

The Inlook-Outlook Letter
Of the Prison Ministry of the St. Lawrence Valley Friends Meeting
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
Potsdam, NY (September, 2012)

This 'Inlook-Outlook Letter' is for you, to let you know you are in our hearts and prayers. When we *look into* our hearts we see God and this benefits our *outlook*.

George Fox's Revelations and the "Quaker Testimonies"

In England, a young man suddenly left his home "at the command of God" in 1643, aged 19 years. Thus George Fox began his itinerant search for what his friend Robert Barclay would later call "the true Christian divinity", for he saw that most Christians of his day were so in name only, "They did not possess what they professed". He must have been frustrated with the tragedy he saw everywhere, England was in the midst of a civil war that was supposed to reform government and "purify" the church, yet when it came to put the new ideas into practice, they fell short. He was moved by divine revelations he called "openings" [of the Spirit] after several years of a troubling search for truth. George Fox with Margaret Fell, would eventually found the Religious Society of Friends as he met other spiritual seekers and began to speak among them.

Friends, who became widely known by the insulting name "Quaker" given them for their penchant to tremble when they felt the Spirit of God upon them in meeting for worship, were critical of the Protestant Reformation, which had begun 125 years earlier. They felt that it had failed to bring the world back to a true Christian divinity, which had been lost when the church became allied with Rome around 325 C. E. [C. E.= "common era" the new designation for "A.D."]. They found a model for a true Christian divinity in the simple services of the earliest Christians as described in the letters of the Apostle Paul, and the Prophets and Psalms of the Jewish people: *Wait* upon the Spirit of the Lord with patience and *watchfulness* in unadorned settings; listening for the "still, small voice" of God.

George Fox's main revelation came when it dawned on him that when in the past God came upon the prophets and spoke to them as described in scripture, far from that being a special time when God spoke to people, but no longer did, he heard a voice that informed him otherwise: *And when all my hopes in them [the things of organized religions]...had gone, so that I had outwardly nothing to help me...Oh, then I heard a voice which said 'There is one, even Christ Jesus, who can speak to thy condition', and when I did hear it my heart did leap for joy...And this I knew experimentally* [The quotes are from George Fox's Journal, Edited by John Nickalls, published 1952].

Here are other revelations: 1) Being a church member or "believer" is not enough, your religion has to show some results, a change of heart and mind, or it is no religion at all. 2) The essence of and responsibility for ministry is in everyone, and everyone must exercise that according to the *light* they have been given. 3) The inward principle or light is our teacher ["that of God in

everyone”]. 4) The scriptures are not enough to understand God’s will: He says, *The Lord would teach his people himself* (p. 8). 5) God does not dwell in temples or other human constructions or “holy places” but in human hearts. 6) Men and women are of equal value in church affairs. 7) Worldly professions are in need of reform to serve humankind; justice to the poor; honor due God, not men; truthfulness in speech and actions; care for creatures, do not use up the earth; and refuses to engage in war: *I told them* [when they offered him a captainship in the reform army of the Puritan Party], *I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars.*

In George Fox’s revelations can be seen the beginnings of the “Quaker Testimonies”, our faith in practice. There is no set number, but here are 4 of the testimonies quoted from the website of the Earlham School of Religion at Earlham College, Richmond, IN [a Quaker school]:

“The Quaker Testimony of **Integrity** is essentially a call for consistency between what a person professes and their actions in "real life." It entails a recognition that, in order for a person to attain godliness or perfection, there needs to be concordance between what they think, say and do; which is to say, there must be a harmony between one’s physical and spiritual existence.”

“The Testimony of **Simplicity** carries the Quaker ethic a step further by applying it to the details of daily life. Just as the external trappings of ritual and doctrine were felt to interfere with the inner spiritual communion essential to true religious worship; so, too, the presence of physical luxury—to say nothing of the consumption of alcohol, tobacco or excessive eating—was also felt to impede the development of a person’s inner spiritual growth.”

“The central importance to Friends of the Testimony of **Equality** is exemplified by their corollary theological belief in ‘that of God in everyone’.”

“All forms of physical violence are categorically disallowed by the **Peace** Testimony. At the same time, it leaves the door more than open for inner spiritual struggle, verbal debate and conscientious dissent.”

Queries to consider: 1) Which Quaker Testimony have I witnessed to in my community today, and how did I do that? 2) Which of the Quaker Testimonies do I resonate with the most, which the least? 3) Have I endeavored to study the history of the people called “Quakers”, in order to deepen and enrich my understanding of my faith community? 4) What aspect of the Quaker message drew me to Friends in the first place, and how has that changed my life?

May God bless you. Anybody who wishes to receive the 'Inlook-Outlook Letter' may request a subscription by writing to the address below. Be sure to let us know your complete address. You will be put on our mailing list and receive a monthly copy at no cost. Also, please feel free to write us with your comments, suggestions and contributions to the Letter: St. Lawrence Valley Friends Meeting, P.O. Box 292, Canton, NY 13617. This newsletter is not copyrighted and may be reproduced.