

Different denominations emphasize various aspects of faith—setting it at the center of faith

- Sacraments
- Scripture
- Mystical experience
- Social gospel
- All welcome nature of God
- Holiness
- Obedience

We have often talked about the mystical experience as a central Quaker theme

George Fox, who came to the end of his searching and found no answers, said...

*"... 'there is one, even Christ Jesus that can speak to thy condition,' and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy.... And this I knew experimentally."*

That we can know God directly and personally

That when Jesus said, *My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. John 10:27*

He meant us—we can know the "voice" of Jesus—we can know the "voice" of God

This direct encounter with the real thing is what makes all the difference

Without that, everything else is simply going through the motions

Words on a page, action because it is a good idea, legalism, etc.

But Quakers aren't just about the direct experience of God

Although this was emphasized to me in my early days as a Quaker

That along with all things personal

Quakers have been known for how we live out that direct encounter with the Living Christ

That as we have been transformed—our sense of how to live is transformed

That our connection to God must be lived out in new ways that tell the truth of God

Early Quakers had a profound social impact on their world

Their life with God had implications

If God speaks to everyone—then everyone must be treated equally

If there is that of God in everyone—then we must lift it up even if very hidden

If I can live so that it takes away the occasion for war—then peace is possible

If my words are true—then they are true all the time and have integrity

Sometimes, even as Quakers, we forget that our social concern comes out of our life with God

I well remember the conflict in our yearly meeting

—tension between evangelism and social concerns and the value placed on them

Boards of evangelism and missions were large, while social concerns was small

Truth is that we need the "whole gospel"

We can't isolate out our favorite part to the exclusion of the other

In so doing we miss the truth of who God is

It is the "exclusion of the other" that is particularly wrong

Some will be led to one emphasis or another

Remember a poem by Sam Shoemaker—I stand at the door

He talks about his place standing at the door to invite folks in

Contrasts that with those who are deep within doing the study and theology

It made me think of riding a Colectivo in Bolivia—crowded bus, hanging on as you can

Some hang out the door where you can easily get on and off

Others are deep within—riding to the destination

But we need to recognize the whole bus is going somewhere  
Those who hop on and off have as much place as those deep inside  
In holding the “whole gospel” together we fill in the gaps in our callings  
I need your strengths to fill out my weaknesses—and the things I am not called to do  
Together we are a more perfect representation of who God is in our world  
Evangelism/Missions and Social Concerns have equal place in the whole gospel  
However, in NWYM, although they combined them in Outreach, missions is “top”

Thomas Kelly says, *“The straightest road to social gospel runs through profound mystical experience. The paradox of true mysticism is that individual experience leads to social passion.”*<sup>1</sup>

Jesus said, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”* Matthew 22:37-40

The truth is that these aren’t two commandments, but they are really one commandment  
We learn to love the world because God loves the world through us  
We cannot fully love God and not love people  
Loving God spills over into loving people

We have our individual callings and they will lead us in different directions  
That’s why it is so important that we are part of a community that goes out together  
We accompany one another—usually not literally—but in spirit  
When the social activist goes out—that person carries with them the evangelist  
The theologian brings the outreach ministries of others into the study of scripture  
We find ourselves tethered to the other  
It’s also why we need to share what we are doing so we know how we accompany one another

I also want to challenge us to find the balance within ourselves  
For the one whose emphasis is the social concern—let it be grounded experientially in God  
For the one who is drawn to spending time in the heart of God and the mystical experience—  
Take yourself out into places of ministry and people  
Don’t let yourself become untethered from the other

The true mystical experience of God will take us into practical ways of living out our experience

This week, I challenge you to begin each day with this prayer...  
“Christ, let me know you and your love for the world.”

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Kelly, *The Eternal Promise*, Friends United Press, 1966, page 24.