

## Reflections

### EXPERIENCE OF GOD

*As we reflect on our experience, intimations emerge about the nature of God. In this we are helped by the experiences of others which enlighten our path. We remember Nayler in his suffering testifying to 'a spirit which delights to do no evil nor to revenge any wrong' and Barclay when he first went to Friends' meetings, feeling the evil weakening in him and the good being raised up. We recall those who have been upheld by love, or filled with joy, or called to commit their lives to service, or who have sensed a divine reality in the wonder of the world or in the depths of being or in the hardest challenges of life.*

- 26.01 Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts, which are the leadings of God.

*Advices, 1964*

- 26.02 After this I returned into Nottinghamshire again and went into the Vale of Beavor... And one morning, as I was sitting by the fire, a great cloud came over me and a temptation beset me; but I sat still. And it was said, 'All things come by nature'; and the elements and stars came over me so that I was in a manner quite clouded with it. But inasmuch as I sat, still and silent, the people of the house perceived nothing. And as I sat still under it and let it alone, a living hope arose in me and a true voice, which said, 'There is a living God who made all things'. And immediately the cloud and temptation vanished away, and life rose over it all, and my heart was glad, and I praised the living God.

George Fox, 1648

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- 26.03 Now I was come up in spirit through the flaming sword into the paradise of God. All things were new, and all the creation gave another smell unto me than before, beyond what words can utter.

George Fox, 1648

- 26.04 *Caroline Fox (1819-1871) wrote in her journal at the age of 21, of 'the struggle through which a spark of true faith was lighted in my soul':*

The first gleam of light, 'the first cold light of morning' which gave promise of day with its noontide glories, dawned on me one day at meeting, when I had been meditating on my state in great depression. I seemed to hear the words articulated in my spirit, 'Live up to the light thou hast, and more will be granted thee.' Then I believed that God speaks to man by His Spirit. I strove to lead a more Christian life, in unison with what I knew to be right, and looked for brighter days, not forgetting the blessings that are granted to prayer.

1841

- 26.05 *Emilia Fogelklou (1878-1972) here recalls her own experience at the age of 23. She had been put in charge of the religious instruction in a progressive school in Gothenburg at a time when she was oppressed by the failure of her search for the reality of God; she was filled with despair, almost to the point of suicide, and felt she was 'just a shell, a shell empty of life'. (She writes of herself in the third person.)*

But then one bright spring day – it was the 29th of May 1902 – while she sat preparing for her class under the trees in the backyard of Föreningsgatan 6, quietly, invisibly, there occurred the central event of her whole life. Without visions or the sound of speech or human mediation, in exceptionally wide-awake consciousness, she experienced the great releasing inward wonder. It was as if the 'empty shell' burst. All the weight and agony, all the feeling of unreality dropped away. She perceived living goodness, joy, light like a clear, irradiating, uplifting, enfolding, unequivocal reality from deep inside.

The first words which came to her – although they took a long time to come – were, 'This is the great Mercifulness. This is God. Nothing else is so *real* as this.' The child who had cried out in anguish and

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been silenced had now come inside the gates of Light. She had been delivered by a love that is greater than any human love. Struck dumb, amazed, she went quietly to her class, wondering that no one noticed that something had happened to her.

26.06 *Rufus Jones described the experience which his friend John Wilhelm Rowntree had in 1894:*

Just as he was entering young manhood and was beginning to feel the dawning sense of a great mission before him, he discovered that he was slowly losing his sight. He was told that before middle life he would become totally blind. Dazed and overwhelmed he staggered from the doctor's office to the street and stood there in silence. Suddenly he felt the love of God wrap him about as though a visible presence enfolded him, and a joy filled him, such as he had never known before. From that time ... he was a gloriously joyous and happy man. His physical limitations have all along been turned into inward profit. His long, hard battle with a stubborn disease which was attacking the very citadel of his powers – his sight, his hearing and his memory – has only made him more heroic and gentle.

26.07 *Hilda Clark (1881-1955), a doctor, wrote in 1908 of her experience when her sister-in-law died in childbirth:*

I am thinking of those lovely fine days when Cara sat with me for hours sewing her little things. I feel as if my whole life might be better and more use to others from those two days, but what an awful price it is to pay. Do you know, I actually felt that it was 'better' somehow than those awful hours with those two poor creatures in the maternity hospital, when one's heart felt like ice within one, because one realised the tragedy with one's brain, and not with one's heart. And if I ever have to hold such a cold hand and feel such a death stricken pulse, I think a little of the love I have for Cara will go out to the victim, whoever it may be ... No, justice is of the Spirit, not of the outside world – but our understanding is so wrapped up in outward things that we can only grow spiritually by applying spiritual things to material ones – therefore we must be just though Nature is not.

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One thing I understand now is that one's intellect alone won't pull one through, and that the greatest service it can perform is to open a window for that thing we call the divine spirit. If one trusts to it alone it's like trusting to an artificial system of ventilation – correct in theory but musty in practice. How I wish it were as easy to throw everything open to the spirit of God as it is to fresh air.

- 26.08 About two years ago on an April morning I felt ill at ease and unhappy. Life was difficult and the burden of the war weighed upon me. I climbed the steep path at the entrance of one of our public parks and stood beneath some cherry trees that fringe the crest of the bank. A fresh wind blew dark clouds across the green-blue sky. The white blossom shone and glistened in the sunlight. As I stood relaxed and still, I had the illusion that I was enveloped in light. I had the feeling that the light and I were one. Time and space slipped from me. All awareness of details vanished. A sense of unity with the world entered into me. I was tranquillised and steadied by the beauty, the stability of Nature. I do not suppose that I learnt anything that was new to me during this experience. But I believe I was taught something and that something happened in me. I returned to my work tranquil, and strengthened in faith and hope by my experience.

Howard Collier, 1943

- 26.09 *J Rowntree Gillett (1874-1940) was a banker who gave up his business in the First World War on pacifist grounds and devoted his life to religious and social services.*

Brought up in a house where Jesus Christ was loved and honoured, I can never remember a time when his claims on me were not more or less a living issue, and although on attaining manhood I wandered for many years in a maze of doubt and unrest, nevertheless that issue remained. Just thirteen years ago I became convinced that God was a living reality and had revealed himself to humanity in the character and personality of Jesus Christ. From that time I dedicated myself to him and have tried to lead men and women into a realisation of God's love and care for them.

c 1918

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26.10 I am by temperament a sceptic. But, at my feeblest, I am conscious of a power of choice, of a better and a worse. This 'ought' is my insignia of personality. Directly I admit that my life might be better than it is I have a sense of failure and feel a need of help from something or someone outside myself. This sense and this need are to me the meanings of the terms 'sense of sin' and 'need of salvation'. I recognise absolute moral or, rather, spiritual values, quite beyond reason or argument; very often indeed contradicting reason and flouting even scientific law... I am not going to wait until I have fathomed all mysteries and secret lore before I begin to live. It has been my good fortune often to be in company with great souls, who have not only helped me in my intellectual quest for truth about religion, but have always encouraged me to strive towards experience, towards belief in religion. Fitfully and falteringly and with repeated failures I have tried to 'mind that which is pure' in me to guide me to God.

Francis H Knight, 1945

26.11 Whenever we are driven into the depths of our own being, or seek them of our own will, we are faced by a tremendous contrast. On the one side we recognise the pathetic littleness of our ephemeral existence, with no point or meaning in itself. On the other side, in the depth, there is something eternal and infinite in which our existence, and indeed all existence, is grounded. This experience of the depths of existence fills us with a sense both of reverence and of responsibility, which gives even to our finite lives a meaning and a power which they do not possess in themselves. This, I am assured, is our human experience of God.

John Macmurray, 1967

26.12 So one approaches, by efforts which call for the deepest resources of one's being, to the condition of true silence; not just of sitting still, not just of not speaking, but of a wide awake, fully aware non-thinking. It is in this condition, found and held for a brief instant only, that I have experienced the existence of something other than 'myself'. The thinking me has vanished, and with it vanishes the sense of separation, of unique identity. One is not left naked and defenceless, as one is, for example, by the operations of the mind in

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self-analysis. One becomes instead aware, one is conscious of being a participant in the whole of existence, not limited to the body or the moment... It is in this condition that one understands the nature of the divine power, its essential identity with love, in the widest sense of that much misused word.

Geoffrey Hubbard, 1974

- 26.13 My experience came after many years of doubting and uncertainty. It came to me one evening, alone in the sitting room at home. It came at a moment when God, who through many people and events over a period of several months had been pursuing me, put his hand on my shoulder. I had to respond – yes or no. It was unequivocal, inescapable and unconditional. It was also completely unemotional; I was stone cold sober – no heavenly visions or lumps in the throat. It was a challenge to the will, a gift of faith for me to reject or accept – and I accepted.

Roy Farrant, 1974

- 26.14 If anyone had told me in the summer of 1979 that within three years I should be unable to walk, speak, write by hand and feed myself, then surely I would have gone to pieces emotionally and perhaps spiritually. After all, I had just enjoyed a vigorous walking holiday in North Wales, descending from Snowdon by the difficult Crib Goch route... Since hearing the diagnosis, I have been struggling to come to terms with the implications of this illness – no, ‘struggling’ is the wrong word, for as my physical power has waned, so faith has been wonderfully strengthened... I feel surrounded and upheld by God’s love.

Walter Martin, 1984

- 26.15 In silence, without rite or symbol, we have known the Spirit of Christ so convincingly present in our quiet meetings that his grace dispels our faithlessness, our unwillingness, our fears, and sets our hearts aflame with the joy of adoration. We have thus felt the power of the Spirit renewing and recreating our love and friendship for all our fellows. This is our Eucharist and our Communion.

London Yearly Meeting, 1928

WAYS OF SEEKING

26.16 In its early days our Society owed much to a people who called themselves Seekers: they joined us in great numbers and were prominent in the spread of Quakerism. It is a name which must appeal strongly to the scientific temperament. The name has died out, but I think that the spirit of seeking is still the prevailing one in our faith, which for that reason is not embodied in any creed or formula.

Arthur S Eddington, 1929

26.17 I should like to change the name 'seekers' to 'explorers'. There is a considerable difference there: we do not seek the Atlantic, we explore it. The whole field of religious experience has to be explored, and has to be described in a language understandable to modern men and women.

Ole Olden, 1955

26.18 It is because the learning process is continued throughout life that Friends are seekers as well as finders – not one or the other, but both. One only has to think of the need for a continual search for fresh language, unsoiled by use, to know that we must, if we care about truth, continue to be seekers. We may have a firm hold on old truth ourselves, but unless we are eager to find new ways of expressing it we may be unable to speak the word of life to others just when they most need it.

Ruth Fawell, 1987

26.19 God is revealed to individuals through models suited to their temperaments and abilities; to communities through models suited to their culture. Nor will the interpretation of these models always be the same. Each one is only a guide to the truth that is greater than

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them all yet accessible in the nearest and simplest way... As our experience widens we are brought closer to aspects of God which we did not understand before. But we are compelled to respect the experience and response of others. If there is no one model of the truth and if no model is essential then there is no basis for authoritarianism or heresy-hunts. Our own vision is widened by the vision of others.

Janet Scott, 1980

- 26.20 The advice to be open to new light from wherever it may come is one of the reasons why the Quakers have continued to answer that of God in everyone. The trust they showed in the living Christ was their strength 300 years ago, as it is today, though we do not all use the same words. A living truth, if it is to stay alive, must speak to the conditions of the times. Once it is tied up in concise terms, bound by the words used and thought to be the last word, it is already on the decline. Life means growth – and death. We should not cling to words that have lost their life. We cannot force ourselves to believe something which does not ring true for us. Christianity used to survive because of the empty tomb; now Christianity survives in spite of the empty tomb. Great truths survive throughout history, clad in the clothes that are right for the times. A change of garb is inevitable if the truth is to be acceptable. But it is only in the trappings – the bare naked truth remains for all to feel, to acknowledge and express.

Jean West, 1988

- 26.21 It ought to be recognised that at the present time, at least in this country, the real danger is not from a too narrow, cramping and militantly dogmatic theology, but rather from an inveterate haziness of mind, a half-heartedness and general belittlement of the importance of true thinking in religion. And the final outcome of this is the assumption ... that Christianity may indeed reasonably claim to be 'good', that is, to put forward an elevated ethical standard and an edifying moral idealism, but makes and can make no claim to be 'true'. I do not think it likely that terms like 'theology', 'dogma' and 'creed' will ever evoke enthusiasm among members of the Society of

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Friends. But it ought to be possible to allay what almost amounts to a phobia with regard to them.

John W Harvey, 1947

- 26.22 We know that as individuals we have no adequate check upon the development of mere notions within our minds; and so we insist upon the discipline of the worshipping community in which mere waywardness of mind or individualism will be seen for what it is. And we know that the stimulus and personal interchange of the religious community will enable the individual to rise to a greater clarity of perception than would be possible for him alone.

Kenneth C Barnes, 1960

- 26.23 It is difficult for us to reconcile the two ideas of God as a loving Father and as the Creator of all things, because of the existence of cruelty and undeserved suffering in Nature itself. Jesus apparently did take for granted the idea that God controlled the rising of the sun and falling of the rain and had made us male and female. It makes me long to have him here now so that I could ask him some of the questions that his disciples didn't ask him. In fact I find that I am talking to him in my mind and that it is a great deal more profitable than talking to myself; even though it is, in one sense, talking to myself; and even though I don't get the answers to the questions that puzzle me. But that doesn't worry me now, because I have learned, as a scientist, how much I don't understand. I have learned too that when a scientist encounters two apparently irreconcilable ideas, these are the stepping stones to new knowledge.

Kathleen Lonsdale, 1962

- 26.24 It is often supposed that science and religious belief are incompatible. Indeed, a dichotomy does exist between some traditional views of God's interaction with the universe and science's perception of natural laws. If we only use God to fill the gaps wherever a rational explanation has not been found, God's role must diminish as scientific understanding grows. A 'God of the gaps' is inevitably a rather small God. However, the immanence of God in our world

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may be appreciated through Science as vividly as through the Arts. Many scientists daily experience God through their work: in the elegance and sophistication of natural design or the beauty and harmony revealed in certain theories. The growing body of scientific knowledge demands a continuous re-thinking of what is meant by 'Creator' but our greater understanding magnifies rather than diminishes our appreciation of God.

Science and religion have much in common. They are communal activities and involve a search for some greater truth. The sharing of ideas is fundamental to both. The discipline of science can make a valuable contribution to religious thought; critical honesty, the willingness to abandon old ideas and modes of thought when fresh insight demands it and the centrality of experience as an arbiter of truth are as important in one as in the other. In both the scientific and religious searches for truth, the implications of current beliefs are explored to see where they lead. Beliefs are not just safe ledges in an uncertain reality, but rather handholds from which further heights can be reached.

Eleven Quaker scientists, 1989

- 26.25 As a teenager I looked for proof of the existence of God, but soon realised that there would be none. I chose to adopt as a working hypothesis a belief in God, and to go on from there. I have not felt the need to revise that hypothesis – yet. I believe in a powerful, all-knowing God, but a caring and a forgiving God. I believe he says to us: 'All right, you've got life, get on with it, live it! I am there behind to guide you, to help you live it; but don't expect me to interfere to make life smooth for you – you are old enough to stand on your own two feet.'

From what I have learnt as an astronomer I believe that the Universe evolved itself without any active participation from God, and it seems reasonable to me that the world continues, at least on a grand scale, to evolve by itself – that God does not directly interfere with the running of the world; but that he does through people and their attitudes...

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I believe that we are God's agents in this world and that he may require things of us. A lot of my effort goes into trying to understand what God expects of me. I do this by trying to maintain an orientation towards God – to live my life in the spirit – to bring my whole life under the ordering of the spirit of Christ – to acknowledge my discipleship.

S Jocelyn Burnell, 1976

- 26.26 You say: 'But with the best will in the world, I can't get to the point of believing in God.' Well then, if you want to believe in him, if you feel something great behind it all and not just words, well, work for God, and you will see not only that it comes to the same thing as believing in him, but something infinitely more alive, more real, more powerful which fills you and satisfies you more than anything you might vaguely imagine under the name of 'real and living faith' – a reality, a life and not words.

Pierre Ceresole, 1935

- 26.27 It's a funny thing about God, which I still haven't understood. If you say with all your heart: He isn't there, then oddly he isn't. He seems to withdraw. In the same way, just not noticing produces the same results. He doesn't come thrusting himself into your life if you don't want him there. (I recognise that some people will want to say that's exactly how God came to them, but I think this is a different matter.) Yet if we say: God, I need you, then he moves closer to us. If we start the conversation, surprisingly it does not simply seem to fade into empty space. A sense of presence gradually begins to make itself felt.

Now I really don't know how I'm going to convince you of that. I also hear people telling me: I've tried that and it doesn't work. And that's also perfectly true, as we all painfully know from our own experiences. I know it's true and a very blank feeling it is when we have it. Yet I also know that the presence of God is as real, as the absence is negating. I begin to recognise that ultimately it is not for any intellectual reasons that I believe in God, nor even possibly as a result of my emotional state, but simply from the growing sense that when I call he answers.

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I don't find it easy to write this, for I also need to overcome the sense that you will find what I say faintly ridiculous. However it seems worth the risk, because the alternative is rather bleak – that there is, after all, no converse with God, because we do not begin the conversation. All I want to say is that once the conversation begins, one does not want it ever to stop.

Tony Brown, 1984

26.28 From early on, too, I became aware that the movement into a place where in an ineffable way God became real, was not dissimilar from what went on when I entered into the space of imagination. That kind of space was one which attracted me from as far back as I can go in memory, whether it was opened up by someone reading to me, or when I was older by my reading to myself, or by games which drew open that part of me. And I sense that what went on when we sat round the table for reading after breakfast, or when I said my prayers before getting into bed, or when we went to worship on Sundays, belonged to the same kind of experience. Other ways into that space which opened up very early were through music, both listening to it and making it, and through the beauties of the world. Obviously now I realise that there are differences, a sense of the presence of God is not just the result of the use of imagination, or attending to something lovely, but the thing which is germane for me now is that inner space of various kinds has called my attention and has been a large and enlivening place.

Christopher Holdsworth, 1985

26.29 If we set our hearts on goodness as a personal goal, it means that we have to ignore or suppress all the other parts of ourselves that do not fit into our ideal of goodness. That was what George Fox had already done and he was actually shocked when, on the first part of his inward journey, he came upon the dark and unacceptable parts of himself. Like Simone Weil, the twentieth century mystic, he found that he knew from the inside a potential for all possible crimes. His fantasies were guided by no one but himself, but he quickly made the acquaintance of the things inside him that could be bestial, murderous and depraved. Instead of slamming the door of his consciousness, as many of us do when we come on the less

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acceptable bits of our inner world, he went on through them, understanding that he would not be of any use to others if he did not acknowledge in himself the impulses to kill, to lust or cheat or indulge his more primitive passions. If he had not had the courage to accept what he discovered, he would never have made the discovery that sets Quaker spirituality apart from the narrow righteousness of the Puritans. He found that, having faced and acknowledged his dark self, he came upon a more liberating truth at the heart of himself.

He experienced the moment of enlightenment which enabled him to trust the creative and intuitive part of himself and know that it could not be obliterated by the dark side... He spoke of 'the ocean of darkness and the ocean of light'. Both are symbols of the unconscious and of the contradictions and polarities of our being – our dark negativities and our shining possibilities.

Jo Farrow, 1984

### PERCEPTIONS OF TRUTH

26.30 What is love? What shall I say of it, or how shall I in words express its nature? It is the sweetness of life; it is the sweet, tender, melting nature of God, flowing up through his seed of life into the creature, and of all things making the creature most like unto himself, both in nature and operation. It fulfils the law, it fulfils the gospel; it wraps up all in one, and brings forth all in the oneness. It excludes all evil out of the heart, it perfects all good in the heart. A touch of love doth this in measure; perfect love doth this in fullness.

Isaac Pennington, 1663

26.31 I do believe that there is a power which is divine, creative and loving, though we can often only describe it with the images and symbols that rise from our particular experiences and those of our communities. This power is part and parcel of all things, human, animal, indeed of all that lives. Its story is greater than any one cultural version of it and yet it is embodied in all stories, in all traditions. It is a power that paradoxically needs the human response. Like us it is energised by the reciprocity of love.

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It wills our redemption, longs for us to turn to it. It does not create heaven and hell for us, but allows us to do that for ourselves. Such is the terrible vulnerability of love.

Harvey Gillman, 1988

- 26.32 Perhaps more wonderful still is the way in which beauty breaks through. It breaks through not only at a few highly organised points, it breaks through almost everywhere. Even the minutest things reveal it as well as do the sublimest things, like the stars. Whatever one sees through the microscope, a bit of mould for example, is charged with beauty. Everything from a dewdrop to Mount Shasta is the bearer of beauty. And yet beauty has no function, no utility. Its value is intrinsic, not extrinsic. It is its own excuse for being. It greases no wheels, it bakes no puddings. It is a gift of sheer grace, a gratuitous largesse. It must imply behind things a Spirit that enjoys beauty for its own sake and that floods the world everywhere with it. Wherever it can break through, it does break through, and our joy in it shows that we are in some sense kindred to the giver and revealer of it.

Rufus Jones, 1920

- 26.33 To apply the term 'God' (in the Christian sense) is to say that we perceive intuitively a connection between the marvels of the natural world, the moral law, the life of Jesus, the depths of the human personality, our intimations about time, death and eternity, our experience of human forgiveness and love, and the finest insights of the Christian tradition. To deny the existence of 'God' is to say that we cannot (yet) see such connections. But even the word 'God' is not an essential tool for grasping them.

John Lampen, 1985

- 26.34 It is not an accident that throughout the centuries women have provided the core of Christian worship. Although, in order to fulfil the Divine Will at that particular place and time, Jesus was born as the son of Joseph, when he passed out of time into eternity surely sex was transcended. Might we not gain also if the male image of the Lord Almighty were replaced in our imagination by a conception

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more in line with Julian's vision of the Mother-Christ, the dual emblem of the mystery of creative love?

Katharine Moore, 1978

- 26.35 All my life I've heard, 'God is love', without understanding what was meant. Recently I've come to feel that in a very real way G-d/ess is the love that flows in and between and among us. The ebb and flow of my commitment to love, to peace, to harmony makes G-d/ess stronger or weaker in my heart.

Sometimes the web feels like G-d/ess' body, her vast cosmos, of which we are an inextricable part. The web is also the love that flows through creation, from G-d/ess, from us, from everywhere. The web is an affirmation and comfort, support and clear-naming. The web is harmony, proving to me by its fleeting, fragile appearances that peace can happen. Most of all, for me, the web is friendship.

That the web exists is my faith. Spinning at it, dancing along it and calling others into it are my ministry. Ripping it or withdrawing into isolation and despair are my sins. Articulating my faith is hard enough; living it is often beyond me. But we are all connected. Strength seeps in from everywhere and amazing things happen. The sense of participation and communion sweeps over me like ocean waves.

*At the end of the article from which this extract is taken, the writer explained her use of 'G-d/ess':*

I've yet to find a term that describes how I feel about the divine. 'The Spirit' comes close, and so, sometimes, does 'Goddess'. 'G-d/ess' attempts to convey the difficulty of naming the divine. The dash is an old Jewish practice meant to show the impossibility of confining the divine in a word. The single 'd' and feminine suffix are to show that I don't experience the goddess as different from or inferior to what folks generally refer to as God.

Rose Ketterer, 1987

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26.36 *As the Yearly Meeting in 1994 struggled to find unity on whether 26.35 should have a place in our book of discipline, Jo Farrow wrote:*

In the seventeenth century the first generation of Friends shocked many of their Christian neighbours. In trying to express their experiences of God – within them, as spirit, inward light, seed, inward teacher – they used words and phrases which sounded strange and audacious to their contemporaries. They spoke of their experiences of being drawn into community with one another using metaphors and analogies which were both new and old at the same time. ‘The kingdom of God did gather us all in a net...’ wrote Francis Howgill, trying to express the sense of relief and excitement which was theirs when they discovered one another and became aware of how deeply they had been drawn together as they struggled to articulate their experiences of the Spirit. In much the same way many women today are discovering a need to express their spirituality in ways which seem as strange to some Friends as the expressions of early Quaker spirituality did to those who first heard them. Rose Ketterer is a member of Haddonfield Friends Meeting, New Jersey. She writes of her attempts to reclaim a more womanly understanding of the divine.

26.37 Religion is living with God. There is no other kind of religion. Living with a Book, living with or by a Rule, being awfully high-principled are not in themselves religion, although many people think they are and that that is all there is to it. Religion has got a bad name through being identified with an outward orderliness. But an outward orderliness can be death, dullness and masochism. Doing your duty may be admirable stoicism; it isn’t religion.

To find religion itself you must look inside people and inside yourself. And there, if you find even the tiniest grain of true love, you may be on the right scent. Millions of people have it and don’t know what it is that they have. God is their guest, but they haven’t the faintest idea that he is in the house. So you mustn’t only look where God is confessed and acknowledged. You must look everywhere, to find the real religion. Nor must you look, in others or in yourself, for great spooky visions and revelations. Such visions and revelations come to many, a great deal oftener than we think; and to those to whom they come they are sun, moon and stars. But in most people

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who know God, and in all such people most of the time, living with God is not an apparition but a wordless and endless sureness. Like the silence of two friends together. Like the silence of lovers.

God is waiting to live like that in every single person in the world.

Bernard Canter, 1962

- 26.38 God for me is the whole; and 'in him I live and move and have my being'... Since I am a person God must be in some measure personal. But the universe is full of other energies, and so God is other than personal too. With Gerard Manley Hopkins I sense that he is 'past all grasp, God'; and yet with Tennyson I am sure that 'Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet'. This is so infinitely wonderful and mysterious that my natural human conceit is checked, I see myself in perspective, and worship becomes a rational response. Reverence for the world, for life, for man, leads on inescapably to reverence for the whole which I call God.

Donald Court, 1965

- 26.39 True faith is not assurance, but the readiness to go forward experimentally, without assurance. It is a sensitivity to things not yet known. Quakerism should not claim to be a religion of certainty, but a religion of uncertainty; it is this which gives us our special affinity to the world of science. For what we apprehend of truth is limited and partial, and experience may set it all in a new light; if we too easily satisfy our urge for security by claiming that we have found certainty, we shall no longer be sensitive to new experiences of truth. For who seeks that which he believes that he has found? Who explores a territory which he claims already to know?

Charles F Carter, 1971

- 26.40 I do not know the course I am to run, all is hid in mystery, but I try to do right in everything... Look up to true religion as the very first of blessings, cherish it, nourish and let it flourish and bloom in my heart; it wants taking care of, it is difficult to obtain. I must not

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despair or grow sceptical if I do not always feel religious. I felt God as it were, and I must seek to find Him again.

Elizabeth Fry, 1798

26.41 What is my religion? My friends, my teachers, my God. And who is my God? He speaks within me; if I mishear, my friends correct me; if I misdo, I look to Jesus Christ. How then am I taught? I hear in the silence, I ponder in solitude, and I try in the noisy crowd to practise it. What do I learn? To put gaiety before prudence, grace before pleasure, service before power. What am I commanded? To seek patience in suffering, humility in success, steadfastness always. What is forbidden me? To reject another's love, to despise another's wisdom, to blaspheme another's God. And to what purpose? To help others, that we may enter the Commonwealth of Heaven together, each to find our Being in the Whole.

Frederick Parker-Rhodes, 1977

THE LIGHT THAT SHINES FOR ALL

26.42 Now the Lord God has opened to me by his invisible power how that every man was enlightened by the divine Light of Christ; and I saw it shine through all, and that they that believed in it came out of condemnation and came to the Light of Life, and became the children of it, but they that hated it and did not believe in it were condemned by it, though they made a profession of Christ. This I saw in the pure openings of the Light, without the help of any man, neither did I then know where to find it in the Scriptures, though afterwards, searching the Scriptures, I found it. For I saw in that Light and Spirit, which was before Scripture was given forth, and which led the holy men of God to give them forth, that all must come to that Spirit, if they would know God or Christ or the Scriptures aright, which they that gave them forth were led and taught by.

George Fox, 1648

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26.43 The heart of the Quaker message does not lie in a doctrine expressed in abstract terms, but in an experience of power and grace, known in our hearts and also related to the structure of the universe; also known individually and recognised as belonging to all. At the same time this universal spirit is focused and made personal in Jesus in a way which makes it appropriate to speak of the Universal Light as the Light of Christ. It is from this double emphasis on universal and Christ-like that the Quaker message starts. It is these two elements, held firmly together, which provide the coherence and unity of Quakerism.

L Hugh Doncaster, 1972

### The Light of Christ

26.44 If you would know God and worship and serve God as you should do, you must come to the means he has ordained and given for that purpose. Some seek it in books, some in learned men, but what they look for is in themselves, yet they overlook it. The voice is too still, the Seed too small and the Light shineth in darkness. They are abroad and so cannot divide the spoil; but the woman that lost her silver found it at home after she had lighted her candle and swept her house. Do you so too and you shall find what Pilate wanted to know, viz., Truth. The Light of Christ within, who is the Light of the world and so a light to you that tells you the truth of your condition, leads all that take heed unto it out of darkness into God's marvellous light; for light grows upon the obedient. It is sown for the righteous and their way is a shining light that shines forth more and more to the perfect day.

William Penn, 1694

26.45 Christ has not conquered to excuse us, but that we should follow his steps.

Job Scott, 1792

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26.46 The New Testament clearly sets out Christ as fully human and as fully divine. The writers are conscious of no difficulty or contradiction involved in this position. It seemed to them the most natural thing in the world. Probably the sense of contradiction only arises in our minds through ignorance of what is meant by personality. We set divinity over against humanity, on the assumption that so much added to the one must be so much subtracted from the other. Some have so emphasised Christ's divinity as to leave no room for his humanity, while others have done just the reverse. It seems so easy to solve the problem by cutting the knot: either say that Christ was absolute God or that he was ordinary man. But this does not solve the problem, for either solution fails to take account of many of the facts. The difficulty is to get a conception of Jesus that is true to all the facts – of one who was the incarnate Son of God and yet (perhaps we should say 'and therefore') was truly man. It is a pity that we insist on using the terms 'humanity' and 'divinity' as though they implied opposition. May we not rather say that Jesus 'shows us the divine life humanly lived and the human life divinely lived'?

Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting, 1919

26.47 If you allow me to have Christ simply as a friend, he may become what you call God; if you force him on me as God, he cannot become a friend.

Pierre Ceresole, 1920

26.48 I am far from having arrived at the mount of vision where so many more faithful disciples have stood, above all mists of doubt: yet to think of Christ has meant again and again a parting in the clouds through which a beam of light comes gleaming. Sometimes that light has shone into my vision reflected from word or deed of some man or woman who themselves have been illumined by the same Lord; sometimes the echo of his words in the New Testament; the impress of what he did, above all of what he was, and is and will be, has brought the help I needed. I do not understand more than a very little of that life; there are passages in the gospels which puzzle me; I know there may be in the narrative things imperfectly reported or misunderstood by those who heard him. But there he remains, and

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life goes forth from him still into our lives, bringing hope and forgiveness and healing, a new vision and a new spirit.

T Edmund Harvey, 1949

26.49 'I and the Father are One'. That means to me that I think of God in terms of Jesus Christ, that I pray to Jesus as representing the Father to my consciousness, or to the Father as I see him in Jesus. Carry that thought to Calvary itself. See in the crucifixion not merely a martyr's death, not merely a passing gleam of God's love, certainly not a sacrifice to God carrying a legal significance, but in truth the flashing into light of an eternal fact, the nature of God's relation to sin, of the pain we inflict on his heart by our own wrongdoing. Here is the wonderful dynamic of the cross. God calls you to him. He shows you his suffering, he shows you the hatefulness of the sin that caused it, and, in showing you his love, shows you the punishment of alienation from him, the hell of the unrepentant, in which we must remain until repentance opens the gate for the prodigal and gives entrance to the free forgiveness and love of the Father's house. In Jesus, in his life and his death upon the cross, we are shown the nature of God and the possibilities that are within our reach. We are shown the world as the Father sees it, are called to live in harmony with his will and purpose, to hate the sins that made him mourn, to scale the barrier of sin and discover that the way of penitence lies open and direct to the Fatherly heart. No legal bargain, but a spiritual conflict, an inward change, the rejection of the living death of sin, the choice of the new birth, of the purified self, the conversion from a low and earthly to a high and spiritual standard of life and conduct – here you have the practical conditions of salvation, and in the active, free and holy love of God, ever seeking entrance, ever powerful if we but yield the gateway of our heart, is the substance of the Gospel.

John Wilhelm Rowntree, 1904

26.50 We can respond to the Christ-event in such a way that we see Jesus as a symbol of God, a concrete example of divine being and action. When we do this, though we make statements focused on Jesus, we are in fact trying to talk about God. Using this symbol we can talk about God as helpless and humble, sharing human vulnerability with us. We can see the brokenness of God, the giving up of power in

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order to take on pain and mortality; the creativity of love which remakes hope out of despair, promise out of sin; the incarnation of the divine in the human, making all of life sacred; the fusion of holiness with life; the divine self-offering. Using this symbol we can talk about comfort; about the light that shines in the darkness; about the certainty of love and joy. We can see the presence of God in every aspect of our lives, so that whatever our situation it is shared and understood. Using this symbol we can above all see God in our fellow-humans and thus be called to service. In every homeless child, every refugee, every criminal or outcast, every worker or preacher, those in authority and those without it, there is a child of God, one who is precious and loved.

Janet Scott, 1980

- 26.51 The central perceptions of Christianity remain as a source of perennial wisdom without which we sink into non-life. Incarnation, the cross, repentance, forgiveness, resurrection – these unfashionable words express the deep realities of the human condition. At the time of our origin the first Friends relinquished the excrescences and the exterior trappings by which the churches obscured the central vision. When we read George Fox and are shaken by a power and a passion which we apparently have lost, what we should seek is not an impossible return to the historical moment which fostered such convictions but to see in the terms of our own very different, though also chaotic, times what the centrality of Christ can mean to us now.

Lorna M Marsden, 1985

- 26.52 If we try to imagine ourselves in the position of the first disciples, we would have to think of ourselves as strictly monotheistic Jews, believing in the one God, Jehovah, the creator. As they associated with Jesus, they gradually came to recognise more and more in him: first the special rabbi who taught with authority and not as the scribes; then the Christ, the holy one of God; finally the affirmation of Thomas: 'My Lord and my God'. What a terrible thing for a Jew to have said – and yet, somehow, that was the effect of the impact Jesus made. And then, after his earthly life was finished, these same disciples and their friends were aware of the continuing life of his spirit among them, encouraging, guiding and sustaining them. In

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short, they had a threefold experience of one reality: they knew God the father; they knew the person of Jesus who was so identified with him that Thomas could burst out with his great affirmation; and they knew the continuing inspiration of the spirit which they identified with him.

L Hugh Doncaster, 1963

- 26.53 I cannot explain the mystery of how someone who is a human being just as I am can also be worshipped. And yet the more real the mystery has become for me, it isn't that Jesus has become more like God, but that all my brothers and sisters have. It is through him that I recognise God in my neighbour – through Jesus I've discovered the uniqueness of everyone. And there was in him a quality of willingness to be defeated and destroyed by his enemies and to go on loving them, that alone made possible a new quality of life afterwards.

Paul Oestreicher, 1981

- 26.54 We make our guesses at the nature of God, and we are often like my small daughter who said, 'My mind goes round and round when I want to think about God, but I can think about Jesus.' To me Jesus is a window through to God, a person who in terms of personality, in a way that can be grasped by our finite minds, shows what mercy, pity, peace are like in human life. I turn to the Jesus of the New Testament – to his healing word, his freedom from anxiety, his outreaching insight, to him as a whole person – not to imitate him but to let him live and grow in my life...

I do not pray to him – I look at him, dwell upon him, love him. But it is the presence of the God he worshipped of which I am conscious as I look at the night sky, the sleeping child and the rose. When I listen in the quietness and when I pray, it is to God that I listen and pray. And since personality is the highest value that I know in life, since all truth comes to us through the medium of human minds and thoughts, I am not surprised that God too comes to me in terms of personality. I can well understand how to many Christians Christ comes as a tangible figure, a Son of God in a special unique way, even though that is not the way he comes to me. Every word that comes to our lips is a symbol and the symbol of the father God has

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been sanctified by Jesus' use of it as well as by how it has been used throughout the Bible. We have much to learn about the image of fatherhood and from the growing and developing idea of God in the Old Testament. Now we may be beginning to learn about God the mother as well.

Ruth Fawell, 1987

- 26.55 Jesus the Jew of Nazareth, ... to me, puts a question mark and an exclamation mark to everything. It is not a matter of saying 'Jesus is the answer'. It would be true and more useful to say that Jesus is the question. Here the questions of action and achievement, of God and humanity, are brought to a focus in the paradox of triumph on a cross, of God dying as a man, of a man living as God. Here the question mark which death and suffering put against the love and joys of this world is itself confronted with a question: 'Death, where is thy sting?' And in the light of this, we are faced with the question: 'Who do you say that I am?' I have found, too, that it is easy to side-step the challenge of Jesus. The history of the early church and the growth of the creeds, which are such red rags to Quakers, is precisely the attempt of the church not to lose sight of this paradox, this knife edge, this scandal. Constantly, people wanted to make things easier to grasp and more comfortable to live with by stressing the human side of Jesus at the expense of the divine or vice versa. No one would deny that the attempt to encapsulate the truth about Jesus in words is bound to fail, but the achievement of those years was to keep the tension that he embodies alive so that it has resonance now, instead of opting for an easier answer.

Hugh Pypers, 1986

- 26.56 The resurrection, however literally or otherwise we interpret it, demonstrates the power of God, to bring life out of brokenness; not just to take the hurt out of brokenness but to add something to the world. It helps us to sense the usefulness, the possible meaning in our suffering, and to turn it into a gift. The resurrection affirms me with my pain and my anger at what has happened. It does not take away my pain; it still hurts. But I sense that I am being transfigured; I am being enabled to begin again to love confidently and to remake the spirit of my world.

S Jocelyn Burnell, 1989

26.57 I decided long ago that God was not the most 'powerful' thing in the universe. He much more resembles a barefoot Galilean prophet speaking in up-country dialect, followed by tax-gatherers, fishermen and prostitutes, who becomes a nuisance and ends up (very properly) by being crucified while the guards dice for his clothes – more to pass the time than because the garments are worth anything. It is not because God is powerful that I worship him; if he is powerful it is in some dimension that I don't know anything about, which we can agree (if you like) to call eternity...

No, the moment when I love God is at the moment when the Galilean prophet was watching his followers melt away and suspected that Simon Peter the fisherman would soon be off too, back to his nets. 'Wilt thou also go away?' he asks Simon; but mercifully Simon is too stupid to see the point of the question, or to take his chance to get out. 'Lord, to whom should we go? Thou hast the word of eternal life.' That's it, the obscure, futile shaky thing, as feeble as a baby in a stable, that's what I worship.

J Ormerod Greenwood, 1973

26.58 For two thousand years there has been emphasis on the Yang aspects of Christ, that is, on the amazing teacher, healer and master of all spiritual power, he who rebuked the winds and the waves and told his disciples they had only to believe and mountains could be uprooted and set down in the seas. This over-emphasis upon the power aspect of the spirit has resulted ... in domination of the planet. But because intuitive reverence has been missing we have unwittingly set about destroying the living and healing processes which actually hold the world together.

The Yin or feminine aspect of the Christ now awaits our discovery. This is the Christ in the second period of the Gospel story. He who, echoing his mother's receptivity to the divine, in the garden of Gethsemane prayed, 'Nevertheless, not as I will but as thou wilt.' Just here in the rending of the material, which the cross betokens, a new invasion of spirit into matter occurs. This is the Christ, agonisingly separated from spirit, who by his receptivity makes possible a fresh

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flow of impregnation from the divine, right down into the depths of nature and into humanity.

Damaris Parker-Rhodes, 1985

26.59 An awareness of older, lonely Friends grew in me with many hours spent visiting, and I felt able to volunteer for work with the Children's Meeting, which I really enjoyed. Living where we did near all the symptoms of inner-city decay and change I had ample opportunity to feel the needs of those around us. This process of awareness culminated when I rather simply and naïvely asked God for a deeper understanding of Christ. I think I expected something rather comforting and lovely. Instead all the world's suffering was gathered up in a moment and pressed upon me. It was quite searing, quite devastating. The experience gave me an understanding of Jesus as one deeply involved in our suffering and pain, actually experiencing it too, that God is not remote but that God *is with us*. Truly Emmanuel.

Rosamond Robertson, 1990

26.60 Those of us who cannot yet personally witness to the experience of direct encounter with the living Christ can only at our peril deny the truth of the experience to which others testify; just as those who do feel this experience are on equally dangerous ground when on account of it they claim that they alone possess the sole route to that God whom Jesus of Nazareth defined as spirit and whose kingdom he once likened to a house with many mansions. Respect for the validity of personal encounter with the spirit of God, subjected to the check of corporate discipline, is part of the essence of our Quaker witness. Thus, though both our practices of worship and our theological understandings now differ widely, these variances may be accepted as elements within the direct, continuing development of the spirit of Jesus, the sensing of which was at the heart of the original Quaker experience.

Richard Rowntree, 1987

**The Universal Light**

26.61 There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath 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.

John Woolman, 1762

26.62 The light for which the world longs is already shining. It is shining into the darkness, but the darkness does not apprehend it. It is shining into the darkness, but the darkness is not overcoming it. It is shining in many a soul, and already the new order has begun within the kingdom of the heart. It is shining in many a small group and creating a heavenly-earthly fellowship of children of the light. It will always shine and lead many into the world of need, that they may bear it up into the heart of God.

Thomas R Kelly, 1941

26.63 The light that shines into man's heart is not of man, and must ever be distinguished both from the conscience which it enlightens and from the natural faculty of reason which, when unsubjected to its holy influences, is, in the things of God, very foolishness. As the eye is to the body, so is conscience to our inner nature, the organ by which we see; and as both light and life are essential to sight in the natural eye, so conscience as the inward eye cannot see aright without the quickening and illumination of the Spirit of God.

Yearly Meeting in London, 1879

26.64 Wrth roi pwyslais ar y Goleuni oddimewn nid ydym yn dyneiddio crefydd yn ormodol. Nid ein goleuni ni ydyw; ei dderbyn yr ydym ni. A ni ynghanol ein profiadau gyda'n cyd-ddynion, daw rhyw oleuni sydd yn peri i'r profiadau hynny edrych yn wahanol. Dywedwn, yn drwsogl, mai'r Goleuni Oddimewn sydd yn peri'r cyfnewidiad, a chredwn mai oddiwrth Dduw y daeth. Sut y gwyddom nad ydym yn

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ein twyllo ein hunain? Yn y pen draw nid oes gennym ddim ond ein profiad ein hunain i bwyso arno. Yn y pen draw nid oes gan un a dderbynio'r grefydd fwyaf traddodiadol ddim ond ei brofiad i bwyso arno.

Waldo Williams, 1956

*For a translation of this extract into English see page XXX*

- 26.65 This central affirmation, that the Light of the Christ-like God shines in every person, implies that our knowledge of God is both subjective and objective. It is easy to misconstrue 'Inner Light' as an invitation to individualism and anarchy if one concentrates on the subjective experience known to each one. But it is an equally important part of our faith and practice to recognise that we are not affirming the existence and priority of your light and my light, but of the Light of God, and of the God who is made known to us supremely in Jesus. The inward experience must be checked by accordance with the mind of Christ, the fruits of the Spirit, the character of that willed caring which in the New Testament is called Love. It is further checked by the fact that if God is known in measure by every person, our knowledge of him will be largely gained through the experience of others who reverently and humbly seek him. In the last resort we must be guided by our own conscientiously held conviction – but it is in the last resort. First we must seek carefully and prayerfully through the insights of others, both in the past and among our contemporaries, and only in the light of this search do we come to our affirmation.

L Hugh Doncaster, 1972

- 26.66 We may seem at times to take God for granted. But we know the beyond in our midst; we rely on grace, on God's free, sustaining, creative and lively action as we rely on the air we breathe and the ground we walk on.

London Yearly Meeting, 1986

## 26: Reflections

26.67 We misunderstand the truth of the Inward Light if we imagine that it means a present inspiration independent of the past. Fox claimed that he had a word from the Lord as sure as any of the Apostles ever had. We join him in affirming our faith in the contemporary inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But Fox could never have made his claim if he had not recognised the word of the Lord which came to the Apostles.

H G Wood, 1951

26.68 The Inner Light does not lead men to do that which is right in their own eyes, but that which is right in God's eyes. As the Light is One, so its teaching is ultimately (though not superficially) harmonious. In actual experience, it is not found that souls truly looking to the Inner Light as their authority will break away from each other in anarchy.

Ellen S Bosanquet, 1927

26.69 There is no easy optimism in the Quaker view of life. Fox had no illusions about sin; but he asks us to deal with it in a new way. When early Friends likened God's gift to a 'Seed' they did not think of it as growing inevitably into a noble tree. They were fully aware of the influences that might arrest its growth. Fox never regarded the conquest of sin as a casual undertaking. But with astonishing psychological insight he laid the whole emphasis of his method not on the sin but on the light that revealed it. By implication he was criticising those who were so obsessed with the fallen state of man that they stayed their eyes on man's wickedness rather than on the means of his redemption. To contemplate evil is a poor way of becoming good... Fox assures his friends that light will come on conditions. These conditions were well laid down by Isaac Penington in the darkness of Reading gaol: 'We were directed to search for the least of all seeds and to mind the lowest appearance thereof, which was its turning against sin and darkness; we came by degrees to find we had met with the pure living eternal Spirit.'

The practice of minding 'the lowest appearance' of the Seed involves a steady discipline. We must face the austerity as well as accept the joy of life if we are to grow. The method of this discipline is beautifully and most practically suggested in George Fox's oft-

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repeated instruction, 'Mind that which is pure in you to guide you to God.' Here Fox displays a deep psychological insight, born of his own personal struggle. We are to use the little that we have to make it more. We are to tend the small Seed and help it to grow.

Edgar B Castle, 1961

- 26.70 Give over thine own willing, give over thy own running, give over thine own desiring to know or be anything and sink down to the seed which God sows in the heart, and let that grow in thee and be in thee and breathe in thee and act in thee; and thou shalt find by sweet experience that the Lord knows that and loves and owns that, and will lead it to the inheritance of Life, which is its portion.

Isaac Pennington, 1661

- 26.71 If you build upon anything or have confidence in anything which stands in time and is on this side eternity and [the] Being of beings, your foundation will be swept away, and night will come upon you, and all your gathered-in things and taken-on and imitated will all fail you... Why gad you abroad? Why trim you yourselves with the saints' words, when you are ignorant of the life? Return, return to Him that is the first Love, and the first-born of every creature, who is the Light of the world... Return home to within, sweep your houses all, the goat is there, the little leaven is there, the grain of mustard-seed you will see, which the Kingdom of God is like; ... and here you will see your Teacher not removed into a corner, but present when you are upon your beds and about your labour, convincing, instructing, leading, correcting, judging and giving peace to all that love and follow Him.

Francis Howgill, 1656

- 26.72 To you who are seekers, to you, young and old who have toiled all night and caught nothing, but who want to launch out into the deeps and let down your nets for a draught, I want to speak as simply, as tenderly, as clearly as I can. For God *can* be found. There *is* a last rock for your souls, a resting-place of absolute peace and joy and power and radiance and security. There is a Divine Center into which

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your life can slip, a new and absolute orientation in God, a Center where you live with Him and out of which you see all of life through new and radiant vision, tinged with new sorrows and pangs, new joys unspeakable and full of glory... The reality of Presence has been very great at times recently. One knows at first hand what the old inquiry meant, 'Has Truth been advancing among you?'

Thomas R Kelly, 1941

- 26.73 I would hesitate to claim that I receive direct guidance from God – I do not hear a divine voice that tells me what to do. But I do have a sense that I am being drawn to take one course of action rather than another. The guidance, however, arises from a countless number of experiences, influences, attitudes and disciplines which I have accumulated over the years and upon which I have reflected. So certain types of action seem to be my natural response to particular circumstances. In them all the sense of the presence of God is real and immediate but it is not unmediated.

George Gorman, 1973

- 26.74 What manner of spirit are we of? Have we any connection with the spirit which descended on the upper room, sounding like 'a mighty rushing wind'? Do we look to be swept out of our comfortable existence by an invading power which comes, as Jesus said, no one knows whence? Or do we look rather for a gentler movement within? Do we say, it was this Spirit of God which breathed into our human clay to make us living souls? It is there, in our humanity, but mixed with passions which confuse its purpose, limited by the tunnel vision of the self. Occasionally a blinding flash may come from without and someone is jolted forwards; but the Spirit's normal method is a quiet insistence, a still small voice barely audible amid the turbulence of earthquake, wind and fire.

Stephen Allott, 1981

- 26.75 For some time now I have thought of God in more pantheistic terms than I suppose is true of most of my Quaker brothers and sisters. To

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me, God is something about the universe, something about the depth in each of us.

We've never talked about it in the meeting but this difference in thinking doesn't seem to matter in what we share. We visit the prison in Richmond together, give shelter to runaway teenagers, aid those who are resisting the war. We come together and wait quietly to regain our sense of what lies deepest in us, of the things most important to us. Then when we each of us speak and listen from this condition of mind and heart we somehow understand and are bound together in ways that are healing and empowering.

To me, these are the things that are prayer and revelation and encounter with that which is holy. And when I find something like them beyond the meeting and its membership there too I sense a unity of being. These are the things which, for me, any thought of God must have to do with. How thankful I am that this seems so surely to be true for the others with whom I share the silences, the concerns, the activities of this meeting that I love so well.

Anonymous, 1970

- 26.76 Within the Society of Friends we have our own problems with the traditional language of Christian spirituality... There are those who can comfortably talk in Christian language, because they experience it deeply as expressing truth and reality as they perceive it. For them it is not 'just a language'; it *is* the truth. The words used are inseparable from the underlying truths, the stories, the tradition, the nature of God as revealed in Jesus. There is no 'gap' between their experience of faith, their beliefs and the language used by the Christian tradition. There are those who just cannot use that language at all, because for them it precisely does not express their deepest truths, and may in fact be felt to deny or even violate them. For these people, their deepest experiences of spiritual reality, as they have encountered it, cannot be encompassed by a language that has acquired so many historical accretions and distortions that it has become at best meaningless and at worst a falsification of truth. So they must grapple with the equal inadequacy of contemporary language to express the depths of their searching.

Pam Lunn, 1990

26.77 In this day and age the place where Friends find their unity is in the kind of God they worship. Their apprehension of the relationship of Jesus Christ to God embraces every orthodox and unorthodox shade of theology from unitarian to trinitarian; but whether we regard Jesus ... as God himself or as the supreme revealer of God to man, it is the same kind of God: a spirit of peace, truth, love and redeeming power. We need to feel the influence of this Spirit in our lives rather than to argue about our different modes of apprehending him. Directly we begin to chide each other for orthodoxy or unorthodoxy, we cease to be the catholic body we are; for the logical end of such chiding is sanctions and the excluding of the weaker body by the stronger. Let us keep our different modes of apprehension and remember always that it is the same God we serve, revealing himself to each according to his faith, his openness and his need.

Beatrice Saxon Snell, 1961

26.78 It is not opinion, or speculation, or notions of what is true, or assent to or the subscription of articles or propositions, though never so soundly worded, that ... makes a man a true believer or a true Christian. But it is a conformity of mind and practice to the will of God, in all holiness of conversation, according to the dictates of this Divine principle of Light and Life in the soul which denotes a person truly a child of God.

William Penn, 1692