



Talking points

Chat rooms on general subjects

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With grateful thanks to members of the Junior Yearly Meeting event teams from 2007-2011 who have contributed to this resource.

Community: Generations

"There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children." Nelson Mandela

"We are made for togetherness; we are made for family, for fellowship, to exist in a tender network of interdependence" Desmond Tutu

"There is nothing wrong with today's teenager that twenty years won't cure" Unknown

"People who don't cherish their elderly have forgotten whence they came and whither they go." Ramsey Clark

How do you interact with of a different generation, do you treat them differently because of their age?

Can you think of any situations where your age has prevented you from doing something that you wanted to do? Looking back do you think that this was fair?

Do you feel that other generations judge you on your age? Are they justified in doing this?

How might we respond as individuals and members of a Quaker and wider community to the issues that sometimes occur between different generations?



Community: Religious Diversity

“No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.” Nelson Mandela

“Religion is a candle inside a multicoloured lantern. Everyone looks through a particular colour, but the candle is always there” Mohammed Neguib

“I never told my religion nor scrutinized that of another. I never attempted to make a convert nor wished to change another's creed. I have judged of others' religion by their lives, for it is from our lives and not from our words that our religion must be read. By the same test must the world judge me.” Thomas Jefferson

In a world full of diverse religious traditions is it inevitable that conflicts will arise? Do you think that peaceful co-existence can be achieved, is it even desired by the majority?

What are the benefits of living in a religiously diverse society? Do these outweigh the negatives?

How might we respond as individuals and members of a Quaker and wider community the problems that may arise out of religious diversity?



Community and Individuality

“In Africa, a person is identified by his or her interrelationships and not primarily by individualistic properties.”

“That personhood is identified by an individual’s interaction with others does not eliminate personal identity.”

“It is not easy to discover that there is no such thing as an individual

But it is worth the effort

To finally find yourself in others”

From the poem ‘Lose It’ by Martin Wroe

How do you rate your sense of the importance of community in relation to your perception of your individual ‘rights’ and ‘freedoms’?

Can a sense of individuality be maintained even where community structure and ties are very strong, for example in a small, isolated village, a football or work team or a faith community?

Are there particular problems associated with maintaining one’s individuality whilst being part of a worshipping community, with its emphasis upon shared ethical codes and, often, beliefs?

Is it possible to create a good balance between community values and freedom to be individual? What sorts of problem can you see in seeking to maintain your individual identity? How might your quest for individual recognition endanger the structure of the community?



Environment and Sustainability

“True identity will have to incorporate some elements that relate to higher levels of being (e.g. God, ancestors, transcendent reality) and lower levels of being (e.g. environmental and other living creatures.) This broadens the notion of individual identity from a single level of validation to a multi dimensional validation.”

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”
Martin Luther King

In what ways do you feel an individual decision to adopt an environmentally sustainable life-style might reinforce the philosophy of a network of mutuality? Are there situations which could undermine it, for example where does our recycling go to be processed?

Can respect for other individuals aid the growth of a respect for the whole of nature?

Do you think shared sustainable lifestyle choices are possible within a community? Will the pursuit of such shared choices strengthen the community?

Do you feel that a religious faith, as expressed above as a sense of the transcendent has any bearing on sustainable life-style choices at individual or community level? How?



Sustainability

'All species and the Earth itself have interdependent roles within Creation. Humankind is not the species, to whom all others are subservient, but one among many. All parts, all issues, are inextricably intertwined. Indeed the web of creation could be described as a three-ply thread: whenever we touch it we effect justice and peace and the health of all everyone. So all our testimonies, all our Quaker work, all our Quaker lives are part of one process, of striving towards a flourishing, just and peaceful Creation – the Kingdom of God.'

Audrey Urry, 1994, Quaker faith and practice, 25.04

Living sustainably is about living in a way that meets our needs today without damaging the planet or preventing other people elsewhere and in the future meeting their needs. There are many signs that we are not living sustainably however; such as climate change, species extinction and deforestation. These stem from and contribute to global inequality, poverty, injustice and conflict.

As Quakers we know that all life is sacred. So we are called to live in ways that enable the planet and all people to flourish. What could the world be like if we were all successfully living sustainably? Friends, with others, can act now to make a vision of a sustainable world real, and to be beacons of sustainable living in their communities.

What do you think of when you hear the word sustainability? Talk about what excites you and what worries you.

How does thinking about sustainability and the environment make you feel? Depressed? Angry (if so, at who)? Scared? Hopeful? Inspired to take action?

What can Quaker testimony offer in a world faced with climate change and other environmental crises?

What is your dream or vision for a sustainable world? In 2020 if we were all living sustainably what would the world look like/ what would we all be doing/ how would we be eating, travelling, working, holidaying differently to today?

Think of one change you can make in your own life to help this vision come true. Think of one change you could make in your meeting to help this vision come true.



As a meeting you might like to show your commitment to this by creating a pledge tree like the one illustrated (Image © Colin Edwards).

Doing Outreach...talking Quaker...

Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one. George Fox, 1656, Advices and Queries, 42.

If we don't tell others about our Quakerism, how will they ever know? If we don't share it, how will Quakerism survive?

If it is true that to really understand Quakerism, you just need to spend time with Quakers, what will they find out from meeting us? How do you know this?

If you had to describe yourself in 5 words, what would they be?

If you had to describe Quakerism in 5 words, what would they be?

*What helps you keep on being a Quaker?
What sometimes makes you think about leaving?*

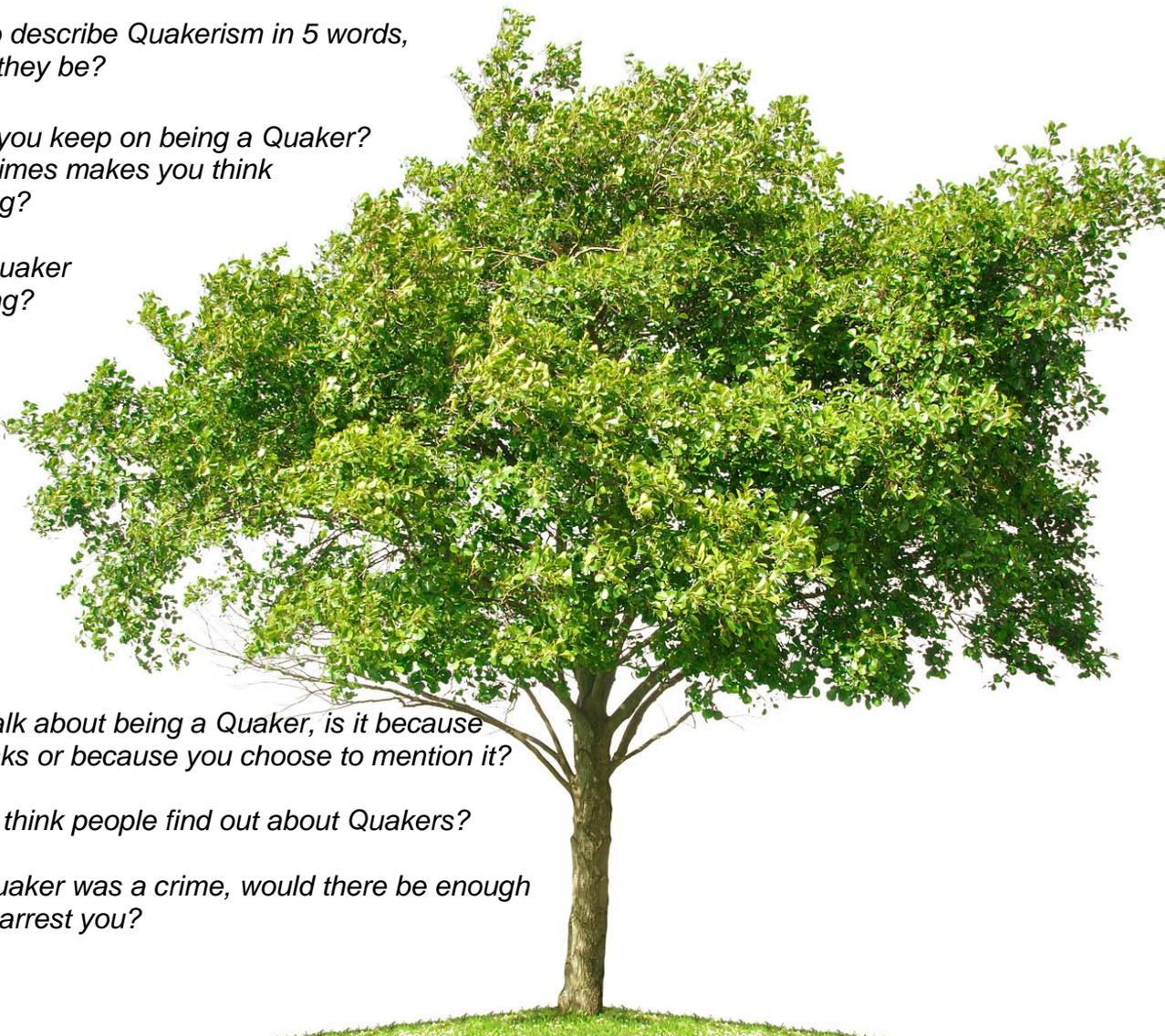
Is being a Quaker embarrassing?

How do you find talking about being a Quaker?

When you talk about being a Quaker, is it because someone asks or because you choose to mention it?

How do you think people find out about Quakers?

If being a Quaker was a crime, would there be enough evidence to arrest you?



Quakers and the world

Early Friends separated themselves from the world with a 'hedge' by dressing differently, saying 'thou' instead of you, not using titles like 'Lord', 'Sir' or 'Mr' and not taking off their hats to those in authority.

They thought of themselves as being different to other people and as being "in the world but not of it"

They were often criticised and attacked for this and even imprisoned – their distinctive ways made them easy targets for abuse.

Quakers nowadays don't face the same issues... or do they?

"People at school think religion and God are stupid"

"We become easy bullying targets for people who don't understand us"

Not many people will be challenged to a fight at the office, but many Quaker teenagers have to defend daily a peace testimony which they may not yet have worked through for themselves. Hugh Pyper, 1986 Quaker faith & practice 22.68

Can you be a Quaker in today's world?

'We leave having identified our values and beliefs... eager to apply them to our daily lives' (JYM Epistle 2003).

I don't regularly recite passages from Quaker faith and practice... I don't dutifully commit myself to all tasks with the same presence of mind and assurance that I do when sitting down in meeting for worship... But after much more careful consideration... I began to deeper examine my daily routines and tasks, and search for those little essences of 'Quakerism' which I've woven into the fabric of my life. I discovered that everywhere I searched; there were little gems of faith flashing back at me. Chris Beck 2007

Things to think about.....

How can we be Quakers in today's world?

Should we as Quakers separate ourselves off from the rest of society?

What aspects of Quakerism can we take into the world?

What are the 'little gems of faith' that reflect back to you?

What helps you to do this? What makes it difficult?



Quakers and Action



The actions of a person is the best judge of their beliefs

Do you agree? Why? When have you judged someone on their action?

The world is a dangerous place, not because of those that do evil but because of those who look on and do nothing.

Have you ever looked on, rather than doing? When and why?

If you want anything said, ask a man. If you want something done as a woman.

Does this sound like the women you know?

When it comes to getting things done we need fewer architects and more bricklayers.

Why? When is this true? When might it not be true?

Quakers and the future 1

*Where do **you** see the Society of Friends in 5 / 25 /100 years?*

Live adventurously. When choices arise, do you take the way that offers the fullest opportunity for the use of your gifts in the service of God and the Community? Let your life speak. When decisions have to be made, are you ready to join with others in seeking clearness, asking for God's guidance and offering counsel to one another? Advices and Queries: 25

... in 1985, London Yearly Meeting responded to proposals for revision that had arisen... The previous thirty years had seen changes in language, in religious thoughts and social attitudes and in the nature of British society itself. Lives of ordinary people had been affected by advances in communication. Images of famine, war and disaster, wherever they occur in the world, are now brought into our own homes. The immediacy of our knowledge oppresses us with the feeling that the distress and violence of our times are greater than ever before. In Britain, however it has been the good fortune of this generation to be free from war and conscription and, though, poverty, homelessness and unemployment are widespread, many live with expectation of comfort, care, and length of life.

There is no yardstick by which the experiences of one generation can be judged against that of another, but we do know that whatever that circumstance, we are called to rediscover the Quaker way and to find appropriate words to express it. Quaker faith and practice, introduction.

How do we direct others to the Religious Society of Friends?

How do we respond to and celebrate, the diversity convincement brings?

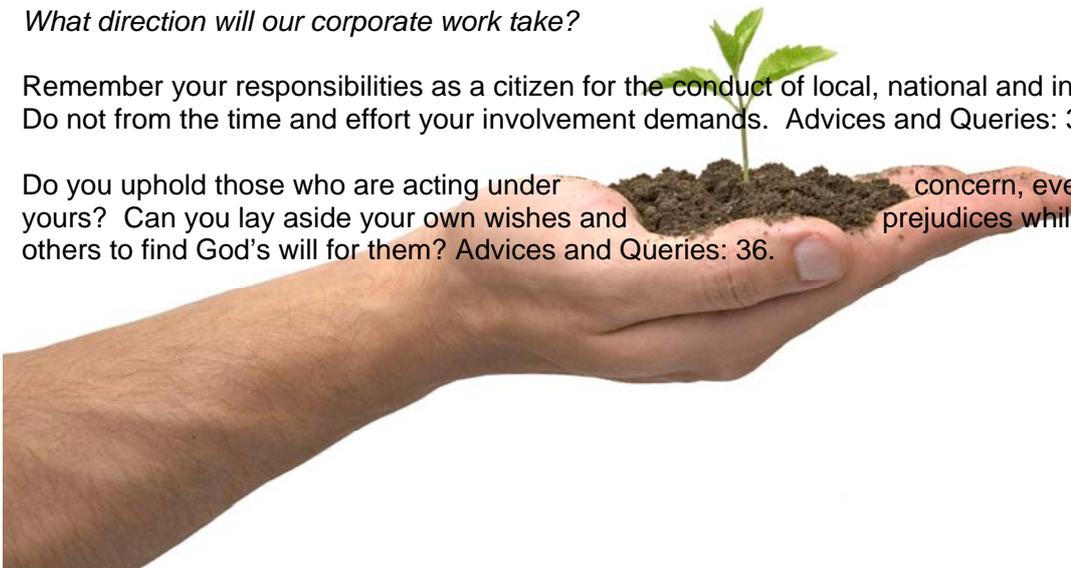
How can we make the meeting a community in which each person is accepted and nurtured, and strangers are welcome? Seek to know one another in the things which are eternal, bear the burden of each other's failings, and pray for one another. As we enter with tender sympathy into the joys and sorrows of each other's lives, ready to give help and to receive it, our meeting can be a channel for God's love and forgiveness. Advices and queries: 18

Outreach is for me an invitation to others to join us in our way of worship and response to life which are so important to us that we wish to share them... It is different from some forms of evangelism in that it does not use mass emotional appeal, idiosyncratic demands or autocratic compulsion but only the persuasion of insight, humanity and good sense. It does not depend on rewards or threats, but on the active acceptance of those who see it as truth. Edrey Allot, 1990 Quaker faith and practice 28:09

What direction will our corporate work take?

Remember your responsibilities as a citizen for the conduct of local, national and international affairs. Do not from the time and effort your involvement demands. Advices and Queries: 34.

Do you uphold those who are acting under your concern, even if their way is not yours? Can you lay aside your own wishes and prejudices while seeking with others to find God's will for them? Advices and Queries: 36.



Quakers and the future 2

Some Quakers feel that in order to live most fully and appreciatively, we must live in the present moment.

Do you agree? How much thought should we put into the future?

How much control do we have over our future?

Quakerism has changed a lot since it began in the 17 Century. Although it branched off from Christianity, many Quakers would now not class themselves as Christians. In fact, Quakers involved in other faiths, like Buddhism and Islam, are becoming increasingly common.

Is religion becoming less about community and more about our individual spiritual paths?

Should religion be experimental? Is it ok to combine religions?

How can we help those who are sympathetic to Quaker ideas not to be put off?

Is Quakerism shrinking as a religion, if so, does it matter?

Are Quaker morals spreading outside of the society?

If this is true, would it matter if the Society didn't exist?

If people stopped joining Quakerism, would it matter?



Quakers and Christianity 1

The Religious Society of Friends is rooted in Christianity and has always found inspiration in the life and teachings of Jesus. How do you interpret your faith in the light of this heritage? How does Jesus speak to you today? Are you following Jesus' example of love in action? Are you learning from his life the reality and cost of obedience to God? How does his relationship with God challenge and inspire you? Advices & Queries 4

It would appear that our Quakerism is changing, in that the links between Christianity and Quakerism are existent but not compulsory. JYM Epistle 2008

Bring the whole of your life under the ordering of the spirit of Christ. Are you open to the healing power of God's love? Cherish that of God within you, so that this love may grow in you and guide you. Let your worship and your daily life enrich each other. Treasure your experience of God, however it comes to you. Remember that Christianity is not a notion but a way. Advices & Queries 2.

From the beginning the Quaker Christian faith has had a universal dimension. George Fox saw the Light 'shine through all' and he identified it with the divine Light of Christ that 'enlightens every man that comes into the world' (John 1:9). Quaker faith & practice 27.04

How do you interpret your personal understanding of Quakerism in the light of its Christian roots?

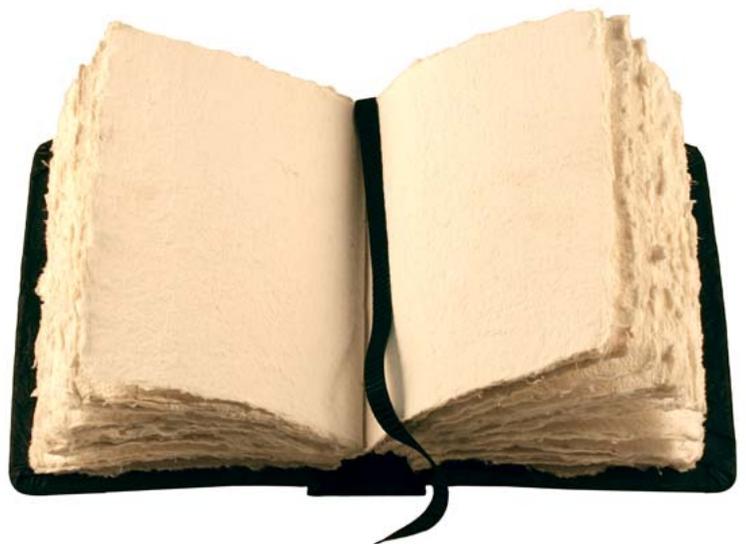
What might it mean to be a Quaker and a Christian now?

Do we see our Quaker lives as being different to what we think of as 'Christian', Why is this and what is the distinction? What are the strengths and weaknesses of both?

How would you react if you told someone you were a Quaker and they said... 'ah so you're a Christian then?'

How does Jesus speak to you today? How does Jesus' relationship with God challenge and inspire you?

Do you think it is bad that Quakerism is losing its Christian roots or are you glad to have left 'all that Christian stuff' behind?



Quakers & Christianity 2

Introduction: Historically, Quakerism is rooted in Christianity, and many Quakers in Britain today would identify as Christian. But many would not; and Friends openness, silent worship and lack of creeds mean that many 'seekers' who identify as atheist or agnostic, and some members of other religions, attend Quaker meetings. This can lead to debate and questions about what unites us as Friends now, and how to regard Christianity.

Remember that Christianity is not a notion but a way

To me it is important that the Religious Society of Friends is not labelled a Christian group. I find one of the most exciting things about the Society is that it changes, it reinterprets itself, it reflects the direct experience of its members. Christians have creeds, and to me that implies a caging of the spirit, a boxing in, an attempt to define something that is too big to be defined in words...
If we advertise ourselves as Christian, then I think a lot of potential enquirers who would have found their home in the Society would be put off.

Why am I a Quaker? I find it strange that people come to Quakerism who say they are atheists, who feel uncomfortable with Christian language. How can you be Quaker without recognising those promptings to love and truth? ... A lot of Young Friends say they don't believe in God. This is where language and labels hinder us. Our impulses are the same, and I believe they derive from the same force. I reject, however, any 'Quakerism' that does not focus to some extent on spirituality. A non-spiritual Quaker is an anomaly.

Some Quakers find traditional language full of meaning some do not

The central perceptions of Christianity remain as a source of perennial wisdom without which we sink into non-life. Incarnation, the cross, repentance, forgiveness, resurrection – these unfashionable words express the deep realities of the human condition.

I would call myself a Quaker, but not a Christian because of the Jesus thing

To me, being a Christian is a particular way of life, not the unquestioning acceptance of a particular system of theology, no belief in the literal truth of the Virgin birth, or the Resurrection and Ascension, but being the kind of person that Jesus wanted his followers to be and doing the things he told them to do...

... well there came a point when I realised that I wasn't a Christian. I recognised the value of the Bible and the messages it contains, but I didn't believe in its literal truth. The clincher was that I did not consider Jesus to be my personal saviour... Rather, I saw (and still see) him as teacher and healer.

I used to think that anyone who did not believe in God was out of place in the Religious Society of Friends. It is a *religious* society, after all. We can come with Christocentrics and universalists, but atheists? Then I started talking to a particularly insightful person I know from Young Friends General Meeting (YFGM). He turns out to be rather on the side of agnostic. Yet he finds YFGM a great place to come to develop his spirituality and to find people to work together for peace, equality, truth and simplicity. How could I not want my friend to be part of the Society?

How do you interpret your faith in the light of this [Christian] heritage? How does Jesus speak to you today?

How do you interpret your faith in the light of this [Christian] heritage?

What values / beliefs do you associate with Christianity, where is there overlap with Quaker values?

Why do you or Why don't you identify as a Christian...

How do you think people's views on Christianity affect their belonging to the Society of Friends?

What or where are the boundaries to Quakerism?

Do you see Quakerism as a part of Christianity?

Quakers and Worship

	adore	apotheosis	awe	bow down	celebrate	
prayer						honour
prostration						glorify
religion						faith
respect						exalt
revere						date on
ritual						devotion
spiritual						conformity
venerate						service
	idolize	laud	love	magnify	praise	

The first thing that I do is close my eyes then still my body... Then I still my mind and let it open to God in silent prayer

How can a person best prepare for worship?

Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.
Matthew 18:20

Can a person worship alone or is worship a community activity only?

Worship is our response to an awareness of God. We can worship alone, but when we join with others in expectant waiting we may discover a deeper sense of God's presence. We seek a gathered stillness in our meetings for worship so that all may feel the power of God's love drawing us together and leading us.
Advices and Queries 8

Friends have never regarded [worship] as an individual activity.
John Punshon, 1987 Quaker faith and practice, 2.73

Is the use of the word 'worship' appropriate in a Quaker context if Quakers believe in equality and a direct relationship with God?

Worship. The act of paying divine honors to the Supreme Being, religious reverence and homage; adoration, or acts of reverence, paid to God, or a being viewed as God.
[1913 Webster]

When I admire the wonders of a sunset or the beauty of the moon, my soul expands in the worship of the creator.
Gandhi.

What is the purpose of worship?

If all of life is worship, then what is not worship?

Early Friends felt that the churches' worship was not true worship. George Fox wrote, "For teachings, churches, and worships that have been set up by man's earthly understanding, knowledge, and will must be thrown down with the power of the Lord God"

Quakers and God

So here's what I want you to do. God helping you; take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life – and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him.

Romans 12:1 The Message

Do you respect that of God in everyone, though it may be expressed in unfamiliar ways or be difficult to discern? Each of us has a particular experience of God and each must find the way to be true to it. When words are strange or disturbing to you, try to sense where they come from and what has nourished the lives of others. Listen patiently and seek the truth which other people's opinions may contain for you. Avoid hurtful criticism and provocative language. Do not allow the strength of your convictions to betray you into making statements or allegations that are unfair or untrue. Think it possible that you may be mistaken.

Advices and Queries 17

Reflection on a pilgrimage along the East Coast... some Queries [Evan] created for his trip:

- How do I remain secure and non-threatened in my own faith to be open to others?
- What are the blindness's or biases from my Quaker roots?
- What is selflessness and is it ideal?
- How do I know what is my will and what is the will of God?¹

How might you answer these Queries?

How do you explain to others what you believe?

Would you use the word God? Why?

What words do you use to describe "God" – why?

Do you have to believe in God to be a Quaker?

What kind of God do Quakers believe in?

What is God doing for you?

Is God important for Quakerism?

² Edited by Angelina Conti et al. (2010). *Spirit Rising: Young Quaker Voices*. Philadelphia: Quakers Uniting In Publications, 2010, p.95

Quakers and other Faiths

There have been suggestions that Quakerism should include non-Christians from at least as far back as 1870, but this idea has become more visible during the latter half of the 20th century. This idea is still controversial among some Friends. Other Friends feel we should be accepting of those who actively identify themselves as a member of Quakers and another faith, such as Islam or Buddhism.

The humble, meek, merciful, just, pious, and devout souls are everywhere of one religion; and when death has taken off the mask they will know one another, though the divers liveries they wear here makes them strangers.
William Penn, 1693

Quakers have no set creed or dogma - that means we do not have any declared statements which you have to believe to be a Quaker.

...although we come from different faiths and backgrounds, human core beliefs are often very similar... JYM 2007 Epistle

In all Faiths the centrality of God's love is present.

The Quaker way has its roots in Christianity and finds inspiration in the Bible and the life and teachings of



Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God 1 John 4:1

If everyone listened to the promptings of their own minds and interpreted them in their own their way, there might be total



We are Christians or we are nothing.

We may have more in common with other main world religions than with traditional Christianity.

We are rooted in but not limited to Christianity as a source of religious inspiration.

Some traditional Friends find the whole idea of Buddhist Quakers inconceivable.



Differences of Faith are linked to conflict situations.



We need to focus on what we have in common.

Questions to consider:

- If Quakers are accepting of all faiths, why do we only have Quaker faith & practice and the Bible out during meeting?
- Are all Quakers Christian?
- Would it not be easier just to have one super-religion?
- How can anyone be of more than one Faith?
- What do Quakers actually believe?
- Why do people bother with a religion, doesn't it just waste time and bring false hope?
- Are we, as Quakers, judgmental of other faith groups?
- How do you know that Quakerism is the correct Faith for you? Can you be truly sure?