

Facing Eco-Despair in an Era of Eco-Disruption

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Scripture: Gen 1:27-28, Is 40:6, Numbers chapters 13-14.

Supporting Scripture: Mt 7:20, Deut 30:19 , Mt 18:22, Rom 8:22-23, 1Cor 15:20-28, Mt 10:16-17, Mt 6:31-33, Mt 4:5-7, Mt 13:22, Ps 19:14, 2Pet 3:10 (KJV).

Gen 1: ²⁷ So God created humankind^[a] in his image,
in the image of God he created them;^[b]
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion [over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and] over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

Is 40:6 A voice says, “Cry out!”

And I said, “What shall I cry?”

All people are grass,

their constancy [impermanence] is like the flower of the field.

[Not read:] Numbers, chapters 13 - 14: Twelve spies sent by Moses into the Promised Land.

Sermon Text

A few weeks ago, one of our members cried out in this room about the inaction of the US government in the face of a climate crises ignited by the burning of carbon fuels. I wanted to respond to that cry of despair at that time, but I realized that an impromptu response could not do justice to the complexity of the subject. The message today is my attempt to address both the climate issue and the feelings of despair that it engenders. Since I share many of these feelings myself, I am speaking to myself here as much as to anyone else.

I want to enlarge the arena to go beyond climate issues, and to use scripture to illuminate these pressing real-world problems. By the term eco-disruption, I mean the external forces that are arrayed against life as we know it in our era. By eco-despair I refer to the reluctance or inability to engage with or even to think about the thicket of forces that are arrayed against life as we know it. On the other

hand, eco-despair may be the inability to stop thinking about these same forces. Whether manifesting in denial or in distress, eco-despair is all around us, and it is likely to increase.

I want to spend a few minutes describing eco-disruptions, because how we describe a predicament can influence how we see our options for remediation. Then I want to describe some of those options and then I want to talk about how eco-despair makes it difficult to implement those options. So in section 1 we have the objective conditions of eco-disruption, and in Section 2, some possible objective solutions. On the other hand, we have a subjective pile of emotion that obscures those solutions and impedes their implementation. In section 3, I describe eco-despair and suggest some solutions. Finally, in section 4, I want to address what Quakers specifically might offer as solutions to eco-disruption and eco-despair. This is my longest sermon to date, so hunker down and pull down the shades whenever you need to take a nap.

There is a segment of scripture that seems to describe eco-despair fairly closely, and I will mention it only briefly, due to time constraints. You might look at it on your own time. When Moses sends 12 spies into the Promised Land,¹ they report on the wonders they saw, but they conclude that the Israelites could never defeat the current inhabitants of the Promised Land. This report sends the Israelites into paroxysms of despair and impotent rage. They thrash about in the wilderness, where most of them die. Only their children can enter the Promised Land. There are several parallels in this story with our situation today, which I would enjoy exploring on another day, but I will mention only one parallel here. As with the Israelites, young adults and adolescents² today seem to have a better grasp of reality, of urgency, and of strategy than the retiring generation of elders, who seem stuck in impotence and despair or in distraction and denial.

Section 1: Eco-Disruption [In the first section of this talk, I will attempt to describe eco-disruption.]

What are the dimensions of the crisis that I am calling eco-disruption? An economic system we call capitalism^{3 4} concentrates wealth into a narrow circle of investors, venture capitalists and entrepreneurs. Statistics may vary, but by one account, 5% of the US population owns 70% of the assets. Wealth disparities grow with the passing years, largely because a low tax rate allows wealthy people to keep more and more of their income. The recent tax bill will accelerate wealth disparity to astonishing new levels.

¹ Numbers, chapters 13 and 14. The application of this scripture to the topic of eco-despair is developed in Part 2 of this sermon, delivered on Oct 6, 2019.

² A noted adolescent leader in the climate controversy is Greta Thunberg (pronounced TUN-beri). She is interviewed here: https://www.democracynow.org/2019/9/11/greta_thunberg_swedish_activist_climate_crisis

³ What passes for capitalism in one era or one region can be quite different from capitalism in another era or place. Hence, it is a serious oversimplification to say that we live under “capitalism” without defining the parameters of that economic system in terms of property rights, taxation methods and rates, externalities, government subsidies and price supports, anti-trust enforcement, etc. A good read is *Economix* by Michael Goodwin; it provides an informed overview of the history of capitalism in the U.S. through 2012 in an easy-to-read comic-book format.

⁴ A critical assessment of capitalism is provided by Ellen Meiksins Wood in *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View* (2017) Verso. Wood (z”I) taught sociology at the U of Toronto.

Because a small percentage of the population controls ever more wealth, they have more wealth to spend; they primarily spend their wealth on investment opportunities, such as stocks and bonds and real estate, in order to generate yet more wealth. This ever-growing purchasing power causes real estate to inflate in value, and this makes it harder for everyone else, outside of the 5%, to purchase housing. Hence we have a housing crisis, not only in the Bay Area, but in many cities with viable economies. This same pressure inflates the values of stocks, leading to even more wealth for those who already owned significant amounts of stock. Another application of great wealth is for political contributions. Politicians must pander to the wealthy to stay in office, so they keep lowering taxes and raising the national debt. This generates more government bonds, which the wealthy purchase in place of paying higher taxes.

Meanwhile, mechanization changes the number and types of jobs available. Some careers are rendered obsolete; other careers pay less. Real wages have stagnated since 1980 while living costs have increased. Higher education is no longer free or inexpensive. Many people work 2 or 3 menial jobs to maintain basic necessities. This requires more and more driving and the use of more fossil fuels. While most people are aware of the risks of rising CO₂, they must drive to maintain the income needed to stay housed. This raises the price of petroleum and makes it profitable to frack for natural gas. Fracking releases methane into the atmosphere, increasing global heat retention.

Meanwhile, increasing numbers of people fail in their efforts to stay housed and the ranks of homeless citizens grows. This is disheartening to watch and fearful to consider that it could happen to anyone who falls ill or who works in an industry that could be outsourced or mechanized by robots. Moreover, many companies have reneged on retirement benefits, leaving many people ill-prepared for old age.

Meanwhile, the growth of populations, both of people and of cattle depletes the remaining forests, which are converted to farmland and ranch lands to feed a growing human population. This reduces the habitat for other species and raises temperatures. **Meanwhile**, the rise in CO₂ and methane in the atmosphere leads to instability of the weather with more flooding and more droughts and heat waves, and at times polar vortices that drive arctic air to lower latitudes. Thus some areas are subject to floods, this year in south India, destroying crops and homes, while other areas suffer drought, this year in Argentina, also destroying crops. The loss of crops leads to bankruptcy and suicides among farmers. This leads to further loss of food production. This raises the price of food, and makes it profitable to burn off forest to provide more land for crop and cattle, as is happening right now in Brazil. Agribusiness turns to genetically modified plants that can survive in higher temperatures and with less water. This depletes the diversity of crops and encourages monopoly practices by GMO companies.

Meanwhile, rising temperatures deplete ice reserves in the Himalayas, leading to water shortages in Pakistan, India, China and SE Asia, with the prospects of mass migrations of desperate people, such as we see collecting on the US border with Mexico, and the European maritime borders with N. Africa and with Turkey. **Meanwhile**, the birth rate in parts of the world remains high, despite civil wars and natural disasters. Civil conflicts lead to rape and forced pregnancy while disrupting the provision of health care, including access to family planning technology. Civil wars also deplete food supplies and crop harvests.

Meanwhile, governments invest in more infrastructure to stop mass migration, including military weapons and border walls. Rising international tensions also fuel a new nuclear arms race.

Meanwhile, some people want to give up on planet earth to colonize Mars, even though the conditions on Mars make Greenland look like a tropical paradise. Nevertheless, they are willing to invest billions of dollars in order to get a foothold on Martian real estate. **Meanwhile....** Well, I could go on, but you get the drift. Lots of people are worried about survival, and their desperation makes a difficult situation much worse. Both the poor and the wealthy are desperate, and desperate people do desperate things.

Eco-disruption offers stiff set of challenges. Intertwined ramifications of economics and ecology impact nearly every aspect of human society and personal life. The psychological effects are extensive and complicate the ordinary stresses of life. There is an old German saying from the Thirty Years War era⁵ that seems apt in this era as well: *Und wers bedenkt, ist immer im Streit*:⁶ whoever is thoughtful is ever in strife. This is what I am calling eco-despair. In some sense, it is not new, as the old German adage suggests, but the stakes are now global in scope and it is not likely to disappear.

Section 2: Objective Responses to Eco-Disruption [In the second section, I will describe some possible responses to eco-disruption.]

It is not enough to describe eco-disruption without offering some program of relief. The Quaker sociologist, George Lakey,⁷ emphasizes this principle in his work as a political change trainer. If you have no coherent program, people will often turn to destructive programs of racialized selfishness, and politicians will eagerly foment racial antagonism, because it keeps the focus away from the structural basis of eco-disruption that lies in capitalism, consumerism, and unrestrained growth.

Let's look next at some of these options. This is not an exhaustive list; it's just a start, but it essential to have concrete proposals.

1. We need to learn how to talk to a wide variety of people about these painful topics. We can develop skills for doing this. The Alternatives to Violence Project and Non-Violent Communication are two approaches here for reaching beyond our comfort zone. I'll mention that there will be an AVP workshop in this building in October.

⁵ 1618-1648.

⁶ Part of a hymn archived in the *Exequien* (1635) by Heinrich Schuetz: *Es ist allhier ein Jammertal, Angst, Not und Trübsal überall, des Bleibens ist ein kleine Zeit, voller Mühseligkeit, und wers bedenkt, ist immer im Streit.*

⁷ Lakey was involved in the early civil rights movement in the 1950s, and continues to be engaged with social change efforts. He taught Peace and Conflict studies at Swarthmore. His most recent book is *How We Win: A Guide to Nonviolent Direct Action Campaigning* (2018) Melville House. Lakey is well-represented on YouTube; here is a recent talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lrq2RSLdWz0>

2. We need to learn about the white nationalist movement, odious though it is.⁸ If we don't understand our enemies, can we persuade them to change? At the same time, we should learn as much as we can about the legacy of racism and how to become effective opponents of racism.
3. We need to promote access for voluntary contraception. Many women do not have the means to avoid pregnancy if they wish to do so. Moreover, children should not be an accidental byproduct of lust. Several organizations work in these areas, to engage with.
4. We need to strengthen democratic institutions and access to voting. Another factor is to limit the size of political contributions. Many groups focus on this approach.
5. We need to support people who are devising appropriate technology for conservation and alternative energy sources.
6. We need alternative sources of information and restoration of the fairness doctrine in major media outlets.
7. We need a broad economic overhaul, starting with the Green New Deal,^{9 10 11} including a tax structure like the one that prevailed in the 1950s,¹² amplified by transfer payments to achieve both a minimum income – and a maximum income. This would go a long way to controlling the investment bubbles that make housing more expensive, shrink the middle class, and grind the poor. It is interesting to note that the Quaker president, Richard Nixon,¹³ endorsed a guaranteed minimum income.
8. We need to engage with electoral politics to elect candidates who will deliver on a Green New Deal.
9. We need to make education more affordable for more people, as it was in the 1950s and 60s.
10. We need to revise the US Constitution to reduce the number of “checks and balances” that are designed to impede effective government. At the same time, we need to limit presidential powers, which have come to overshadow Congressional power. The US being a dominant nation in the world right now; how it functions is of considerable importance to the world.
11. We need to formulate a theology of eco-disruption and eco-despair. One project we could work on is developing a better version of this sermon.
12. The last point I will suggest is to preserve the integrity of the Religious Society of Friends, in other words, us. This might not seem so obvious, but we can hope that humanity does survive

⁸ One resource is *The Proud Boys and the White Ethno-State* by Alexandra M Stern. Listen to the author interviewed at <https://kpfa.org/player/?audio=318110>

⁹ One resource is *All-Electric America: A Climate Solution* (2016) by S. David Freeman, a utility engineer and former director of the TN Valley Auth. Hear Freeman interviewed here: <https://kpfa.org/player/?audio=314475>

¹⁰ Another resource: *The Green New Deal: Why the Fossil Fuel Civilization will Collapse by 2028 and the Bold Economic Plan to Save Life on Earth*, by Jeremy Rifkin, an economic advisor to China and to Germany. Hear Rifkin interviewed here: <https://kpfa.org/player/?audio=319002>

¹¹ Another resource: *On Fire: The Burning Case for a Green New Deal* by Naomi Klein, journalist. Hear Klein interviewed here: <https://kpfa.org/player/?audio=318964>

¹² One source on economic strategies is *Saving Capitalism for the Many and not the Few (2015)* by Robert Reich, former Secretary of Labor and Prof of Public Policy. Hear Reich here: <https://kpfa.org/player/?audio=225138>

¹³ It's obvious that Nixon had a number of serious faults, but he also had some innovative ideas and policies. While he was raised in a Quaker church in Whittier, CA, he did not participate in Quaker worship as an adult.

eco-disruption, and, if so, it will need the wisdom of Quakers to repair and heal from the ordeal. Only Quakers can perform this valuable service of sustaining the Religious Society of Friends. This effort does not have to be heroic, but it needs to be sustained. The Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus said, is like bread rising in the kitchen.¹⁴ [More on this below.]

These are ambitious goals and would require a significant levels of energy, cognition, cooperation and cash. Even though we have some good ideas for addressing eco-disruption, many people are collectively paralyzed by feelings of inadequacy and impotence, just as the Israelites were paralyzed by doubt and indecision in the desert. Let's look now at eco-despair as a major impediment to addressing eco-disruption.

Section 3: Ways to Address Eco-Despair

Eco-despair is the psychological response to eco-disruption. It may take a passive form with depression, denial, or distraction, or it may take an aggressive form with anxiety, projection, and lashing out at perceived threats and villains. People with the aggressive form of eco-despair may lose the capacity for rational thought and become a danger to themselves and others. People with the passive form may manifest surplus powerlessness and fail to utilize the power and influence they actually possess.

It is evident that many Christians are not immune to eco-despair; there seems to be a limitation in what Christianity – as it is currently structured – can achieve. I would emphasize that what passes for Christianity now is quite different from Christianity in previous generations. A few centuries ago, church attendance was a prolonged affair, and it was often compulsory. Sermons would typically last for an hour or two. Quakers, in particular, devoted several hours to collective worship and this was not confined to Sundays. Nowadays, a sermon that lasts more than 15 minutes is considered excessively ponderous. Today, Christians may show up for worship, sing some songs, stay for coffee, and then go back to their private rat race. Even this level of observance does not take place every week. So it should not be surprising that many Christians are not prepared to confront eco-despair, if they have not primed their spiritual pump.

Given the limitations on our Christian institutions today, we may need to supplement our institutional experience of church – what we are doing here right now – with other time devoted to prayer and study. However, prayer is not always the right venue, for the simple reason that, in prayer, we typically focus on our desires. These may be desires that have already been met, for which we thank God; or desires that have not been met, for which we implore God. These desires do not have to be selfish desires; we might pray in behalf of someone else or we might pray to be with Jesus or to be faithful Christians. Still, most prayer is a manifestation of desire, in some form or another. This is useful to a point, but, at times we simply need to wipe the mental landscape free of desiring and be receptive. We

¹⁴ Mt 13:33

need to empty the buffers and reboot our mental computers. That is what Quakers do in worship, at least some of the time, but as I noted, we don't meet together with sufficient frequency and duration for this process to work adequately in the face of eco-despair.

In addition to prayer, the Bible also recommends meditation.¹⁵ Psalm 19 concludes with this familiar passage:

Let [May] the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
Be acceptable *and* pleasing in Your sight,
O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.¹⁶

There are many ways of doing prayer and perhaps even more ways to do meditation. The Bible recommends it, but does not provide much instruction in meditation. Today, we have many options to choose from. I am thinking primarily of mindfulness-based stress reduction. This is a system involving 4 types of meditation that was designed and popularized by an American physician, Jon Kabat-Zinn.¹⁷ He applied this therapy to otherwise untreatable conditions, such as intractable pain or persistent mental distress. Eco-despair certainly qualifies as intractable mental distress.

As Jesus says of pagans, They worry about where to sleep, what to eat, what clothes to wear. Eco-despair is this same agitation writ large: where will future generations sleep, what will they eat and wear? As Jesus says, Your Father in heaven knows that you need these things, but seek ye first the kingdom of God, and these needs will be provided as well.¹⁸ Even so, Jesus does not explain how to set aside these survival worries. Perhaps He once did so, but those instructions were not preserved by the early Christians.¹⁹ Mindfulness meditation does provide this type of instruction, and it provides a framework for applying those instructions. (True Quaker worship can only be done in group settings; MBSR is a similar process that can be done alone.)

In recommending mindfulness meditation, I realize that mindfulness itself is neutral in content: it could be used for a variety of tasks besides eco-despair. However, the quality of attention that we bring to bear on ecological issues also matters. If we are harried, agitated, and weary, then we cannot expect to make much progress. We need clear thinking that is not overburdened by despair. If you can maintain a clear state of mind through prayer, then by all means, keep it up. But if you have not been able to calm agitation and despair through prayer, then mindfulness-based stress reduction is another approach to

¹⁵ Two words are used for meditation. Aleph-Sin-Chet in Gen 24:63, Ps 77:4,7,13; Ps 119:15,48,78,97,148. Hai-Gimmel-Nun in Ps 19:14, Ps 77:13. Verse Ps 77:13 contains both words in parallel structure, indicating that they are close synonyms.

¹⁶ Ps 19:14

¹⁷ Jon K-Z has 8 books in print: *Full-Catastrophe Living* (2013, pp. 609) is a full (exhaustive?) description of his program. *Meditation is Not What You Think* (2018) is a more manageable introduction to his Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program. Here is an introduction to MBSR: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xecXhXDkzpw>

¹⁸ Mt 6:31-33

¹⁹ In the tumultuous First Century, Christians were doing well to survive. Any archives held in Jerusalem were destroyed in 70 AD during the civil war and Roman invasion.

consider. I will warn you, however, that, like Christianity of two hundred years ago, it takes a sustained commitment, because meditation is demanding work.

Fortunately, we live in an era with many resources. In addition to Jon Kabat-Zinn and George Lakey, several people have devoted considerable attention to reversing eco-despair. I will mention Joanna Macy as one remarkable resource.²⁰ A talk she gave in Marin County in August 2019 is available on YouTube,²¹ along with other talks she and George Lakey²² have given. Both have a great deal to offer in understanding eco-despair.²³

[I would add here that as eco-despair becomes more manageable, you may find that you are then able to engage in one or more of the programs listed in Section 2 of this sermon. You may find that this engagement puts you in contact with more up-beat people which further alleviates eco-despair. At the same time, you may find that this engagement is quite challenging. If so, MBSR – and prayer – could become even more important.]²⁴

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Section 4: The Christian predicament and the role of Quakers [Next I want to turn to the 4th section and describe the Christian predicament and the role of Quakers.]

There are some ways in which Christianity contributes to the problems of eco-disruption. The Bible reading today includes the dominion clause in verse 28 (Gen 1:28), and dominion has certainly been used to justify many abuses of the natural environment. Dominion deserves an entire sermon unto itself, yet there are other ways²⁵ in which Christianity provides a false sense of security for eco-despair. Christians who assume that “God is in control” may be content to sit back and let history unfold without exerting much personal effort. Some folks say, “Let go and let God.” This is not the only possible outcome of imagining God as omnipotent, it is a common outcome. It is, however, not the Quaker approach. Quakers have been quite engaged in altering history through active participation. Quakers arose during a Puritan era in which God was perceived to favor those who did not wait for God to act. In contrast to Puritans, Quakers did wait for God to lead them, but they fully expected to be called to action.

While many people believe that “God’s got the whole world in His hand,” Scripture does not speak with one voice on this matter. Whenever Scripture maintains that much of the human world is under the

²⁰ **Joanna Macy and the Great Turning**, a video is available online at www.berkeleypubliclibrary.org and on YouTube

²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGDMfFw9-wQ>

²² **George Lakey** has several presentations on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lrq2RSLdWz0>

²³ **Active Hope: How to face the mess we’re in without going crazy** (2012) and **Coming Back to Life** (2014) by Joanna Macy.

²⁴ This paragraph was added later on Sept 19, 2019

²⁵ The concept of heaven is another ubiquitous example of how Christian expectations can devalue the present lived experience, much like the people who plan to escape to Mars. In contrast with many Christians, Quakers have been reserved in talking about heaven; the focus instead is on living under the present embodied conditions.

dominion of Satan or under the dominion of “powers and principalities,” this means that God does not have complete control over creation. [Perhaps God has relinquished partial control or it is possible that God does not operate in creation as we imagine. This is, of course, almost certainly the case, that God operates by rules and procedures of which we have little or no knowledge, nor could we.]

However, there is a more basic way in which God relinquished control over creation to human kind. Besides the dominion clause in Gen 1:28, there is the clause about “created in the image of God” in Gen 1:27. The image of God clause indicates that God has privileged humankind in a particular way that no other species appears to enjoy. Early Quakers, in their disputes with English Puritans, emphasized free will over predestination. And if free will has any significance, it means that human choice has both efficacy and validity. It is both potent and significant. So significant, in fact, that God steps back and allows human choice to take its course, even when that course is misguided or destructive. We don’t know to what extent God steps back, and we probably don’t want God to step back entirely, but it is pretty clear that wrong-headed ideas can take root and take over entire countries, leading at times to genocide and ecocide. Should we count on God to save us from such disasters in the nick of time? Jesus says no, don’t jump off the Temple to see if angels will come to your rescue; do not put God to the test.²⁶ This means God expects us to be and become adequate stewards of our own destiny. So if God has this expectation, then God has relinquished significant control over creation. Obviously, this idea is not entirely comforting.

To be a Quaker is to assert that salvation is not pre-ordained as the Calvinists were persuaded to believe. We recognize no guarantee of salvation, whether by fire, nor water, nor by ecstasy. We only recognize true prophets by their fruits.²⁷ The Quaker concept is that we constantly need to choose salvation, day in and day out. As Moses said at the climax of Deuteronomy, “*This day I place before you life and death,...Therefore choose Life.*”²⁸ Choice requires the ability to choose, and hence free will. Free will means that we can say NO to God, and that we often do so. We can also say no to love, no to cooperation, no to salvation, no to life. Human choice has real world consequences that can be destructive of human lives, of animal life, and destructive of air and water. At the same time, in the midst of this suffering caused by human free will, there is an opportunity for hearing God in a new way: in the crucible of that suffering. Thus suffering can lead to a new redemption. This is not necessarily a better redemption. God may prefer that we be redeemed without added suffering, for Jesus has already suffered for all. However, God defers to our errors of judgement, which usually lead to added suffering.

God is constantly looking for rear-guard actions to compensate for human sin and error, in order to give us a second chance, a third chance, even seven times seventy chances.²⁹ However, God may run out of options at some point. Our species, too, may go the way of the passenger pigeon. It would be better if

²⁶ Mt 4:5-7

²⁷ Mt 7:20

²⁸ Deut 30:19

²⁹ Mt 18:22

we could make mature and responsible choices that would avert suffering now and in the future. Let's help each other do this.³⁰

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Postscript: The point here is to work toward 1) an understanding of the challenges we collectively face in the economic, ecological and psychological realms, and 2) some agreement on a program to address those challenges. This will require input from and communication with a wide variety of people. If the ideas proposed here are a step in that direction, then let's build on it. If these ideas are not helpful, then please propose another set. **This "sermon" is interactive**, in terms of the resources identified in the footnotes, and in the opportunity to improve upon the sermon itself. You are invited to wrestle with it.

Addendum: More on the Role of Quakers

All denominations have unique roles and identities. Quakers are a small denomination that now constitutes about 0.04% of the US population (4 in 10,000). During the colonial period, Quakers constituted about 1% of the US population, with larger concentrations in PA, NJ, RI, MA, NY and NC. They arose in England during the English Revolution (1641-1659), where they were a contentious minority, often in conflict with Puritan Calvinists, with Anglicans, and with Roman Catholics. Their persecution increased after the Restoration in 1660. Nonetheless, many of the customs that Quakers initiated in England have become common place in American life. These include fixed prices in stores, less ostentatious dress, the reduction of arms (swords and pistols) in public view, a single second-person pronoun, direct (forthright) speech, restrictions on legal oaths and loyalty oaths. Quakers were the first Christian group in Europe to encourage full participation of women in religious leadership and in educational opportunities. Quakers were prominent in the women's suffrage movement that gained for women the right to vote. Quakers were prominent in the abolition movement to end slavery and efforts to improve conditions in jails, prisons and mental institutions. The Quaker colony of Pennsylvania was the first government to permit freedom of religious expression, including the right to not participate in any religious institution. All other governments required compulsory church membership. In honor of this innovation, Quakers of Pennsylvania commissioned the construction of the Liberty Bell in 1751.

Recently, Quakers took a leading role in the recent efforts to end solitary confinement in the California prison system, under the leadership of the Friends Committee for Legislation, based in Sacramento, CA. Some features that Quakers may offer future generations are:

- A distinct religious tradition, now 370 years old.
- Collective decision making that seeks consensus without using democratic (voting) or hierarchical (coercive) patterns of decision making. (The goal is to seek God's will.)
- A non-patriarchal organization that puts women on equal footing with men.
- Non-violence in speech and behavior.
- Values that favor simplicity, directness of speech, frugality and avoidance of ostentation.
- Efforts to reduce militarism and avoid warfare.

³⁰ One way to help each other to do this is to suggest ways of improving this sermon and distributing it to sympathetic readers.

- A respect for the Biblical tradition that is neither literalist nor fundamentalist, and which avoids the patriarchal and militaristic patterns found in the Bible and in many Christian denominations.
- Sympathy, respect and tolerance for other racial and religious groups.
- Voluntary membership: most Quakers choose, as adults, to affiliate. Only a minority are born into Quaker families.