

Chapter 2

Approaches to God – worship and prayer

EXPERIENCE AND NATURE OF WORSHIP

- 2.01 Worship is the response of the human spirit to the presence of the divine and eternal, to the God who first seeks us. The sense of wonder and awe of the finite before the infinite leads naturally to thanksgiving and adoration.

Silent worship and the spoken word are both parts of Quaker ministry. The ministry of silence demands the faithful activity of every member in the meeting. As, together, we enter the depths of a living silence, the stillness of God, we find one another in ‘the things that are eternal’, upholding and strengthening one another.

1967; 1994

- 2.02 On one never-to-be-forgotten Sunday morning, I found myself one of a small company of silent worshippers who were content to sit down together without words, that each one might feel after and draw near to the Divine Presence, unhindered at least, if not helped, by any human utterance. Utterance I knew was free, should the words be given; and, before the meeting was over, a sentence or two were uttered in great simplicity by an old and apparently untaught man, rising in his place amongst the rest of us. I did not pay much attention to the words he spoke, and I have no recollection of their purport. My whole soul was filled with the unutterable peace of the undisturbed opportunity for communion with God, with the sense that at last I had found a place where I might, without the faintest suspicion of insincerity, join with others in simply seeking His presence. To sit down in silence could at the least pledge me to nothing; it might open to me (as it did that morning) the very gate of heaven. And, since that day, now more than seventeen years ago, Friends’ meetings have indeed been to me the greatest of outward

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helps to a fuller and fuller entrance into the spirit from which they have sprung; the place of the most soul-subduing, faith-restoring, strengthening, and peaceful communion, in feeding upon the bread of life, that I have ever known.

Caroline E Stephen, 1890

- 2.03 Some Friends are able to recall with clarity the first occasion on which they attended a Quaker meeting. While I cannot remember when or where I did so, I do have a vivid recollection of the meeting which I began to attend regularly.

It was held in a rather hideous building: the meeting room was dingy. We sat on rickety chairs that creaked at the slightest movement. The whole place gave little hope that those who worshipped there might catch a glimpse of the vision of God. It was in stark contrast to the splendour of the Anglican churches to which I had been accustomed, where through dignified ritual the beauty of holiness was vividly portrayed.

However, it was in this unlikely setting that I came to know what I can only describe as the amazing fact of Quaker worship. It was in that uncomfortable room that I discovered the way to the interior side of my life, at the deep centre of which I knew that I was not alone, but was held by a love that passes all understanding. This love was mediated to me, in the first place, by those with whom I worshipped. For my journey was not solitary, but one undertaken with my friends as we moved towards each other and together travelled inwards. Yet I knew that the love that held me could not be limited to the mutual love and care we had for each other. It was a signal of transcendence that pointed beyond itself to the source of all life and love.

George Gorman, 1973

- 2.04 *Daniel Wheeler (1771-1840) went to St Petersburg as agricultural adviser to tsar Alexander I and helped with the draining of marshes; he later spent four years sailing the South Seas as a missionary.*

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Last First Day, in our little meeting, the Master was pleased to preside, and it was indeed a ‘feast of fat things’; and the language which arose in my heart was, ‘Take, eat, this is my body’. I never remember being under such a covering, and my desire is, that I may never forget it; and oh! that the fear of the Lord may so prevail amongst us, as to entitle us to His Love, which can alone enable us to ‘run through a troop, or leap over a wall’: and which at this time enableth me to call every country my country, and every man my brother.

Daniel Wheeler, written in Ochta near Petersburg, 1818

- 2.05 A’r pryd y gwelo Duw yn dda roddi gair yng ngenau neb ohonynt, mae hwnnw i ddywedyd y peth y byddo yr Arglwydd wedi ei ddatguddio a’i ddysgu iddo. Felly mae ef i roddi allan yn eglurhad yr ysbryd a’i nerth, ac yn y rhinwedd a’r bywyd, fel y byddo er adeiladaeth yn yr eglwys; canys mae dyfnder yn galw ar ddyfnder, a bywyd yn cyrraedd at fywyd, a’r gynulleidfa yn cyd fyned i’r dyfroedd i yfed yn rhad. Yna os datguddir dim i’r un a fyddo yn eistedd ger llaw, mae y cyntaf i ddistewi, oblegid mae y ffrwd honno o ddawn ysbrydol yn cael ei throi ar olwyn y dyn arall; canys mae y rhyddid ysbrydol hwnnw, yn y wir eglwys, i bob un, i lefaru megis ag y cynhyrfer hwynt, gan yr Ysbryd Glân.

Ellis Pugh, c1700

An English translation ‘from the British tongue’ was published in 1732:

And when God sees meet to put a Word into the mouth of any one of them, he is to speak what the Lord hath revealed and taught him (I Cor 2:4). So is he to give it forth in demonstration and power, and in the virtue and life of the Spirit, that it may be to edification in the church; for deep calleth unto deep, and life reacheth unto life, and the congregation go together to the waters to drink freely (Ps 42:7). And if anything be revealed to one that sits by, when the first is silent, that stream of the spiritual gift is turned to the other, because that spiritual liberty is in the true church, for every one to speak as they are moved by the Holy Spirit.

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- 2.06 The treasure I had found [in meeting for worship] seemed startlingly simple, and I held this treasure quietly to myself, exploring its significance, feeling it almost too good to be true. Part of its simplicity was that I and others were to start just where we were at the moment and proceed at our own pace from there. How blessed that there were no restraints of belief. The promptings of love and truth were the starting places and we could move at our own pace to recognise them as the leadings of God – the beyond which drew me and others on from our limitations and despairs and smallnesses.

Ruth Fawell, 1987

- 2.07 Worship is essentially an act of adoration, adoration of the one true God in whom we live and move and have our being. Forgetting our little selves, our petty ambitions, our puny triumphs, our foolish cares and fretful anxieties, we reach out towards the beauty and majesty of God. The religious life is not a dull, grim drive towards moral virtues, but a response to a vision of greatness.

Thomas F Green, 1952

- 2.08 To me, worship is recognising and communing with the divine, whether it is within myself, in others, or in the world. The precondition of worship is my belief in worth-ship, my own and that of other people.

A member of the Quaker Women's Group, 1986

- 2.09 All true worship is inspired by God. The place of worship is the place of dependence, the place of wonder and of power, the place of fellowship and of communion... Worship links us to God and implies faith in a God who is in some sense personal. Personality is the highest category we know and we cannot worship a Being who is less than the highest of which we conceive... Thus the act of worship presupposes on our part a sense of dependence on God and the acknowledgment of our need of him, and this means that the element of adoration and thanksgiving should always be present in worship. Worship in Christian experience is our response to the God of Love.

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Robert Davis, 1933

- 2.10 *Thomas Kelly (1893-1941) was a scientist from Ohio who taught philosophy at Earlham and Haverford colleges. Towards the end of his life he had vivid experiences of the love of God, of which he spoke and wrote, in his Testament of devotion.*

In this humanistic age we suppose man is the initiator and God is the responder. But the living Christ within us is the initiator and we are the responders. God the Lover, the accuser, the revealer of light and darkness presses within us. 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock.' And all our apparent initiative is already a response, a testimonial to His secret presence and working within us. The basic response of the soul to the Light is internal adoration and joy, thanksgiving and worship, self-surrender and listening.

Thomas R Kelly, 1941

- 2.11 True worship may be experienced at any time; in any place – alone on the hills or in the busy daily life – we may find God, in whom we live and move and have our being. But this individual experience is not sufficient, and in a meeting held in the Spirit there is a giving and receiving between its members, one helping another with or without words. So there may come a wider vision and a deeper experience.

1925; 1994

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- 2.12 In silence which is active, the Inner Light begins to glow – a tiny spark. For the flame to be kindled and to grow, subtle argument and the clamour of our emotions must be stilled. It is by an attention full of love that we enable the Inner Light to blaze and illuminate our dwelling and to make of our whole being a source from which this Light may shine out.

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Words must be purified in a redemptive silence if they are to bear the message of peace. The right to speak is a call to the duty of listening. Speech has no meaning unless there are attentive minds and silent hearts. Silence is the welcoming acceptance of the other. The word born of silence must be received in silence.

Pierre Lacout, 1969

- 2.13 True silence ... is to the spirit what sleep is to the body, nourishment and refreshment.

William Penn, 1699

- 2.14 We highly prize silent waiting upon the Lord in humble dependence upon him. We esteem it to be a precious part of spiritual worship, and trust that no vocal offering will ever exclude it from its true place in our religious meetings. Let not the silence ... be spent in indolent or vacant musing but in patient waiting in humble prayerful expectancy before the Lord.

Yearly Meeting in London, 1884; 1886

- 2.15 I know of no other way, in these deeper depths, of trusting in the name of the Lord, and staying upon God, than sinking into silence and nothingness before Him... So long as the enemy can keep us reasoning he can buffet us to and fro; but into the true solemn silence of the soul before God he cannot follow us.

John Bellows, 1895

- 2.16 [The early Friends] made the discovery that silence is one of the best preparations for communion [with God] and for the reception of inspiration and guidance. Silence itself, of course, has no magic. It may be just sheer emptiness, absence of words or noise or music. It may be an occasion for slumber, or it may be a dead form. But it may be an intensified pause, a vitalised hush, a creative quiet, an actual moment of mutual and reciprocal correspondence with God.

Rufus Jones, 1937

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- 2.17 Meeting is the chance to escape from the trivial thoughts of everyday living, and to find answers from yourself or from God. Some people are scared of the silence. Without the noise that serves to reassure us, that blocks out thoughts we'd rather not have, we're vulnerable and find it's time to face ourselves. We can never hide from God, but it's easy to minimise the effect he has on our lives – except in the silence where he can be heard. Don't feel restricted by the silence, it is there to set you free from the pressures of life. No-one is judging your movements, your thoughts... Freedom of expression is the freedom to worship God on your own terms. Value the opportunity to think unguided by the world. Learn what you feel you need to know, let other information pass. No moment of silence is a waste of time.

Rachel Needham, 1987

PRAYER

- 2.18 Be still and cool in thy own mind and spirit from thy own thoughts, and then thou wilt feel the principle of God to turn thy mind to the Lord God, whereby thou wilt receive his strength and power from whence life comes, to allay all tempests, against blusterings and storms. That is it which moulds up into patience, into innocency, into soberness, into stillness, into stayedness, into quietness, up to God, with his power.

George Fox, 1658

- 2.19 *William Leddra of Barbados on the day before he was martyred in 1661 wrote:*

As the flowing of the ocean doth fill every creek and branch thereof, and then retires again towards its own being and fulness, and leaves a savour behind it; so doth the life and virtue of God flow into every one of your hearts, whom he hath made partakers of his divine nature; and when it withdraws but a little, it leaves a sweet savour behind it; that many can say they are made clean through the word that he hath spoken to them. In which innocent condition you may see what you are in the presence of God, and what you are without him... Stand still, and cease from thine own working, and in due time

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thou shalt enter into the rest, and thy eyes shall behold his salvation, whose testimonies are sure, and righteous altogether.

- 2.20 Do you make a place in your daily life for reading, meditation, and waiting upon God in prayer, that you may know more of the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit? Do you remember the need to pray for others, holding them in the presence of God?

Queries, 1964

- 2.21 I read that I was supposed to make ‘a place for inward retirement and waiting upon God’ in my daily life, as the Queries in those days expressed it... At last I began to realise, first that I needed some kind of inner peace, or inward retirement, or whatever name it might be called by; and then that these apparently stuffy old Friends were really talking sense. If I studied what they were trying to tell me, I might possibly find that the ‘place of inward retirement’ was not a place I had to go to, it was there all the time. I could know the ‘place of inward retirement’ wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, and find the spiritual refreshment for which, knowingly or unknowingly, I was longing, and hear the voice of God in my heart. Thus I began to realise that prayer was not a formality, or an obligation, it was a *place* which was there all the time and always available.

Elfrida Vipont Foulds, 1983

- 2.22 How, then, shall we lay hold of that Life and Power, and live the life of prayer without ceasing? By quiet, persistent practice in turning all our being, day and night, in prayer and inward worship and surrender, towards Him who calls in the deeps of our souls. Mental habits of inward orientation must be established. An inner, secret turning to God can be made fairly steady, after weeks and months and years of practice and lapses and failures and returns. It is as simple an art as Brother Lawrence found it, but it may be long before we achieve any steadiness in the process. Begin now, as you read these words, as you sit in your chair, to offer your whole selves, utterly and in joyful abandon, in quiet, glad surrender to Him who is within. In secret ejaculations of praise, turn in humble wonder to the Light, faint though it may be. Keep contact with the outer world of

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sense and meanings. Here is no discipline in absent-mindedness. Walk and talk and work and laugh with your friends. But behind the scenes keep up the life of simple prayer and inward worship. Keep it up throughout the day. Let inward prayer be your last act before you fall asleep and the first act when you awake. And in time you will find, as did Brother Lawrence, that ‘those who have the gale of the Holy Spirit go forward even in sleep’.

Thomas R Kelly, 1941

- 2.23 Prayer is experienced as deeper than words or busy thoughts. ‘Be still and cool in thy own mind and spirit from thy own thoughts’, said Fox. It is marked by a kind of relaxed readiness, a ‘letting-go’ of the problems and perplexities with which the mind is occupied, and a waiting in ‘love and truth’: the truth about oneself, the truth about the world, deeper than the half-truths we see when we are busy in it about our own planning and scheming, the love in which we are held when we think of others more deeply than our ordinary relations with them, the love that at root holds us to the world. Prayer is not words or acts, but reaching down to love: holding our fellows in love, offering ourselves in love; and being held by, being caught up in love. It is communion, an opening of the door, an entry from the beyond. This is the point where secular language fails, for this cannot be spoken about at all: it can only be known.

Harold Loukes, 1967

- 2.24 Consider now the prayer-life of Jesus. It comes out most clearly in the record of St Luke, who leaves us with the impression that prayer was the most vital element in our Lord’s life. He rises a great while before day that he may have some hours alone with His Father. He continues all night in prayer to God. Incident after incident is introduced by the statement that Jesus was praying. Are we so much nearer God that we can afford to dispense with that which to Him was of such vital moment? But apart from this, it seems to me that this prayer-habit of Jesus throws light upon the *purpose* of prayer.

I think of those long hours alone with God. Quite obviously *petition* can have had a very small place in our Lord’s thoughts. We cannot suppose that He whose chief desire was that God’s will should be

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done in all things could have been incessantly asking, asking. There must have been a sacred interchange far deeper than this. Especially are we sure that He was not praying for material blessings to be enjoyed by Himself alone. On the only occasion recorded in which He asked (in perfect submission) something for Himself, at Gethsemane, His request was not granted.

My own belief is that outward circumstances are not often (I will not say *never*) directly altered as a result of prayer. That is to say, God is not always interfering with the working of the natural order. But indirectly by the working of mind upon mind great changes may be wrought. We live and move and have our being in God; we are bound up in the bundle of life in Him, and it is reasonable to believe that prayer may often find its answer, even in outward things, by the reaction of mind upon mind. Prayer is not given us to make life easy for us, or to coddle us, but to make us strong ... to make us masters of circumstance and not its slaves. We pray, not to change God's will, but to bring our wills into correspondence with His.

William Littleboy, 1937

- 2.25 Prayer is not an occasional nod
Given in passing to God.
It's more like marriage – a closeness of living,
A constant receiving and giving.

Louie Horne, 1987

- 2.26 Prayer, we learn gradually, has far more to do with listening than with talking. In emotional stress the thoughts are so obsessive that they leave one no opportunity to listen. So, when we know someone is in trouble, we can and must listen (pray) for them. A Friend who had missed meeting for several weeks told us that she knew we had been praying for her before we said so; she had felt it and been sustained by it. She had thought there was no point in prayer or belief in God, but she had been helped by the knowledge that we still prayed and believed. It seems that one can do no less than this. We are seldom given guarantees that it is effective, just hints along the way; but they are hints we cannot ignore. We cannot prove the

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effectiveness of prayer, but nor can we cast scorn on examples of the kind I have given.

A friend tells me that when she prays for someone she does not so much pray *to* God for them as *for* God for them. This seems to me a vital clue about prayer. It is God that the troubled person needs, not our advice and instructions. As we learn more about worship we learn to listen more deeply so that we can be channels through which God's love reaches the other person. It is God at work, not we ourselves; we are simply used.

Diana Lampen, 1979

- 2.27 Prayer is an act of sharing with God, the Spirit, and not an attempt to prompt God to action. It is a promise that I will do my best, even if what I am able to do seems too insignificant to be worthwhile. When I pray for peace, and that the hearts of those in authority may be changed, it is a promise that I shall do such things as write to those in power, share in vigils, and above all lead my own life, as far as possible, in such a manner as to take away the occasion for strife between individuals and between peoples. When I pray for others who are in need, it is a promise to make my own contribution, perhaps by writing, by visiting, by a gift, by telling someone whom I know could help. When I pray for forgiveness, for strength and courage, I try to open my heart, making it possible for me humbly to receive.

'Anna', 1984

- 2.28 There is little point in praying to be enabled to overcome some temptation, and then putting oneself in the very position in which the temptation can exert all its fascination. There is little point in praying that the sorrowing may be comforted and the lonely cheered, unless we ourselves set out to bring comfort and cheer to the sad and neglected in our own surroundings. There is little point in praying for our home and for our loved ones, and in going on being as selfish and inconsiderate as we have been. Prayer would be an evil rather than a blessing if it were only a way of getting God to do what we ourselves will not make the effort to do. God does not do things for us – he enables us to do them for ourselves.

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Elisabeth Holmgaard, 1984

- 2.29 The sick and those caring for them have need of our prayers. But let us not imagine ... that a few sentimental good wishes from a distance are all that is needed. Whenever we intercede in prayer we must be prepared for an answer which places a practical obligation upon us. A prayer is always a commitment.

Thomas F Green, 1952

- 2.30 A silent pause before meals is the Friends' equivalent for 'saying grace' – a practice which I own I think has much to recommend it. Here again there is, of course, the opportunity for words, should words spontaneously arise to the lips of any of those present.

Caroline E Stephen, 1890

- 2.31 Do not let us be discouraged because we find the path of silent prayer difficult or because we do not experience that joy of conscious communion which is given to some. The sunlight shines through the cloud; even when the cloud is so thick that we cannot see the sun at all, its rays carry on their healing work, and it does us good to go out into the open, even on a grey day. The experience of many of the greatest saints points to the traversing of a dark night of the soul before the light of full communion dawns, and to times of dryness of spirit coming at intervals to test the faith and perseverance of the seeker.

T Edmund Harvey, 1929

- 2.32 There is no use trying to conceal how difficult it is to find time for private prayer in the congested schedules under which most modern people live. But at the bottom it is not a question of finding time ... [but] of the depth of the sense of need and of the desire. Busy lovers find time to write letters to one another, often ... long letters; although what really matters is not the length of the letter any more than it is the length of the prayer. In this life we find the time for what we believe to be important.

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Douglas Steere, 1938

- 2.33 Prayer is not just a matter of the feelings, but of the will. When we least feel like praying and when prayer seems pointless because there appears to be no-one to accept it – when God indeed seems absent, then is the time to call our will into action and refuse to give up. There will be occasions when our desert will seem only dry and barren. But refreshment is not far away, and we must persevere, holding on to the promise that the parched ground shall become a pool and the thirsty land springs of water.

Jack Dobbs, 1984

- 2.34 Prayer, then, is *communion*, whether it takes the form of petition, intercession, thanksgiving, or whether it be just the quiet unveiling of the heart to a trusted friend, the outpouring of the soul to the one who is nearest of all.

William Littleboy, 1937

See also 20.01-20.14

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- 2.35 Friends, meet together and know one another in that which is eternal, which was before the world was.

George Fox, 1657

- 2.36 In worship we have our neighbours to right and left, before and behind, yet the Eternal Presence is over all and beneath all. Worship does not consist in achieving a mental state of concentrated isolation from one's fellows. But in the depth of common worship it is as if we found our separate lives were all one life, within whom we live and move and have our being.

Thomas R Kelly, 1938

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- 2.37 Friends have never regarded [worship] as an individual activity. People who regard Friends' meetings as opportunities for meditation have failed to appreciate this corporate aspect. The waiting and listening are activities in which everybody is engaged and produce spoken ministry which helps to articulate the common guidance which the Holy Spirit is believed to give the group as a whole. So the waiting and listening is corporate also. This is why Friends emphasise the 'ministry of silence' and the importance of coming to meeting regularly and with heart and mind prepared.

John Punshon, 1987

- 2.38 In a gathered meeting there may be few spoken words, but there is rich ministry. An hour passes quickly. Other meetings are lifeless. They may be full of words, but there is little ministry, little that is of service. Time drags and people feel the need to fill the silence.

A gathered meeting has the strength to absorb the differences and support the needs of those who attend it; this is easier when the meeting is a community of people who know and trust each other, who are not afraid to share their experience of worship and to learn from one another.

Conference: *Exploring the fundamental elements of Quakerism*, 1986

- 2.39 A Friends' meeting, however silent, is at the very lowest a witness that worship is something other and deeper than words, and that it is to the unseen and eternal things that we desire to give the first place in our lives. And when the meeting, whether silent or not, is awake, and looking upwards, there is much more in it than this. In the united stillness of a truly 'gathered' meeting there is a power known only by experience, and mysterious even when most familiar. There are perhaps few things which more readily flow 'from vessel to vessel' than quietness. The presence of fellow-worshippers in some gently penetrating manner reveals to the spirit something of the nearness of the Divine Presence. 'Where two or three are gathered together in His name' have we not again and again felt that the promise was fulfilled and that the Master Himself was indeed 'in the midst of us'? And it is out of the depths of this stillness that there do arise at times spoken words which, springing from the very

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source of prayer, have something of the power of prayer – something of its quickening and melting and purifying effect. Such words as these have at least as much power as silence to gather into stillness.

Caroline E Stephen, 1908

- 2.40 What is the ground and foundation of the gathered meeting? In the last analysis, it is, I am convinced, the Real Presence of God.

Thomas R Kelly, 1940

The individual in meeting

- 2.41 The first that enters into the place of your meeting ... turn in thy mind to the light, and wait upon God singly, as if none were present but the Lord; and here thou art strong. Then the next that comes in, let them in simplicity of heart sit down and turn in to the same light, and wait in the spirit; and so all the rest coming in, in the fear of the Lord, sit down in pure stillness and silence of all flesh, and wait in the light... Those who are brought to a pure still waiting upon God in the spirit, are come nearer to the Lord than words are; for God is a spirit, and in the spirit is he worshipped... In such a meeting there will be an unwillingness to part asunder, being ready to say in yourselves, it is good to be here: and this is the end of all words and writings to bring people to the eternal living Word.

Alexander Parker, 1660

- 2.42 Come with heart and mind prepared. Pray silently as you gather together that you may all be drawn into the spirit of adoration and communion in which fellowship with one another becomes real. Yield yourselves and all your outward concerns to God's guidance, that you may find the evil weakening in you and the good raised up.

Advices, 1964

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- 2.43 'Where two or three', saith our Lord, 'are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them' (Mt 18:20). In these words he ... invites us not only to meet one with another but, in so doing, with himself also... Shall the poor perishing gratifications of sense and self-love, or any inconveniences of a trivial nature, be suffered to prevent our dutiful attendance upon him, in whom alone stands our everlasting interest? Shall a cloudy sky, a little wet, a little cold, a little ease to the flesh, a view to a little earthly gain, or any common incident, furnish an excuse for declining this duty, and thereby depriving ourselves of the blessed advantage, often vouchsafed to the faithful, of enjoying heavenly communion together in spirit with the Lord of life and glory?

Yearly Meeting in London, 1765

- 2.44 There are times of dryness in our individual lives, when meeting may seem difficult or even worthless. At such times one may be tempted not to go to meeting, but it may be better to go, prepared to offer as our contribution to the worship simply a sense of need. In such a meeting one may not at the time realise what one has gained, but one will nevertheless come away helped.

Berks & Oxon QM Ministry & Extension Committee, 1948

- 2.45 It is the individual faithfulness of each Friend which is needed if our meetings for worship are to be held to the glory of God. Each one of us must come expecting not only to receive but to be used. This involves a preparation of spirit, but many interpret the phrase 'Come with heart and mind prepared' too narrowly. The preparation needed is the living of our daily lives in constant awareness of the presence of God. In the rush of living we may miss the true Life. We must face realities, however, and try to overcome the practical difficulties which we do encounter. Our lives are sometimes inevitably rushed. This means that we may come to meetings for worship in turmoil or trouble. We may be tired, irritable or sleepy. We should not in such cases turn away from the meeting for worship, but should realise the value of such occasions as training times.

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Important though our part of preparation, dedication and faithfulness is, we have always to remember that our part is dependent upon that power which comes to us, unlooked-for and undeserved, the power of the grace of God.

Berks & Oxon QM Ministry & Extension Committee, 1947

- 2.46 Regular attendance at your own meeting, leading to a deeper knowledge of the members and their needs, will contribute to the quality of its corporate life. We recognise and encourage concerned visitation of other meetings and opportunities of worship with those of other communions, but continued casual or undisciplined attendance sometimes at one place of worship and sometimes at another is a source of weakness both to the individual and to the meeting.

1959; 1994

See also 13.21-13.32 Travelling in the ministry and intervisitation

- 2.47 Does punctuality matter? It is not merely a question of disturbing the peace and quiet of those already assembled... What is on my mind is more than that. If we were coming together to worship individually, each to enter into his or her own private meditation, then it wouldn't much matter whether all arrived by the appointed time. In private meditation the worshippers could each 'settle' separately, training themselves not to be disturbed by latecomers. But if our goal is to achieve a group mystical experience, deepening and enriching our individual experience, then, it seems to me, we need to start the process at the same time.

A 'gathered' Quaker meeting is something more than a number of individuals sitting down together but meditating individually. So long as each sits in meditation in the way one does when worshipping by oneself, the worship will seldom reach that greater depth which a Quaker meeting at its best achieves. The goal of a truly 'gathered' meeting is to become fused into something bigger than the sum of the parts...

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As a meeting 'gathers', as each individual 'centres down', there gradually develops a feeling of belonging to a group who are together seeking a sense of the Presence. The 'I' in us begins to feel like 'we'. At some point – it may be early in the meeting or it may be later, or it may never occur at all – we suddenly feel a sense of unity, a sense of togetherness with one another and with that something outside ourselves that we call God.

Thomas R Bodine, 1980

- 2.48 Heed not distressing thoughts when they rise ever so strongly in thee; fear them not, but be still awhile, not believing in the power which thou feelest they have over thee, and it will fall on a sudden. It is good for thy spirit and greatly to thy advantage to be much and variously exercised by the Lord. Thou dost not know what the Lord hath already done and what he is yet doing for thee therein.

Isaac Penington

- 2.49 The mind wanders and the will falters again and again... But it is foolish to allow failures in concentration to plunge us into profitless self-condemnation. A mother does not condemn her child who is struggling with many a failure to learn how to walk, but rather she is pleased by each successful effort... I like to believe that God is similarly pleased with our efforts and understanding of our many failures. What matters is whether or not the will, like a compass needle when deflected, is so pivoted that it can swing back to the true direction.

St Francis de Sales is reassuring:

When your heart is wandering and distracted, bring it back quickly to its point, restore it tenderly to its Master's side, and if you did nothing else the whole of your hour but bring back your heart patiently and put it near our Lord again, and every time you put it back it turned away again, your hour would be well-employed.

Thomas F Green, 1952

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- 2.50 At meeting for worship relax and let your baby be with you; my small daughter called it ‘the best cuddle of the week’ when I couldn’t rush off and do something busy. It’s not easy for the parents to believe that their child’s gurglings actually help the meeting rather than interrupt it. Nonetheless, that is true, and you shouldn’t give way to the temptation to take a happily babbling child out of the meeting (though howling is something different!).

Anne Hosking, 1986

- 2.51 When meeting for worship begins, I like to look around and see who is there, and this normally leads to a feeling of gratitude for the friendship, warmth, and support I’ve found among Friends. If I know of any difficulties or problems being experienced by anyone present, I would think along these lines. Or perhaps I would think of someone missing from their usual seat, and this might lead me to think of others who were ill, bereaved, anxious or overworked. I might then reflect on my own many and great blessings, and seek direction in using my time and talents. Or I might see someone unemployed, and be led to think of some of our social problems. It’s a sort of chain reaction.

Dorothy Marshall, 1987

- 2.52 When I sit down in meeting I recall whatever may have struck me freshly during the past week. This is in part, initially at least, a voluntary and outward act... It means that the will is given up to service; and it is quite possible to stop everything by taking an opposite attitude. So thoughts suggest themselves – a text that has smitten one during the week – new light on a phrase – a verse of poetry – some incident, private or public. These pass before the door whence shines the heavenly light. Are they transfigured? Sometimes, yes; sometimes, no. If nothing flames, silence is my portion.

John William Graham, 1920

- 2.53 A score of years ago a friend placed in my hand a little book which became one of the turning points of my life. It was called *True peace...*

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It had but one thought ... that God was waiting in the depths of my being to talk to me if only I would get still enough to hear his voice.

I thought this would be a very easy matter, and so I began to get still. But I had no sooner commenced than a perfect pandemonium of voices reached my ears, a thousand clamouring notes from without and within, until I could hear nothing but their noise and din. Some of them were my own voice, some were my own questions, some of them were my very prayers. Others were the suggestions of the tempter, and the voices of the world's turmoil. Never before did there seem so many things to be done, to be said, to be thought; and in every direction I was pushed and pulled, and greeted with noisy acclamations of unspeakable unrest. It seemed necessary for me to listen to some of them, and to answer some of them, but God said, 'Be still, and know that I am God'. Then came the conflict of thoughts for the morrow, and its duties and cares; but God said 'Be still'. And as I listened, and slowly learned to obey, and shut my ears to every sound, I found, after a while, that when the other voices ceased, or I ceased to hear them, there was a still, small voice in the depths of my being that began to speak with an inexpressible tenderness, power and comfort.

John Edward Southall, c 1900

- 2.54 As I silence myself I become more sensitive to the sounds around me, and I do not block them out. The songs of the birds, the rustle of the wind, children in the playground, the roar of an airplane overhead are all taken into my worship. I regulate my breathing as taught me by my Zen friends, and through this exercise I feel the flow of life within me from my toes right through my whole body. I think of myself like the tree planted by the 'rivers of water' in Psalm 1, sucking up God's gift of life and being restored. Sometimes I come to meeting for worship tired and weary, and I hear the words of Jesus, 'Come unto me, all that labour and are weary, and I will give you rest'. And having laid down my burden, I feel refreshed both physically and spiritually. This leads me on to whole-hearted adoration and thanksgiving for all God's blessings. My own name, 'Tayeko, means 'child of many blessings' and God has surely poured them upon me. My heart overflows with a desire to give him something in return. I have nothing to give but my own being, and I

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offer him my thoughts, words and actions of each day, and whisper 'Please take me as I am'.

Tayeko Yamanouchi, 1979

Vocal ministry

- 2.55 Remember that to every one is given a share of responsibility for the meeting for worship, whether that service be in silence or through the spoken word. Do not assume that vocal ministry is never to be your part. If the call to speak comes, do not let the sense of your own unworthiness, or the fear of being unable to find the right words, prevent you from being obedient to the leading of the Spirit. Ask wisdom of God that you may be sure of your guidance and be enabled humbly to discern and impart something of his glory and truth. Pray that your ministry may rise from the place of deep experience, and that you may be restrained from unnecessary and superficial words. Faithfulness and sincerity in speaking, even very briefly, may open the way to fuller ministry from others. Try to speak audibly and distinctly, with sensitivity to the needs of your fellow worshippers. Wait to be sure of the right moment for giving the message. Beware of making additions towards the end of a meeting when it was well left before.

Advice, 1964

- 2.56 Jane Fenn, a young woman who migrated to Philadelphia in 1712 and became in time a travelling Quaker minister of note, describes sitting in meeting one day and hearing an inner voice declare that she had been chosen for the ministry:

Yet I must confess, this awful word of Divine command shocked me exceedingly, my soul and all within me trembled at the hearing of it; yea my outward tabernacle shook insomuch that many present observed the deep exercise I was under. I cried in spirit, 'Lord I am weak and altogether incapable of such a task, I hope thou wilt spare me from such a mortification; besides I have spoken much against women appearing in that manner.'

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For six or seven months, Jane Fenn continued to resist the command to speak in meeting, until she could withstand the pressure no longer. She stood up to utter a few broken words and returned home rejoicing. Nevertheless, for many years thereafter, she continued to struggle with her own sense of inadequacy when confronted with the growing demands of the Spirit that she not only preach to local meetings, but also travel through the colonies and eventually back to England.

Margaret Hope Bacon, 1986

- 2.57 I went to meetings in an awful frame of mind, and endeavoured to be inwardly acquainted with the language of the true Shepherd. And one day, being under a strong exercise of spirit, I stood up, and said some words in a meeting, but not keeping close to the divine opening, I said more than was required of me and being soon sensible to my error, I was afflicted in mind some weeks, without any light or comfort, even to that degree that I could take satisfaction in nothing. I remembered God and was troubled, and in the depth of my distress he had pity upon me, and sent the Comforter. I then felt forgiveness for my offence, and my mind became calm and quiet, being truly thankful to my gracious Redeemer for his mercies. And after this, feeling the spring of divine love opened, and a concern to speak, I said a few words in a meeting in which I found peace. This I believe was about six weeks from the first time, and as I was thus humbled and disciplined under the cross, my understanding became more strengthened to distinguish the language of the pure spirit which inwardly moves upon the heart, and taught me to wait in silence sometimes many weeks together, until I felt that rise which prepares the creature to stand like a trumpet, through which the Lord speaks to his flock.

John Woolman, 1741

- 2.58 For some weeks before this particular Sunday I had been puzzling over and questioning in my mind various problems connected with my work. It was one of those episodes of spiritual upheaval which most of us go through from time to time when we seem to question our normal certainties, poke around the foundations of our normal

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life and discover to our alarm that some of them are very shaky. I had been in this highly charged state for several weeks.

On this Sunday morning though, I went quietly to meeting with the family, my recent preoccupations submerged by the business of getting us all dressed and breakfasted and to the meeting house on time. But as the minutes ticked by and I sat in the healing peace, I began to be aware that something inside me was formulating a question which urgently needed to be asked. I say 'something inside me' because it seemed at the same time to be both me and not me. I discovered to my horror that this something was urging me to get up and ask my question. My heart was pounding uncomfortably and I began to shiver (I don't know whether this was obvious to those around me; I was certainly aware of this shivering but shyness prevents one from asking afterwards whether these physical symptoms are visible to others). To start with I resisted this prompting. I looked round the room and noticed several Friends before whom I was reluctant to make a fool of myself. I could not get up and speak in front of them. I would rather die first. The shaking and pounding diminished a little as I decided this. But not for long. Soon it started up again, insistent, not to be denied. This time I told myself 'I'll count twenty and then if no one else has spoken I shall have to.' Again a slight abatement of the symptoms. But to no avail. I counted twenty and then fifty and still no one spoke. Now I sat conscious only of this overpowering force which was pushing me to my feet until finally I had to give in to it.

Afterwards I found it difficult to believe that I had spoken. It was all over so quickly. Had I really stood up in front of all those people and testified? Well, hardly testified, but yes, I had been driven by some inner prompting which, for want of a more precise word, one might well call spirit; and yes, I had quaked, most fearfully, with something which was more than just the fear of making a fool of myself before family and friends.

Elisabeth Salisbury, 1968

- 2.59 Some think, through a mistaken judgment, that they must be doing something every meeting, (like the preachers of the letter, who must either be singing, preaching or praying all the time) and by such a conduct they lose their interest and place in the hearts of friends by

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too long and too frequent appearing in both preaching and prayer: For the avoiding of which, keep close to thy gift, intently waiting to know thy place, both when to speak and when to be silent; and when thou speakest, begin under a sense of divine influence, whether it be in preaching or praying; and without it, do not either preach or pray.

Samuel Bownas, 1750

- 2.60 All true ministry springs from the reality of experience, and uses our gifts of heart and mind in its expression. But ministry is not the place for intellectual exercise. It comes through us, not from us. Although we interpret the Spirit it is that Spirit which will lead us to minister. The Spirit will decide which experiences are relevant and which will speak to the condition of the meeting. If you have to decide whether it is right to speak, consider that it isn't. If your words are important the meeting will find them anyway.

Conference: *Exploring the fundamental elements of Quakerism*, 1986

- 2.61 Ministry should be of necessity, and not of choice, and there is no living by silence, or by preaching merely.

John Churchman, 1734

- 2.62 In Friends' meetings also, from the fact that everyone is free to speak, one hears harmonies and correspondences between very various utterances such as are scarcely to be met elsewhere. It is sometimes as part-singing compared with unison. The free admission of the ministry of women, of course, greatly enriches this harmony. I have often wondered whether some of the motherly counsels I have listened to in our meeting would not reach some hearts that might be closed to the masculine preacher.

Caroline E Stephen, 1890

- 2.63 When language is used unthinkingly, without being related to the experience of either the speaker or the listener, it is meaningless. Words are only symbols and when there is no shared experience the

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symbolism breaks down. When we speak of our own experience, our feelings are always involved. The same is true when we listen to others: we may read into their words meanings which are not intended but which reflect our own emotions. Certain words or kinds of language may arouse such strong emotions that we are only able to relate them to our own experience and not to that of the speaker. Speakers too may be unaware of the effect of their words. The more important and profound the subject matter, the greater the need for sensitivity in choosing our words. This is no excuse for playing safe in what we say, or for not listening to others when what they say makes us uncomfortable.

Conference: *Exploring the fundamental elements of Quakerism*, 1986

- 2.64 Each Friend who feels called upon to rise and deliver a lengthy discourse might question himself – and herself – most searchingly, as to whether the message could not be more lastingly given in the fewest possible words, or even through his or her personality alone, in entire and trustful silence. ‘Cream must always rise to the surface.’ True. But other substances rise to the surface besides cream; substances that may have to be skimmed off and thrown away before bodies and souls can be duly nourished. ‘Is my message cream or scum?’ may be an unusual and is certainly a very homely query. Still it is one that every speaker, in a crowded gathering especially, should honestly face. Some of the dangers of silent worship can best be guarded against by its courtesies.

Violet Holdsworth, 1919

- 2.65 *In the Life*

My piece was pat and all ready to say,
She rose first. I threw my piece away.
 My well-turned stuff
 Was not so rough
As hers, but easy elegant and smooth.
 Beginning middle end
 It had and point
And aptly quoted prophet priest and poet.
 Hers was uncouth

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Wanting in art
Laboured scarce-audible and out of joint.
Three times she lost the thread
And sitting left her message half unsaid.
‘Why then did thee throw it
Into the discard?’
Friend,
It had head
(Like this). Hers oh had heart.

Robert Hewison, 1965

- 2.66 Ministry is what is on one’s soul, and it can be in direct contradiction to what is on one’s mind. It’s what the Inner Light gently pushes you toward or suddenly dumps in your lap. It is rooted in the eternity, divinity, and selflessness of the Inner Light; not in the worldly, egoistic functions of the conscious mind.

Marrienne McMullen, 1987

- 2.67 To some are granted deeper spiritual discoveries and revelations than to others, but to all, waiting in expectancy, at moments and in some measure is given a sense of the living touch of God. At such moments there may come the kindling of mind and heart which impels obedience to speak under the immediate promptings of the Holy Spirit. This is the ministry of inspiration, the prophetic ministry in the true sense, when the spoken word pierces to the heart of our relationship with God, unveils the living presence of Christ in the midst of the worshipping group and in its separate members, opens to our sight the way we must tread if we would realise that Spirit in and through our ordinary daily activities and find the creative response to the challenges of our time. In ministry of this character and depth something is given in the utterance which is beyond the intellectual and emotional capacity of the human being speaking, but which uses and enhances and transcends the natural gifts, the acquired knowledge, the hard and honest thoughts or the reaches of the speaker’s imagination.

There is also the ministry of teaching which combines ‘the potency of prayer and thought’. It recalls the meeting to the discoveries of

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truth, the perception of the acts of God in the lives of individuals. It includes the effort to understand and to interpret the central fact of Jesus Christ and his place in history, and the searchings and findings of men and women down the ages and in our own day as they have sought to relate new discoveries and insights to their understandings of eternal truth.

1967; 1994

- 2.68 In my young tempestuous days I heard many things in the Friends' meeting that I disliked and some that seemed to me quite false, and I felt the need to answer them. I was taught, and I believe correctly, that to insist on answering there and then would be to destroy the meeting; and that we all sit under the baptising power of the spirit of Truth, which is its own witness. We sit in silence so as not to trip over words; and we trust the good in each other which is from God, so that we may be kept from the evil.

J Ormerod Greenwood, 1980

- 2.69 A Friends' meeting for worship finds no room for debate or for answering (still less for contradicting) one another; if this is desirable, it will be left for another occasion. And if anything should seem to be spoken amiss, the spiritually minded worshipper will have the wit to get at the heart of the message, overlooking crudity and lack of skill in its presentation, and so far from giving way to irritation at what seems unprofitable, he will be deeply concerned for his own share in creating the right spiritual atmosphere in which the harm fades out and the good grows. Many a meeting has known this power, transforming what might have been hurtful into a means of grace.

A Neave Brayshaw, 1921

- 2.70 I think that learning to move in the exercise of the meeting, so that one is a part of it, yet taken beyond it and brought to see some new light as a result of it, is most important in creative ministry. The cluster of messages, with a fair interval of silence between each of them to let its message sink in; the cluster that goes on down, with

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each message deepening and intensifying and helping to light up a further facet of the communication, can be most effective. But for this to happen those sharing in it cannot be in a discussional frame of mind or in a debating stance, or yield to the ruthlessly critical mind, or all is lost and the meeting is pulled into a forum. It can only be done if there is a willingness to be led by each of the ones ministering into a deeper level of what they were not only saying but what they were meaning to say, and perhaps even beyond into what something beneath us all was meaning to have said through what we were saying... When a cluster ministry moves in this way, we all know that we are moving in the life, that we are breaking the cerebral barrier and being released ... and we are ourselves ignited by what is taking place.

Douglas Steere, 1972

- 2.71 It should be the care of elders to foster the spiritual life of all members and to give caution and advice to Friends who share in the vocal ministry. They should look out for Friends who may be likely to help the ministry and lead them to make their right contribution to the life of their meeting, and to encourage our members to think deeply on the great issues and problems of life and the fundamentals of our faith.

This, however, is not the duty of elders alone; as any Friends may hinder the work of the ministry by a critical or unloving spirit, so their sympathy and prayers for those who speak will help to create an atmosphere in which an inspired and inspiring ministry may grow. A friendly word of thankfulness from one who has been helped is often a great source of encouragement to the minister.

1925; 1959

For more about eldership see chapter 12 Caring for one another

- 2.72 He had an extraordinary gift in opening the Scriptures. He would go to the marrow of things and show the mind, harmony and fulfilling of them with much plainness and to great comfort and edification... But above all he excelled in prayer. The inwardness and weight of his spirit, the reverence and solemnity of his address and behaviour,

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and the fewness and fullness of his words have often struck even strangers with admiration, as they used to reach others with consolation. The most awful, living, reverent frame I ever felt or beheld, I must say, was his in prayer. And truly it was a testimony that he knew and lived nearer to the Lord than other men; for they that know him most will see most reason to approach him with reverence and fear.

William Penn writing of George Fox, 1694

- 2.73 The intent of all speaking is to bring into the life, and to walk in, and to possess the same, and to live in and enjoy it, and to feel God's presence.

George Fox, 1657

Children in meeting

- 2.74 Children have an uncanny knack of knowing the difference between living ministry, as opposed to words that are injected into the meeting for their good. This is why I feel Friends should at any time avoid deliberately speaking to children, for it usually means speaking down to them. In fact it is an excellent discipline for anyone who speaks in meeting to try to use words and ideas that can be understood by children, and yet speak to the condition of all present, because they arise from the profound depths which, in fact, produce things that are truly simple.

George Gorman, 1973

- 2.75 We had two daughters who were the only children to attend on Sundays. That they continued to come with us, and still retain affectionate memories of that, is due entirely to the loving care given by Friends in teaching them and making them feel part of the meeting. We need to instruct our children in the widest sense, so that they can use the knowledge we pass on, both in relation to the Bible and to our Quaker heritage... We do our children (not only those biologically ours) a disservice if we do not pass on to them our

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concerns, beliefs and ideas. It is a mistake to imagine that children taught nothing positive will then be able to evaluate everything for themselves. But we teach them what we have experienced, in the knowledge that they will incorporate it and use it in their own way, accepting or rejecting it for a world that is of their making, not ours. In the life of the Quaker meeting there is a tradition of equality and respect for individuals that I have found to be of pure gold in value. It is expressed in love and affection between the generations. I know that my daughters, now young adults, have truly felt part of the family of the meeting because they have respected and been respected in an atmosphere that is unusual even among Christian churches. When elderly Friends have died, they too have wept because they have valued the companionship of people who saw them as individuals in their own right and gave them a true sense of belonging.

Jean Brown, 1984

- 2.76 I recall a family weekend, when the children, about twenty-four of them, aged three and upwards, had their own sessions in parallel to the adults. On the first evening, after the getting-to-know-you games, we sat down on the carpet to worship. We lit some candles on the hearth, turned off the lights, asked two children to be elders, and were still. The meeting went on for over a quarter of an hour, and was very deep. Then the two elders shook hands, but the silence continued. After another five minutes, I started a conversation, but no one responded to my cheerful comments. I was the one who had lost touch. When the children did speak, it was slowly, thoughtfully, with long spaces between. This was when I realised that children do minister... That meeting lasted until someone entered the room and interrupted us – about forty minutes.

Anne Hosking, 1984

See also 2.50, 10.09, 10.10, 12.01 paragraph 6 & 19.35

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Enriching worship

- 2.77 The depth of Quaker worship, its richness, its power and its ability to meet the needs of each worshipper as well as the gathered group, depends on the commitment of every participant, and on the way we all come to our meetings with hearts and minds prepared.

Jack Dobbs, 1982

- 2.78 I think that we suffer from lack of biblical study both individually and in groups; I do not urge that this should be done in the regular gatherings for worship, but rather in groups during the week. To restrict our fellowship to the single hour on Sunday mornings is, under ordinary conditions, to impoverish our times of worship. The over-busyness resulting from the changed and difficult home conditions has, I fear, told on this side of our lives and does need distinct attention.

Joan Mary Fry, 1947

See also 10.07 & 27.33

- 2.79 Friends are not usually noted for their art and in earlier periods of their history they objected to paintings, theatre, music and novels. But they did adopt one distinctive art form and made it their own – the spiritual journal. It became the characteristic way in which early Friends told the story of their journeys, both their inward pilgrimage and their outward travels. It is from his journal that we learn that John Woolman was not always pacific or self-controlled and had to wrestle with his desire to impose his own will on others. And we take comfort from the fact that self-doubt and uncertainty were part of his journey as they are of ours.

In this century the practice of journal keeping is being explored as a way of becoming aware of the patterns of our inner life, of growing in self-knowledge and discovering our own gifts and possibilities... Keeping a journal is just one way ... of beginning to re-create your life. At its most basic it is a decision that your life has value and meaning and deserves the effort of recollection and reflection. It is

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also a decision that what you are living and learning is worth recording. That decision has its roots in a very deep layer of gospel truth.

Jo Farrow, 1986

- 2.80 I have valued most during my time at Woodbrooke the opportunities to participate in worship-sharing groups. I believe that these are of fundamental importance to one's individual spiritual growth and well-being and to the health of the community of which one is an active member. I am developing a capacity to listen more attentively to disclosures of sorrow and joy as others recount to me their spiritual journeys. Tenuous at first is the hope that we will receive understanding in response to our awkward efforts to communicate. Courage grows though as we experience the concern of others touching us where we feel the pain most deeply. Compassionate listening involves the total engagement of the heart. It is through strength and grace that we are enabled to achieve trust and spiritual intimacy.

Kathy Tweet, 1993

- 2.81 Power of the inner kind increases with use. It is not unusual for telepathy to develop between those who are close to each other in love. Again, prayer groups increase prayer power, and as the bonds of friendship and trust develop, charismatic healing gifts arise. This type of spiritual study and prayer fellowship has been the most precious part of my life for many years. Such groups sustain and bind people together so that when one falls ill, feels depressed or suffers a bereavement, he or she may count upon the friendship of the others. It is this kind of relationship, where there is both giving and receiving at an inner level, which sometimes extends beyond the grave.

Damaris Parker-Rhodes, 1985

- 2.82 We have seen the need to evolve a meeting that is a preparation for meeting for worship, a meeting which is similarly open, personal and democratic but which is implicitly educational and uses a wide range

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of modes of interaction. The touchstone of its success is its ability to generate richer fellowship between participants as they come to know each other and themselves in the deepest things. Learning, in this use of the word, is not head and fact learning, but whole-self learning where feelings and spirit find equal room with thinking and reason.

There is no one way of going about meetings for learning; nor is there one content nor one single aspect of self that they might enrich. As well as intuition there is also information; as well as creative listening and role play and music there is also discussion and guidance. But yet all meetings for learning are about growth in that territory of the self which touches on ultimate meanings, about those things which we feel the deepest, about our shadow as much as about our light, about our being accepted and held in the group and not judged for being found wanting, about new community. Such meetings demand as much discipline as meetings for worship or our business meetings.

Alec Davison, 1982

See also 21.31

- 2.83 The importance, both for ourselves and for our children, of active association with our fellow members in work and worship has led our Society in the past strongly to encourage Friends to live near meetings. We [urge] Friends in fixing their places of residence to bear this in mind. But we are aware that there are many whose duties oblige them to reside where there is no meeting. We do not desire in any way to discourage these from associating in worship with members of other religious denominations. It is our concern that Friends thus situated should [consider holding] meetings of a simple spiritual character with their neighbours, either on first-day or during the week. The world needs this message, and it is one for which many souls are hungering. Where a meeting on first-day may not seem a wise arrangement a quiet hour of worship with neighbours of other religious denominations on a weekday may be found mutually helpful, and may serve to draw away from too great a dependence on the outward in religion.

Meeting for worship

London Yearly Meeting, 1905

- 2.84 If we met more often for worship in each other's homes, it would remind us that God is with us in every place, at the kitchen sink and at the table; we should get to know one another more intimately, and could break bread together; the home atmosphere might make it easier to invite our acquaintances to join us; and any increase in numbers would lead to multiplication by cell-division; and an expanding coverage of the community.

David W Robson, 1971

In addition to the regular meeting for worship on Sundays, and/or perhaps other days of the week, meetings are held on particular occasions, such as marriages and funerals. For extracts concerning meetings for worship on particular occasions, see 10.12 for a meeting held in the home of one who is ill, chapter 16 for Quaker marriage procedure, 17.01-17.06 for funerals and 22.44-22.46 for celebration of commitment.

Meetings for church affairs

- 2.85 The meeting for business cannot be understood in isolation; it is part of a spiritual discipline.

John Punshon, 1987

- 2.86 Are your meetings for church affairs held in the spirit of worship and dependence upon the guidance of God? Do you take your right share in them? Do you maintain your respect for others as persons however strongly you may differ from their opinions? Do you refrain from using hurtful and provocative language? Are you sufficiently conversant with our Christian discipline to be able, when difficult questions arise, to consider them with an informed mind as well as a loving and tender spirit?

Queries, 1964

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2.87 Being orderly come together, [you are] not to spend time with needless, unnecessary and fruitless discourses; but to proceed in the wisdom of God, not in the way of the world, as a worldly assembly of men, by hot contests, by seeking to outspoke and over-reach one another in discourse as if it were controversy between party and party of men, or two sides violently striving for dominion, not deciding affairs by the greater vote. But in the wisdom, love and fellowship of God, in gravity, patience, meekness, in unity and concord, submitting one to another in lowliness of heart, and in the holy Spirit of truth and righteousness all things [are] to be carried on; by hearing, and determining every matter coming before you, in love, coolness, gentleness and dear unity; – I say, as one only party, all for the truth of Christ, and for the carrying on the work of the Lord, and assisting one another in whatsoever ability God hath given.

Edward Burrough, 1662

2.88 We see our meetings for church affairs not as business meetings preceded by a period of worship, but as ‘meetings for worship for business’. Ideally the sacred and the secular are interwoven into one piece. Believing that all our business is brought before God for guidance we deprecate all that may foster a party spirit or confrontation. We therefore seek for a spirit of unity in all our decision making.

London Yearly Meeting, 1986

2.89 In all our meetings for church affairs we need to listen together to the Holy Spirit. We are not seeking a consensus; we are seeking the will of God. The unity of the meeting lies more in the unity of the search than in the decision which is reached. We must not be distressed if our listening involves waiting, perhaps in confusion, until we feel clear what God wants done.

London Yearly Meeting, 1984

2.90 What is required is a willingness to listen to what others have to say rather than to persuade them that one’s own point of view

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represents what is right and proper. It also requires restraint. The reiteration of one point by several Friends each in their own way lends no weight to the point. What the meeting must learn to discern is its rightness, not how many people support it...

When conflict comes, as it does, and the temptation to compromise – to seek consensus – is resisted, the sense of divine guidance is unmistakably registered. New possibilities for a way forward which nobody has thought of emerge out of discussion. Postponement and delay settle minds and assist the process of coming to a united mind. Above all, those who take opposing views come to find that the discipline of waiting has mysteriously united them.

John Punshon, 1987

- 2.91 It has been the experience of this yearly meeting in the past to know that Friends have met in division and uncertainty, and that then guidance has come, and light has been given to us, and we have become finders of God's purpose. This gives us ground for confidence. We shall not be held back by the magnitude of the questions which are to come before us, nor by a sense of our own unworthiness.

London Yearly Meeting, 1936

- 2.92 The day was Friday, and we were mindful that within a few hours we would be going in separate directions, never to be gathered under the same circumstances again. As we met for worship that morning we were faced with the decision, whether or not to approve the epistle. We had laboured for several hours the day before, and it looked as though preferences for wording and other concerns would make it impossible to approve the final draft.

However, something happened which transformed the feeling of our meeting... [A New England Friend] said something like 'I know that the blood of Christ and the Atonement are very important issues for some Friends, and I don't see anything in the epistle which addresses those convictions...'

2: Approaches to God – worship and prayer

In the discussion that followed, [an] evangelical Friend expressed his concern that the number of references to Christ might be difficult for Friends not used to Christ-language. What had begun as an act of loving concern for other Friends transformed the meeting into a unified whole. The discussion had changed from persons wanting to ensure that their concerns were heard to wanting to ensure that the concerns of others were heard and that their needs were met. We had indeed experienced the transforming power of God's love.

Paul Anderson, *Report of the World Gathering of Young Friends*, 1985

The text of the epistle may be found at 29.17

See also chapter 3 General counsel on church affairs