

Readings for Reflection

from the Committee on Ministry and Counsel

2008 Lake Erie Yearly Meeting Query

Are we open to the Other?

What keeps me/us from connecting with those who are different from me/us?

What fears cloud my/our vision of the Light in all beings?

How can I listen with my heart, willing to be vulnerable?

How are we teaching our children that God's love includes all?

Quotations on the Theme of the 2008 LEYM Query

1 - The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.

Leviticus 19:34 (NRSV)

2 - "Master, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery." ... But Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger.

As they persisted with their question, he looked up and said, "If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." ... When they heard this they went away one by one, beginning with the eldest, until Jesus was left alone with the woman, who remained standing there. He looked up and said, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she replied. "Neither do I condemn you," said Jesus. "Go away and don't sin any more."

John 8:4-11 (Jerusalem Bible)

3 - "I am the good Shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.

"I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd."

John 10:3-4, 14, 16

4 - There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galations 3:28

5 - Argue not with the People of the Scripture [Jews, Christians, Muslims] unless it be in (a way) that is better, save with such of them as do wrong. And say: we believe in that which hath been revealed unto us and revealed unto you; our God and your God is One, and unto Him, we surrender.

Qur'an 29:46

6 - Do rightly, justly, truly, holy, equally to all people in all things, and that is according to that of God in every man, and the witness of God and the wisdom of God and the life of God in yourselves; and there ye are serviceable in your generation, labouring in the thing that is good, which doth not spoil nor destroy nor waste creation upon lusts.

George Fox, Epistle 200 (1661)

7 - Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness:

And bearing one with another,

And forgiving one another,

And not laying accusations

One against another;

But praying one for another,

And helping one another

Up with a tender hand...

Isaac Penington (Britain YM F&P, 10.01) (1667)

8 - And yet we are very apt to be full of our selves, instead of Him that made what we so much value; and, but for whom we can have no Reason to value our selves. For we have nothing that we can call our own; no, not our selves: For we are all but tenants, and at Will to, of the great Lord of our selves, and the rest of this great Farm, the World that we live upon.

We are apt to be very pert at censuring others, where we will not endure advice our selves. And nothing shows our Weakness more than to be so sharp-sighted at spying other Men's Faults, and so purblind about our own.

William Penn, Some Fruits of Solitude (1693), 18, 41, 121

9 - Love was the first motion, and then a concern arose to spend some time with the Indians, that I might feel and understand their life and the spirit they live in, if haply I might receive some instruction from them, or they be in any degree helped forward by my following the leadings of Truth amongst them. And as it pleased the Lord to make way for my going at a time when the troubles of war were increasing, and when by reason of

much wet weather travelling was more difficult than usual at that season, I looked upon it as a more favourable opportunity to season my mind and bring me into a nearer sympathy with them. And as mine eye was to the great Father of Mercies, humbly desiring to learn what his will was concerning me, I was made quiet and content.

John Woolman, *Journal* (1772), 127

10 - There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath had different names. It is, however, pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion nor excluded from any, where the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, of what nation soever, they become brethren in the best sense of the expression.

John Woolman, *On Keeping Negroes II* (1762)
in: *Britain YM F&P* 26.61

11 - Oppression in the extreme appears terrible, but oppression in more refined appearances remains to be oppression, and where the smallest degree of it is cherished it grows stronger and more extensive: that labour for a perfect redemption from this spirit of oppression is the great business of the whole family of Christ Jesus in this world.

John Woolman (Source?)

12 - Personality, sex, race, culture, and experience are God's gifts. We need one another and differences shared become enrichments, not reason to be afraid, to dominate or condemn. The media have increased our knowledge of the world, but we need greater self-awareness if our actions are to be changed in relation to the information we receive. We need to consider our behaviour carefully, heeding the command of Jesus that we should love our neighbours as we love ourselves.

Meg Maslin, in *Britain YM F&P*, 23.33

13 - I have been greatly exercised for some time by the image we like to present of ourselves (albeit with beating of breasts) as a white, middle-class, well-educated group of heterosexual people, preferably in stable marriages with children that behave in socially acceptable ways. I do feel that this is a myth. The danger of such myths is that we exclude many potential Quakers who feel they cannot/do not live up to the image or who feel that such a group is not one with which they wish to be associated. Sadly, many of us within the Society who do not fit in feel marginalized and second-class.

Susan Rooke-Matthews, in *Britain YM F&P*, 23.46

14 - While Quakers believe that a seed of God is in every human being, it is sometimes easier to believe this of persons at a distance than it is of those near at hand. This is particularly true when the need arises to address contentious issues. A Meeting community should always seek to consider openly matters at issue, seeking a loving resolution of conflict, rather than to preserve a semblance of community by ignoring issues. Even when resolution is not immediate, the Meeting should make room for different expressions of continuing revelation while persisting in earnest search for unity.

At the same time, it is well for Meetings consciously to cultivate fellowship and unity. The goal, in George Fox's words, is to "know one another in that which is eternal, which was before the world was." Religious education programs for Friends of all ages are a primary bond. In the common experience of worship we draw together in a most essential way. The discussion of matters of concern, as well as fellowship based on recreation, intellectual pursuits, music, and other aesthetic interests, can help unify the Meeting community. Working together also builds bonds of trust, understanding and communication. In all things the principle of simplicity suggests that leisure activities, working, and faith be compatible and complimentary.

Baltimore YM *Faith and Practice* (1988)

15 - All of us are enmeshed in the net of racism, whether we choose to be or not. But there is hope. Let me share an analogy with you ... Racism is very much like alcoholism. The alcoholic doesn't choose or intend to be an alcoholic; neither you nor I choose or intend to be racists, or to benefit from a racist society. Both are things that happen to us, through no choice of our own, without our intent. The alcoholic is not a wicked, evil person; neither are you or I ... The illness of racism, like alcoholism, is not my fault, but is my responsibility. I didn't cause it, but I must and can control it.

In both cases – racism and alcoholism – the first step on the road to health is to acknowledge the reality, to stop making excuses, to stop denying it. We need to face the facts before we can cope with them. In both cases you're never fully cured; the alcoholic is always an alcoholic. And I really doubt, sadly, that those of us who grew up in a racist society can ever totally shed our unconscious racist attitudes. But we can take responsibility for our actions from now on.... We can choose to work to end racism, and learn skills to do that.

Alison D. Oldham,
in Catherine Whitmire, *Plain Living* (1984)

16 - As a black Quaker, I see the Inner Light as the great liberator and equalizer able to erase the psychological deficits of racism. The internalization of this divine principle has the potential to remove the sense of powerlessness that so often characterizes the thinking of the downtrodden. For if the Divine Light is the Seed of God planted in the souls of human beings, in that Seed lies all the characteristics of its source. Consequently, the Light within is also the Divine Power within. It is the indestructible power in us that is able to create from nothing, able to make ways out of no way, able to change what appears to be the natural order of things. It is the power in us that can never be overcome by the darkness of fear and hatred or altered by the might or money of people. It is the power in us in which lies unfathomable capacity to love and forgive even the most heinous of crimes.

Ayesha Clark-Halkin Imani, in
Philadelphia YM F&P (1988)

17 - At its best, a Quaker meeting is able to convey to newcomers a sense of unconditional acceptance: of listening, openness, and hospitality that invites the newcomer to enter ever more deeply into the life of the meeting.... A true community comes to understand and value the diversity of its members and is able to both accept and transcend those differences.

Thomas Gates, *Members One of Another* (PHP)

18 - Practicing compassion means overcoming our sense of fear and separateness and being willing to give and receive from a stranger. Erich Fromm says that courage is the door to all the other virtues, for without practicing courage, neither love, faith, or hope are possible.

When we have esteem, or at least respect, for ourselves and others, not as we might be, but as we are, burdensome problems can often be transformed into exciting challenges.

To practice compassion: 1. The first step is defining one's community in an inclusive way; 2. The second step is learning to separate people from problems; 3. Learning to differentiate positions and goals is the third step in loving the stranger.

We must practice compassion, not only for the stranger outside ourselves, but also for the stranger within. By loving the stranger within, we empower ourselves to have compassion for the stranger in the world. ... Communities are essential for getting to know the stranger within.

Nancy C. Alexander (PHP 271)

19 - In 1976, I (said) ... that if we (the United States) were to survive for two hundred more years, we would need the contributions of those left out of the Declaration of Independence: people of color, Native Americans, women, the poor, children, and young people. I said: that we must internalize that the majority of the world population is dark-skinned, and our arrogant assumption of white superiority is no longer endurable; that indigenous people can point the way to a simpler lifestyle and a less destructive world-view; that women can help us to make decisions at a national level, as well as a personal level, on the basis of caring about people and about the earth, rather than on the basis of greed and self-interest; that homeless and hungry and unemployed people make a mockery of our boast of "liberty and justice for all"; that children need a future in which to live and dream and make their contributions to the world.

Elizabeth Watson, 1992, in Whitmire [*sic*]

20 - Are Friends aware of the extent to which race and culture affect profits and privileges?

What efforts do we make to welcome persons of other cultures and color into Monthly Meetings of the Society of Friends, and into Friends' committees?

Are Friends active in trying to help overcome the contemporary effects of past and present exploitation and deprivation of people who are racially different?

Excerpts from *LEYM Query on Racial Concerns* (1997)

21 - Religious people are far more tolerant than I think the popular culture gives them credit for. Conversely, secularists are far more interested in morality and ethics than the right wing would portray them. ...

The issue of race now has more to do with wealth and class. That isn't to say there's no discrimination or bias. But I think that if people think you can help them, whether it's in business or politics, they can look beyond color.

Barack Obama in his own words,
pp. 35, 135 (2007)