



# The Quaker Heron

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## From the Editor

R.M. Rilke counsels young poets to live the questions. "Have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and try to love questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language." Little did I guess when I announced that the next issue of *The Quaker Heron* would be on queries that it would be so long 'til the room was unlocked. What accounts for this? I had the presumption to believe that "On Queries" could not go to press without my contribution to the question. Over the course of this long period I began to write five or six times about queries. Scattered throughout my journals are opening sentences trailing off into empty space. There was, however, a certain knowledge that I would use in this issue John Woolman's exquisite meditation which asks what is, for me, the most important question of all: "Does mankind, walking in uprightness, delight in each other's happiness?" (See page 2.) In the edited text given here I have asked, "Do I, walking in uprightness, delight in every person's happiness?" for this is the way I have heard this query from the moment I came upon these words (Phillips P. Moulton, ed., *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, Friends United Press, p. 142).

The context of this meditation is startling. A hired man who worked for Woolman had been a soldier in the French and Indian War and when a  
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## On Queries

### Why Queries

by Ramona Buck

The format of the queries is a wonderful device for promoting self-examination, both for individuals and for the Meeting, as a whole. There is a profound difference between a statement and a question. If I say, "You should come to Meeting with your heart and mind prepared," that has a totally different feeling from the question, "Do you to come to Meeting with heart and mind prepared?" The question requires me to think about what I shall answer which puts me into a self-reflective mode. It requires an active response while the "should" statement does not require any response from me at all, other than either acquiescence or non-agreement. The statement doesn't require me to measure myself against this "should" concept, so it really lets me off the hook. The feeling of the query is at first deceptively mild — then, as the query is further considered, it burrows into my mind and bounces around for a while, gathering other thoughts.

The question format of the queries reminds me of some of the responses that a mediator may make. Rather than saying "You need to find a way to end the conflict between the two of you about the boundary line between your two properties," a mediator might instead ask, "Do you want to try to find a way to resolve the conflict between the two of you?" That puts the choice for seeking to find a solution with the parties themselves — not imposed upon them. Later on in the mediation, instead of saying, "I think the solution to your problem is . . ." the mediator might say, "Would you like to brainstorm some possible ways to resolve this issue?"

People have a difficult time being told what to do. This is true for adults as well as children. When we are given rules and/or laws, we do strive to follow them, but it may be with a feeling of resentment. Also, the rule or law may obscure the underlying reason that the rule or law was created. It would be interesting to consider the effect of having some queries on the highway — maybe in addition to the posted speed limit. How would we react, I wonder, if every so often, there were a query flashing at us, "Are you going the speed that is safe for you to drive under the current conditions?" "Are you driving as you

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## On Queries

# *Do you delight in each other's happiness?*

*from John Woolman's Journal; edited by Susan Rose*

*Why Queries...*

would want your children to drive?" "Are you being attentive to the drivers around you, some of whom may be tired or distressed?" "Should you pull over for a brief rest?"

Choice of words is carefully considered in the writing of a query. That is probably why committees work so long and hard to find the best wording. Consider the New England Faith and Practice that includes in its query on the Meeting for Worship, "Do both silent and vocal ministry arise in response to the leading of the Holy Spirit?" Baltimore Yearly Meeting's comparable query instead asks the questions, "Are Friends encouraged to share spiritual insights? Are special gifts of ministry recognized and encouraged?" One can imagine the long discussion that went into the writing of either one of these two approaches. People on the committee to rewrite the queries might have considered their own query, "Is it better to focus on what actually happens in the silent and vocal ministry, or is it better to focus on how the Meeting supports such ministry?"

People are often surprised to hear that Quakers don't have a creed. "Does that mean that Quakers don't believe anything?" they may ask. We counter by saying that we believe there is that of God in each person. And, we have our queries. If we truly respond honestly towards those queries and use them to reconsider our intent and our actions, the effect could be as significant to the parts of society that we touch as the queries are to our minds and hearts.

Has he who gave me a being attended with many wants unknown to brute creatures given me a capacity superior to theirs?

Has he shown me that a moderate application to business is proper to my present condition?

Has he shown me that this moderation, attended with his blessing, may supply all outward wants so long as they remain within the bounds he has fixed, and no imaginary wants proceeding from an evil spirit may have any place in me?

Attend then — O my soul — to this pure wisdom, as my sure conductor through the manifold dangers in this world.

Does pride lead to vanity?

Does vanity form imaginary wants?

Do these wants prompt me to exert my power, requiring others to do what I would rather be excused from, were it required of me?

Do those proceedings beget hard thoughts?

Do hard thoughts when ripe become malice?

Does malice when ripe become revengeful, and in the end inflict terrible pains on my fellow creatures and spread desolations in the world?

Do I, walking in uprightness, delight in every person's happiness?

Do I, a creature capable of this attainment, by giving way to an evil spirit employ my wit and strength to afflict and destroy others?

Remember then — O my soul! — the quietude of those in whom Christ governs, and in all its proceedings feel after it.

Does he condescend to bless me with his presence?

Does he move and influence me to action?

Does he dwell in me and walk in me?

Remember then my station as a being sacred to God. Accept of the strength freely offered me.

Take heed that no weakness be given way to in conforming to expensive, unwise, and hard-hearted customs, giving rise to discord and strife.

Does he claim my body as his temple and graciously grant that I may be sacred to him? Oh! that I may prize this favour and that my whole life may conform to this character.

Remember, O my soul, that the Prince of Peace is my Lord, that he communicates his unmixed wisdom to his family, that they, living in perfect simplicity, may give no just cause of offense to any creature, but may walk as he walked.

# Living the Questions

by Jim Rose

*Have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps someday far in the future you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.*

R.M. Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*.

The focus of my life as an engineer and a scientist has always been on the answers, on solving the problem, on fixing the world. From a youth in school where sums had to be figured, authors identified and words correctly spelled, I have been trained not only to find solutions, but to view the world as a continuing examination: am I prepared, have I memorized the catalog, have I mastered the tools and techniques?

I reckon that it was not until University that I became aware that the questions themselves were of paramount importance. Time after time we were instructed that the only way to get to the right answer was first to ask the right questions. The root of a problem often lies beyond the obvious, beneath the evidence, imbedded in the unspoken world hidden between the lines. We were trained to question our assumptions, to recognize how our minds shape the facts, to mistrust the obvious and experiment with the more audacious paths.

The fundamental directive of this mode of analysis, to question our assumptions, can and has led to equally fundamental shifts in our understanding of the world. Darwin's evolution broke upon the world with a new paradigm of life; Einstein shifted the attention of physics just by wrestling with the meaning of simultaneity, and later by overthrowing our primitive understanding of reality by questioning the elasticity and deformability of space itself.

The conventional paradigms in many branches of science have been

wrenched and torn and pushed, sometimes with a great deal of screaming, into a new world, a new vision, a novel and more powerful understanding of reality. But while we employed a different approach, freeing ourselves from ordinary arguments, the objective was indeed the same: solve the problem, devise and answer, resolve the current paradox.

But Rilke asks all of us young poets to go still a step further: consider living the questions themselves, consider how you would live in a world where answers were no longer possible.

Physics, genetics, evolution, cosmology seem distant concerns from our daily lives. But the same approach of questioning the assumptions which guide our lives can lead us to dramatic shifts in our own understanding, to new revelations, to life-changing transformations. How difficult it is! I have an enormous investment in my assumptions, my world-view, my understanding built and refined, adjusted and amended with each new experience. That gestalt must have a terrible integrity; that collection of experience, of hurts and achievements, of mistakes and lucky guesses has become a powerful aggregate of expectations, justifications, rationalizations bestowing meaning to my reality. Can I change that gestalt without destroying my hard-earned integrity? What becomes of my well-ordered understanding of reality if I begin to question my own basic assumptions? Can the puzzle of cause and effect, problem and solution, questions and answers be reassembled when the connecting assumptions are

broken? At the heart of Quaker tradition is our expression of our 'Faith and Practice;' and at the heart of that testimony are our queries. Each query can be considered as a challenge to our way of life, our understanding of reality, our trusted gestalt. If we take those queries as young poets to be lived, not answered, if we open ourselves to that paradox, we put ourselves in a position to know the truth.

Revelation is not a product of rational thought, not a result of pondering cause and effect, not a fulfillment of an expectation imposed by my well-tested world-view. Revelation and transformation are the resolution of a paradoxical query, a question without answers held up to the Spirit, held in the Light. Where does that resolution come from? God only knows.

From a position of certainty about the world, a conviction that cause and effect fit my understanding of the cosmos, and a trust that 'all is right,' I have encountered a paradigm-shifting revelation that the way to Truth is perhaps a suspension of my long-held convictions, and opening to the unanswered question. Where the path of certainty is mired in hubris perhaps my journey is to take another way: to live the questions.



## On Queries

# Have you considered slowing down?

by Bob Rhudy

In November, 2005, I attended the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FNCL) annual conference in Washington, D.C. One of the luncheon speakers at the conference, Michael T. Klare, delivered a presentation on his new book, **Oil and Blood: The Dangers and Consequences of America's Growing Dependency on Imported Petroleum**, describing the relationship between our country's national and military policy and its dependency on oil from the Middle East and other unstable areas around the world. America's dependence on foreign oil sources has grown very substantially over the last few decades, and will continue doing so in the future under our current state of energy planning and policy. We will also be in increasing competition for declining world oil reserves with other countries in the future; and as the 1991 Gulf War, the current war in Iraq, and possibly our war in Vietnam were wars over oil, future wars and American international policies will be driven by oil unless we can break our addiction to petroleum.

The United States has about five percent of the world's population, but consumes nearly twenty-five percent of the world's petroleum production annually. In addition to driving our military policies and international relations, emissions from our burning of petroleum are perhaps the single greatest threat to the environment through their major contribution to global warming, and are the principal reason the U.S. is the only major nation that has refused to ratify the Kyoto Treaty on the Environment.

As Quakers seeking to promote a world without violence and a sustain-

able environment, what can we personally do to reduce our dependence on oil and witness to others? We live and work in a cultural environment that is dependent on our daily use of our personal automobiles, where many of us live in the suburbs and drive to work, to worship, to shopping, and for our social and recreational activities. With the exceptions of our major metropolitan areas, our culture has failed to develop an efficient mass transit system unlike many other developed countries.

I pondered this question in the days following the FCNL conference, and found one small act that I could do to reduce my use of gasoline. I have been a long-term habitual speeder. I usually drive 10 to 15 miles per hour over the posted speed limit. I remembered reading a while back that speeding increases a car's fuel consumption by as much as twenty percent. I resolved to begin driving at posted speed limits. I have been doing so over the past month, and have even noticed having a slightly more contemplative mood while traveling down our roads.

I also experienced a curious event when driving on a curvy suburban road a couple of weeks ago. I was driving at the posted 35 mile per hour limit when a car with a couple of young women sped up to my rear. In a couple of minutes we came to a straight section of the road where passing was permitted, and I pulled slightly to my right to more easily allow the young women to pass. They didn't pass during the following mile or so as we continued on the road! Could they also have become a little more relaxed and contemplative in the time they had been following me?

Traditional twelve-step programs, developed to break alcohol and drug addictions, involve acknowledging the addiction, admitting your powerlessness alone to break the addiction, seeking help from your "Higher Power" in curing the addiction, reviewing your personal weaknesses as related to the addiction and asking your Higher Power to remove them, using prayer and mediation to grow spiritually, and helping others with their similar addictions. Since their creation nearly seventy years ago by a small band of former alcoholics, addicts have used such programs very successfully worldwide. Perhaps we need similar personal and national programs for our petroleum addictions.

Quakers give considerable discussion to the importance of public education to promote growth in individuals and society. The strongest form of "education" comes from personal example, from some individuals finding more appropriate ways of living and "witnessing" such behaviors for others. Perhaps as a certain portion of society begins following the successful models, a "tipping point" is reached where societies and cultures change. (How many of you have read **The Hundredth Monkey**?)

To reach a more peaceful and environmentally sustainable world, we need to begin sharply reducing our use of oil. In addition to learning, speaking, writing, and advocating, as concerned Friends we need to act. While we wait for our government and neighbors to reach this realization and develop appropriate actions, we can decide what we can do to serve as living examples.

## What are we teaching our children?

by Diane Reynolds

Do you ensure that schools under the care of Friends exemplify Friends' principles? Do you support and strive to improve the public schools?

I would rewrite these queries to ask: "How can we promote the practice of Quaker testimonies in both Quaker and public schools? When I am choosing a public or Quaker school for my child, why am I making that choice? How do I best ensure that my children get an education consistent with Quaker principles?" These queries should especially force us to look at how well our schools are living up to the Quaker testimonies. How could our schools be improved to be more consistent with our most core beliefs?

I ask the above questions because I have long struggled with my unease with both local Quaker schools and public schools. Neither has seemed a comfortable fit for me.

Ideally, religious faith would be at the core of our children's education. Not the mindless teaching of religious dogma, but the living out of the Quaker testimonies within an educational setting. Public schools bother me because they sometimes promote values that are at odds with my family's values. For example, especially in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, my children's school went into a patriotic frenzy that seemed to equate patriotism with military aggression. I was deeply disturbed by this. Further, while I love the United States very much and consider myself intensely patriotic, I do not like the concept of pledging allegiance to the flag. The rote quality of it makes me uncomfortable. I would like my children to be exposed to silent worship and religious education in school, something not allowed in public education.

My problems with local Quaker schools are somewhat different. The

first concern I have is the high cost of local Quaker schools. It would be prohibitively expensive for our family to send all three children to a Quaker school. Catholic schools, in contrast, offer reasonable tuitions and more financial aid than Quaker schools, making them more truly affordable for middle-class families. Another concern is that many local Quaker schools are selective, especially at the high school level. At Sandy Spring Friends School, I am told, you have to pass an entrance exam to gain admittance to the high or upper school. Also, my understanding is that the school does not provide full services for children with learning disabilities, physical handicaps or mental retardation. While I understand the financial rationale for not providing full services, I find this at odds with the equality testimony. I don't feel completely comfortable either with segregating children with learning disabilities into special Quaker schools. The public schools are on much firmer ethical ground here and even some local Catholic schools are starting to offer services to all children.

Quaker schools should first and foremost practice the testimonies of equality and simplicity. This would mean thinking outside of the conventional private (and public) school box. Tuitions would be set as a percentage of a family's income, not on the basis of what amenities the school thinks it needs to have to compete with other public or private schools. Schools would be open to all students. Schools would take what money they had and design an educational program within the constraints of the amount of money on hand. Thus, Quaker schools might not offer small class sizes, computer labs, music, art and several foreign languages. They might have to become truly simple — and humble.

In other words, really practice the testimonies. Schools might have to hold classes in meeting houses or private homes, and rely on volunteers to run some of their programs. Schools might lose state accreditation. Academics might be slowed or disrupted by children with disabilities in the classroom. People might start opting for public schools because of the better amenities. The rich might bail out fast. Staying in a Quaker school might require a sacrifice based on faith that the principles of equality, simplicity, peace, integrity and community being lived would outweigh the lack of a science lab, a language or a host of other conveniences. Students and parents might learn to trust God to provide what our students need. And kids might come out more whole and better educated than at the most elite schools.

I suspect that making changes to Quaker schools would lead to ideas for changing public schools in positive ways as well.

All of this might sound unappealing to many parents. None of it, on the surface, is practical. But as Ghandi pointed out, there is no true religion without sacrifice. Over and over, I ask myself: what values do my children learn in public school? What values would they learn in Quaker school? In both cases, the spiritual education could improve.



## Jesus and the Woman Taken in Adultery

by Phyllis Hoge Thompson, taken from Friends Journal

I confess that though I've faithfully gone  
To meeting for years, Jesus never convinced me.  
My parlay was with God. No need for a son  
To translate praise or prayer. And he seemed to be  
Unreal, mythic, until I read again  
In John of the woman taken in adultery.  
They haled her to the temple, struck and thrust  
The woman down before him. "What is thy word  
For one seized in the very act of lust,  
Rabbi? What say you?" As if he had not heard  
He knelt and wrote with his finger in the dust  
Beside her. A little sputter of crosswind stirred  
The dust and erased the marks. He rose again.  
"Stoning by Law," they insisted. "What say you?"  
Deeply he gazed in the eyes of each of the men  
As if to discover their inmost virtue. "Who  
Without sin is among you cast the first stone." And then  
He knelt once more and wrote in the dust. They knew  
Themselves, and one after one let fall a stone  
From their hands, hurtless. Abashed, they hurried away  
Silently, leaving him silent. And alone,  
Except for the frightened woman. They dared not stay  
To be blamed. Then Jesus stood up, smiling. "Have done  
With sin," he told her. "Go thou." And she went her way.  
So real, I can think of him now as a friend. Still I crave  
To know what he thought of, puttering in dust like a child,  
As if not heeding the woman, her life to save.  
Dreamy. Yet that's just how solutions would come to a mild  
Good man who trusted himself in the upshot. And gave  
The right answer. It came to him fooling in dust. And he smiled.

## Living until Death

by Susan Rose

*Growing Older:  
A View from Within*

Norma Jacob, Pendle Hill Pamphlet  
239 (1981)

*Note: This year Ministry and Care has facilitated a series of worship sharings and an information session on Death and Dying. This pamphlet speaks to how we might live until death.*

On her 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday, Norma Jacob retired from her job as a social worker in the mental health field and moved from New York to Kendall-at-Longwood, a retirement community outside Philadelphia. This pamphlet was written seven years later as her answer to the question: What is growing old *really* like? This subject has great interest to me as Jim and I attained the age of 65 in 2003 and Jim retired from Space Telescope Science Institute after 21 years covered in honors, including the planting of a tree in his name. I "retired" many years earlier and so have been practicing growing older for a much longer time than he, and I was interested to compare my experience with Norma Jacob.

Everyone's growing older is particular, but I was taken by the decisions both Norma Jacob and my mother reached about arranging their lives so as not to be dependent economically or emotionally on their children. For them the decision to move to retirement communities was made early and without regret. In fact, my mother and two or three of her friends made quite jolly excursions over a period of

months to the few communities available and affordable to them at that time. Anticipating a similar move sometime in the future, Jim and I stopped at Kendall-at-Longwood in November 2003. After about 15 minutes there I fell into the bluest funk thinking about moving into this, or any other, retirement community. My tendency in such situations is to do a *Scarlet O'Hara* and think about it tomorrow. (I sometimes fear that the Quaker version of this is “way will open” — forgetting the necessary work of standing in the Light and being searched.) Norma Jacob was clear about her move and eager to begin to understand this next phase of her life “upon which [she] had so eagerly (some said, so hastily) embarked.”

Here are some of the discoveries she made in those seven years.

Growing older is liberation from being in an appointed place at an appointed time, from the obligation to behave well. There's no job or promotion to be jeopardized if you stand on a picket line in front of the White House, or “wear outlandish clothes, or write subversive letters to the daily press.”

She speaks with great sensitivity about the losses and diminishments of aging. “Growing old is slowing down . . . we are able to do almost everything we could do at 14, and equally well: it just takes more time.” But inevitably we lose friends, lose words. Eventually, we must sell our cars, which she likens to having a limb amputated. For many

Americans to lose our car is to become a different, lesser person. “I have a mental exercise, which I use from time to time, that of imagining the hands gently opening and letting what was clutched so disparately go free. It is hard, but it has to be done. These are the voluntary relinquishments — voluntary, in order that they may not be forced upon one in the end.”

But then there is the “Catalogue of Riches”: Emotions that can be recollected in tranquility, the things our children teach us, the unfailing, boundless patience of strangers and friends. “This to me is one of the most real manifestations of love.”

And Norma Jacob finds most unexpectedly that growing old is learning to live in the present. I think it was at this point that this pamphlet on growing old took on added dimensions for me. In 2006 I will be celebrating the 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my being diagnosed with cancer. At points along the way I was told that I had maybe a year or two to live. In a way being told you are probably going to die sends you into another kind of retirement; it shouldn't be a surprise that what Norma Jacob learned in her seven years sounds very familiar to me. And the lesson I am still working on is learning to live in the present. There has been no other time in my life that I have been mindful of learning to live *right now*. It was the prospect of death that did that. I count myself lucky that I was awakened from my sleep at fifty-six and that I was among Quakers as I

awoke. Norma Jacob quotes Aldous Huxley from his novel **Time Must Have A Stop**:

It is only by taking the fact of eternity into account that we can deliver thought from its slavery to life. And it is only by deliberately paying our attention and our primary allegiance to eternity that we can prevent time from turning our lives in a pointless or diabolic foolery. The divine Ground is a timeless reality . . .

George Fox encouraged us to speak to each other of things that are eternal. It has been my discovery that the eternal becomes real only as I attend to this moment. The delight is that as I grow older all things are new.

I highly recommend this pamphlet to all. No matter your age it has much wisdom to offer. From the moment of birth we all grow older. We needn't wait until we are 65 to start being alive to being alive.



## On Queries

# Christianity: An “emerging paradigm”

by Diane Reynolds

*The Heart of Christianity*  
 Marcus Borg, HarperCollins, 2003

In *The Heart of Christianity*, Borg, author of the bestselling book *Meeting Jesus Again For the First Time*, woos the seeker. Look at Christianity again, he urges. It's not what you think. It's a richer, fuller, and more intellectually coherent faith than what you have heard. Rightly understood, it's worth believing in.

Borg posits two Christianities, which he calls “earlier paradigm” and “emerging paradigm” Christianity. The earlier paradigm is the stereotypical Christianity most of us are familiar with: a literal interpretation of the Bible, an emphasis on the afterlife, a belief in individual sin or “badness”, and the conviction that only Christians achieve salvation while the adherents of other faiths are consigned to hell (exclusivism).

Borg provides poll data to show that most Americans no longer believe in the “earlier paradigm.” In 2001, for example, only 27 percent of respondents believed in a literal interpretation of the Bible, according to a joint poll conducted by PBS and U.S. News and World Report. In a 2002 poll, only 17 percent of respondents believed that their religion was the only true religion.

Thus, “for millions . . . the earlier paradigm no longer works. . . . What is the Christian message, the Christian gospel, for people who can't be literalists or exclusivists?” he asks in the book.

In answering that question, Borg systematically demolishes overly simplistic and superficial notions of Chris-

tianity. He sets aside definitions of Christianity that nobody with a shred of reason could possibly believe, and instead of saying, “Well, I don't believe in that,” he asks (implicitly), “What is it about Christianity that has attracted so many brilliant minds over two millennia? Could it be that there is something here I don't rightly understand?”

Borg favors “emerging paradigm” Christianity. Developed, he writes, over the last 100 years, it interprets the Bible as a historical and metaphoric rather than literal recording of man's encounter with the divine, emphasizes social justice, finds truth and salvation in other faiths and believes in the transformative power of Christianity in this life rather than the afterlife. The emerging paradigm recognizes Christianity as a way of living, not merely a set beliefs.

Borg thus removes many stumbling blocks that can keep educated, Western people from embracing Christ. Faith, he says, doesn't have to be mindless assent to creeds but can be more richly understood as trust in God. The God we trust does not have to be a “personlike being out there,” but can be understood as the ineffable, or, borrowing from William James, the More. Being “born again” can mean being transformed rather than adhering to a slavish set of evangelical doctrines. Sin can be redefined as separation from God rather than “being bad” and can be set in a societal rather than an individual context.

Much of what Borg has to say speaks my mind and reflects my many years of pondering what the Bible really means. For example, Borg argues, rightly, I think, that earlier paradigm

Christianity can “domesticate” the radical message of social transformation at the heart of Christianity.

While Borg got so much right, I had some problems with his book. One question that kept popping into my mind was: Didn't the Quakers figure out so-called “emerging paradigm” Christianity 350 years ago? In what way is this an “emerging” paradigm? Don't educated, intelligent people “get” all this? Yet I had to remind myself that I was baptized, catechized and confirmed in a mainstream protestant church without ever grasping more than the most fleeting glimmer of what Christianity is really about.

More disturbing is that Borg's book, in positing two Christianities, reflects the religious and political schisms in our culture. I asked Borg about this after he spoke this fall at the Religion Newswriters Association conference in Washington D.C. He defended his book as not truly dualistic. Of course, he is technically right. However, while the book clearly describes Christianity as a continuum of beliefs, I would argue that the book's tendency to speak in terms of “two Christianities” is divisive. While I am on the so-called “emerging paradigm” side of the divide, I find myself strongly resisting being cut off from my “earlier paradigm” brothers and sisters. I don't want to be forced to choose sides. I don't want to be pigeon-holed. I don't want to be talked down to or to talk down to others. In many ways, I am both one of “them” and one of “us”. Further, I believe we all have much to learn from each other. I believe we need each other. While I think the Borg might say the same, I also believe the book



## First Day School, 2004-2005

by Roger Reynolds

could easily reinforce the destructive “us and them” fissures in our culture — and worse, reinforce the conviction that “we” are “better.”

The book’s title, **The Heart of Christianity**, speaks to Borg’s belief that at its core, Christianity is a matter of “heart,” not head, that Christianity reaches something deeper than the intellect. I agree. Yet, ironically, the book functions primarily as an intellectual, not emotional, argument in favor of Christianity. While I agree with Borg that earlier paradigm Christianity has often domesticated faith by undermining its social justice message, emerging paradigm Christianity also threatens to domesticate the Judeo-Christian faith tradition by intellectualizing its deep mystery. I personally don’t want the parting of the Red Sea and the resurrection of Jesus dismissed as mere “myth.” I want my religion to breathe grandeur, power and mystery. I don’t want it to be distorted or domesticated to align with only what science or so-called common sense can explain.

That said, I do strongly recommend the **Heart of Christianity** as a book that rightly understands much of Christianity. The book provides a cogent counter-argument to the ridicule often directed at the Christian faith and performs the much-needed task of correcting many of the misconceptions that have grown up about Christianity. *[Editor’s note: Marcus Berg will be a plenary speaker at the 2006 FGC Gathering in Takoma, WA]*

The theme in First Day School for the year was “living your faith,” and my goal for the year was to try to engage the kids in thinking about the testimonies and start them on the path to actually practicing their faith, through silence and worship sharing. In the first half of the year, our curriculum was Friends General Conference’s excellent **Quakers on the Move**. This is an anthology of stories centering on several generations in the same Quaker family. Through their lives we learn not only about Quaker history, but also how living their faith affected their lives and the lives of those around them. The stories challenged the children to reflect on the ways they do or do not live their faith in their dealings with those around them, in school or at home.

In the spring, the 4th and 5th graders expanded on the “living your faith” theme by spending the semester on queries. The students were challenged to develop their own queries, based on their own common experiences. I would introduce some bible verses centered on one of the testimonies, then encourage the kids to consider these verses in light of their own personal experiences. The discussions that ensued were surprisingly rich and varied, and led to some real engagement in the query writing process. They came up with three queries in this way:

Equality: Do you treat others with respect, honoring the spirit of God within them? Do you treat yourself with respect?

Helpfulness: When someone asks you to do something, do you respond in a spirit of helpfulness?

Sports: When you participate in sports, to you treat your teammates and opponents with fairness and respect? Do you try to make the game a better experience for everyone?

As a final piece to this, the 4th and 5th graders had a worship sharing session in which they considered these queries.

Both terms ended with a round of Quaker Jeopardy, in which the kids could show off their knowledge of Quakerism (and win prizes).

As a final send-off for those graduating to middle school, we had an end-of-year campout and picnic at Doris Rausch’s place in June for the rising sixth graders and above. It was a great way to end the year and begin the summer!



## On Queries

*Why Queries...*

captive witnessed the Indians' horrific torture unto death of two fellow captives. "This relation affected me with sadness, under which I went to bed, and the next morning soon after I awoke a fresh and living sense of divine love was spread over my mind, in which I had a renewed prospect of the nature of that wisdom from above which leads to a right use of all gifts both spiritual and temporal, and gives content therein."

I also was certain that I would use the beautiful poem *Jesus and the Woman Taken in Adultery* (page 6), a reflection on a story which wanders around from Bible to Bible, sometimes found in John 7:53-8:11, sometimes after Luke 21:38, or John 7:36 or

21:24, or appearing not at all. That dismissal is a sad fate for a story that so powerfully witnesses to the truth.

*He knelt and wrote with his finger in the dust. . .*

*'Stoning by Law,' they insisted.*

*'What say you?'*

*Deeply he gazed in the eyes of each of the men*

*As if to discover their inmost virtue.*

Puttering in the dust. A good conflict manager's trick. I imagine these angry men turning from the woman to look over Jesus' shoulder to see what he was writing there, their curiosity getting the better of their anger, creating, if only for a moment, silence, a place for love to operate. And then Jesus, knowing their inward virtue,

trusting them as God's children, invites them to look inward to see the truth in themselves.

"What say you?" . . . "Look within."

Queries invite us to look within. We are invited by the queries to examine ourselves in the sure faith that we will find there "a fresh and living sense of divine love" and the right way to walk. "They knew themselves and one after one let fall a stone from their hands, hurtless."

Do we delight in each other's happiness?

*Patapsco Friends Meeting*

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Web: [www.patapscofriends.com](http://www.patapscofriends.com)

*Meeting for Worship and First Day School.*

Sunday, 10:30 AM at Mt. Hebron House, followed by Simple Meal.

*All are welcome!*