

Maury River Faith and Practice Listening Session 3/10/2013

From the Committee: Jim Rose
Recorder: Susan Hills Rose

We heard that from a Friend who appreciates the document and believes it helps orient people to Quakerism. He was not familiar with the previous version and sees Faith and Practice documents as a continuing revelation process.

The clerk said that the meeting has had several second hours on Faith and Practice and several committees have looked at it. The meeting paid special attention to the first four chapters and the queries, advices, and voices in Part II. It also looked at some of part IV. He said the “heartfelt” conclusion of the entire meeting was that the Life of the Spirit was so good that it could stand alone in pamphlet form as an introduction to Quaker worship and spirituality.

A Friend appreciated the queries, advices, and voices. However, it would be helpful to have some cross referencing in the first section so Friends could easily find the more complete treatment of a topic. A better index would help to. A specific instance is the various treatments of testimonies. There are succinct references in the first section but more extended treatment later. The same applies to meeting for worship. One Friend gradually came to understand that the opening is a preview and there were more extended treatments of many topics later, but this could be presented to help Friends understand this sooner. Another Friend suggested adding an overview of the document (a “roadmap”) that would describe what is to be found in each section. This is common in many documents. Also, the index might make it clear where the primary treatment of a subject is to be found (sometimes this is bolded).

A Friend noted that Britain Yearly Meeting has a manual of procedures and another manual with the voices and other material. Friends were of different minds about whether separate books would be a good idea. One Friend said she could easily find what she needed in the book and did not need anything to be physically separated out. A Friend noted that some sections are boring until they become relevant.

Asked if it was appropriate to include non-Quaker voices, Friends said it was absolutely right; what mattered was the spirit of the quotation.

A representative of the care and counsel committee said the committee spent time looking at how the meeting’s practices compared with those described and found that there were no conflicts. One thing they found lacking was what the meeting called a listening committee. This is called when someone is facing something that is a chronic or ongoing condition (such as becoming a caretaker for a spouse) and needs to be heard lovingly, but there is no decision to be made about the situation. After the person has spoken, there are sometimes queries or comments, as in a clearness committee. If need be, there might be more than one meeting. A Friend said a good place to insert this would be on pages 27-28 in the life in community within the listening subsection.

A Friend said the queries on marriage are very helpful.

A Friend not present wanted to know why Jesus and the Bible were not in the index. She found the “Christophobia” disconcerting and unnecessary.

A Friend saw the need for a voice and query on the issue of sustainability. Are we as Friends called to live sustainably, meeting our needs in a way that preserves environmental resources for the future? He also commented on the grief that people feel who love the earth and see the harm we are doing to it. The BYM website has some material on the subject.

Some Friends had difficulty with p. 43, where there is a paragraph about the use of intoxicants that includes a sentence that implies Friends have total unity on the issue. It also references “illegal” drugs, and Friends felt legality or illegality were not the issue for Friends. A better way to approach the issue is through queries about how alcohol or drugs are affecting the individual or family. It is appropriate to say how alcohol and drugs may affect families, but the material should be exploratory rather than prescriptive. The “thou shalt not” approach is always disturbing among Friends. However, a Friend noted that historically Friends were for temperance.

A Friend who said he had not read the book wondered if the entire book could be shrunk to just a few key principles. He said he ministers in prison where prisoners cannot read and it is necessary to simply speak and share.

A Friend said it is difficult to put an experiential religion into words. He said this version does a much better job of this than the previous one.

In reference to finding and seeking in the opening section, Friends found an appropriate balance. The first few pages are about seeking, but the rest of the section describes important practices that are part of what Friends have found together. Another Friend said Friends experience the truth as alive and ongoing in continuing revelation, so you cannot say you have found what you need to know and just stop. A Friend said the seeking aspect of Quakerism is its most distinctive feature. Another Friend said this is similar to science, in that scientists are still seeking but have made a wealth of discoveries. A Friend found a “dynamic tension” between “seeking and landing.” Conceptually, Friends may feel led in many directions, but we have procedures to test leadings.

A Friend said the recently adopted vision statement was not integrated in the book and it was not clear why it was there. The friend noted that the paragraph about the inward spirit that some call Spirit and some call Christ is very important and could be a model for approaching the issue of language about the divine.

A Friend said how much he appreciated the committee coming to the “grassroots” level to listen unlike the process used to develop the Vision Statement.