

A Way of Being

Introduction

“There is a sense among Quakers in Britain that this is a moment to take forward our faith and renew our work in society”.

The Friends Quarterly, 2009.

In the Summer of 2009, *The Friend's Quarterly* launched an essay competition under the title “The future of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain”. Those participating were encouraged to submit work that represented “imaginative theology and effective action”. Young people, in particular, were encouraged to take part.

This call for testimony was also presented at the 2009 Britain Yearly Meeting, held at the University of York. Attending that meeting and seeing, for the first time, such a large number of Friends gathered in one place, made me, too, think about what it is that Quakerism has to offer. Twelve hundred Quakers meeting together in one large room is a very particular phenomenon and although I was struck by the simple dignity of our way of proceeding in discussion and report, I was also aware that our well-known tolerance and search for consensus can sometimes mask great differences of opinion and belief. Snatches of conversation overheard in entrance ways or along the pathways of the campus were evidence of what we might call “our diversity”.

Beneath a calm surface, there has always been in our Society a fervent questing for truth and direction. And although the underlying structure of our meetings for worship and our business meetings continue to follow simple and traditional principles of silence and inclusion, British Quakers have never been locked into set or rigid forms of practise. There has always been plenty of discussion of, and disagreement about, social and political issues. There has been, too, a richness of work beyond the Meeting House. If, in my lifetime, peace testimony and a marked concern for global poverty have been especially strong, there have also been many other matters that have engaged the attention and effort of Friends. Most recently, this has meant a great concern for sustainability and climate change, for living within our means and within the limits of Nature – for our sakes and for the sake of all who live or may come to live on planet Earth.

There has also been discussion about what it means to be a Quaker, or as Elaine Pryce has put it, what it means to “be Quaker”.¹ And perhaps this was part of Quaker concern when it was decided to propose the competition, inviting contributions both on the theology of Quakerism and the work of Quakers. For some of us, perhaps all of us, “the theology” and “the work” cannot be considered apart. Both are part of “being Quaker” and there is a danger in supposing otherwise – a separation of principle and action, of means and ends, which can sometimes lead us astray. True work is founded on true contemplation and prayer. Theology has no meaning other than in respect to the work of life, however it might be defined.

Nevertheless, it is not uncommon for such a separation to occur; those most active and concerned with work have no time for theological reflection and those taken up with theology lack a sense of how it might be expressed in the everyday. And these lapses into disconnection are often

¹ Elaine Pryce, “Being Quaker: the lost heritage of Quietist spirituality”, *The Friends Quarterly*, January 2008, 7-16.

reinforced by a powerful if outmoded convention, a powerful but now outmoded world view of reality.

For a very long time, something like 350 years, our lives and our understanding of what is or, indeed, can be considered to be true or real have been shaped almost exclusively by an unbalanced, reductive and materialist rationality – beginning with The Age of Reason and then The Enlightenment – which has encouraged us to see things separate and apart. And although we are now, in so many ways, beginning once more to see the interconnectedness of all that is – for example in our concern with environment and ecology or with integrated health care – this outmoded way of thinking still hold us in its thrall. Although we are now beginning to see that being is always “being-in-relationship” – or as I would say relating-ness – it still requires conscious effort and discipline to shun the damaging propaganda of what I sense will soon be known as “the old time” – a world presented to us as unerringly riven with competition and strife, where by looking out for our own advantage we will miraculously contribute to the good of all; a world in which we not only have a right but also an economic duty to meet any or all of our appetites by endless consumption regardless of the costs; and, what is more, a world which can only be known by observing it from the outside.

We must break free from the fetters of this old, fractured and insufficient world; for otherwise, whether or not we are Quakers, our ability to see what might be possible will be mightily constrained and diminished, and our vision for the future will be blinkered.

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This being so, it is important to remember that, despite our inheritance, there was “a time before”, a time when the understanding of one-ness was commonplace; when seeing the world as whole and interconnected seemed

obvious and natural. This was not some Golden Age of perfection but just another time. Midst all its own difficulties, injustices and unhappiness, this was a time when the experience of wholeness was simply common, the experience of the everyday.

I want to propose that we need to reclaim this notion of wholeness or “holiness” as part of *our* everyday lives; to suggest that without this common experience and remembrance something is missing; to suggest that the absence of wholeness and holiness leaves us incomplete and wounded; and to discuss how such a wound might be healed.

Reflecting on all of this, and on the nature of a whole and holy life, I have found myself asking the questions: If we can longer be as we are, how shall we be? And looking for this “other way of being” I have stumbled upon the writings of the thirteenth century monk, Thomas Aquinas and his teachings of what is known as “Natural Law”.² The roots of Natural Law lie with the ancient Greeks, with Plato and Aristotle, with the Roman Stoics, Cicero and Marcus Aurelius, with the Neo-Platonist, Plotinus and then with Aquinas, who, in his *Summa Theologica*, set these earlier teachings within a Christian context. Indeed, the roots of this teaching can also be found in earlier times, for example in ancient Egypt, where the principle of harmony, balance and order are evident in the myths of the gods and the duties of the Pharaoh.³

According to Aquinas there is, beyond and within the realm of Nature as we know it and experience it, Eternal Law. This law governs all and does so not by will but by a natural and wholesome participation, which is ever moving all that is towards goodness and union with the Good, with God. This is the true nature of reality and we can *only* be truly ourselves when we act in accordance with it. Within Eternal Law, there is, then, Natural Law, which is the manner in which we live when we live in a good and

² I am much indebted to my friend and Temenos Scholar Joseph Milne for directing my path.

³ See for example, Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image*, Viking Arkana, 1991.

wholesome way, in a way that enables us, in all we do, to be at one with that Divine, lawful and eternal reality of which we are naturally a part. Love is the power holding us in this way of being.

In all of this, says Aquinas, the special part played by humankind is our ability to reflect upon that which is. In doing this, we give expression to the inherent mindfulness or intelligence of Nature and its fulfilment in being truly known. Human lawfulness is therefore *that which accords with the greater good of the whole* – for the individual, society; for society, Nature; and for Nature, wholesome-ness and union with the Divine. Since we are part of both society and Nature then, to be truly ourselves, we needs must also participate towards their goodness and to the goodness of the whole – that which I would call “holy”.

And then there is the guiding presence of Providence. In a way, Providence is the essence of Natural Law since it is the flowing stream we step into in our participation with lawfulness. It is quite unlike predetermination, which, of course, expresses a sense of compulsion. We choose to participate, *for when we do so we are most truly ourselves*. When we choose to act aright, we place ourselves in the unfolding stream of Providence and are thereby naturally carried onwards towards the good. Thus there is (and we by nature participate in) an intelligent, lawful and purposeful reality ever moving towards wholeness and goodness. This would seem to point towards a true way of being. And this is what I see when I look out of the window of my study and watch the ordered and regular movement of the seasons, the birth, life, death and rebirth of the garden.

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I want to propose it is within these broader possibilities (or ways of being) we needs must find the framework for our consideration of future Quaker

testimony – both theology and work. For if we fail to do so, we will not be able to discern what is true.

I know, of course, that the reality of which Aquinas tells us has no meaning in the inert, mechanical, blind and purposeless universe of “enlightened” science, the reality of convention. It is, therefore, of no surprise that the consequences are as they are – no sense of the sacred, no true reverence for Nature, including all of humankind, and, thus, the disintegration of, and damage to, economies, environments and communities...and each one of us, too. Indeed, seen with the eye of Natural Law, it was inevitable that the irreversible and linear development of what I have now called “the old time”, with its exclusive language of Enlightenment *alone*, would take us to where we are; that, unchallenged, it would run its course, step by step taking us further and further away from the understanding of a relationship and participation, which is now manifestly relevant to our time. But as we begin to see where it is we have been led to – the degradation of natural resources, the disruption of climate, the collapse of financial and economic structures, the loss of trust, the onrush of poverty and the widening gap between those who have and those who have not – it is also no surprise to find that in many millions of small ways more and more people (and more latterly governments) now recognize a crisis of perception⁴ and turn towards structures and processes that are integrative and whole.

In this, however, and especially at the level of government, it seems there is still a struggle to find the words needed to frame robust and sustainable policy and action. The old and profane language of separation and division has been so pervasive it stifles right thinking and expression. What is needed, therefore, is a new and I would say holy language of reverence, relationship and wholeness. And it is this language we need in trying to express a future for ourselves as Quakers and for Quakerism as a whole.

⁴ For a discussion of this, see for example, *Selected Speeches and Articles by His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales, Volume 2, “Harmony – a crisis of perception”*, Editors David Cadman and Suheil Bushrui, The Center for Heritage Resource Studies, The University of Maryland, 2009.

A Common Understanding

When you make the two One,
and you make the inner even as the outer,
and the outer even as the inner
and the above even as the below,
so that you will make the male and female
into a single One,
in order that the male is not made male
nor female made female...
Then you shall enter the kingdom of heaven.

Gospel of Thomas, Logion 22.⁵

To find our way forward as Quakers, we will, first, have to be prepared to re-align and clarify our perception of the way things are. We will have to find our way out of the constraints of separation and dis-integration –

⁵ *The Gospel of Thomas*, presented by Hugh McGregor Ross, William Sessions Limited, The Ebor Press, York, 1987.

which have been set by what I have called “the old time” – and find our way into the realm of reverence, connection and wholeness. There was a time when to see the world in this way, to see it as sacred, whole and inter-related, was commonplace. We have to bring such understanding back into our lives.

To do this, we may have to widen the scope of the teachings to which we turn for guidance. This would include *The Gospel of Thomas*, quoted above. It would also include *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, which is, perhaps, the most inspiring example of what we have lost. Here, in the first extant verses of the gospel, is a conversation between Mary and Jesus, the Teacher:

The Teacher answered:

“All that is born, all that is created,

All the elements of Nature

are interwoven and united with each other.

All that is composed shall be decomposed;

Everything returns to its roots;

Matter returns to the origin of matter.

Those who have ears, let them hear.”⁶

This poignant text is unfamiliar to most of us because it was not included in the texts of the orthodox canon, decided upon at the Council of Rome in 382 AD. Indeed, Mary’s gospel was not known to us at all until it was

⁶ *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, translated by Jean-Yves Leloup, Inner Traditions, Rochester, Vermont, 2002, 25

discovered in Cairo in fragments, first at the end of the nineteenth century and then as part of the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library in 1945. Its translation into English is even more recent.

What could this gospel be telling us? Why does it touch us so? And who, in truth, is Mary Magdalene? Because the picture is unclear, we can only find answers to these questions by opening our hearts, waiting and, as it were, allowing Mary to speak to us. From the cloud of uncertainty that surrounds her, some clarity shines through: she was especially loved by Jesus and washed his feet with her tears, drying them with her hair; Jesus purified her spirit so that she could see clearly⁷ and just before his betrayal, she anointed his head with oil; she was there at the foot of the cross, wept for him and came to his tomb with sweet spices, before being the first to see the risen Christ; she was then the one who received special teachings, with an instruction to take them to the other disciples. And yet, despite all of this and despite her evident importance – or perhaps because of it – she is the one who has been mis-represented for the best part of two thousand years as being no more than the “penitent prostitute”, so that her authority might be diminished and her teaching lost.

And so they were. But now they have re-emerged, arising from the dust so that for us reading the opening stanzas of Mary’s gospel for the first time is both a revelation and a remembrance. It reveals that which we all once knew but have forgotten – have been encouraged to forget. It takes us into a place of understanding that is both ancient and timeless, a place that, at some level, we have always known was there. It carries a resonance from a much earlier time, the time of the goddess and the realm of the Moon. This was a time when the divine presence was recognized to be, at one and the same time, both masculine and feminine. It was a time when this presence was known in the ever-changing rhythms of Nature, ebbing and flowing, and in the cycles and phases of the moon – arising, fullness, declining and darkness. In this tradition, the very name Magdalene is understood as

⁷ What are sometimes referred to as her seven sins or demons may also be the transformation by love of the seven manifestations of Wrath, referred to Mary’s gospel, which lead to Repose and Silence.

meaning Great Moon.⁸ Indeed, in painting and sculpture, Mary Magdalene is often depicted with a skull, associating her with the third and declining phase of the moon that leads to the days of death and darkness, and then to resurrection or re-birth.

The symbolism and meaning of this lunar tradition would have been understood in the lifetime of Jesus – the three Marys at the foot of the cross would have had a resonance with the Three Fates of Greek mythology, the weavers of shrouds whose thread determined the length of life;⁹ and the three dark days of the resurrection would signify the three dark days of the moon, which disappears before rising once again. And, of course, this lunar tradition is still present in the timing of Easter.

For Jesus...also dies, was buried and descended into hell, rising again on the third day, after the pattern of the Moon. ... his resurrection coincides with the Earth's rebirth, with the festival of Easter timed to the first full Moon after the spring equinox, reflecting turning winter into spring.¹⁰

Indeed, the relationship between the Sun and the Moon permeates the story of Jesus and another Mary, his mother:

The understandable ambivalence as to which heavenly body Christ is to transfigure is reflected in the Church's rites of celebration. In the cycle of the Christian year, Christ is incarnated at the birth of the Sun in the winter solstice. Yet the commemoration of the essential drama of his life and teaching, his willing death and resurrection, is set by the Moon: Christ's rebirth at Easter – after his victory over the forces of darkness –

⁸ I am indebted to my friend Jules Cashford for this.

⁹ Jules Cashford, *The Moon: Myth and Image*, Cassell Illustrated, 259-260.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 36-37.

is arranged for the day of the Sun (Sunday) following the first Full Moon of the spring equinox. In this way the lunar symbolism structures the story of Jesus, casting him as the latest tradition of dying and resurrected gods, which, it is implied, had existed for thousands of years in anticipation of this, its final apotheosis. So, in the language of the metaphor, Christ *is* the Sun, but he *becomes* the Moon.¹¹

And in the sixteenth century Digby Mystery Play *Mary Magdalene*, Jesus was said to have gone on a Moon journey, resting in the Moon on his way to heaven.¹²

Each one of us will have our own views on these stories and how they should be interpreted, but – whether we like it or not (and some, perhaps, will not like it all) – there can be no doubt that the symbolism expressed in myth influences our understanding of the way things are. If it is not this myth that does so, it will be another. And it is at least possible that this particular myth of renewal, this timeless way of seeing and knowing, may be re-emerging in our time. For this reason alone, then, Mary's gospel is important to us *now* because it shows us a more complete reality, a more cyclical and integrated reality:

All the elements of Nature

are interwoven and united with each other.¹³

Prefiguring the later teachings of Aquinas and his Natural Law, Mary's gospel is also radical in that it sees Nature and our true nature as good. Following on from the extract quoted above comes this:

¹¹ Ibid, 166.

¹² Ibid, 342.

¹³ Op cit, *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene*.

Peter said to him: “Since you have become the interpreter

Of the elements and the events of the world, tell us:

What is the sin of the world?”

The Teacher answered:

“There is no sin.

It is you who make sin exist,

When you act according to the habits

of your corrupted nature;

this is where sin lies.”¹⁴

Here, then, we are asked to see – or rather behold – both an inherent goodness within the cosmos and a natural tendency towards goodness in all.¹⁵ It is only if our true nature is corrupted that we fall from grace. And we are told that if we are able to shake off our blindness and ignorance so we become at one with that which truly is, we, too, will be, must needs be, part of this purposeful goodness. In this way, and only in this way, we will be fulfilled. Become one.

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But if we want to discover how this might come about, we must continue with Mary’s Gospel, return to Aquinas and meet up with the mystic, Meister Eckhart.

¹⁴ Ibid, 25.

¹⁵ Again, I am indebted to my friend Joseph Milne for these understandings.

Firstly, Mary's gospel. Here, we are next presented with the practice of non-attachment and of being-in-harmony so clearly foretold in the earlier teachings of the Buddha, in the teachings of Plato, in the ancient civilisations of Egypt and in the lunar myths of the goddess. According to Mary's gospel, the Teacher continues by saying:

“Attachment to matter
gives rise to passion against nature.
Thus trouble arises in the whole body;
This is why I tell you:
‘Be in harmony...’
If you are out of balance,
take inspiration from manifestations
of your true nature...”¹⁶

“Peace be with you – may my Peace
arise and be fulfilled within you!”¹⁷

“For it is within you
that the Son of Man dwells.
Go to him,

¹⁶ *Gospel of Mary*, Page 8, lines 1-8.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, lines 13 and 14.

for those who seek him, find him.”¹⁸

So, we now find we have to let go of attachment, of grasping and craving, for otherwise, as we have experienced in our own time, we shall find ourselves damaging and degrading Nature. We are told that to do this we have to become at one with, in harmony with, all that is, to *dwell* in true being. Only here, within our true selves, will we find Peace. If we turn to it with a pure heart, we shall find it. And if we are wondering how this might be done, we are told this way of being arises from the “law” of Love. For later in the gospel we are told Christ says we are “to impose no law” other than the one to which he has given witness, his commandment of Love.¹⁹ Only the way of Love will do.

In this way we are shown the link between the “laws” of Goodness, Truth and Love; we begin to see the teaching of wholeness and integration, where all is interwoven and united one with another. And one part of this new way is to be able to use not just the rational mind but also what, in Mary’s gospel is called “the nous”. Speaking of her meeting with the resurrected Christ in the garden, Mary says:²⁰

I had a vision of the Teacher,

And I said to him:

‘Lord I see you now

in this vision.’

And he answered:

‘You are blessed, for the sight of me does not disturb you.

¹⁸ Ibid, lines, 19-22.

¹⁹ *Gospel of Mary* Page 9 lines 1 and 2.

²⁰ Ibid, Page 10 line 16.

There where is the nous, lies the treasure.²¹

And when Mary asks the risen Christ from whence her vision of him arises, is it through the soul or the spirit, he answers:

‘It is neither through the soul nor the spirit,

but the nous between the two

which sees the vision...’²²

This answer is important because Mary is asking a question that goes to the root of the way in which we can know and understand the teachings, to the root of the relationship between “theology” and “work”. Indeed, in Jean-Yves Leloup’s commentary on this passage of the gospel, he says:

...the question of how one knows the resurrected Christ is also a question of the nature of Reality itself...²³

This is difficult territory, not least because, as Leloup says, it has no place in our modern world, in the one-dimensional, “enlightenment” reality that has shaped our perception for so long, where we are regarded as physical bodies that will one day simply decompose and be no more.²⁴ The teaching of which Mary tells us has no place either in the two-dimensional Enlightenment or Cartesian world of mind and body which ignores any spiritual dimension.²⁵ Her gospel, he says, relates more, but not entirely, to

²¹ Ibid, Page 10 lines 10 to 16.

²² Ibid, lines 23 and 24.

²³ Jean-Yves Leloup, *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, Inner Traditions, Rochester, Vermont, 2002, 117.

²⁴ Ibid, 120.

²⁵ Ibid.

Platonic and Neo-Platonic thought, in which there is a place for body, soul and spirit – soma, psyche and nous; where the spirit (nous):²⁶

...is the divine dimension, which needs to be liberated from the clutches of sensations (soma) and emotions (psyche).²⁷

But according to the teaching given to Mary, the nous is now something different, it is an intermediary – perhaps something like an intuition – between the realm of psyche (now called soul) and the realm of the Holy Spirit (Pneuma). As Leloup puts it, in Mary’s gospel, “spiritualization is a process of imbuing these different dimensions of the human being with the presence of the Holy Spirit”. This “transfigures the body, expands and calms the soul [and] simplifies and clarifies the mind and spirit (nous)”.²⁸

Thus it is, in Mary’s gospel, we find not only the teaching of a new way of understanding Reality, seen as whole and interconnected, but also the means of doing so which requires us to challenge a narrow and conventional rationalism and rediscover how to see clearly, that is through the eye of the spirit or nous. This mystical way of seeing has been lost to us for the best part of two thousand years but it is the teaching of Christ and part of our Quaker roots.

Thus Mary turned their hearts towards the Good.²⁹

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²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ This, says Leloup, describes a “Fourfold Humanity” or four levels of knowing: the one-dimensional material body (soma); the two-dimensional immortal soul (psyche); the three-dimensional bridge to the Divine Spirit, which is the nous; and, finally, the fourfold Holy Spirit (Pneuma) of the eternal and mysterious Divine Being. Through the nous we are completely turned towards and united with the Divine. Ibid, 121-124.

²⁹ *Gospel of Mary*, Page 9 line 19.

So, continuing our quest for testimony, we are brought back to Aquinas and then to Eckhart. For what we have found in Mary's gospel is not only something about ends but also about means; and it is this concern for means that is important. We often hear it said: "the end justifies the means". But in the tradition of Aquinas and Eckhart, this would be a meaningless thing to say as so often the means, as it were, become the end. Mindful of this, of course, William Penn says: "A good end cannot sanctify evil means; nor must we ever do evil that good may come of it..."³⁰

If we look once more at Natural Law, we find that it, too, emphasises the means, the "being with". Everything proceeds towards the Good *only* in as much as it *participates in* goodness itself and for the good of the whole. And such "providential order belongs to the nature of things as such":

The essential insight of Natural Law...is that there is a divine providential order in the cosmos which draws all things ultimately to the Good. This providential order belongs to the nature of things as such and in this sense the cosmos is permeated by *logos* or reason.³¹

This "reason", however, does not, as we have been told for so long, emanate from the detached and observing individual towards an external cosmos but is there "in the nature of things" to be received when we participate in it, when we turn ourselves towards it with a pure heart and mind. In this sense, to know what is true, we must learn to dwell with and in God.

³⁰ William Penn, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 24.03.

³¹ Joseph Milne, "All Things in the Mind of God and the Mind of God in all Things", Eckhart Conference paper, 2009, 2, forthcoming *Eckhart Review* No. 19, 2010.

This way of being requires a completely different form of enquiry than the one we normally suppose. Most of us will have been brought up in a world in which we have been encouraged to seek for *explanations*; how is this made and how does this work? This is the modern form of enquiry, the way of the Enlightenment – and, of course, within its own limitations, it can be extremely useful and worthwhile. However, it is but one mode of thought and given that its method has become centred so much upon the individual rather than the whole, it is at best limiting and at worst increasingly damaging.

Natural Law offers us a different kind of “reason”, one that is especially relevant for a society that calls itself The *Religious* Society of Friends:

This view of the cosmos, though “natural”, is also essentially “religious”. It is a religious way of apprehending reality. For the ancients this religious way of apprehending reality is understood as the primary way of apprehending reality, the way that transcends delusion or the fleeting images of mere appearances. It is the way the unity of reality is approached and apprehended. Thus, the more we say about it, the more it departs from our modern conceptions of the cosmos, and our modern conceptions of ultimate truth.³²

As a religious society we must surely participate in a different form of enquiry, one that waits attentively not for explanation but for *revelation*; one in which we behold rather than see; one, most especially, that is founded upon wholeness. In this form of enquiry, there is no end to which we progress, only good being and being that is not good. And if we struggle with this it may be, in part, because our modern mode of perception – as knowing by external observation – clouds our ability to see things as they are in and of themselves and as known by what we have come to call God. We only know of or believe in one form of perception.

³² Ibid.

And because of this we are blinded to any other possibility. Indeed it is as if such a possibility was unreal.

But here comes Meister Eckhart, for he has something shocking to say about the way in which we come to “know”. Our modern way, which is markedly possessive, assumes that we *get* to know something by brining our reason to bear upon an otherwise unknown “thing”; we *take* it apart and through our own intelligence *make it known*. For Eckhart, this is all the wrong way round. Things only exist and are knowable because they are already known by God. Knowing precedes being. Everything that is, has been and is known; its origin or beginning arises simultaneously with its being known. At best, we participate and receive:

Modern secular thought has become so accustomed to assuming that the human intellect is the only knowing agent in the cosmos that it is a great challenge to consider that our knowledge of things may come from a universal primary knowledge that holds things in existence, that the cosmos is essentially an act of knowledge, or that knowledge is prior to the being of things and their principle. This turns our usual epistemology upside-down.³³

Difficult though this is for us, we have to let go of the desire – the compulsion – to govern our knowing only with the external observation of supposedly rational mind and allow what is already true to be shown to us within. This requires a contemplative and receptive mode of being.

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³³ Joseph Milne, “All Things in the Mind of God and the Mind of God in all Things”, Eckhart Conference paper, 2009, 8. Milne goes on to say: “Nevertheless, Eckhart is following Aquinas here, and not simply because of his Platonic tendencies but because it is the primacy of the act of knowing in God which for Eckhart provides the key to how created things are at once within God and yet come forth from God.”, forthcoming *Eckhart Review* No. 19, 2010.

So, once again, to think about what it means to “be Quaker”, or indeed to contemplate any future way of being, we have to come to know what it means “to be”. And to do that we have to peel back the obscuring layers that have come to diminish our capacity to see clearly – to behold. To begin with, we have to see conventional modes of thought for what they are – no more than one way of seeing the world. Then we have to allow a more complete and integrated vision of the world to come forth; allowing our narrow reason to broaden out and embrace older and timeless ways of knowing. We have to set aside the present possessive and self-centred ways and surrender ourselves to a knowing that can only be experienced in participation with and waiting upon the Divine. Most importantly, we have to allow means to take us towards ends. And, finally, we have to remove one more layer to allow to emerge the most ancient and timeless realm of all, the realm of the undifferentiated One, both feminine and masculine; allowing the ancient figures of “Mary”, separate and one, to come to their place alongside the figure of Jesus, bringing together once more the realm of Sun and Moon as a revelation to us:

[For when] the Father God took over the role of the sacred from the Mother Goddess, eternity or the sacred was redefined, as it was when (in a parallel way) the Sun took over the role from the Moon and Earth. It seems regrettable that, for these earlier transferences of the sacred to be effective, the previous carrier of the sacred ... had to be redefined as, at best, inferior and, at worse destructive to the new order; but so long as this process of transferring the sacred from one image to another takes place unconsciously, it is probably inevitable. Just as, broadly, when the Father God became supreme, the Mother Goddess who had given birth to all life was redefined as chaotic or inanimate (before she became invisible), so with the rise of the Sun, the Moon, once the hope of rebirth, now promised death. The Moon, and Earth below Moon (looking down from the Highest Heaven), had to carry the pejorative image of time as

dissolution and decay – *sublunary* – in contrast to the eternal and immutable Sun who was now the one beyond death.³⁴

Until we make this kind of transformation of thought and knowing, we will continue to be fettered by what is now an outmoded perception, too narrow, too materialistic, too self-centred, too assertive to enable us to understand things as they really are. Once more recognizing the importance of the practical mysticism of Quakers over and above our “busyness”, we have to bring back to the common place, the contemplative, the integrative, the self-less, the gentle, the generous dwelling in and being with one another, Nature and the Divine. In this place, we just may be able to find the way forward.

The Way of Surrender

And I said to my soul be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.

³⁴ Jules Cashford, *The Moon: Myth and Image*, Cassell Illustrated, 361.

T. S. Eliot, *The Four Quartets*

Letting go of anxious mind – the restless quest to put everything in order with “me” at the centre – there is ease; surrendering to the Great Mystery, which gathers me in, there is peace – at-one-ment.

When the Buddha awakened from his deep meditation beneath the Bhodi Tree, he spoke of what he had seen – the rising and falling away of life birth and death; “Coming to be, coming to be! Ceasing to be, ceasing to be!”. At every place, in every moment however long or short, this is what is happening. And the holy life of the everyday – the life that is common and whole – is found in such daily surrender, by the letting go of self. This we must learn. For in the end we will have to surrender. At some time and for each one of us, life in this world will end and our bodies will be given to the earth or the air, leaving our souls to find their way home.

So much of my life has been taken up with what I thought had to be done – to study, to work, to “succeed”. Often this has meant that my attention has been distracted, driven by ignorance and stupidity, by vanity and foolishness. And so it is I have searched outside for what was always there, inside; struggling when I should have surrendered.

But now I see more clearly what it is I must do. Dadi Janki of the Brahma Kumaris says to me:

The more you practice taking spiritual light and might from God,
the lighter you will feel internally as this becomes your spiritual

state of being. You will also experience yourself to be a divine point of light.

I listen to what she says.

*

So, in this quest for testimony and a vision of the future, let us return once more to Aquinas and Natural Law.

In the Spring and Summer of 2009, I studied a series a papers written by the Temenos Scholar, Joseph Milne – whose writings I have already referred to.³⁵ In these papers, Joseph suggested that, according to Natural Law, every part of Nature has a tendency towards fulfillment; an inclination to become the best of whatever it is and of whatever it can be, thereby offering itself for the good of Nature as a whole. It is natural for the part to nurture the whole, just as the hand takes the blow aimed at the body or a mother gives herself for her children. And, as conscious beings, it is our role to know things for what they truly are so that all may be known and come “to rest”³⁶ – to be at one with the presence of the Divine, which knows all, and which some of us call God. Thus it is we must play our part. In reverence, we must submit ourselves to the common and greater good of the whole and thus, and only thus, find rest and peace.³⁷

As we have already seen, Joseph explains how in the thirteenth century, in the teachings of Thomas Aquinas, creation came to be understood as being

³⁵ Joseph Milne is a Fellow of The Temenos Academy and the papers started with one given at a Conference in Manchester on 10-12th September on *Religion and Political Theory and Philosophy*. The paper, which has not been published, was entitled “Society and Natural Law in Thomas Aquinas”

³⁶ From a private conversation with Joseph Milne 31st March 2009

³⁷ Ibid.

“not only good but also rational and intelligible”; that “Nature was intelligent and oriented towards the maximum fullness of being and reason at all levels”.³⁸ According to this Law, the natural world works by way of an impulse (a relationship) both from and towards what is Good and Whole “reconciling the realm of Nature with the realm of Grace”.³⁹ It thus provides us with a new and quite different insight into how we might consider how we shall be in our relationship with Nature – a different set of principles to govern such a relationship – by starting from the premise that the created world directly manifests the divine wisdom of God.

In the search for “a way of being”, this is a great help. For seeing the natural world as the revelation of “the divine Wisdom of God”,⁴⁰ seeing it as good and lawful and as the inevitable expression of a divine cause, goes to the root of our relationships with each other and with the rest of Nature – and places upon all of us a very particular responsibility as we wrestle to come to terms with the damage we have caused by our own thoughtlessness and profligacy.

In this, there are two further principles that will shape our understanding of what it means to live a holy life. The first is that reality is not fixed but ever “underway”; and the second is that we are a part of a greater whole, and that life is, therefore, wholesome or “holy”:

Natural Law, considered in its most essential ground, is itself an embodiment of the natural and just ends of Nature *taken as a single whole*... [it] is not conceived as a restraint upon things, but rather as the manner in which the being of things may come to its fullest expression and development, both in itself and *for the sake of all things*.⁴¹

³⁸ Joseph Milne, “Society and Natural Law in Thomas Aquinas”, 2008, 2

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid, 3.

Underlying all of this, then, and underlying the search for a new way of being – a common wholeness – is the fact that the order of this Nature (of which we are but part) is not only divine but rational and purposeful, and expresses an innate inclination of all things “towards a higher order and unity”.⁴² This, then, requires us to situate ourselves *within* this natural order as part of an essential inclination towards the fullness of being and goodness. It means that understanding our potential destiny depends upon a truthful correspondence with Nature, and thus with Natural Law.⁴³

In the light of this, I have now come to see the matter of life and death in a different way. When I see a thrush pulling a worm from the ground, do I see an act of violence or sacrifice? For whether I like it or not, I, too, sacrifice my body day and night to minute, microscopic organisms that feed upon me; and when I die my body – flesh, bones and tissues – will return to Nature. What is important is whether we give or take each of these acts of mutuality and reciprocity with a sense of thankfulness, true understanding and humility or whether we resist them. Whether or not we surrender and behold in this the work of Love.

This may sound at odds with all that we see around and about us but in the end we find what we are looking for. If we expect to find a world of violence – red in tooth and claw, the worm torn from the ground – then we shall. But if we open our eyes to the wonder and goodness of the world, we will find that, too. In this sense, what is good is that which properly plays its part for the good of the whole; and the bad is the reverse of this.

By surrendering the self, we come to see that our true nature is neither inherently bad nor good. At root, to act well does not lie in the realm of ethics but in the realm of truth, of true being. To act badly is to act otherwise than in accordance with our true nature, other than in accordance with Natural Law. And when we do this we are without grace,

⁴² Ibid, 6.

⁴³ Ibid, 7.

we act grace-less-ly, not by way of judgment but by way of being. It is not a matter of morality but a matter of revelation.

The Buddha described this in terms of whether or not we are “skilful”, whether we learn from experience. And on one occasion when asked about how we could know the true way he replied:

Do not go by oral tradition, by lineage of teaching, by hearsay, by a collection of scriptures, by logical reasoning, by inferential reasoning, by reflection on reasons, by the acceptance of a view by pondering it, by the seeming competence of a speaker, or because you think, ‘The ascetic is our teacher’. But when you know for yourselves, ‘These things are unwholesome, these things are blamable; these things are censured by the wise; these things, if undertaken and practiced, lead to harm and suffering’, then you should abandon them.⁴⁴

It is only by attentive experience and waiting we find our way.

According to Aquinas, this orientation towards the good is the essential nature of all that is,⁴⁵ and Providence is the manner in which all things are, by their true nature, inclined to goodness:

In created things good is found not only as regards their substance, but also as regards their order towards an end and especially their last end, which...is the divine goodness.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Nyaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: An Anthology of Suttas from the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, Vistaar Publications, New Delhi, 2000, 65.

⁴⁵ Joseph Milne, *The Providential Order of the Universe* a lecture given to The Temenos Academy 8th June 2009, Unpublished, 6.

The constant providential unfolding of Nature is eternal and good and we are a part of it and we needs must *surrender* to it. At the root of this Nature is intelligent and purposeful – a notion that seems to me to be most likely to be true. When I look at Nature I see rhythm, pattern and order. Order implies purpose and purpose implies mind or intelligence. Therefore, the idea that Nature is intelligent seems self-evident and in accordance with my experience. But in our ignorance there are always obstacles.

Until quite recently, one of the obstacles to my own surrender was the very word “God”. Like others, perhaps, I had allowed an intellectual and to some extent emotional concern with meaning and form to hamper me. But then, one morning in my local Meeting, it came to me to stop worrying about it. I did and immediately I was filled with a great peace. I think what may have triggered these thoughts was a story I had heard⁴⁷ about a class of primary school children who were taking part in a drawing class. One little girl of six was especially absorbed in her drawing. The teacher asked her what she was drawing, to which the little girl replied, “I am drawing God”. “But,” said the teacher, “no-one knows what God looks like”. To which the child replied, “They will do when I’ve finished my drawing”.

Letting go of worrying about “God”, accepting the word for what it is, ceasing to fret about this great mystery – which, by definition, is beyond explanation – has enabled me to bring the word back into my discourse and prayers in such a way that all sorts of doors open themselves – the indwelling of God now arises without hindrance, and I begin to move more easily into a place of knowing that is beyond the mere human intellect, the place that Meister Eckhart and other mystics speak of when they talk of us knowing ourselves in the mind of God. It is a great relief to be no longer alone, trying to work it all out on my own. Now I simply open my heart to the presence of God and rest there. I wait on God with as pure a heart as I can.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 5.

⁴⁷ A video by Ken Robinson on www.ted.com

The following comes from Dadi Janki of the Brahma Kumaris:

The question is: Where does Maya (illusion) enter the soul? Is it through the mind or intellect?

Maya or illusion enters the intellect first. It attacks and creates upheaval and the intellect becomes upset and gets destabilized. The term 'buddhi yoga' has a very a deep significance in the practice of Raja Yoga. The soul has to connect (yoga) to God using its intellect (buddhi). The intellect needs to connect to the truth in order to become enlightened. The intellect needs to surrender its ego and reclaim its faith. Through the power of faith, the intellect can witness wonders and miracles.

The intellect has a connection with the eyes. Through the eyes you can see how stable one's intellect is. A stable intellect sees the world as a place of opportunities. When there is faith in the intellect, there is the intoxication and feeling that victory is guaranteed.⁴⁸

Dadi janki speaks with this kind of confident humility because she is a person who has devoted her life to God and has, thereby, developed an assured familiarity with divine presence. Such a form of surrender requires a complete absence of Western scepticism and cynicism. Beyond all the mechanics of life, and albeit with attentiveness, it requires us to surrender our rational mind to the intellect of the heart.

Unless we are able to do this, we will always be operating and seeking within the limits of the world we have made for ourselves. Despite its evident limits, we will never be able to transcend that world. And yet, either personally or corporately, if we are really going to be able to find

⁴⁸ One of a regular series of on-line messages from Dadi JAnki.

new ways forward, in the “waiting” as Eliot puts it, we will *have* to loosen ourselves from such fetters and open our hearts and minds to the Goodness of God.

Being Quaker

“Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. ... Bring the whole of your life under the ordering of the spirit of Christ. ... Seek to know an inward stillness...”

From Advices and Queries 1-3.

As Quakers, we are open to teaching but not inclined to receive it without question. Collectively and alone, we believe we must find our own way to God by waiting upon His presence. In bringing the teachings of others to bear upon our own concern, we need, attentively and with humility, to test them by our own reflection and experience until we know them to be true. This is our tradition, our way. Working within this tradition, we need to *feel* teachings speak to us in truth. As best we can, and with all our own frailties, we have to listen with a discerning but open heart and find whether or not we are truly guided by them. And, in this, the relentless working of a busy and grasping mind will not be enough – and may even be a hindrance. Our discernment has to be of another order, something almost impossible to describe but nonetheless knowable. To say again, we need to behold rather than see, for revelation rather than explanation is the mystical path of Quakers and Quakerism; of knowing through being true and waiting – the promptings of love and truth in our hearts.

When I read the *Gospel of Mary Magdalene* or study the Natural Law of Thomas Aquinas, I feel at one with what they tell. They make sense to me and they relate to my own experience. In a way, they are even familiar. Together, they seem to say: all that is is interconnected and united with the One; there is an order and purpose in our lives, which draws us towards

the goodness of the whole; we are most ourselves when we participate in this goodness, letting go of selfishness and opening to the working of Divine Love; it is Love that unites and draws us towards the Good, towards God. Our task is not to define our destination but to surrender, wait and then walk aright.

I am writing this last part of my essay as the Summer has given way to the first days of Autumn. My body feels the change of temperature; my eyes notice the softness of the light and the shortening of days. Everything around me is *becoming* Autumn, not least the trees whose leaves are turning yellow, orange and deep red, dropping one by one onto the ground. The swallows have gone and the garden birds who will share the Winter with us are left behind. The soldier plants are slowly sinking to the bottom of the pond, there are spiders everywhere and the toad finds a home in the compost box. I, too, am slowing down, wearing warmer clothes, as it were, drawing inwards.

These natural events feel True and they feel Good, of God. They are an expression of Divine Beauty. When I let myself follow my natural feelings and surrender to the turning of the year, I am at one; I know I am acting aright; I feel the presence of Divine Love giving shape not only to me but to all that is around me.

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What, then, does this say about the ways in which we Quakers might come to understand our future and make plans to move towards it?

Let's start from where we are. In the Autumn of 2009, we find ourselves in some distress and disarray. For more than a year we have been living through a period of great financial and economic disruption, with banks collapsing and economies falling into recession. Unemployment is on the rise and, once again, those with least suffer the most, and it is clear that the government expenditure, which might otherwise bring remedy, will now have to be cut. At the same time, a recent report from the Meteorological Office has suggested that the threat of global warming is closer and more severe than has so far been supposed; whilst another highlights both rising energy costs and questions about security of supply. In other parts of the world, there are unusually severe floods and/or unusually severe drought.

In many places, war and other forms of violence continue unabated. These are not only difficult times, the difficulty is of a new dimension.

We are living in a period not simply of change but of transformation – an old world giving place to a new realm. In ancient myth, the possibility of such change was understood and told in many stories, not least in the story of the sons of Zeus, Apollo and Dionysus, where, to enable renewal to take place, the order of Apollo is disrupted by the chaos of Dionysus.⁴⁹ In our own mythology, the tale is the same: the maker of change, the one who turns the wheel of life, the “shift-shaper” is the Old Woman who, in the dark half of the year, enables the seeds of Autumn to be transformed into the green shoots of Spring, where she will appear as the Maiden and, later, in times of harvest, as the Queen. The wheel of the year must turn.⁵⁰ Transformation will have its way. Therefore, however much we may long for stasis, the truth is that all is (has to be) in flux. As T. S. Eliot has it, “at the still point of the turning world...there the dance is”.⁵¹

The change we are experiencing is not the regular rhythm of change seen in markets as fluctuations of greater and lesser prosperity arise around some identified and known equilibrium. It is something of greater volatility and magnitude that will greatly affect society, economy and environment. In observing the life of economies, the twentieth century economist Joseph Schumpeter expressed this kind of change by talking about “gales of creative destruction”,⁵² by which he meant this: what may appear at one moment to be collapse and disorder may be part of a *necessary* wave of change, which in destroying also leads to renewal – the story of Apollo and Dionysus. And so, for us now, mindful though we might be (must be) of eternal truth, there is little to be gained from trying to hold onto old and outworn rigidities. We can only find our way forward in transformation. The questions we have to ask are therefore: What was it about the old time that needs to be destroyed in order that a new and more harmonious realm can arise? What should remain and what should go? Where is this destructive/creative wave of transformation trying to take us? How can we best ride the wave?

⁴⁹ Once again, I am indebted to my friend Jules Cashford for this.

⁵⁰ See, for example, David Cadman, *The King Who Lost His Memory* available from the author at The Box Hose, Priors Way, Aldeburgh, IP15 5EW.

⁵¹ T. S. Eliot, “Burnt Norton”, *The Four Quartets*.

⁵² I am indebted to my friend Richard Barras for this, which is discussed in his book, *Building Cycles: Growth and Instability*, Wiley Blackwell, 2009.

From all that is happening, we can see that the old world that we are leaving was deeply flawed; that the difficulties it has brought about are not, as is sometimes suggested, an unfortunate and inexplicable accident but are a direct consequence of the values and principles upon which that world had come to depend – too disconnected; too materialistic, too greedy, too self-centred, too violent; and, I would say, too prosaic and too godless. Seeking a new realm will require new forms of perception and a new language in which that perception can be expressed. The old and flawed language of convention – the language of selfishness, acquisitiveness and institutionalised greed – and its supposed (but narrow) rationality, are not an option because they will simply bring us back to where we are.

What is needed is the re-birth of a way of being rooted in, and expressive of, the perennial or timeless wisdom which lies at the root of all of the great spiritual traditions and which was, of course, taught in the parables of Jesus and his sermon on the mount – meekness, simplicity, peacefulness, generosity of spirit, forgiveness and justice; truths of integration, wholeness and self-less-ness. However difficult this may be, however unrealistic it may at first sound (and there will be many who say it is), it is not more complicated than this and we should not be persuaded that it is. We do not have to discover something which has never been known before but, since we have lost our way, we do have to rediscover it, for example in the teachings of Mary's gospel and in the Natural Law of Thomas Aquinas. It is this (and only this) wisdom of wholeness, participation and integration that will be able to steady us upon the new shore to which we are being taken by Schumpeter's gale. The chances are that this new realm will be fraught with difficulty – a shortage of resources, a hostile climate, a population too large to be sustained, great inequalities and injustice, significant insecurity, anger and hatred – but these are the very conditions which require this new way of being. This is the challenge we face.

And what is it we as Quakers can offer? Fond as I am of my fellow Quakers and convinced as I am that, together, we have a contribution to make, I am sometimes conscious of our complacency. The very fact we are so often liked, even admired, by others for our supposed tolerance and “good works” can make us overly self-satisfied. It can make us assume we have already found the right way of being at the very time when we need

to challenge ourselves individually and corporately. This must, surely, be one of those times.

Nevertheless, my proposal is that when we come to question our existing forms and directions, we must, at the same time, have confidence in those parts of our tradition that have served us well. Indeed, we should deepen this experience and not be “hurried” into procedures and structures which take us away from it. Whilst we should never be complacent or afraid of the need for change, my suggestion is that, one of the most important things we need is ever to slow down and to insist upon reflection before action. There has never been a time when this was more true. Although, therefore, many of the problems we have to face up to are urgent, the starting point for action must always be our Meetings for Worship and our blessed silence. Whenever we gather together, locally, regionally or nationally, we must continue to begin by bringing ourselves into the presence of the Divine and to do this for as long as it takes us to find our centre. *Only* from this point can we hope to find true action. This should never be hurried, and curbing our (or at least my) natural impatience should be an essential part of our personal and corporate governance.

We must learn to dwell in thought in such a way that we are ever mindful of an essential interconnectedness. Above all else, the problems we face show a need for an understanding of “related-ness”, the ways in which the economic, the social and the environmental are, in the words of Mary’s gospel, “interwoven and united” with each other. In doing this, the structure and character of Aquinas’ Natural Law helps us to see that above all else we act most truly when we act for the goodness of the whole – the economy as a whole, the community as a whole; an ecosystem as a whole. Perhaps, we as Quakers can make this a special part of the way in which we contribute to the debate about these matters and the ways in which programmes of action are arrived at. Perhaps, because of our naturally contemplative way of being and our love of silence, we can make it our special task to understand and hold this whole-some-ness (or, as I would call it, holiness) and offer a particular and evident place for it to be expressed in prayerful community. Our record on peace and social concern stands as a strong foundation. Now we need to bring such concerns within the wider ambit of what we have come to know as “sustainability” – the eternal goodness of the whole.

Many of us, together and alone, are already living at levels of consumption and expectation that take us beyond the carrying capacity of the Earth.⁵³ Those who have most must therefore give to those who have least. Politicians cannot say this. But it is the truth nonetheless. Many of us and many of our children and grandchildren will need to see the “quantities” (but not necessarily the “qualities”) of our lives being reduced, either by choice or by compulsion. The discomfort this will bring to us, matched by the growing despair of those who have least, will test us. Without the strong foundation of Love, which governs all, there will be great disturbance and unrest. As the “dogma of consumption” falls apart, what will hold us together? Without the governance of Love, what will guide us? In every way we meet together and with others, can we be exemplars of this Love in action?

This is the context in which we Quakers will need to think about our future and discern what our particular contribution can be. Many of our reputed characteristics – a love of simplicity, a concern for others, our testimony of peace and self-discipline, our tolerance of others – will serve us well. But most important of all will be our ways of proceeding. Indeed, the thrust of my contribution, such as it is, is that we cannot move directly to policy and action unless and until we have broken with convention and changed our way of being. Then, if we proceed aright the “ends”, our futures, will be aright, too; our futures will arise from the ways in which we take steps towards them and these steps, our work, must be formed by a new integrative and participative theology. In this, therefore, I have only these final suggestions. Ever mindful of the timeless teachings of our tradition, we must: break free of the fetters of “the old world”; strengthen our simplicity; nurture our compassion; insist upon our peacefulness; and govern ourselves for the good of the whole. And, finally, in all of this we must let Love be our guide, our companion and our way. In the words of William Penn:

⁵³ See: Donella H. Meadows, Jorgen Randers, Dennis L. Meadows, *Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update*, Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2004.

Let us then try what Love will do...⁵⁴

⁵⁴ William Penn, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 24.03

Addendum

Given the need to relate theology and action, it might be helpful to suggest how this essay could be used to build a bridge between the two or, rather, to bring theology and action together as a whole, in holiness.

Since a main thrust of the essay is to propose “a way of being” that, of itself, will tend to the good, only tentative suggestions can be made as to how to proceed. However, it seems to me that the way might be something like this:

- The essay proposes that the guiding “method” is for reflection to precede action and so the basis of proceeding must be set within the context of our blessed silence. As is our custom, the essay implies that periods of silent worship and contemplation should be used *extensively*, at the beginning, the end and throughout any working session. Such moments of silence and *attentive waiting* will take their own form but most often they will need to be more than a token “moment”. Despite the urgency of the problems we face, there must be no hurry and much thoughtfulness, *surrendering* to the presence of the Divine.
- Matters of concern, such as our peace testimony or testimony for poverty, may sometimes need to be considered on their own but as a general rule they should be considered *as a whole*. None of our concerns is singular and apart. As Mary’s gospel tells us, at root, all our concerns are “interwoven and united” one with another. This requires a particular form of engagement. As the essay suggests, although many of us have been brought up to look at things in isolation or on their own, we need to learn to see them in their relatedness. This is not easy.

- In accordance with the Natural Law of Aquinas, we must also learn to shift from observing problems from the outside and learn what it means to *participate* in their understanding and solution. This will require conscious attention to the mode of reflection and action, which will need to be supported by our blessed silence. Quakers have a record of being involved and this quality must be strengthened and deepened.
- If this essay is thought to be useful, it could become part of the way in which this form of study and action is undertaken. Reading the essay and reflecting upon it, might, for example, be used at the start of a programme of study leading to action. Most especially, it should be used to invite and encourage Friends to develop their own ways of developing an integrated and whole way of proceeding – as a means to extend and further understanding, leading to wider and other sources of inspiration and teaching. Friends will want to use the essay as *no more than an indication* and certainly not as a given template for understanding. They will, no doubt, find their own sources and inspiration – deeper and more wide-ranging than those offered in this essay.
- It is possible to use the principles outlined in the essay to consider any matter whether it be social, economic, environmental or, more likely, a combination of all three. Indeed, in order to break out of the habitat of thinking in the old way, it is necessary to do this. So, at any point in the more detailed consideration of testimony and action, we can use the theology to ask ourselves about the underlying presumptions we are using (consciously or unconsciously). Because the old ways are so engrained, this is an essential discipline. It is only by consciously removing the old fetters that we can think and act anew.

Although this essay does not deal with the particulars of testimony and action, the author hopes this addendum gives an indication as to how it might make a useful contribution to them and would be interested in developing this in a particular instance, for example in relation to testimony and action for peace or sustainability.