in, and may have to wait a while until it gets clearer.
  - d. When we act on the understanding we do have, and wait in the light for further enlightenment, it does become clearer.
  - e. So there is a pattern and a process to living a faithful life, and that ensures that, if we follow it, we will do the right thing.

### Answering the misunderstandings of Quaker practice

We people of the modern world find it difficult to grasp what the Quaker thing is really about.

1. We understand the world out there very well, and we analyse it and talk about it endlessly.
2. But we don't generally understand the inner life, the illumination of our life by the Spirit, or the value of silent waiting, without words.
3. These things have to be learned, against the grain of our modern way of doing things, and we Quakers have to start learning them and teaching them.