



Several years ago I spoke at the 100th anniversary of the construction of the 15th Street Meetinghouse in New York City. In that large audience were many friends of Friends, and I felt led to speak to them, as part of my address, on the central ideas of Quakerism, stressing their contemporary relevance. Edited and slightly expanded, this was my message. As you read it, perhaps you will think about some "near-Friend" and consider how well these remarks might speak to him or her.

To Inquirers About the Society of Friends

by Leonard S. Kenworthy

If you are repulsed by the idea that God is dead, we invite you to join with us in our continuing search for Divine leadership in our lives, believing as we do that God is very much alive and eager to speak to all of us, any time, anywhere, and on any subject, if we are ready to listen and talk with the Divine. A leading Friend, Rufus Jones, once wrote that there is a double search going on constantly—human beings seeking God and God seeking human beings.

If you decry the secularism and materialism of our times, we encourage you to identify with us in our belief that purposeful living is fundamentally spiritual, permeating every aspect of our lives.

If you are distressed by the conformity of our age and the disregard for the precious nature of every individual, we welcome you as fellow seekers in a religious society which believes that something of the Divine is implanted in each of us at birth and which treasures individuality but tempers it with the wisdom of the group—under Divine Guidance.

If you are disturbed by the frenetic pace of modern life with its attendant

pressures, tensions, and anxieties, we invite you to our fellowship as we strive to simplify our lives and gain a sense of inner peace for living in times like these.

If you shudder at the military might of our own and other nations and at the threat of a nuclear holocaust, we urge you to join with us in finding ways to implement the historic Peace Testimony of Friends, opposing all wars and preparations for wars and seeking to remove the causes of conflicts.

If you are discouraged by your individual efforts to help create a better world, we would like to point to the many projects in which Quakers are involved—locally, nationally, and internationally—in our attempts to bring freedom, justice, and more creative living to people in many places. We encourage you to work with us in some of these important undertakings.

If you consider creeds archaic and even intellectually dishonest, Friends offer you the creedless church. We share many common beliefs and approaches to life, but we encourage individuals to develop their own beliefs and patterns of living. Hence you will find a great variety of viewpoints in our groups.

If you are put off by the paraphernalia and programs of most churches, Friends welcome you to our worship services, where we wait upon God in

expectant silence. We believe that in such periods of quiet we can tap the spiritual resources which will enable us to live more calmly, more compassionately, and more creatively in this chaotic age.

If you have been helped by some of the practices of Eastern religions but have felt that those faiths concentrate upon individual worship to the neglect of corporate waiting upon God, and bypass social action, we suggest that you explore the faith and practices of Friends. We stress individual *and* group worship and combine the vertical relationship to God with the horizontal relationship with other human beings.

If you are repelled by the practices of many Christians, we urge you to consider with us ways in which we can reclaim the best in our Judeo-Christian tradition and rediscover Jesus of Nazareth as The Great Revealer of the grandeur of God and the potential greatness of human beings who live in the Light—as well as to try to ferret out with us the many truths in other world religions.

If you are disturbed by the loneliness of life in our large metropolitan areas, Friends point out that their meetings are intended as homes away from home: caring communities, spiritual fellowships, societies of friends.

As you come to know us better, you will realize that this is an idealistic statement of Friends. It is what we aim to accomplish, not what we are always able to achieve.

You will quickly discern our shortcomings, our faults, and our failures. We are not saints. Becoming a Quaker brings with it no halos, no plaques for perfection, no passports to heaven. It is more like a learner's permit for the lifelong journey toward truth and fulfillment—a journey made more meaningful and easier by the companionship of other seekers. □

This article was excerpted from "Our Messages: Our Message-Bearers," a speech Leonard Kenworthy delivered to the 1984 FGC gathering in Canton, N.Y., on July 3. Leonard, who serves on the JOURNAL's board, lives at Kendal at Longwood in Kennett Square, Pa., and attends Kendal Meeting.