

## Chapter 29

### Leadings

*What shall we hand on? Where is the Spirit now leading us? In this book we have seen how we have been gathered, guided and ordered for more than three hundred years. We shall want both to keep the rich openings we have inherited and to be open to continuing guidance in changing circumstances. This will only be possible if we heed the promptings of love and truth which we trust as the leadings of God.*

*Individually and corporately Friends are seeking new ways of expressing our testimonies to equality and social justice, to the building of peace, to truth and integrity in public affairs, and to simplicity in a lifestyle that reflects our renewed understanding of our relationship with all creation.*

*As we try to respond to new leadings we often cannot discern what will remain important and what will be seen as ephemeral. There will be tensions as we wrestle with our diverse perceptions and convictions, and tensions can be creative. Our hope and our experience is that when we are faithful we shall be rightly led.*

29.01 How can we walk with a smile into the dark? We must learn to put our trust in God and the leadings of the Spirit. How many of us are truly led by the Spirit throughout our daily lives? I have turned to God when I have had a difficult decision to make or when I have sought strength to endure the pain in dark times. But I am only slowly learning to dwell in the place where leadings come from. That is a place of love and joy and peace, even in the midst of pain. The more I dwell in that place, the easier it is to smile, because I am no longer afraid.

If we dwell in the presence of God, we shall be led by the spirit. We do well to remember that being led by the spirit depends not so much upon God, who is always there to lead us, as upon our willingness to be led. We need to be willing to be led into the dark as well as through green pastures and by still waters. We do not need to be afraid of the dark, because God is there. The future of this earth

need not be in the hands of the world's 'leaders'. The world is in God's hands if we are led by God. Let us be led by the Spirit. Let us walk with a smile into the dark.

Gordon Matthews, 1987

29.02 *Following consideration of priorities in financing the work of London Yearly Meeting in 1992, Meeting for Sufferings minuted:*

The ground of our work lies in our waiting on and listening for the Spirit. Let the loving spirit of a loving God call us and lead us. These leadings are both personal and corporate. If they are truly tested in a gathered meeting we shall find that the strength and the courage for obedience are given to us. We need the humility to put obedience before our own wishes.

We are aware of the need to care for ourselves and each other in our meetings, bearing each others' burdens and lovingly challenging each other.

We also hear the cry of those in despair which draws out our compassion. We know the need to speak for those who have no voice. We have a tradition of service and work which has opened up opportunities for us. But we are reminded that we are not the only ones to do this work. Not only can we encourage a flow of work between our central and our local meetings; but we must recognise the Spirit at work in many bodies and in many places, in other churches and faiths, and in secular organisations.

When we look at our past we can see the length of time needed for transformation. We are a small church with the pretensions to change the world. But first we have to let God change us – to empower us to be better Friends, and more active in our own work. We should not be creating structures to work for us, but empowering each other to do the work laid on each of us. However we plan ... the Spirit is unchanging and will always lead us... All is interconnected, worship with action, wisdom with love.

We must look to our meetings, to our love for each other, and our corporate discipline. We must look to ourselves, to speak of our

## 29: Leadings

lives and to let our lives speak. Above all we must look to the Truth. We have an Inward Teacher who teaches, guides and commands us. When we know what we have to do, how to do it will come.

- 29.03 We seem to be at a turning point in human history. We can choose life or watch the planet become uninhabitable for our species. Somehow, I believe that we will pass through this dark night of our planetary soul to a new period of harmony with the God that is to be found within each of us, and that S/he will inspire renewed confidence in people everywhere, empowering us all to co-operate to use our skills, our wisdom, our creativity, our love, our faith – even our doubts and fears – to make peace with the planet. Strengthened by this fragile faith, empowered by the Spirit within, I dare to hope.

Pat Saunders, 1987

- 29.04 It is said that all great movements progress through three stages: ridicule, discussion, adoption. For the anti-vivisection movement the stage of ridicule is passing, the stage for discussion has begun. Will the Religious Society of Friends condemn vivisection before or after its abolition? Our yearly meeting at present is not a participant in this unfolding humane drama but a silent spectator to it... Should a search for unity with the anti-vivisection movement not be our concern?

Ralph Rowarth, 1994

- 29.05 We recognise the enormous powers of newly developing genetic engineering techniques to change living matter with speed and scope hitherto unthinkable. Recent applications of bio-engineering to plant and animal species have benefited mainly people in materially wealthy countries at the expense of the materially poor, and of global biodiversity. Continuation of these technologies and their extension to human beings highlights the need for Friends to affirm that the intrinsic value of all life forms is not restricted to their utilitarian functions, and that the richness of human diversity should never be reduced to the level of a commodity or made subject to market forces. The potential of genetic technologies for good and ill

requires humility, wisdom, and lovingkindness, and also the capacity to know when to stop. We Friends need to bring our own diverse gifts to help ensure that research into and application of genetic technologies do not proceed without consideration for justice, democracy, and respect for the dignity and well-being of all.

Amber Carroll and Grace Jantzen, 1994

29.06 *In reflecting on time spent working in Vietnam in the early 1970s, Helen Steven wrote:*

Perhaps our most positive contribution to peace-making was to affirm and value Vietnamese culture in the face of the appalling destruction which we saw around us.

I believe that it is this fundamental respect for 'that of God' in everyone which is at the heart of all true development. On my return home I was horrified by our cultural, material and spiritual arrogance. I believe that it is profound arrogance which initiates aid programmes which force western methods of education, medicine or agriculture on people with traditions longer than our own; it is arrogance to assume that any political system or social or economic structure must be maintained and defended no matter how many people are bombed, napalmed or tortured in the process. Surely arrogance drives us to rape and destroy the earth's scarce resources to fuel and protect the needs of one generation in one corner of the globe. And supreme arrogance to believe that we have the monopoly of spiritual truth.

I came home from Vietnam convinced that the real task of development lies at home at our own door.

1987

29.07 We are all one, in a subtle but most significant way, one in the sense of being interdependent. I would not be as I am without you; you would not be as you are without me. At one level this is not difficult to understand. I realise how much I am the product not only of my parents' genes, but also of their emotional and intellectual influence which derived, in turn, from the ambience of their own family life,

## 29: Leadings

culture and education. And I am the product of my schooling, the intellectual ideas which have shaped my thoughts, my friends, my wife, my children – all of whose lives I, in turn, am helping to create.

This is easy to grasp. It is also easy to grasp how, for example, our tastes and addictions influence people far outside our range of knowledge. For instance, whether I prefer tea to coffee for breakfast affects the economy of, say, Sri Lanka or India, Kenya or Colombia. And this means that the lives of millions of people I have never met are affected. The whimsy of my taste buds may lead to the bankruptcy or the prosperity of nations, to revolutions or oppressions. Who knows? All we can be sure of is that everything we do, say or think cannot help having an impact on the totality, the All of which we form a part.

Adam Curle, 1992

- 29.08 We Quakers say we have no creed. We almost do! For nearly all of us would say we believe in ‘that of God in everyone’.

How easy that is to say. How difficult to live! If we mean it, we have to live it. That is why some of us in Northern Ireland do speak to the men of violence. It does not mean we agree with what they do. It does mean believing in the good that is in everyone and in the potential for growth and change that is in us all.

Some of our closest friends used to be involved in violence and have changed. I have learnt so much from them and their courage in changing, and I am encouraged to believe that anyone can change.

Diana Lampen, 1991

- 29.09 We have to take responsibility in our own countries for the trade in weapons, which will continue unless we intensify our actions against it. Let us do this together as an international body. Let us picture where Jesus Christ would be in this matter. What would he be saying about the trade in weapons? I often have to remind myself of this, and I even try to remind some of my colleagues in the Australian Senate – well, what would Jesus be saying about this or that – and it pulls them up a bit short, I can tell you.

He would be there, he would be working with us, he would be arguing and doing everything in his power to ensure that this trade, which is totally immoral, was stopped as soon as possible. It's a big job, Friends, but Quakers have often taken on a prophetic role in the past. We should be glad of the example of the slave abolitionists and remember their strength, their courage, their witness, and do likewise now.

Jo Vallentine, 1991

- 29.10 We are trustees of a long tradition which has sought to bring our religious convictions into the world 'and so excite our endeavours to mend it'. We are trying to live in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars.

Fundamentally, taxation for war purposes is not a political or a fiscal issue. We are convinced by the Spirit of God to say without any hesitation whatsoever that we must support the right of conscientious objection to paying taxes for war purposes. We realise that we live in a world where it is impossible to see clearly the final consequences of the actions we might initiate from this Meeting. Nevertheless we are impelled by our vision of a peaceful and loving society.

We ask Meeting for Sufferings to explore further and with urgency the role our religious society should corporately take in this concern and then to take such action as it sees necessary on our behalf. We know that this is only one further step in our witness to the Truth, to which we are continually summoned. We go forward in God's strength.

London Yearly Meeting, 1987

- 29.11 What we have heard on the degree of secrecy which permeates our national institutions brings out in us fear, shock, distress and dilemma at the level of deviousness and distortion that flows from this. The vast security apparatus extends through the whole fabric of society. As a Religious Society we have an historic message of love which will conquer the fear which lies at the base of this increasing secrecy.

## 29: Leadings

We need to uphold those who experience persecution and harassment as a result of this secrecy. We must also ask ourselves: 'Just how truthful are we?' Recognising the sincerity of those of opposing views, we are reminded of the need for our whole lives to be in harmony, so we can speak powerfully to others.

Conference on 'The secret state', convened by Warwickshire Monthly Meeting, 1989

- 29.12 Early Friends were inclined to address the monarch or ambassadors negotiating a peace treaty. Friends are now more likely to address those involved in the work of international institutions, like the UN or the European Economic Community, although letters are still written to the Prime Minister, and recently British Friends addressed the monarch. It might also be argued that power in today's world has shifted from governments to global financial interests, and it is there that Quaker efforts should be directed.

Our primary objective in speaking truth to power on social and economic issues, especially on the problem of world poverty, should be the interests of the poor. Our role is to remind the rich and privileged, including ourselves, of the challenge to surrender privilege.

Cecil R Evans, 1987

- 29.13 We have thought and felt deeply about the disgrace that there is poverty in our wealthy country. So long as any one person in our midst can say 'I exist, but I'm nothing' the longing for a more just social order will persist. The truth is that we are all hurt and need healing. There is a spiritual poverty among both rich and poor... If we are to be whole, we can no longer ignore the divisions created by idolising wealth, success and power. A key to a deep-rooted response to poverty is to throw away the illusion that the rich alone have much to offer and to grasp the reality that we all have much to gain from one another.

London Yearly Meeting, 1987

29.14 Quakers believe that the same God who is graciously present with us is also known in other religions of the world, and by all who are 'humble, meek, merciful, just, pious and devout'. An encouraging aspect of the Inter-Church Process has been its lively awareness of Britain as a multi-faith community... But beyond the other faiths, there is a whole people of God, the whole of humanity. We affirm, with the Swanwick [inter-church] declaration, that 'the world with all its sin and splendour belongs to God.' ... The gospel-imperative for the church is to serve the people of God, and most especially 'these least'. The hungry, the homeless, the sick and the prisoners abound in Britain today: the world cries out for justice and peace.

Meeting for Sufferings, 1988

29.15 We recognise and celebrate what we as Black, Asian and mixed-heritage Friends [in Britain] bring to the Society and with pride we affirm our rich positive contributions. However, we find spoken and unspoken assumptions that because we are Black people we are economically needy, socially deprived, culturally disinherited and spiritually in need of Quaker instruction. We experience isolation both physical and spiritual within our meetings. It is not just a matter of numbers but without the active commitment to promote diversity within the Society of Friends it will continue to be difficult to foster a true experience of a spiritual community.

As Black and white Friends we recognise the importance of our children's needs to know and value themselves and the world around them with the love and support of a settled and secure family environment. We must all strive to ensure that race is not a barrier to our children's success. We need to look honestly and openly at the structure of our meetings and seek to broaden our experience of other enriching forms of worship. Quakerism enables us to face both the glory and the seemingly unfaceable in ourselves. Let us do so now – together.

*Epistle of Black, white, Asian and mixed-heritage Friends, 1991*

29.16 *At the World Conference of Friends in 1991, Val Ferguson asked:*

Does anything unite this diverse group beyond our common love and humanity? Does anything make us distinctively Quaker? I say yes. Each of us has different emphases and special insights, but wherever Friends are affirming each other's authentic experience of God, rather than demanding credal statements, we are being God's faithful Quakers. Wherever we are seeking God's will rather than human wisdom, especially when conflict might arise, we are being faithful Quakers. Wherever we are affirming the total equality of men and women, we are being God's faithful Quakers. Wherever there is no division between our words and our actions, we are being faithful. Whenever we affirm that no one – priest, pastor, clerk, elder – stands between us and the glorious and mystical experience of God in our lives, we are faithful Friends. Whether we sing or whether we wait in silence, as long as we are listening with the whole of our being and seeking the baptism and communion of living water, we will be one in the Spirit.

29.17 *Over 300 Young Friends from 34 countries, 57 yearly meetings, and 8 monthly meetings under the care of Friends World Committee for Consultation, met at Guilford College, Greensboro, North Carolina in July 1985, to envisage the future of the Religious Society of Friends and to see how their lives should speak within that vision.*

We have come together from every continent, separated by language, race, culture, ways we worship God, and beliefs about Christ and God... We have been challenged, shaken up, at times even enraged, intimidated, and offended by these differences in each other. We have grown from this struggle and have felt the Holy Spirit in programmed worship, singing, Bible study, open times of worship and sharing, and silent waiting upon God.

Our differences are our richness, but also our problem. One of our key differences is the different names we give our Inward Teacher. Some of us name that Teacher Lord; others of us use the names Spirit, Inner Light, Inward Christ or Jesus Christ. It is important to acknowledge that these names involve more than language; they involve basic differences in our understanding of who God is, and how God enters our lives. We urge Friends to wrestle, as many of us have here, with the conviction and experience of many Friends throughout our history that this Inward Teacher is in fact Christ himself. We have been struck this week, however, with the

experience of being forced to recognise this same God at work in others who call that Voice by different names, or who understand differently who that Voice is.

We have often wondered whether there is anything Quakers today can say as one. After much struggle we have discovered that we can proclaim this: there is a living God at the centre of all, who is available to each of us as a Present Teacher at the very heart of our lives. We seek as people of God to be worthy vessels to deliver the Lord's transforming word, to be prophets of joy who know from experience and can testify to the world, as George Fox did, 'that the Lord God is at work in this thick night'. Our priority is to be receptive and responsive to the life-giving Word of God, whether it comes through the written word – the Scriptures, the Incarnate Word – Jesus Christ, the Corporate Word – as discerned by the gathered meeting, or the Inward Word of God in our hearts which is available to each of us who seek the Truth.

This can be made easier if we face the truth within ourselves, embrace the pain, and lay down our differences before God for the Holy Spirit to forgive, thus transforming us into instruments of healing. This priority is not merely an abstract idea, but something we have experienced powerfully at work among us this week.

Our five invited speakers presented vivid pictures of economic, ecological and military crisis in this world today. We acknowledge that these crises are in fact only a reflection of the great spiritual crisis which underlies them all. Our peace testimony inspires us, yet we move beyond it to challenge our world with the call for justice. We are called to be peacemakers, not protestors.

It is our desire to work co-operatively on unifying these points. The challenges of this time are almost too great to be faced, but we must let our lives mirror what is written on our hearts – to be so full of God's love that we can do no other than live out our corporate testimonies to the world of honesty, simplicity, equality and peace, whatever the consequences.

We pray for both the personal and inner strength as well as the corporate strength of a shared calling/struggle that will empower us to face all the trials that we will necessarily encounter. We have no

## 29: Readings

illusions about the fact that to truly live a Christian life in these cataclysmic times means to live a life of great risk.

We call on Friends to rediscover our own roots in the vision and lives of early Friends whose own transformed lives shook the unjust social and economic structures of their day. They treasured the records of God's encounters with humanity found in the Bible, and above all, the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. And we call upon Friends across the earth to heed the voice of God and let it send us out in truth and power to rise to the immense challenge of our world today.

- 29.18 And now at this critical point in time, when our outdated world view no longer satisfies, comes this breakthrough: science and mysticism speaking with one voice, the rediscovery of our own (Christian) creation-centred and mystical tradition, and the recognition of the spiritual wisdoms of the native traditions. All uniting and all challenging in a profound way our narrowly drawn boundaries.

Are we willing to open ourselves to this wider vision, to cease our urge to control and dominate, to listen instead to our hearts, to recognise again the integrity and sacredness of this planet which we have so abused? This means entering into a new relationship with 'our Mother the Earth', it means seeing ourselves again in a cosmic context, a larger perspective, which includes fire-ball, galaxy, planet and all other life forms.

If we can move from our 'human-sized' viewpoint and look instead from the cosmic viewpoint, there is a sudden and dramatic widening of the lens through which we look. Redemption is seen to be for all creation, and our human story, far from being diminished, is incorporated in the whole drama of an emerging universe.

Grace Blindell, 1992

- 29.19 Therefore, dear Friends, wait in the Light, that the Word of the Lord may dwell plentifully in you.

William Dewsbury, 1675