

Growing Up Quaker And Universalist Too

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THE QUAKER UNIVERSALIST FELLOWSHIP

...is composed of seekers, mainly, but not exclusively members of the Religious Society of Friends. QUF seeks to promote open dialogue on its issues of interest. It writes in its statement of purpose:

While being convinced of the validity of our own religious paths, we not only accept but rejoice that others find validity in their spiritual traditions, whatever they may be. Each of us must find his or her own path, and each of us can benefit for the search of others.

In the selection of both its speakers and manuscripts, QUF tries to implement those ideas.

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

For the last sixteen years Sally Rickerman has given unstintingly of her considerable energy to the Quaker Universalist Fellowship. She is now the only person who has been and is still actively connected with QUF's Steering Committee from its founding. Until 1997 she served as treasurer, kept membership records, and saw to the production and distribution of QUF publications. As publications clerk, she still performs the last-named tasks. None of this has kept her from working hard on other Quaker causes and committees, including service to her own monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings, as well as Friends General Conference. Currently she is clerk for the Western Quarter of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

Here she looks back on her journey as a Quaker universalist from her ancestral roots in 17th-century Quakerism, to her family's experiences on the American frontier, to her own upbringing as a 20th-century Friend by "both nature and nurture." She also reflects on her perceptions of Quakerism and the leadings that have drawn her into working for QUF. The essay is based on a talk she gave in 1988 to a meeting of the Quaker Universalist Group in Bath, England. The opening quotation is from Ralph Hetherington's Swarthmore Lecture, *The Sense of Glory*, published by Quaker Home Service in 1975.

Rhoda R. Gilman

The raw material of thinking, imagery, dreams and fantasies, therefore must come from firsthand empirical experience in the external world.

Ralph Hetherington

Reliance on the experiential is the basis of my Quakerism, my universalism, and my Quaker universalism. To give flesh to this statement, I wish to trace the growth of my experience through my family background, Quakerism in the frontier communities, my own growth as a Quaker universalist, the Quaker Universalist Fellowship and my interaction with it, and finally, why I have continued my involvement with it.

My family background

Part of all experience is background, and as John Donne has reminded us, “No man is an island.” My background is intertwined with the Religious Society of Friends. Some of its members are very closed, exclusive and narrow, and some are part of an amazing, open and nonjudgmental group of people. This group seeks a direct relationship with the Divine, free from the imposition of past discoveries codified by an elite. Because I honor this second kind of Quakerism, I do not like to use the term “birthright” in contrast to “convinced” to describe my membership.¹ I say instead that I am a Quaker both by nature and nurture. Nature is divinely given. Nurture can be acquired during a long lifetime or as recently as the onset of one’s first religious experience, which could have happened only a moment ago.

Another part of my experience is that like Johnny – out of step with the army – I belong to a minority which is out of step religiously with the larger society in which I live. As an unprogrammed Quaker, I am a member of a group that represents only one third of North American Friends. All branches of Friends together are only .045 percent of the population of the United States. Unprogrammed Friends are only .0021 percent of the world's Christians, and a mere .000013 percent of the earth's religious people. If being a part of this diminishing fraction were not minority enough, I am faced with being born of Quaker parents and registered at birth. Birthright Friends are only 13.41 percent of all unprogrammed Friends across the country, and even in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting – that bastion of Quaker establishment – we are only 26.6 percent of total membership.² On my paternal side I belong to one more minority. That is the class of presently practicing Quakers who can trace their Quaker ancestry from the mid-17th century. (There are no known statistics here.)

An additional part of my experiential foundation lies in the life journeys of my Quaker ancestors as well as those of my immediate family. These have been a fertile seedbed that has nourished my own experiences as a Quaker who considers herself universalist in her perspective. On my father's side I am in a direct line from William Edmondson, who gathered people together at the first Quaker meetings for worship in Ireland, in North Carolina (where it was the first European religious service), in New York, and in Pennsylvania.³ His influence is still felt in today's Quakerism, for he along with George Fox set up the system of autonomous business meetings for each worship group, which helped to balance the concerns and leadings of the individual with the collective prayerful wisdom of that group. This delicate balance has permitted the Religious Society of

Friends to survive for almost 350 years, while some eighteen other dissident groups that formed in England at about the same time disappeared before the 17th century ended.⁴

Even though Edmondson did not develop a concern for the plight of American Indians, his stance on slavery was unique. As the distinguished Quaker scholar, Henry J. Cadbury stated in 1968: "Like other Friends from the British Isles who visited the American colonies he was confronted unprepared with the phenomenon of Negro slavery. None of these visitors spoke against it any earlier or more strongly than Edmondson did."⁵ It is a heritage that carries with it great responsibility.

I also have a broken-line side from Quakerism, and it may be the only majority class into which I can fit. On my maternal side, back five generations, is James Wigham. When on a recent trip to England I discovered that he was a son of Cuthbert Wigham, the first to take Quakerism into Scotland. James had married out of meeting, was disowned and had disappeared.

Through this line I could qualify for a society to which my neighbor belongs. At the time she moved into a nearby house, I invited her to meeting. She refused the invitation and told me that she was a happy Presbyterian. She went on to say, however, that her ancestors were Quaker and she had a certificate to prove it. When I questioned her further, she informed me that there was an organization in or near Washington, DC, that would register the applicant who had evidence of Quaker ancestry for a mere \$100. By belonging to this society of Quaker descendants one could attend its annual meeting. The other privilege of membership was a certificate that proved the connection with Quakers!

Within months after a "little Irish weaver," my ancestor, arrived in 1794 on these shores from County Tyrone, Ireland, he married. Thomas Hinshaw's chosen one was the great

granddaughter of William Edmondson and they were married under the care of Marlborough Meeting in North Carolina. His path was that of one of the major Quaker migrations to the New World from the British Isles. It occurred five generations ago in my family.

At that time Friends were already becoming more and more concerned with the institution of slavery. Since 1776 no Friend had owned slaves – not even in the South – but additional problems were arising in their relation to a society based on slavery. Unfortunately, freed slaves, including those formerly owned by Quakers, were often taken by slave traders and were sold despite their “freedom” papers. To solve this problem Friends began “selling” them to the yearly meeting, but even with that evidence of “ownership” established, these black people were still kidnapped and resold. The evils of slavery and the difficulty of making a decent living in a slave economy without slaves became more and more apparent to many Quakers. This led to another major migration, as large numbers of Friends journeyed across the Appalachians to the free Northwest Territory, decimating the state of North Carolina of a great part of its Quaker population.⁶

Thus Thomas Hinshaw’s grandson Andrew left North Carolina with his parents in 1830 at the age of three. The family settled just north of Indianapolis, but Andrew, who was my great-grandfather, eventually pushed on westward. His intended bride, Sarah Ann Hiatt, had moved with her parents from Indiana to the banks of the Neosha River in Kansas Territory. A year later Andrew followed, traveling by stagecoach to the end of the line at Des Moines, Iowa, and then walking to his destination near present-day Emporia, Kansas.

According to family tradition, for the final 24 hours of his arduous journey across a largely uninhabited area, Andrew had no food with him except two apples. But these

he did not eat. He had brought them all the way from Indiana as a token for his beloved, who had been “appleless” for the year that she had lived in the new territory. A few days after his arrival, they became the first European couple to be married in Chase County, Kansas, and a year later Stephen, my grandfather, was the first European child to be born there.

Quaker background in the frontier communities

For a majority of Quakers and also for others the most frequently used route westward went straight across Pennsylvania to the newly opened Northwest Territory. Friends were often in the vanguard and were the first to establish new communities. This became one of three factors in their evolution from the original method of worship – in the sphere of silence – into what became, over time, pastoral and evangelical Quakerism, both of which have prearranged or what is called “programmed” worship services.

As newcomers from disparate religious backgrounds arrived and settled in Quaker communities, membership in meetings increased, but often because it was the only church in town. These new members were not necessarily empathetic to the mystical and universalist strains which had been present in Quakerism since its earliest days. When they joined the meeting, they did so because it was their only choice, not because they were either convinced or were comfortable with the method of worship.

Secondly, even the migrating Friends who were at ease with their religion had difficulty in maintaining their faithfulness. The hardships of the frontier and the isolated farm life made attention to spiritual matters a challenge. In addition the absence of internal and external nurture from the traveling ministers and the elders they had left behind

affected the quality of their worship. As Howard Brinton points out: "Traveling Friends were the links which bound the widely scattered Society together, giving it a coherence and insuring a certain degree of uniformity."⁷ When visits from traveling ministers to the struggling Quaker enclaves became more infrequent, and the vocal ministry in meetings for worship dried up, the local elders frequently would beseech a Friend who had spoken well in the past to extend his ministry, and they would offer him (invariably a "him") compensation for the time lost plying his usual trade. Hence the custom of having paid ministers or "pastors" arose.

My great-grandparents were sensitive to this need and both of them served as traveling Friends. This produced family stories and traditions to which I am the heir. My great-grandmother Sarah Ann Hiatt Hinshaw traveled as far as Sweden on such a mission. At one time when Andrew, her husband, was in Chicago with one of their sons as a traveling minister, a woman of questionable intentions approached him. Since Andrew was deaf at this point in his life, he turned to his son and asked in a very loud voice, "Son, could thee tell me what this woman requires of me?"

I have been sufficiently inspired by my father's accounts of the importance of traveling ministers to the little community of Quaker Valley, Kansas, that I undertook, under the auspices of Friends General Conference, to produce the first two editions of *The Directory for Traveling Friends*, which is still updated and issued biennially. This volume permits 20th century Friends to visit with other Friends as they travel on business or pleasure. Quaker communities are often hard to find, since they no longer cluster near a meetinghouse, and if travelers do find the meeting place, they are usually unable to be present on a Sunday.

The frontier revival movement was a third main factor in the shift away from the discovery of George Fox and other

early Friends that the meeting for worship is the ideal matrix in which the direct relationship with the Divine in oneself and others is best nurtured. In the mid- and late Victorian Age, when conflicting aims and a growing urban industrialized society produced a perceived need to protect its new values, prudery and conservatism became important societal standards. One result of these turbulent times was that the population flocked to the revival tents and sinners benches. Quakers, then as now, were subject to the winds of the time and joined with the rest of society in bringing this sinner-oriented spirit into their “church.” These “new” understandings of the evangelicals and their method of approaching religion were antithetical to early Quakerism in my opinion. But, as with all reformers in any era, the innovating Friends feel that they are the “real” Quakers and the ones who interpret Quakerism’s message correctly.

My own further growth as a Quaker universalist

The first memories I have of Quakerism are of a small child, the only one in Twentieth Street Meeting, going into a vast well-windowed room across from Gramercy Park in New York City. This unprogrammed orthodox meeting was the one to which my family chose to go and the one my mother joined, even though we lived across the street from Fifteenth Street Meeting, which was Hicksite.

My mother had come east from Kansas after college and worked in New York, as did my father. Their marriage meeting for worship was held at Croton Valley Meeting at Mt. Kisco, New York, for at that time the meetings in Kansas were evangelical. She had long since left her childhood church because its religious understandings were rigid and too well ensconced to her way of thinking. She found no fulfillment in the services, and she wished to bring her future

children up in a religiously united home. In Quakerism she felt she could explore her own spiritual depths.

At her clearness committee for membership, my mother felt it was incumbent upon her to be clear that Friends knew she neither believed in the divinity of Jesus nor the virginity of Mary. Even so, she was welcomed into membership. Those on her committee apparently ignored this variance with their yearly meeting's statement of faith and practice and its support of the Richmond Declaration of Faith adopted by orthodox Friends in 1887.⁸ That yearly meeting was part of the Five Years Meeting, now renamed Friends United Meeting (FUM). But Twentieth Street Meeting was unprogrammed – as was Philadelphia. It was closer to what I would today understand to be a Wilburite or Conservative meeting than to the present programmed and pastoral meetings in FUM.⁹

In today's religious (or nonreligious) climate my mother's views may not seem exceptional. They would easily fit into the world of the late 20th century. But she was born in 1887 and grew up in the heyday of the Victorian era – a climate that made such views as she held almost heretical. As she grew into womanhood, this country was recovering from the strictures of 19th-century evangelism and the throes of World War I. Added to that were the climate of the "Roaring Twenties," the controversy over the Scopes "Monkey Trial," and the agitation over votes and other rights for women. The resulting contradictions are illustrated in a conversation that my mother reported overhearing on a Pullman car: Three women, returning home from a church convention, were discussing its decision to abolish the doctrine of infant damnation. They expressed approval of that action but also wondered if the delegates should not have made the decree retroactive, thus rescuing the previously damned infants out of an eternity in hell.

Another part of my journey was attending Friends schools from Kindergarten through 12th grade. For the first

three years I went to Friends Seminary on 15th Street and we lived directly across the street from the school. It was a Hicksite school, where there were only four Quaker pupils out of a student body of two or three hundred. I would say that at that time it did not project much Quakerism.

From the fourth grade on I attended Westtown, a Philadelphia Orthodox school. During those years it was my only community, for we lived near the campus and I had few other regular social contacts. In school we were given Bible studies every year, and in the tenth grade we had a required course on Quakerism. As a part of living in Quaker communities, I was also exposed, of course, to regular doses of First Day school!

Reviewing milestones on this universalist journey of mine, there are certain events which stand out. One of these occurred when I was about ten. A classmate of mine told me the following story about her four-year-old sister. I still enjoy its humor and its message.

A dear Friend of sweet earnestness and understanding love was teaching her infant class at First Day school. She carefully explained to the children that God was to be found everywhere. When the sister of my friend returned home, the child went to her room. There she opened her bureau drawer and said, "God's in there!" She went to her closet and opened its door and repeated, "God's in there!" Finally she looked under her bed and repeated her statement. Whereupon she stood in the center of her room, arms akimbo, and emphatically proclaimed, "I don't believe a damn word of it!"

Those were and still are my sentiments as well.

Somewhere, too, in those early years at Westtown, I was introduced to Job. The event in his life that I remember and cherish was his direct reply to the Jews. When they taunted him about God's apparent lack of support for him

“shown” by the travails heaped upon him, he sternly told them: “No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you.”¹⁰ The understanding that it was all right to question the arrogant and the opinionated confirmed to me that no one, no religion, no nation had a patent on the Truth.

Recently, in reading Christopher Hill’s *The World Turned Upside Down*, an account of the turmoil of 16th- and 17th-century England, I found an equally salient and universalist remark. In 1645, William Dell, who was a “low church” Protestant minister, said: “Unity is Christian, uniformity anti-Christian.”¹¹ In today’s language, this can be interpreted as the life of the spirit being unity with one another and the dependence on uniformity of belief and action being its antithesis. So for my spirit, I need unity and never uniformity.

Looking for other landmarks in my developing thought, I can remember that when I was around ten I questioned the arrogance of sending missionaries to go among the “heathen.” I wondered how these Christian saviors could have the effrontery to be sure that the relationship to the Divine which the native had worked out was not the best for that person in that culture, or that it did not contain many universal truths within it.

The final youthful milestone on my journey in what has been labeled in recent years as Quaker universalism, but which I then thought of as merely Quakerism, was my introduction to the prophet Hosea. He demonstrated the validity of new revelations concerning the nature of God. His story helped validate for me that new insights and enlarged horizons are constantly available to those who seek with open hearts and minds.

As many realize, before the coming of this prophet, Jaweh was known as a mean, patriarchal, and vengeful god, one who had little love, forgiveness, or compassion in his

makeup. Hosea's experience with his wife led him to reason from the specific to the universal, from the particular to the general, from the individual to the group. Based on this, he arrived at the amazing discovery that God was a god of love, acceptance and forgiveness.

The story, as we know it, described Hosea's desertion by his wife, who first became another man's mistress. Then Hosea became aware of her traveling down the primrose path to become the woman of many men. Her next step was to become a common prostitute, and finally she dropped to the depths of society to be sold as a slave. On the slave block in the market square, Hosea found her. Then and there he bought her. Not for vengeance, but for love! Not to humiliate her and grind her under his feet, but to elevate her once again to the position of mistress of his home. Then, it appears, he reasoned from the specific to the universal and concluded (paraphrased by me), "If I, a mere mortal, am capable of this love, acceptance, and forgiveness, surely the God whom we worship is capable of this and more."

Here lies the intellectual basis for my universalist beliefs. Namely, if I a mere mortal am capable of understanding that no Divine Spirit would eliminate from true enlightenment the 98 percent of the past, present, and future world population who have never heard and will never hear of Jesus, then surely the God whom we worship is capable of revealing the Divine Nature, with validity, through many prophets, in many cultures, and in many eras.

The Quaker Universalist Fellowship and my interaction with it

The Quaker Universalist Group formed in England in 1979 as a result of John Linton's talk, *Quakerism as Forerunner*, given in 1977.¹² John and his wife Erica had

served British Friends at the Friends Centre in New Delhi for many years. They developed two main thoughts as a result of their experience there, where they met many godly people from many different faiths. One concept was that Quakerism with its positive message of that of the Divine in each, no creeds nor dogma, and its worship occurring in nonpejorative communal silence could be a nurturing milieu in which those of all faiths could worship together. The other was concern arising from the fact that certain Friends in Britain and elsewhere, especially those associated with the New Foundation movement, were beginning to circumscribe Quakerism by using the words of George Fox and the Bible as their major guide.¹³ This meant that these Quakers seemed to be ignoring the important experiential and continuously revealed aspects of Quakerism. Linton's thoughts, expressed near the conclusion of his initial lecture in 1979, were:

The weeding out of irrational dogmas, however, does not in my view mean adopting a rationalist position. I believe in mystical religion. I don't think we have an inkling about the whole truth yet. What I envision for Quakerism is to become a meeting place for spiritual seekers of all faiths or none, where they can worship or meditate as they feel drawn. It will be a worldwide religion, without any particular bias, Christian or otherwise, but enshrining the supreme truths of all religions.

This speech, delivered in England, excited interested Friends in both the United Kingdom and the United States. In 1982 Linton was invited to come to the U.S. to give talks at certain meetings on the East Coast. In March, 1983 an informal group of Friends arranged a gathering at Providence Meeting in Media, Pennsylvania, where Jim Lenhert, then

editor of *Friends Journal* spoke on “Great Blue Herons, Wineskins, and Universal Love.”¹⁴ By May of that year this group, which included Friends from several states, gathered at London Grove Meetinghouse near Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, to form an organization.

I had missed the first meeting but learned of this one in time to be present. The various offices of the new organization were filled by willing volunteers, except that of treasurer. There was general doubt as to who might do the job. I opined that the task was not that difficult, for I had served as treasurer of two nonprofits. So Friends offered me the dubious honor on faith.

Our next agenda item at that meeting was establishing our name. We were certain that Quaker we were, and universalists we also were, but we wished to indicate two perspectives with our third name. First, although we were in close cousinship with QUG, we were not QUG. Second, we were aware that in American usage the word “group” implies exclusivity. Therefore we chose “Fellowship” to indicate inclusiveness. Our aim was to be consistently universal, so at that time we used the terms “subscribers” and “fellows” rather than delineating the ins and outs with the words members and membership.

The Why of my continued involvement

In a world which has the luxury of leisure time, all individuals, in my opinion, have their own agendas into which they put their spare time and energy. Quakers are no exception. My own effort is based on my deep leading and concern for more effective outreach for the Religious Society of Friends. I regard this concern as the *ministry of outreach*. As with all ministries, we rise to the call. Then after we have responded to the Spirit, we find justification for our

actions and look for intellectual shoring up so that we may continue on our path in internal peace. I think I can say with honesty that I have not put this energy into establishing the legitimacy of Quaker universalism because I felt threatened in my own beliefs (as some others have told me they did) by those among Friends who differed with me.

My self-justification for following my ministry of outreach within the vehicle of QUF is that I feel there are many people looking for the Quaker religious home. Among Friends there is always a creative tension between the individual's leading and concern, the group with which that individual is working, the group's understanding of that leading, and that group's own leading(s). Since Quakerism is such a minority religion in the world (all varieties of Quakers total only 213,800), many seekers are disheartened by their inability to find us as they look for us and our message.

This frustration was not present during our early days. With the first enthusiastic flush of discoveries, Friends felt impelled to share their insights with all others. Later, as the second and third generations appeared with their wish to consolidate their beliefs and preserve their community, they withdrew from vigorously sharing their message with outsiders. Not until after World War I did they do so again, when Friends, through service to the war-torn world, became more open to helping those who were seeking the freedom of a direct relationship with the Divine through Quakerism.

My perception has been and still is that what we have to offer seekers is important to both them and us, and to the world as a whole. There is need for a religion that accepts the rich variety of understandings of great religious truths without being confined by absolutes. Therefore I constantly strive to make both Quakerism and Quakers better known. Most of my efforts are directed toward making the Religious

Society of Friends available to all people who have a basic commitment to a direct, unfettered relationship with the Divine and a recognition of that of the Divine in each.

My fondest dream, therefore, is to continue to have Quakerism accessible to those holding all shades and hues of theology from universalism to Christocentricity. I hope to enable both universalist and Christocentric Friends – and those in between – to worship in peace, acceptance, pleasure, and comfort with one another. I am not alone in this understanding of the depth and breadth of Quakerism. Even Douglas Gwyn, the newest and best grounded spokesman for the New Foundation, acknowledges that both the universalist and Christ-centered threads have been a part of our religious society since its very beginning.¹⁵ My own image of this symbiotic relationship is that of the double helix – the DNA and the RNA strands first coming together, crossing, and then parting to recross soon again. Occasionally, either or both of the strands will gain the added bonus of a gene from the other, which enriches its counterpart.

This process is essential to the health of an organization, for it gives it new blood, new genes, and new strength. Part of this health is in maintaining a balance, neither swinging radically away from what appear as “theologies” in opposition nor risking stability by climbing out on a tiny, fragile limb. When the danger of extremes is avoided, gross overcorrection threatening the life of the organism does not have to occur at a later time.

My hope for those involved with Quaker universalism – group or fellowship – is that we:

- will be the first with a new-old perspective;
- will not swing so vehemently from the center in our attempt to gain balance that future overcorrection will be needed;

- continuously remember that the goal of religion is to provide a guide to a better way of life, one which includes both love and acceptance;
- remember that no one – not even we, the anointed – has a patent on truth.

Quakerism can be a beautiful multi-colored shawl. It has grades and shades of color for interest. Its richness and strength are shown through its weaving. The disparate threads contained are, in the cloth of a religious society, ready to revolutionize the world and bring the Kingdom of Heaven into its full reality on earth.

We need all the fresh eyes, the fresh light and the fresh insight available to help create a better amalgam. These are needed regardless of our individual end purposes. Whether our goal be having the blessed uniqueness of Quaker universalism or the Quaker understanding of *real* or *primitive* Christianity, it does not matter. That which we share, universally, with all religions is the wish to implement our divine interconnectedness. This goal, to be neither divisive nor exclusive, but to wear proudly the beautiful Quaker shawl, is our human and Quaker responsibility.

In the 1980s many Friends did not (and some still do not) see the point of having another Quaker organization. The question most often posed to those involved with Quaker universalism was: “Don’t most Quakers hold these views?” My usual reply was, “Yes, but not all by any means.” There are a goodly number of Christocentric Friends. For the most part both they and we are pleased to worship in a religious community which permits and encourages all to seek their light. Now and then there is a Friend from either perspective who will positively proclaim a provocative and exclusionary *truth*. There was one such universalist Quaker who said with absolute conviction that Quakerism had not arisen out of a

Christian background. In the same vein a young New Foundation Friend informed me that New York Yearly Meeting's outreach committee was unable to go forward because they were not able to agree on "the Quaker message." My response to those of either extreme is that there is no Quaker message save the one that states: "Quakers continually seek to expand their understandings of the eternal verities but do not expect to find *the final everlasting truth.*"

So from my perspective, QUF is and has been there to help those new (and some old) to the Religious Society of Friends to acclimate. These are the Friends who have difficulty in "hearing where the words come from" when those words differ from their own. They can be Friends who have trouble translating seemingly opposing views into their own language. It is possible that they are new attenders or even old members who feel that they are alone and uncoun-
ted. We in QUF are there to help them know that indeed most Friends feel about two essentials of Quakerism as they do. Those two gifts of Quakerism are the ability to see the Divine in each one of us and the ability not to be mired in symbols and dogma.

For QUF to help further these goals, we met and meet together in person, in our journal, in our pamphlets, and now on the internet.¹⁶ As an "official" voice we have an effect on other Quaker bodies. In one instance we, as an organization, were able to modify the definition of Quaker universalism in a pamphlet which was frequently used in mailings to inquirers. As individuals we would not have had the capacity to do this.

I would like to share my personal reflections with an excerpt of some words that I used at a joint conference of QUF and the Religious Education Committee of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.¹⁷ These were:

Also I have learned Experimentally that if and when I give myself space and quiet, I can tap into unity with all creatures and aspects of our earth and our cosmos. The easiest place for me to do this is in Meeting for Worship, for it is in this location that I can most clearly hear from whence the words of others come, rather than permitting their spoken words to interfere with my unity with them.

I was thrilled recently to have these feelings validated when I read Geoffrey Holyland's *Use of Silence*, where he says that God does not speak to any of us in words, that we are spoken to through grace, and the words that result, however deeply and truly they may be inspired are still our words, human words from the vocabulary of everyday life. And grace is what I strive to hear from others, rather than to be constricted by their words or by their particular theological understandings.

There are other special locations beyond the Meetinghouse, where I have this same sense of belonging to all others. These are where it is evident that those who have preceded me have themselves reached out to that which is universal and divine. These sites are those of the great cathedrals of Christianity, the Acropolis of the pagan Greeks, the curvycombed Hindu ashram of Gandhi, and the pre-Celt Stonehenge. I cannot believe, since I feel such unity with those who created these places special to their faith, that their God and my God are not one and the same. We differ only in our interpretation and cultural understanding, not in grace.

The third class of location is the one which

occurs in the midst of the indifferent vehemence of “natural” forces, when it seems as if I am no more than a mindless leaf tossing about in a violent storm. Here, I have felt at one with the universal Uniter, the Spirit able to lift us, up and beyond our limited selves, to the heights which we do not know that we can attain. For here, in these violences of “nature,” I am whittled down to size, appearing to be as infinitesimal and insignificant as any trivial unit can possibly be. It is as if I were merely a single drop of water absorbed without trace in all the oceans of the world, one grain of sand merged – indistinguishable – with others on all the beaches on this earth, or the lone ant working in isolation in its towering hill.

Yet, even as I intellectually discern this apparent loss of separateness and uniqueness, I find in this loss that which is exhilarating, uplifting and quickening: my sense of the universal unity with all. I find in the experience the knowledge that each drop of water is more than just a single isolated drop, for together with other drops – all necessary – they form magnificent oceans; that our vast land mass arises from the collection of all grains of sand; and that even the huge and amazing ant hills of Africa depend on each and every ant for their size and efficient functioning.

The latest affirmation of the appropriateness of my understanding that Quakerism is truly universal and has been since its earliest days is in recently finding a quotation from George Fox’s journal in which he states: “The Lord taught me to act faithfully in two ways, viz., inwardly to God and outwardly to man.” The author who quotes the phrase goes on to say:

To the old question that resounds through the history of Christianity, the issue between faith and works, he proclaimed this plain answer, that faith must be accompanied by works, that the worship of God is incomplete without helpfulness to men. That phrase of his, expressing this principle is to be found on one of the very first pages of his *Journal*; it was thus a fundamental principle of the young preacher's, dating from the time when he was still wrestling with himself. Conversely, the way to the knowledge of God lies, he held, through men's "setting their lives in the way of good."¹⁸

I can think of no better way to setting my life in the way of good than in honoring and respecting the discernment of *all* others about their relationship to the Divine. I feel that this path is the basis of universalism in a Quaker setting. Thus, it is mine.

Notes

1. The term 'birthright' has been used in Quakerism since 1737 when memberships first became recorded. This system was instituted in an era when churches were legally required to be the agencies of all social services to their membership. Therefore membership was recorded and the children of adults of record were designated members at birth to establish the children's claim to Quakerism and its resources. Within the unprogrammed yearly meetings around the world, Philadelphia is the only one which still accepts full membership which is registered at birth.
2. These figures are based on four surveys which I did on the background of Quakers. Two were done at Friends General Conference gatherings in 1986 and 1987. One was done at Philadelphia Yearly Meeting session in 1988 and the other at North Pacific Yearly Meeting, also in 1988.
3. *The Journal (Abridged) of Wm Edmondson, Quaker Apostle to Ireland and the Americas*, pp. v-vi, ed. by Caroline Nicholson Jacob. Foreword by Henry Joel Cadbury. (Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. 1968).
4. Among the better known of these groups were the Children of the Light, the Familists, the Ranters, the Levellers, and the Seekers. See *The World Turned Upside Down*, by Christopher Hill (Penguin edition, 1972).
5. *Journal of Wm. Edmondson*. p. vi.
6. Today the Quaker population of North Carolina is mostly the result of Friends from Baltimore Yearly Meeting moving there after the Civil War to educate and help the former slaves.
7. *Friends for 300 Years*, by Howard Brinton, p. 187 (Pendle Hill Publications and Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. 1964).
8. The Richmond Declaration was an attempt by orthodox

yearly meetings to put forth an agreed-upon, scripturally based statement of belief. See *Uniform Discipline, Constitution and Discipline for the American Yearly Meetings*, pp. 78 – 103, Adopted by New York Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends – 1901 (Friends Book and Tract Committee).

9. Brief (and therefore oversimplified) definitions of the four branches of Quakerism in North America are:

Unprogrammed (Hicksite) – Those which use the original form of Quaker communal worship where both the worship and the ministry arise out of the unstructured silence. Friends General Conference is the service organization for 13 affiliated yearly meetings out of a total of 16 unprogrammed yearly meetings.

Conservative (Wilburite) – These Friends also use the traditional manner of worship but are apt to place greater emphasis on spiritual living and the divinity of Jesus than do the unprogrammed or “liberal” Friends. There are three conservative yearly meetings – Ohio, Iowa, and North Carolina. They have no interconnecting organization.

Pastoral or Programmed (orthodox*) – Orthodox Friends frequently have short periods of “open worship” but rely on the leadership of a paid pastor, and their worship includes pre-planned hymns, sermons, and Bible readings. Friends United Meeting (FUM) is the overarching adjudicatory organization. *Philadelphia Yearly Meeting – Orthodox did not join FUM nor have programmed meetings.

Evangelical – Like the orthodox meetings, evangelical Friends have pastors and programs. They feel that salvation can come only through Jesus and that the Bible is both the word of God and the final religious authority. Six of the seven evangelical yearly meetings

- belong to the adjudicatory Friends Evangelical International.
10. Job 12:2.
 11. P. 100.
 12. This talk has been reprinted in *Quaker Universalist Reader Number One – A Collection of Essays, Addresses and Lectures*, pp. 1–13, (Quaker Universalist Fellowship. 1986).
 13. In 1964 Lewis Benson, a Friend in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, gave a series of five lectures at Woodbrooke College in Birmingham, England (an adult Quaker study center). He had become exercised that liberal Friends had drifted away from what he considered the Christ-centered message proclaimed by George Fox. Benson and his followers formed the New Foundation, which supports this thesis.
 14. See *In the Eyes of the Beholder – A Collection of Addresses 1983–1986 pp. 6 – 12*, (Quaker Universalist Fellowship. 1991).
 15. Gwyn gave a lecture for QUF in 1989. See *The Quaker Dynamic: Personal Faith and Corporate Vision*, by Douglas Gwyn (Quaker Universalist Fellowship. 1990).
 16. The QUF mailing list has between 350 and 400 names; Subscriptions are due at the first of the year, but since people drift in at various times, they are carried until the beginning of the year following. (No one can make Quakers do anything, let alone subscribe at the appointed time) There are some who offer exchange subscriptions and a few to whom we feel it is important to get our message in any case, and to them we send our mailings free of charge. We have obtained 501-C-3 status from the Internal Revenue Service and bulk mailing rates from the Post Office. QUF has a steering or executive committee with its clerk, a journal editor,

pamphlet editor, publications clerk, membership clerk, treasurer, and distributions clerk. We arrange events at the FGC annual gathering and mail out two journals and two pamphlets a year. We also have a web site and an e-mail list.

17. See *Hearing "Where the Words Come From? Four Friends Share*, pp. 7 -8. (Quaker Universalist Fellowship. 1992).
18. *The Quakers*, p. 42, by Otto Zarek (The Religious Book Club. London, 1943).