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Mind Your Calling

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I. Introduction

In rereading printed reactions to the St. Louis Conference of October, 1970, I found the phrases such as “wholesome exchange,” “total dismay,” “new readiness,” and “honest dialogue.” Writing in the Iowa Friend, November, 1970, Wayne Allman reached to the heart of it, however, when he expressed amazement the conference took place at all.

In spite of acknowledged differences briefly skirmished over, the signs of hope for greater Quaker unity were there. We made a new beginning. I saw as it were a small cloud the size of a man’s hand over Mt. Carmel. An end to our drought is in sight.

At the conference I heard Edwin Bronner suggest if we could love others we could love fellow Quakers and we might even change some positions. I saw his tears. Harold Winn helped me remember that obedience is more important than denominational distinctiveness. I appreciated the perspective of Francis Brown and Jack Willcuts who both urged the Yearly Meetings to set up continuing conferences to deal with the basic issues of doctrinal difference.

I appreciated the insight of each of the major speakers. Lorton Heusel for his impatience that we get on with our tasks and in so doing discover the wholeness which will again make us “a flaming band.” Dean Freiday for asking us to look beyond “patchword Quakerism” to what we ought to be as Quakers. Everett Cattell for giving us the real option of a mutually supporting symbiosis until we reach systematic wholeness.

Some of you may be tired of conference talk, of rhetoric. Add to our organizational disunity the more direct local issues and there is room for discouragement. Struggling little Meetings abound, held together in a web of traditionalism and habituated duty. Conditions may appear bleak for the Society of Friends, nevertheless fire of hope flickers. I
would fan it into flame. Pasternak wrote to sustain this kind of hope:

Don't sleep, don't sleep, keep working,
Don't cease work for one hour:
Don't sleep, fight off this drowsing,
Like airmen, like a star;
Don't sleep, ooh don't sleep, artist:
Above your slumbers climb -
Eternity's proud hostage
And prisoner of time!

During World War II and shortly thereafter we began to ask hard questions about our Quaker heritage. We looked for new ways to be gathered together as a people of God proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ in a world where easy assurances and cheap victories no longer satisfied. My own awareness that a central standard for Quakers might be raised again began in 1947 with the first of a series of conferences of evangelical Friends. That was twenty-five years ago and I tell you my hope burns brighter than ever.

II. Things We’ve Got Going for Us

Actually, we Quakers have some good things going for us. Think about them. We have some exciting ancestors. Maybe we head off on tangents so easily because they set a high standard for us. Even caricatures and distortions of that heritage give backhanded testimony to how explosive and apostolic our fathers in the faith were. Let’s just hope they don’t make a movie of Jan De Hartog’s Peaceable Kingdom. That would be harder to live with than Quaker Oats. We have honored our ancestors, I suppose. We have published their journals and kept their message before succeeding generations. Being dead they yet speak. Consider Pierre Lacout, the French monk who became a Quaker. He called Fox’s Journal, “a perpetual hymn of praise to the power of God.” (Sigtuna, Sweden, FWCC, 1970.)

Because we are so small numerically, it does us good occasionally to realize that our ancestors were distinguished, at least. Unless we are content to bask in the Christian glory of their hard won spiritual battles, however, we had better do more than write their memoirs. Let’s discover where they got their fire.

Another thing we have going for us is a good audience. What a day to preach peace! The immorality of the war in Southeast Asia is everywhere sensed, especially among the young. A Christian student at
Reed College said, “Of course, all Reed students are pacifists; most need to become Christian.” You ministers sometimes soft-pedal teaching on peace lest it turns people off before you can get them converted and into the church. There is an openness now to putting peace and holiness together, where they belong. Also, people want more participation in worship. Pretty soon a whole generation will have been television educated. They are receptive to worship in which many voices are heard rather than one. We have not cornered this market, by any means, as witness the emergence of new forms of ministry such as lay witness evangelism and Bible study groups. Again, Quaker fires are rekindled from off the altar of other groups.

Wouldn’t you think, too, that we have a certain attitude of contribution among us which is a healthy sign of renewal? We are not pretending everything is in order. We have accepted the judgment of God upon our house. “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” said Jesus, “for they shall see God.” The Friends World Committee, American Section, is arranging conferences to discuss in depth doctrinal differences. We are no longer hushing them up for the sake of churchmanship.

Quakers have a growing edge. Oh, I know — we have a dying edge, too: But look at our growth. Nearly a fourth of the world’s Quakers are non-white. The earlier work of missionaries has paid off in newer Yearly Meetings such as East Africa, Alaska and Central America. We are learning how to build up the church in the inner-city. There is a spiritual quickening among our young people. At George Fox College we have more students called into full-time ministry than ever before. Bible courses were never more popular. The Quaker Theological Discussion Group elicits continued interest.

Another thing, we have facilities for persuasion. Think of the colleges and schools, the books and magazines which are available to the public and even a Quaker president. We can reach the ear of Congressmen and other political leaders and, in fact, have to beware of manipulation, so well entrenched are we in public affairs. On the local scene our churches are well respected with a reputation for integrity and compassion and a ready spirit to cooperate with other Christian groups in evangelistic endeavor.

We are pretty well practiced in the art of conflict resolution, also, both through our efforts to provide mediatorship among nations as in the Arab-Israeli conflict and within the local Meeting by our Quaker business procedures. The old query reads, “When differences arise do you make an effort to end them speedily?” Well, we may not be re-
solving differences speedily, much as they have dragged out the last several decades, but at least we are not tearing up the house of God in the process.

Finally, God has given us something to say and things to do in his kingdom. We bear this as a deep conviction. We may lack a common language but we share a common urgency to witness. We do consider ourselves to be a people called out and we do seek to be faithful to the leadership of the Holy Spirit in that calling. We want to speak our message clearly.

III. Preparing to Make Our Witness Clearer

At St. Louis, Dean Freiday, author of Barclay’s Apology in Modern English, observed that we look at our heritage from different perspectives. A common “hermeneutic” may be needed, he said, for our Quaker sources as well as our biblical ones.

In any case, it is necessary to learn who we are now if we are to become a movement instead of a collection of artifacts from the past. There are several ways this can be done. One is to read the current literature. Instead of subscribing to the Upper Room for devotional use, why not Fruit of the Vine? Read The Evangelical Friend as well as Quaker Life. Choose Quaker speakers as evangelists and conference leaders. How about devoting three months each year for an adult elective class on “Quakers Today.” This kind of class has proved profitable where I’ve seen it tried. Typical responses are: “Oh, I didn’t realize there were that many Quakers in Alaska,” or “maybe we should send some of our young people to their summer camp,” or “I would like to visit another Yearly Meeting.”

A third thing we can do is participate by Yearly Meetings in the Friends World Committee for Consultation. I know some of you indulge the FWCC as a plaything for ecumenical type Quakers with time and money on their hands or consider it a religious form of British colonialism; each of these caricatures contains a bit of truth, but also much error. Past is past. Actually, we have no world Friends Church and don’t see one shaping up immediately. But why not every Yearly Meeting take its full working representation and make the FWCC truly consultative for all Quakers and not just to provide window dressing for the “company Quaker,” so to speak. This would be an act of faith in the systematic wholeness which Everett Cattell spoke of at St. Louis.

We had enough confidence in each other to delegate secretarial
functions to the Friends World Committee, American Section, for setting up the conferences on faith and life, why not extend that confidence to a world-wide representative effort at the highest level of cooperation possible. Let us seek the most effective symbiosis by which we can find mutuality of respect, and even support, and minimize the canceling out effects which have too often marked diverse operation of service and mission in our world?

Such efforts cost money and I can hear finance chairmen allowing as to how the money might better be spent supporting something else. In the light of our “population zero” achievement, dubious distinction for any Christian group, we might well spend some money in serious confrontation and dialogue on objectives and global strategy. Faith takes risks. And time: “Though the vision tarry,” wrote Habakkuk, “wait for it.” Take those risks for the sake of a clearer witness to the gospel. We do a better job when our tools are sharp and in good repair. Let’s face it, our corporate church has been dulled.

Let’s get rid of dilletantism, avoid creating an international “jet-set” of elite Quakers whose effectiveness we undercut by apathy and indifference. Let’s prepare the ground for sowing our message of Christ.

In this way and in other inter-Yearly Meeting endeavors, we sign up for the future expressing together our hopes. It’s like a family gathering after there’s been fussing followed by studied indifference. There is a better day ahead.

If we hope the Society of Friends can be better structured, less muted in its Christian witness, more effective in its ministry of evangelism and reconciliation than it is now, then we will observe certain ground rules which mark our confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit. Let’s draw our circles in pencil and not in ink. Presently in the United States there are three circles: Friends United Meeting, Friends General Conference, and Evangelical Friends Alliance. They intersect sometimes clearly, sometimes blurred, sometimes compatibly, sometimes incompatibly. Let’s agree these are useful structures now but may not be later. Secondly, let’s extend courtesy to each other, praying for each other more than we criticize. The Holy Spirit can make the dry bones of Quakerdom live in one part of the country as well as another. Let’s pray for our restoration and not breathe anathemas upon each others’ heads.

Thirdly, let’s play all the innings. Now, I respect Ohio Yearly Meeting (Damascus) but I do wish they hadn’t renamed the Yearly Meeting “Evangelical Church, Eastern Region.” I understand their
desire to take a positive evangelical stand, to make a clear witness. I hope they will say, "Look, we didn't really mean to imply others aren't evangelical." I hope they will show by their love they are still in the ball game although they changed the name of our league.

IV. Preparing to Speak a Common Language

Delbert Replogle once told me he thought there should be a glossary of Quaker terms. Perhaps we need a chart of equivalences, too, for example, "All minds are clear" equals "The Lord led us." Does singing "washed in the blood of the Lamb" equal "C'um ba ya"? It is a time of testing for all religious rhetoric. The Quaker movement tacks somewhat uncertainly between "Jesus is cool, man" and "Is thee clear?"

Dean Freiday insisted we ought to develop a common hermeneutic to look at Quaker texts in the same way. In fact, although a glossary may be helpful, common mastery of the texts is better. We have not been using the same texts. I hope our biblical scholars get together and take a look at the kinds of materials they read which form the basis for assumptions about the biblical authority. Hugh Barbour and I will contribute our modest effort to the stabilizing of Quaker texts with the publication next fall of a Quaker source book. If you will indulge me a commercial on its behalf I suggest usage of this and other Quaker literature such as the journals of George Fox and John Woolman and Barclay's Apology. Quaker students at the Quaker colleges and in adult elective classes in Sunday Schools across the land can help prepare us to speak a common language.

The meetings we go to are texts in the broadest sense, too. How many Quaker churches participate in the Kennedy School for Evangelism, for example? Do your young people support Inter-Varsity or Campus Crusade? The fact is, we are all ecumenical, even the most die-hard opponents of organic ecumenicity. In fact, we are so ecumenical that I sometimes wonder how we can raise up a standard of Quaker life at all. How about a moratorium on certain ecumenical connections in an effort to develop Quaker ecumenicity? I don't object to buying a pastor a round-trip ticket to Florida to attend the Kennedy School on Evangelism. But I wonder if Meetings would appropriate the same amount of money to send him to a Quaker mission field or to another Yearly Meeting. If we do all the buying at the super market aren't we really closing down the family store? A number of Quaker young people will be attending Explo '72. Does advertising make the difference
or are there other reasons why you won’t send him to a youth camp in a neighboring Yearly Meeting or to a leadership conference of all Quaker youth? This is looking at the texts. We will speak the common language when we know who we are through sharing similar input from the world around us.

Granted a priority of love and action it is still true that prophecy is the great gift by which the gospel is made known. This means words and propositions. Bear with me while I philosophize. It is important to understand how thought systems change and require new packaging. The three ways of knowing are sense perception, reasoning, and intuition. Generally speaking, the last century and a half has witnessed a dominance of the rational over the other modes of knowing. I say this in spite of the technological revolution which has refined man’s sensory experience through machine and the electronic extension of his senses. Let me illustrate this by talking about demon possession. Do you agree with me in equating demon possession with irrational behavior of a certain type? That is, you surmise demon possession can occur more readily in cases where intuition is trusted rather than reasoning or sense perception. Like in a “backward” foreign or counterculture. Wouldn’t you say, though, that a corporation full of men in business suits and proper sideburns might be just as demonic as a cult leader holding hypnotic spells over his devotees? Or that the Pentagon chapel might be a temple of Baal? Some black militants have claimed universities are violent by nature because they enable people neatly to construct artificial systems of life which feed on exploitation. Without buying their gospel of counter-violence, they do make a point. If the Christian gospel is dismissed as obsolete, isn’t this demonic?

In Romans 6, the Apostle Paul tells us to yield our bodies as instruments of righteousness rather than instruments of unrighteousness. By reasoning men glorify God or conspire against him. Augustine said, “The senses are the messengers of God.” But they serve as instruments of the devil in providing avenues to sin. By intuition one may be an instrument in the salvation of his neighbor and another by intuition engages in cult murder of his neighbor. What is “weird” depends on your perspective.

I would not disparage theology but lift it out in the open and recognize it for what it is, an effort to sort out in words a consistent statement of what God is doing. At its best, reason enhances the image of God in man, putting him in the best light by showing how things hang together. At its demonic worst, reason builds its own temples creating God in
man’s own likeness. The demon always whispers, “Has God said?” Simone Weil compared the Trojan War with twentieth century wars. In the Trojan War, both armies fought in a moral void motivated by “symbols without content” in “the form of gods and myths.” In contrast, in the twentieth century “we shed blood for high sounding words spelled out in capital letters. We seek to impart content to them by destroying other men who believe in enemy-words, also in capital letters.”

The existentialists have pulled the temples of reason down. Thank God for this. Sartre is correct when he says there is no substitute for God, no heaven full of luminous ideas to provide “values or (commands) which will justify our conduct.” Ethics without God is impossible.

When George Fox referred to “notions” in religion he referred to having a head knowledge without a heart knowledge of God. Seventeenth century Quakers protested putting religious experiences into neat rationalistic packages. They were existential — this accounts in part for our Quaker reluctance to dogmatize. Dogmatic religion places an inordinate stress on reason, leading to reactionary counter rationalistic systems. These counter systems are sometimes masked by diffused generalities such as “that of God in every man” which hide naturalistic theories of man. Quietism in the Quaker experience arose as a combination of rationalistic and intuitive approaches which equated the carnal with the sensory. (You know, Whittier’s “let sense be dumb.” Pentecost says let sense be full!) This resulted in a kind of dogmatic naturalism in company with certain rituals of mysticism. The philosophical concomitants to our scientific revolution have forced us to examine how words are used as symbols. When we look at language we ask deep questions. For example do we just play word games in worship? Sounds and squiggles are carriers of meaning without being meaning itself. We get the sensation of standing on a street corner listening to a conversation in an unknown tongue. In groping for better ways to talk of God we have rediscovered metaphor and all across our country preaching styles and other forms of religious address are changing. Television has awakened perceptual and diminished conceptual powers in human understanding. The existential mood of our times has further freed men from bondage to doctrines of secular determinism and psychological election.

We can exult with the Psalmist, “This is the Lord’s doing and marvelous in our eyes.” (Psalm 118:23.)
We clap our hands over our mouths as the Tower of Babel falls at our feet. But out of the silence of a dying order new speech comes. We find better carriers of meaning. Consider the monumental efforts of Kenneth Taylor on behalf of the *Living Bible*. Have you ever had the feeling that words like “Quakerism,” “justification,” or “goodness,” or “the plan of salvation” don’t say what they used to say? Or what they ought to say? Where do meanings come from? Are words simply conventional noises? So the skeptics say, and reduce us to animals growling for food and space on a shrinking planet.

You see, we are driven to knocking at the door of God. Driven to silence. To listening to the Lord. To Pentecost. That is why the sources are so important. That’s why it is important for us to both read the earth right and read the Bible correctly.

Get rid of the rationalist idols which either made a god of words or muted the Good News of God. Do not pen God into a system called “Quakerism” or “the plan of salvation,” or “beloved Community.” There is no heaven full of prototype words nor are we simply free to coin them as we please and shout loud enough to make our sounds and squiggles become conventional. The forms of our words come from the earth, from what is and happens in things and people. The meanings come from God. Words make good signs but poor houses. God gives us all words, and especially The Word, who was made flesh and dwelt among us and the Bible which testifies truly about him.

Since 1940 the Friends United Meeting has tried to provide a common theological statement to the world. The 1945 Discipline did not receive common acceptance and consensus has proceeded on the basis of policy and precedent. The independent Yearly Meetings of Kansas, Northwest, Ohio and Rocky Mountain have reached toward a common affirmation of faith in their 1965 statements which basically refer to the 1887 Richmond Declaration of Faith. The Proposed Affirmation of Faith and Life of the Friends United Meeting has come under criticism for containing ambiguities. Some fear any kind of “creedalism” which any formally approved statement seems to imply. Others, more theologically trained, deplore the lack of logical entailment in the propositions and the lack of careful scriptural explication. At a recent General Board meeting the proposed Affirmation did not gain united support. The Board referred it to the Spiritual Life Committee for any further development.

It is not my intention here to write a declaration of faith but to insist that one can and should be written. A Declaration of Faith puts into
vernacular speech the things we believe, it pools our rhetoric in accordance with biblical truth. It’s a loving thing to state clearly what we believe so that others may know. Do you see how important it is, then, that we talk to each other, read the sources together, spend our money sending our youth to conferences together, praying together? We are engaged in theological redefinition from Maine to California, through the Quaker Theological Discussion Group, through knots of young men who talk theology late at night in colleges and seminars. Through regional Faith and Life Conferences. Is it obstinance and unfaithfulness to the Lord which keeps us from a common declaration? Perhaps to some extent. It is also the presence of informal and ill-defined theologies, product of individual and group study, influenced by Sunday School quarterlies read, Bible commentaries chosen, college courses in Bible and Quakerism, and the particular pattern of personal Bible study. Add to this the way life has ruffled us and secondary authority betrayed us. To inventory the radio and TV programs listened to, books and magazines read, the character and theological position of those with whom we associate will go far in explaining how we affirm our knowledge of God. Our absence of a consuming world vision to be a people of God has made us vulnerable to diverse winds of doctrine (from Zen to Eckankar) even as it has preserved us from overt dogmatism. We have found safety in numbers all right, but not our own flock.

We do not have to consider rhetoric as a “device” to recognize how important is common language for stating our message. So I ask you to shed old assumptions drawn from poor science. Examine the molders of your opinions. Find the Bible fresh by regular, common use of a modern version (not a paraphrase) for Sunday School classes, worship, home study, and memorization. Adopt more “functional” styles of language geared to the perceptivity of persons in a culture free from the jargon of conceptual speech with its deductive subtleties. Speak more in verbs and less in nouns. We need regular language routes, well marked, if we are to travel to a destination without endlessly floundering, but these routes can be re-engineered, and posted with new markers. What’s important is accurate pointing toward the One who summons us and the conditions of our travel to Him.

Too long we have let the Devil divide and conquer, separating mind and body, church and state, private and public morality, words and deeds. To yield our bodies as instruments of righteousness rather than unrighteousness is to medicate a suffering person, to speak truly to a
sinning person of the forgiveness of God is to yield our bodies righteous-
ly. Both our hands and our mouths declare God. Of the early church
Luke wrote, "All whose faith had drawn them together held everything
in common." Words like money and college credit are stored energy.
A united declaration of faith is like a united budget. They correlate,
wouldn't you say?

In common speech our bodies beat in rhythm together, although we
stand apart in space. But we are far from this apostolic pattern if one
group of Friends prays before the White House in a peace vigil and an-
other group denounces this as communist inspired. With common
speech the various gifts of the Spirit can be honored and respected;
without a common language our actions become provincial, competitive,
and less subject to the corporate test of faithfulness to Christ.

V. Clarifying Our Message

The medieval philosopher, Anselm, rightly approached theology
through prayer. Reflecting on how to understand what one believes
(that is, to find the appropriate speech he prayed thus: "Do thou, O
Lord my God, teach my heart where and how to seek thee, where and
how to find thee." 4

Although not quite in as existential fashion, Robert Barclay began
his Apology with a recognition of the revelational character of our
knowledge of God. And he quoted John 17:3 which reads (NEB) "This
is eternal life: to know thee who alone art truly God and Jesus Christ
whom thou hast sent."

And that verse leads me to try to clarify how we speak about Christ.
Quakers can really argue over what is, curiously, a strong and dis-
tinguishing teaching. Is it apostasy and moral rebellion? Sometimes.
Part of our problem, however, comes from the distortions to our
language-culture. Rationalist distortions produced Jeffersonian deists,
Boston Unitarians and Hicksite Quakers. These distortions also pro-
duced counterbalancing fundamentalists a century later. And humanists.
Christ became the religious name for a kind of interiorized quality being
presumed to have some sort of autonomous existence. Mysticism
among Quakers held out a spiritual line of defense against the full
secularizing force of rationalism until psychology removed the word
"Christ" from the list of useful names for interior processes of the mind.
The liberal Quaker clung to the word Christ for its universal connota-
tions, buttressing his weakened fortress by linkages with the world's
religions. Faced with the scandal of Jesus Christ’s particularity he had two options: praising Jesus as a good man who shared and exhibited goodness (which he assumed existed as some sort of natural law) or he rediscovers something about Christ as the Word of God, the definer of qualities, the judge over man’s systems, the upholder of stars. He can listen to Paul Rees, “apart from Christ religion is the last stronghold of human pride.” Or he can realize what Huxley did not, that Teilhard de Chardin is talking about Jesus Christ of Nazareth and Golgotha when he writes: “the generating principle of our unification is not finally to be found in the single contemplation of the same truth or in the single desire awakened by something, but in the single attraction exercised by the same Someone.”

There is no existant thing called “the natural light” as Fox said, there is only the sun and the Son. By the words “the light” we convey what Jesus Christ does in the universe and with people. It’s a good metaphor, for it speaks of needed and basic energy, of showing where to go, of penetration, of growth. When we talk about Christ, who then are we talking about? Well, rationally speaking, he is the universalizing Word, the one “in whom all things consist,” as Paul says. He is what the Greeks hunted for in the word “Logos.” In Platonic language Christ is the reality which opinions shadow, the priestly sacrifice which all human religions copy, however imperfectly. (Note the book of Hebrews.)

But the Word was made flesh. This is so central. We need not flounder in a sea of synonyms or drown in waves of metaphor. Words like light, Lord, priest, son, captain, lamb, and elder brother all point to a person, to happenings as verifiable as the Apollo 16 moonshot. So we understand who Christ is. Jesus of Nazareth. Messiah to the Jews, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified, buried, risen. People wouldn’t boggle at Christ’s resurrection or our own if they could shuck off the rationalist idols which have “Nature” running an ecological theater and pre-determined qualities authorizing the possible. It’s God’s world! As Jesus said to the disciple after his resurrection, “Be not faithless, but believing!” (John 20:27)

It’s true we cannot, like Thomas, place our hands into the wounds of Jesus. We receive the sense perceptions secondhand as far as Galilee and Golgotha are concerned. We take their word for it, believing as the beloved John said, that the testimony is true.

A Friend wrote me recently, disturbed at what he called the absolutizing of Christ by the evangelicals. This creates a barrier to
Quaker fellowship, he thought, inasmuch as not all Quakers believe in Christ. But then he turned around and virtually demanded all Quakers subscribe to peace, the *sine qua non* of our corporateness. I like his emphasis on peace, but, really now, is it better to absolute the word peace? Words function according to stipulated or imputed meanings. Until we know whose peace we are talking about we won’t know whether it is Nixon’s automated air war supported by Asian soldiers or acts of non-resistance toward all men as commanded and made possible by Christ. I’m glad he signed the letter, “peace in Christ.” He may be ticked off at people who say “Lord, Lord,” but don’t do what Christ said. If so, he should say, let’s make the actions of our hands and our mouths and our typewriters conform to who Christ is and what he tells us of God’s will. This state of things we call peace.

We’ve talked about Christ rationally understood and empirically understood, that is, by sense perception. Obviously, Christians in general and particularly Quakers understand more. We know Christ inwardly. He comes to us in many ways, at a youth camp, in a revival meeting, in a solitary walk, in home conversation, in reading of scripture. Sometime, somehow, through one means or another, Christ no longer looms as a figure out of the past, or the personification of concepts in a game of Scrabble called religion. He is immediately known.

At his ascension Jesus gave us his promise, the coming of his Holy Spirit. Intuitively, Christ comes to us in ways which we witness but cannot prove save in obedience to Christ as the Son of God who has become my Saviour. His Spirit bears witness with my spirit. Words cannot describe the ecstasy of believing, can they? Our senses now see God in the world everywhere, our reason brings all thoughts under subjection to Christ and sees the interrelatedness of things not as secular election or random selection but as a hymn of creation. We are new creatures in Christ.

Some men intuit better than they reason: they should learn how to think more clearly. Others reason better than they intuit: let them see visions and dream dreams! In most of us our senses have been blunted by the images we devise to impose our presence upon another’s space. For some of us the theologies of truth are more carefully worked out than the theologies of love. For others obedience is disciplined and clear. We know in part. I ask you, my fellow Quakers, in an hour of our opportunity let us speak in common terms, with our bodies completely yielded to the good news of Jesus Christ. Let no subtle
pride cause us to mute the Name which is above all names, before whom men and nations bow. Let the Holy Spirit take the things of Christ and make them known. Not for us the profanity of demigods, material or alphabetical.

How Christ is fully God and fully man remains a mystery. But it is the mystery like a story unfolding, like a mountain climb revealing greater and greater grandeur. It is the mystery of life showing through the screen of death. Oh, God, one day your cosmos will be healed, your garden restored! We now live in the outskirts of New Jerusalem. How can we keep silent about your annointed one and not tell of his victories? This lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world?

Do we need a simple working statement of what Friends believe about Christ? Try this:

**Question**
Who is Jesus Christ?

**Answer**
Well, Jesus of Nazareth in whom God showed himself in a special way to mankind. By the crucifixion of Christ he suffered with us and for us. In Jesus' death and resurrection God's Spirit gets hold of me and makes me the kind of person God wants me to be. Furthermore, I am assured of a continued, and meaningful personal existence beyond death.

In addition to differences over the person and work of Christ, differences over the place and meaning of the scriptures were evident at St. Louis. To use the same three-fold division, intuition, sense perception and reason, let's examine how Quakers look at scriptures. Almost all Quakers give quite a bit of credence to intuition and assume that scriptures are means of enlightenment used by the Holy Spirit to instruct. Most Quakers would agree that scriptures give a true testimony of those who witnessed certain acts of God. They are not forgeries or deliberate fictions. As Stanley Brown said at St. Louis, "Scripture is the touch point of experience rather than my experience the touch point of Scripture." At the heart of major differences concerning the scripture lie differing assumptions of reason. If on the basis of a world-view someone thinks miracles are not possible and the resurrection couldn't have occurred, then obviously one has to say that the apostles meant well but being pre-scientific they didn't quite understand what they were talking about. Our Quaker position historically has been that the scriptures are the outward test of faith and practice, the divinely authorized record. They reliably relate God's revelation to man. Perhaps our greatest argument concern the "exclusive" claims of scripture in relationship to inspired utterances after the Canon was closed. This
stems from our view that the same spirit which gave forth the scriptures interprets them to man. The unity and truth as found in the Quaker message is an antidote to the idolotry of human systems of thought without becoming narrowly bibliolotrous — without shutting off all other means of communication from God to man save the scriptures. Our Bible is not the Koran.

It may be helpful for us to remember that the scriptures are included in the things which the Holy Spirit revealed and it maintains character with them. This keeps tradition from becoming a tyrannical power play in the hands of the church and makes it embody the true Catholic principle of the presence of Christ with his church through his spirit so that the things of God can be known truly and effectively and applied to specific living situations with the same force and meaning as the scriptural principles which they embody.

What can we say to the one who requires of us a straightforward statement about the Bible? Try this:

**Question**
What about the scriptures?

**Answer**
In a greater and different way than other writings, the Bible relates the special acts of God and especially those which concern Jesus Christ. Scriptures do not tell us everything but what they do tell us is true. We test belief and morality by the standard God has shown us in the Bible. Because the scriptures are written in human speech I don’t always understand them but then I won’t resort to word games to make them mean anything I want them to. When I most truly sense God’s spirit within me I find myself saying yes to what the Bible teaches.

Let’s look at the word church. I got myself into hot water with some people for suggesting we abandon the term Society of Friends in favor of a simpler designation, Friends Church. Inasmuch as the term Society of Friends didn’t come into common usage until more than a hundred years after the beginning of the movement I thought it might have run its course and that we could more firmly identify our goals and objectives by the use of the term church. I persist in that view. Why such vigorous objection? Apparently because of associations which the name brings. I hope that is all. I hope it isn’t a reflection of our feelings that there is something un-Christian about the church or that Quakers are post-Christian, or other such nonsense.

Again, let’s ask ourselves about how words are used. Rationally, the church is the way Christians connect, a universal term for our togetherness. Empirically, the church refers to believers banded together as the highest visible order of God’s community in a given space
and time. Our seventeenth century forefathers repudiated an “invisible church.” Rightly so. The sensed church is that grouping of Christians in familiar places and times, that is, places we can see, hear, touch, taste (at Quarterly Meeting) and smell. Yes, smell. I am sure many of us who squirmed on varnished benches on a hot summer day in an old meeting house retain familiar olfactory memories which we associate with the word church.

Intuitively, the church is the body of Christ into which one is baptized by the Holy Spirit. It is the mystical union of all the people of God, that awesome, powerful sense of having come home. The Church is God’s corporation where love and personal worth constitute the stock for the world’s market. The underground church reminds us of what the word “brotherhood” once meant and how early Christians were known by their love. This spirit is captured by Art Gish and his brothers in the “Post-American” and by a variety of communal activities aimed at making actual the common life in Christ.

Question
How do we define the church?

Answer
Church is a collective word for people who are gathered of God through faith in Jesus Christ and who share their lives and witness together as an affirmation of what God is doing in the world. In its words and actions the church doesn’t always understand everything about God but it listens. The Holy Spirit teaches people how to love in Jesus’ way and to seek his truth. Because people are limited in energy and understanding the church clusters around the ways of thinking and acting which represent the highest consensus of those who are able to communicate with one another and share in the things of God.

Rationally, salvation is the ideal conformity of individuals and groups to God’s plan of being. We give an unclear message, we Quakers. The word denotes relationship with God. Empirically it is the demonstrated deliverance of individuals and groups from the guilt, effects, and fear of sin through faith in Jesus Christ. Moral change occurs. Intuitively, salvation is the individual’s own certainty of his deliverance from sin and its effects through faith in Jesus Christ. It is the leap of faith which one lays claim to through and even beyond all evidence. Whether one comes to this point through the reading of scripture, listening to a sermon, reading devotional literature, or a convincing argument of a friend logically presented, the leap of faith is there. It’s “heart knowledge.” And we Quakers may thank the existentialist movement for making lots of people dare to take that leap of faith. Men know themselves to be personally and corporately participants in evil and they’re getting
sick of it. Call it conviction if you will. But they are bound up with bad news — on TV, at the movies, and in the quiet of the evening in their homes.

On this matter of the leap of faith, I think a few words are needed, partly because Francis Schaeffer has stressed the “God who is there” as a supposed alternative to the horrid subjectivism implicit in existential philosophy and religion. Really now, the word “there” is no more difficult than the word “here.” “Here” and “there” both signify direction. A microcosm is as marvelous as the macrocosm. God who is in here as we say “in my heart” is as big and powerful as the God who is running the cosmos. Now I know what Schaeffer means. God is not simply an extension of my person and he doesn’t have to come and ask me who he is and what to do. But you see we can secularize “there” as well as “here.” “Nature tells us” is a secularized “there” type of sentence. “Super ego” is a secularized phrase of inward reference. It takes a leap of faith to affirm God. It breaks my pride to be called a sinner. We squirm into duty or into cheap grace (fictional salvation) to avoid the call to salvation, to holiness. Writes Thomas Morton, “the sanctity of Christian life is based not on love of an abstract law but on love of the living God, a divine person, Jesus Christ, the incarnate word of God, who has redeemed us and delivered us from the darkness of sin. And it is based also on the love of our brothers in Christ. Hence our moral life is not legalistic, not a mere matter of fidelity to duty, it is above all a matter of personal gratitude, of love and of praise.”

Listening to the earth and reading the Bible together may help us recover sensitivity for the things divine. Why do we talk about spiritual ears and eyes? Why not spiritual noses, or thumbs, or hands? Jesus said, “having ears they hear not” — he didn’t tell us to switch to the other pair. Don’t believe in nature; believe in God. Our speech patterns betray our having reached a truce with the devil. He gets nature and the church gets grace. Do we wish to be heard today? Then let the earth be the Lord’s. Christ stands both as Lord of creation and my Saviour from sin.

Temptation to aesthetic pride is no greater than the temptation to false spirituality (ranters right or left) or to intellectual pride. Executives, technicians or artists, our bodies can be used as instruments of righteousness or instruments of unrighteousness.

Question
What about salvation?
Answer
Salvation then is a word to describe people’s experience of victory over the sin which would destroy their lives in relationship to God. It includes accepting God’s forgiveness for our sins and receiving the Holy Spirit to do his will in respect to others. This relationship may be interrupted by death but never terminated.

VI. Mind Your Calling

In summary, I have suggested St. Louis marked a point of new responsibility for the Friends Church. In the light of this meeting and subsequent meetings aimed at achieving at least a symbiotic relationship among Friends groups certain issues call for resolution. I chalked up some things we’ve got going for us: exciting ancestors, an attentive audience, evidence of contribution among us, a growing edge, facilities for persuasion, practice in conflict resolution, and some important things to say to the world.

To speak our message clearer I suggested we learn who we are, that we resist antiquarianism and resolutely sign up for future participation, more unified than presently, in the body of Christ. I suggest we observe ground rules in courtesy to one another as we sort out our priorities and define our faith with greater corporate clarity.

To speak a common language I asked us to examine the texts we use, biblical, Quaker, contemporary, and how we read them. I tried to show something of the language revolution which is occurring and how the present philosophic mood regarding meaning and life really help us understand which differences are semantic and which are not. Hopefully by pooling our rhetoric and measuring speech by God’s revelation in the scriptures and in the earth we will be able to affirm our Christian faith world-wide in greater unity and with greater faithfulness. I illustrated how the ways of knowing — sensing, reasoning, intuiting — function to convey meaning about doctrines of Christ, scripture, church and salvation.

In his sermon “The Lamb’s War against the Man of Sin” James Nayler wrote, “He that preaches the Kingdom of Christ in words, without victory, is the thief that goes before Christ. So take heed that your own words do not condemn you, but mind your calling and how you have answered.”

How to mind that calling? Let me conclude with a few particular actions which would seem to be entailed by what I’ve said.

1. Local elders could discuss priorities like whether spending money on Basic Youth Conflicts is more important than aid to
Bangladesh, or whether Explo ‘72 is more important than a world-wide conference of Quaker youth to discuss peace and holiness.

2. Delegates who attend regional Faith and Life conferences could spend some time looking at the language sub-cultures which affect choice of words, examining denotations and connotations.

3. We could all agree to read the Bible more, choosing a modern version.

4. *Quaker Life* could sponsor a contest for new hymns and new queries, like, “Do you Quakers resist being fobbed off as quaint?”

5. Adult elective Sunday School classes on Quaker themes could occur regularly. One could be “Quaker lingo and what it means.” Another, “Hang-ups about the authority of scripture.” Another, “Demonstrations and Witnessing, Which and When?”

6. Preachers can preach about peace and peace workers can lead seminars on holiness.

7. Yearly meetings can support the Faith and Life Conference financially so that wealth is not a selection factor. We can put the delegates on the agenda at Yearly Meeting time.

8. Apologetic Quakers and non-Christian Quakers can take a hard look at the Quaker sources — and at themselves.

9. We can apply reality therapy to the structure: put it to work where it will, change it where it won’t.

10. We can keep praying and working for the largest effective level of corporate unity, world-wide.

11. Elders can encourage dedicated youth with gifts in the ministry to use those gifts in the Friends Church.

12. Yearly Meetings can support the London Conference on Mission and Service (January, 1973) so conflicts can be resolved and true symbiosis occur.

13. All Yearly Meetings could decide to make the Friends World Committee or some similar body, truly representative and consultative as a step toward a unity which is not now possible and hardly foreseeable.

14. We can ask the Holy Spirit to touch our own hearts now and kindle within us a fire which cannot be quenched.

15. Friends United Meeting and the Evangelical Friends Alliance, at least, could mobilize for a ministry to the cities of the world, (this is Ben Brantingham’s dream) utilizing all forms of ministry in response to need.

16. We can sponsor some new colonies as a hedge against the death
of western civilization and as models of Christian brotherhood in
the midst of the internecine struggle of competing world empires —
international communities to keep the lamp burning, as it were.

17. We can revitalize worship, using all the senses and their aesthetic
expressions (music, poetry, art, drama) instead of trying to stamp
out carnality by stifling or vulgarizing them.

18. We can start some new missionary activity, or strengthen present
mission fields.

Enough. To help us mind our calling hear now the words concerning
the early church, the explicit text for what has thus far been said:

(Acts 2:14-21 New English Bible)

But Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and addressed them:
‘Fellow Jews, and all you who live in Jerusalem, mark this and give me a
hearing. These men are not drunk, as you imagine; for it is only nine in
the morning. No, this is what the prophet spoke of: “God says, ‘This will
happen in the last days: I will pour out upon everyone a portion of my
spirit; and your sons and daughters shall prophesy; your young men shall see
visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Yes, I will endue even my
slaves, both men and women, with a portion of my spirit, and they shall
prophesy. And I will show portents in the sky above, and signs on the
earth below — blood and fire and drifting smoke.’ The sun shall be turned
to darkness, and the moon to blood, before that great, resplendent day, the
day of the Lord, shall come. And then, everyone who invokes the name of
the Lord shall be saved.’

“Blood and fire and drifting smoke,”
Forecast of the world’s weather.
But wind leaped a fence, blew
Open a door, filled the house.
Curtains trembled. “Who’s there?” creaked
The floor. The windows all rattled
The answer, “He’s here! Whoever
can hear, throw off the night’s cloak!”

Come on out! Come on! Why
Drapes and walls, you sleeping folk.
On this beautiful day? Wouldn’t you rather
Wake up? It’s five minutes ‘til nine!”

The kids came alive, “Hey, He’s here!”
“Get up, Dad, what a great morning!”
And Mom banged the kitchen pans. With her
Breakfast commotion the neighbors awoke.

Inflamed now with imploding wind
We looked, we laughed, we loved.
Each heard the language the other spoke.
Man; woman; boy; girl: together.
“Blood and fire and drifting smoke,”
Forecast of the world’s weather.
But we shouted Yes to God, to ourselves,
To neighbors, the day the wind called.
“He's here; come on out,
Come on... He's here!”

—Arthur O. Roberts
(The Banner, July 2, 1972)

FOOTNOTES

5. Lecture, George Fox College, April 10, 1972.
7. Life of Holiness, Doubleday pb., 1964, p. 64.
DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

I. INTRODUCTION

1. After studying Arthur Roberts’ Lecture you will receive further perspective by reading WHAT FUTURE FOR FRIENDS – the report of the St. Louis Conference, a gathering of Concerned Friends from all Yearly Meetings in North America which considered those things they hold in common, the basis of their differences, and the future of Friends as a united body.

2. What does Arthur Roberts mean by “patchwork Quakerism”; “mutually supporting symbiosis among Friends”; “systematic wholeness?” Which type of relationship between Friends groups do you think is possible or preferable?

PART II. THINGS WE HAVE GOT GOING FOR US

1. How can we get out from under the traditional image of Quaker “goodness” and discover the Fire that ignited those early Quakers and which can ignite new fires of “goodness” and salvation in the world today?

2. Do you believe, as Arthur Roberts says, “there is among Quakers an openness to putting peace and holiness together?” Can one exist without the other?

3. How can we distinguish between the continuity of the true values of past Quakerism and dead traditional forms? between innovative action and petty concerns? What are our guidelines?

PART III. PREPARING TO MAKE OUR WITNESS CLEARER

1. Beginning with your own Meeting, then moving to larger bodies of Quakers, suggest practical ways we can make a more dynamic impact on our changing culture with its problems? Is our own faith and ethic being changed to adapt to the new culture, or are Quakers helping in shaping that culture towards the kingdom of God on earth?

2. In what areas do Friends General Conference, Friends United Meeting, Evangelical Friends Alliance overlap, and in what areas can they together forward a ministry of evangelism, reconciliation, healing, fellowship? Is there similarity in their objectives?
PART IV. PREPARING TO SPEAK A COMMON LANGUAGE

1. Discuss ways to break down automatic attitudes towards branches of Quakerism other than our own.

2. Give understanding and feeling content to the following Quaker phrases inherited from the past –
   - beloved community
   - sense of the meeting
   - gathered meeting
   - that of God in every man
   - Jesus Christ Lord and Saviour
   - Inner Light
   - sinful man
   - salvation

   Are these words symbols without meaning today?

3. State individually and clearly what your basis of faith is, so that communication becomes possible in your group.

4. What role does the Bible play in molding the Quaker message and mission in your community?

5. Are we hiding behind a smokescreen when we depend upon “tolerance” in communication with other Quaker groups? Is this the best we can do?

VI. MIND YOUR CALLING

Study the suggestions offered by Arthur Roberts on pages 23-25 in this pamphlet with the purpose of discovering