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## *Christ Is Still the Answer*

DEAN FREIDAY

Perhaps one of the most significant developments among American Friends during this last century was the 1970 St. Louis Conference. Uniquely among Quaker conferences, "official" delegates were appointed by all the yearly meetings of Friends in the U. S. and Canada. The appointees of two yearly meetings were unable to attend for health or other last-minute emergencies, but no yearly meeting boycotted the Conference. In accordance with Friends' principles, the group could not legislate, but position papers were presented for FUM, FGC, and (the then) EFA.

A highlight of that gathering was the address given by Everett L. Cattell<sup>1</sup> on behalf of Evangelical Friends and calling for Quaker unity under the lordship of Jesus Christ. For many who were present this address had a lasting impact. In a sense a 1986 article by Arthur O. Roberts was a suggestion of the possible ways in which Cattell's proposals might be implemented.<sup>2</sup>

At St. Louis cordial dialogue occurred across what had previously been barriers. So much common ground was expressed that a Faith & Life Movement was established, along with a Faith & Life Panel to look at significant theological issues. The Panel did much by correspondence and met regularly once a year for ten years. A series of regional conferences was held

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1. "A New Approach for Friends," pp. 32-44 in *What Future for Friends? Report of the St. Louis Conference: A Gathering of Concerned Friends*. October 5-7, 1970, published at the request of the Conference (Philadelphia, Friends World Committee for Consultation [the then "American Section"], [1971]) vi + 58 pages.

2. "Paths Toward a Quaker Future" *Friends Journal* (March 1, 1987). The article also appeared in *Quaker Life* and *Evangelical Friend*. Further page citations are from the *Friends Journal* edition.

under the Movement in the interest of involving Friends on the meeting benches and not just their "leadership," pastoral or otherwise.

Yet, in spite of genuine enthusiasm for closer relations between the Quaker varieties and much conferencing and particularly discussion of the Roberts article,<sup>3</sup> no structural changes appear to have resulted. This is especially unfortunate in view of the condition of the world, the role that Quakers working together might have, and the possible input, from the reconsideration by all varieties of Quakers, of the essence of early Quakerism. Cattell's thesis and Roberts' proposals deserve renewed consideration.

In this paper we will take a look at our "World," particularly the North American portion, the place of Quakers in it, and the proposals made by these two authors. A quarter of a century after St. Louis several questions remain:

Where were Friends then in relation to each other?

What was their situation in relation to the cultural context?

Where did we go from there, and where are we today?

Did we take Everett Cattell's advice, and what has happened in relation to Arthur Roberts' "paths?"

### *I. Friends in Relation to Each Other*

One of the remarkable things about St. Louis was that while the "call" had dared to address only "the Friends Church," it was heeded by the unprogrammed as well as programmed Friends. The proposal was to seek "under the guidance of the Holy Spirit...a workable, challenging, and cooperative means whereby the Friends Church can be an active, enthusiastic, Christ-centered, and Spirit-directed force in this day of revolution."<sup>4</sup>

Everett Cattell, the keynote speaker for the Evangelical Friends, stressed that the central reality that we needed to face was the Lordship of Christ, being "measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ" (Eph 4:13 NEB):

This Lordship of Christ is a great center for illumination. This is the inner light we seek. The light at one and the same time illuminates the loving and forgiving heart of the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and as well the corruption and evil of our own hearts, of men [and women] around us, and of the whole kingdom of this world in which we live and in which we feel so much at home until we see Jesus. ... All of us are creatures of our cultures far more than we realize and liberation into the Kingdom of God is extremely difficult.<sup>5</sup>

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3. *Ibid.*

4. From the Introduction, p. v of the St. Louis Report (cited in fn 1).

5. *What Future...*, p. 41.

In the 26 years since then it has gotten even more difficult. We were aware then of a neo-paganism that flourished for a time and still has some echoes. The real "flash in the pan," however, whose very title assured it a widespread journalistic hearing, was the "death of God theology." It lasted barely a decade. By 1970 it was already being succeeded by other forms of "secular theology" or antitheology. New Ageism, which has been troublesome for some current Quaker groups (as well as mainstream churches) had not yet arrived.

Yet in spite of these and other attacks on belief, and although most traditional denominations continue to be in a sorry state of declining membership, shrinking attendance, and financial difficulties there is a widespread hunger for guidance beyond the human. It is still embryonic and has yet to penetrate in any depth either church structures or the structures of society. But some ideas, such as "character," as it involves truthfulness and integrity, are making some comeback. While it is obvious that "the whole picture" involves a large number of interacting factors, it is very difficult to analyze them and to come to grips with them.

## *II. Our Cultural Context*

In struggling with the broad picture of our present world and its religious significance, Dr. Susan E. Davies, a United Church of Christ theologian has said:

The rules our predecessors knew, the ways of common life we inherited, which made sense as recently as ten years ago, have fallen away... We are left to discover the new duties these new occasions demand.

We are living through a cultural paradigm shift so vast we cannot yet grasp it... More people are refugees and homeless than at any other time in the 20th century. Massive human tragedy co-exists with...the wonder of an increasingly non-racial South Africa.

The worlds we have known both within and outside the church...are altering before our very eyes, engendering complex responses of frustration, exhaustion, deeply rooted rage...[but also] a persistent determined hope. [Yet] "all our theological buckets leak," as Luther Smith of Candler School of Theology has said.

The time has come for us to confess that none of us in the broader Christian community carries the fullness of God's vision and purpose for the world. None of us, no matter how ancient or new, no matter how well-established or crumbling or surging on the wings of the Spirit; none of us alone embodies fully the presence and purpose of Christ's people on earth. All of us have a partial testimony. We are merely the branches on the vine, not the vine itself... We have all been grafted into God's purposes, and our particular fruits...are gifts of God for the world, and not for our own continuation.<sup>6</sup>

If this appraisal fits the huge mainstream constituencies, how much more it applies to our 300,000 members, divided four ways in terms of doctrine, and attempting to bring Witness to countries all over the world!

No one needs to be told that the U.S., in particular, needs restoration of community-agreed-upon ethical principles. A survey on values by—believe it or not—that “patron saint” of the Elderly, the American Association of Retired Persons subheaded its “Feedback” on that survey:<sup>7</sup> “America is headed straight to hell, figuratively and literally, unless it changes course soon.” And “not one person disputed the premise that American society is decaying.” Those surveyed suggested that individuals need “to take a stand for the basic virtues...like integrity, responsibility and selflessness...that have been out of fashion.” The article concluded “society’s salvation may well rest on each individual’s willingness to exert a positive influence on others...”

One person, who by no means denies the foundational role of faith on religious values, Stephen R. Covey, has translated the Gospel into secular terms. He speaks of seven personal habits that are not the keys to “success” or “wealth,” but which characterize “highly effective people,” people who influence other people toward restoration of community and ethical values. Without being gimmicky, Covey avoids religious terminology altogether. The Golden Rule and other Christian precepts become roughly: if you wish to be understood, begin by trying to understand the other person. This and the other six “habits” that he enunciates have successfully turned specific corporate structures from competition to cooperation and mutual responsibility. And community life in Columbus, Ohio, has been revitalized.<sup>8</sup>

Much thought that is both realistic and creative is being heard on public television. “Peggy Noonan on Values” was a series of one-on-one interviews. It had very constructive comments on the role of religion. Noonan herself stated that “politicians can’t really get to our deepest problems, which are largely spiritual ones.” Here, the richness of the discussion by a professor of social philosophy; a “left-wing-intellectual-devout Christian-single mother-artist” and others, can only be randomly sampled.

Bill Moyers, of Baptist background, pointed out that religion must have a part in the civil debate because it is “a source of values and ideas...the means by which we try to make sense” of the world and “form our lives in the midst of chaos.” Fr. John Neuhaus corroborated. One of the clearest

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6. In a sermon, “The Shapes We Take While We Wait,” delivered at the Minneapolis meeting of NCCC-USA Faith & Order, March 18, 1995, here in abridged form and used with the author’s permission.

7. *Modern Maturity* (Nov-Dec. 1995):12-14.

8. Stephen R. Covey. *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989). Covey, a Mormon, makes no effort to hide the Christian derivative of his “habits.”

analyses on this point was by Michael Lerner, editor of "the liberal Jewish magazine *Tikkun*," who said: "We have gone overboard in arguing for separation of church and state." We've said "that the whole area of values, the whole area of spiritual sensitivity and commitment can't even be discussed in the public arena." And people are under "a cloud of suspicion if they so much as suggest that their ideas...stem from a religious commitment."<sup>9</sup>

These secular approaches and analyses by no means detract from the focus on Christ as still the answer for Quakers. They are supplemental attempts to bridge the gap between market-economy, and media and other detracting cultural factors. They represent some small beginnings at efforts to restore a national ethical synthesis, reclaim the victims of the drug culture (largely children) and instill some agreed-upon "values." We will have to ignore the political distortion that the word *values* has taken until a better generalizing word comes along. But whatever the distortions, religion in general, Christianity in America, and Quakers in particular have to "mind the store," while others distort the debate by substituting overemphasized individual "rights," or false values.

Other clues as to what is happening have come from widely different sources, and they pertain to both the childhood and adult portions of the age spectrum. A non-Quaker visitor to our meeting at Manasquan (NJ) was prompted by the Spirit of Christ to speak of North America as having become an "adolescent culture." Many adults are reluctant to accept responsibility or to be accountable to anybody or anything, she said. Individual rights, too, have triumphed over the give and take that make for genuine community and which require consideration of the common good as well as individual interests.

For these *adolescent adults* marriage, if an option at all, is merely a substitute for long-term living-together. Any offspring who result are a by-product rather than being regarded as the central purpose of such relations. To say that is not to deny the genuine love of many a single-parent who struggles against almost overwhelming economic and societal odds to provide as normal a parenthood for their children as possible.

Nevertheless, the tendency is for marriages to fall apart under the slightest stress or hardship. Multi-generational families are becoming rarer

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9. The Noonan interviews were in a three-part series aired on Public Television (in NJ on WNET-13 February 10, 17, 24, 1995). In them also Stanley Crouch warned that the problems affecting the black community, whether it is family breakdown, drugs, or teenage pregnancy "tends to be the metaphor for the national future" and eventually becomes everyone's problem. Another Afro-American, Shelby Steele, warned that in casting everything in terms of rights, whether ethnic, feminist, or whatever, tends to "Balkanize our society rather than integrate it." Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a New York Senator who grew up on Manhattan's West Side, raised the question whether "all abuses of freedom [may] make Americans impatient with freedom itself." Ironically, we are producing a society divided along class lines, "with a dependent population and a population resentful of the dependent population."

and rarer. "Traditional families" of father, mother, and children had shrunk to 40 percent in England in 1992.<sup>10</sup> In the U.S. it had slipped even further. For 1990 such families constituted only 19 percent of all households.

This lack of family structure does away with a major part of the protected environment in which children can gradually learn to cope with the realities which face them. Concomitantly "the age of childhood...characterized by innocence, play and learning has shrunk to a span of only a few years. From halfway through the years of primary school the young person today enters the phase of the *adult-child*."<sup>11</sup>

Some of the specific causes for these changes which surround the adult-child and which bring on this "early adulthood" are spelled out in a consultative report on children and the churches, already cited, and which has been published by the Council of Churches in Britain and Ireland (CCBI).

Television, the CCBI report points out, has been not only a "key instrument in bringing about the erosion of childhood," but it represents a return to the supremacy of "image" over "word." In the Medieval era, in particular, church-buildings were not only centers for hearing, but they constituted great storybooks in stone, mosaic, and stained glass. They conveyed pictorially the Gospel and its biblical antecedents, as well as heroic exemplars of the faith, to congregants who for the most part could not read.

With Gutenberg, the printed word became supreme, and thinking was expressed in verbal propositions or theses. The entire thrust of learning shifted toward reduction of illiteracy and the accumulation of knowledge. Thought was transmitted from generation to generation via the printed word.

We still have not come to grips with the electronic revolution and all of the implications of the return to image supremacy—in a different and all-pervasive way. "Learning" in its broadest connotation no longer consists of occasionally viewing a few pictures in a church building, as in the earlier period of image supremacy, but of being barraged almost endlessly by a flood of images. The consequences cannot be overestimated. The pity is that in spite of the potential of the image for enlarging horizons, by and large the trend is toward "superficiality and trivialization. The quick fix of the sound bite, with its simplistic message, is a perverse influence in society." And with the accompanying "decline in literacy may come a decline in the capacity for reasoning."<sup>12</sup>

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10. *Unfinished Business: Children and the Churches*, third in a series of studies by the Consultative Group on Ministry Among Children of the Council of Churches of Britain and Ireland (CCBI). It was published in 1994 or 1995 (London: CCBI Publications), viii + 80 pages, here §1.7, p. 7. Janet Scott, Head of Religious Studies Department, Homerton College, Cambridge, was the Quaker member of the CGMC.

11. CGMC, *op. cit.* §1.1, p. 4.

12. *Ibid.*, §1.3, p. 5.

Then, too, playtime provided the child with an opportunity to make “sense of the world in that necessary mingling of fantasy and reality which constitutes play. While the media are also able to mix fantasy and reality, for them it is coupled with the power to manipulate, and viewing is passive and tends to be solitary.”

“The impact of the immediate and the simplistic and the view that if you see something, then that is how it must be, create a dangerous kind of fantasy world.” And where “computer games channel the child’s imagination in particular ways... [and] encourage violence, they are a cause for concern.” While the CCBI Report’s comment that “The churches must promote a different lifestyle and challenge these values” is addressed to the area of “commercialism, consumerism, and market forces,”<sup>13</sup> it could equally well be applied to almost all of our secular surroundings.

A primary concern must be for children, who by themselves are powerless and yet are “on the front-line” so to speak in the battle against a culture which is inimical to their well-being:

In response to the implications of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the churches have an unavoidable duty to attempt to be in touch with the experiences and lives of children today. Primarily, the churches must set an example of listening to children, their hopes and their fears. There are dangers everywhere for children: child abuse (within and outside the family), environmental hazards and accidents, and street crime. The churches must recognize that children are vulnerable and in need of protection, and must speak out and act on their behalf.<sup>14</sup>

This is not just a call for social activism:

Whilst attempting to be a Christian conscience within society, the churches must also reclaim the numinous, and witness to the presence and power of God. Implicit in this is the challenge to the Church to recognize how children learn, and how they learn about God. In a world of many different beliefs it is important that children are given the opportunity to explore belief in God for themselves and what it means for them.<sup>15</sup>

It should be the mission of all churches and all Friends not only to evangelize in general, but to develop a particular form of evangelism adapted to children. For Friends, who have always emphasized a relational ecclesiology, the opening sentence of the Evangelism and Children section of the CCBI report is directly pertinent:

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13. *Ibid.*, §2.3, p. 15.

14. *Ibid.*, §2.2, p. 15.

15. *Ibid.*, §2.5, p. 15.



Faith in the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit is expressed in personal relationship with God and with others.<sup>16</sup>

We need to emphasize *and practice* "such a vision of life, faith and the world as will fascinate children enough to win their allegiance to Christ" and enable them to both learn about faith and to "participate freely in it." Children should, "at least in part, discover the Gospel for themselves through experiences and encounters rather than" simply verbally.<sup>17</sup> Friends have better than a passing score for involving children and giving them a sense of ownership in their meetings and churches, but are we doing as well in getting across the specific thrusts of Quaker beliefs?

### III. Returning to Friends

It isn't enough to sketch some parameters for evangelization and action for the whole Christian Church. What is our particular role, and are we making progress in doing some things together? We need to look again at Everett Cattell's St. Louis advice for Friends, and also ponder the paths toward a Quaker future outlined by Arthur O. Roberts. We need also to review the significance of the Faith & Life Movement and the Faith & Life Panel which were set up following St. Louis. Were they merely passing phenomena, or did they evoke unrealized implications which are still relevant if we are to move closer together?

Everett Cattell characterized what we had been trying to do prior to St. Louis as a *synthetic approach* composed of certain organizational steps. FGC was organized in 1900-1902 "around special concerns" rather than constituting a uniting of Yearly Meetings. FUM (then Five Years Meeting) had hoped to become more of "a legislative body with binding powers," than it became and FUM remains "in reality a federation because of the heterogeneity of its elements."<sup>18</sup> Cattell asked if "the basis of our efforts had not been too synthetic, too artificial, too much putting together of things which do not belong together in any natural sense."<sup>19</sup>

He uses the word "realignment" seven times, but not in the sense of redividing as it has been used more recently. Everett Cattell suggested that it could mean a "setting for a *symbiotic* approach... a new way of living side by side but preserving our differences with greater integrity than at present." He continues:

But could it be that a still better thing could happen? That we all bow low before our common Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. That we acknowledge

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16. *Ibid.*, §2.29, p. 23.

17. *Ibid.*, ¶2.32, (ii), p. 25.

18. *What Future...*, p. 33.

19. *What Future...*, p. 34.

him openly and unapologetically... . That we then take the time and the patience to work out from the center, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and with truly and utterly humbled and surrendered hearts, the meaning of that Lordship, in a *new system* of bringing men [and women] to Christ, a new system of cleansing our hearts and the whole circle of our personalities, a new system of lifestyle demanded by Christ in a pagan culture full of injustice and evil and exploitation, and a new system of labor to bring elements of society in line with the Kingdom of God, without losing hope when rebuffed, and assured by the faith that the King himself will complete His Kingdom in his own day.<sup>20</sup>

Elsewhere he states specifically<sup>21</sup> that he was appealing “to all Quakers... [those at St. Louis, at least] to make a fresh systems approach to the revival of primitive Quakerism.” He goes on to say that honesty requires us to ask some hard questions of the “humanists or naturalists or syncretists or what have you” that are among us.

#### *IV. A Few Queries for Quakers Individually and Corporately*

[1] Are we on the “cutting edge” or “like a ship without a rudder”? For nearly 300 years Quakers have definitely been on the “cutting edge” of Christianity. Not only did they pioneer great reforms in the social structure—women’s rights and abolition of slavery, just to name two areas out of a possible half dozen or more. They were also an *experiential reformation*. Barclay’s Doctrine of Perfection was adopted bodily by John Wesley with only minor editing to update obsolete words or remove some excess verbiage. It is now regarded as the showpiece of *Methodist* doctrine!

We tend to be unaware of our direct or indirect spiritual descendants. Hannah Whitall Smith (1832-1911), a Philadelphia Quaker who joined the Plymouth Brethren, provided the Holiness Movement with its enduring classic, *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life*, in 1875. Her collected works are still in print. The Apostolic Church developed out of the Holiness Movement, and out of that blossomed Pentecostalism. Perhaps these are “the great people to be gathered” envisioned by George Fox. There are now nearly 500 million Pentecostals and charismatics worldwide, and a recent Pentecostal merger in the U.S. created the largest single denomination in the U.S. with about 50 million members.

[2] In reference to reaching a hurting world with the love of Christ, are we “part of the solution or part of the problem”? The needs that have been outlined above are of colossal proportions, and only a few of them have been touched upon. Quakers of all varieties are at work in complementary ways. There is great zeal for evangelizing in terms that are well adapted to

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20. *What Future...*, p. 44.

21. *What Future...*, p. 39.

particular mission fields coupled with readiness to adapt to new situations. Bolivia's altiplano, e.g., had been badly neglected or abandoned by all other Christians. Through coupling situation-improving with proclamation by Evangelical Friends, Bolivia has seen new life. Add to this kind of commitment that of other varieties of Friends with specialized areas of competence and if we work together on behalf of a common Lord, Quakers will definitely be "part of the solution."

In some regions, Friends of all varieties are again experiencing genuine "seeking," the kind that is a complement to "finding." Others seem committed to standing pat on a provincial understanding of Quakerism and belligerently undermining attempts to reformulate a genuine Quakerism for today's world.

[3] Are we prioritizing our central callings, rather than idolizing our particular strategies and structures? Ritualizing is not supposed to be part of Quakerism, but force of habit can cause us repeatedly to "just do something" because it has always been done that way. Are we simply being busy at make-work, a kind of treadmill activity? Or is it the business of our lives to implement the things that Jesus lived and died for?

[4] Are we first and foremost attending to the leadings of Christ, as opposed to "keeping up with the Joneses" out of some sort of spiritual insecurity? Do we adopt practices like Sacraments simply because the church down the street has them, or because some new members would like to bring them in? Actually we do a disservice to those who have high regard for Sacraments where we do so. Our witness is now regarded constructively by the wider church as a contribution to true sacramentality.

Are we adopting "church-growth techniques" merely because they have built Crystal Cathedrals or whopping-big drive-in congregations? Shouldn't we, instead, be proper stewards of the Truth we have received from the Lord?

[5] Are we picking up the gimmicks of lukewarm (Rev. 3:16) Protestantism—non-controversial preaching or messages; non-involvement in justice issues or advocacy; making worship entertaining; developing programs to help seniors, in particular, but members in general kill time with diversions such as bus trips, museum visits, restaurant parties?

[6] In our meetings and churches do we accept our share of the responsibilities, or do we expect the pastor or a handful of committed Friends to carry the whole load? We are stereotyped when we are called a "do-it-yourself religion," or it's said that "you can believe anything and be a Quaker." But we need to remember that we are being called, gathered, and sent. We are not without purpose, and watering down statements of faith by some provide evidence to support such charges.

[7] Is Christ the dynamic Lord of our lives, not just a notional tenet of faith? Are we really ready to accept the Lordship of Christ as Everett Cattell

asked? Do we attempt to meet today's questions in awareness of the truth that Christ is still the answer—leading us to lives of greater sanctification/holiness and ready to exemplify his love both personally and through our church/meeting structures?

[8] Are we willing to link hands as Friends, subordinating our wills to Christ's and seeking to discern what it is that he would have us do?

If we are, let's find a way to "get with it!"

Arthur Roberts has said that "if our differences are addressed through faith, they will lead to renewed spiritual vigor." In his summary, he gives some tentative and partial conclusions. At that point he picks out the positive contributions (as well as, elsewhere, some negative drawbacks) that each of his seven paths could make: (1) Perspective from the "restorationists" (= Everett Cattell's "revival of primitive Quakerism"). (2) Spontaneity under the Spirit's leadings from charismatic Friends. (3) While he sees mysticism as "a scenic route," it can also offer "a good complement to the lives of the saints." (4) Universalism (if not connected to the universal mission of Jesus Christ), however, "will be a dead-end road if followed very long." (5) Fundamentalism "is a detour." Those traveling that route face "a fork in the road," and the way "leading back to the Quaker highway will be less well marked." (6) Liberalism "embodies Gospel principles." It has been "chastened by events of recent decades, and is recovering confidence in Christian transcendence, including the biblical witness. In stretches it now runs parallel with evangelicalism." (7) Evangelicalism, Arthur Roberts says:

is an alternate route—I prefer it. Its three lanes—proclamation, fellowship, and service—are now open. Forced to show distinction from fundamentalism, it may soon merge with an equally chastened liberalism. This will be a relief to many Friends, I think. At that time, designated signs may be replaced. Perhaps "Christocentric"; or simply "Quaker," will suffice to indicate that we are people of the Christian Way.<sup>22</sup>

Arthur Roberts, here, has added some incisive definition to the purifying difference the Lordship of Christ could make for all parts of the Quaker spectrum. At the heart of the *Evangel*, the "good news," is Christ—the great role model and source of direction for liberals and conservatives alike. New structures and new strategies will not solve anything by themselves. As Everett Cattell reminds us, the true divisions between Friends are not the result of using or not using pastors and structured worship. These have ceased to be problems for many Friends.

The central issue is the willingness to attend to and follow the direct leadership of Christ. Doing so was the great discovery of the early Quakers.

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22. On p. 17 of the *Friends Journal* version of Arthur Roberts, "Paths Toward a Quaker Future" (March 1, 1987). 2/7/1996 D. F.

Discerning His will for them caused them to travel halfway around the world (often on foot and through wilderness) to proclaim the good news wherever they went and to “publish” truth at home as well. Often it was done at the cost of imprisonment or the distraint of all their worldly goods. That witness and the message that the world desperately needs now is that Christ is still the answer.