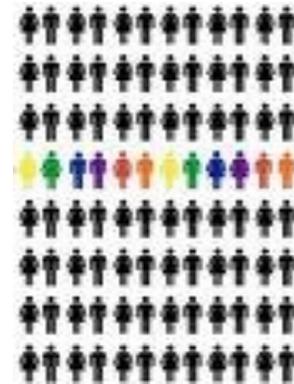


IYM Quakers

Session Four

Equality



Answering to That of God in Everyone

- *That of God in Every Gender*
- *That of God in Every Race*

That of God in Every Gender

Acts 2:17-18

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth and again to Timothy limiting the role of women in the assembly of their churches. Some Christian groups adhere strictly to these limitations today understanding them to be timeless guidelines. Others understand them to be more specific for that culture and feel a sense of liberty to welcome public ministry by women.

From the very beginning Friends recognized that the spiritual baptism they experienced was known equally by both women and men as prophesied by the prophet Joel and cited by Peter on the Day of Pentecost. Knowing the liberty that comes from God's Spirit, Friends welcomed the contributions and leadership of women in this spiritual movement. Even though some of Paul's writings limit the role of women, he also wrote in Galatians 3:28 that in Christ there was no differentiation between male and female. Friends have embraced this truth and have welcomed the ministry of women for over 350 years.

A study of Quaker history will point to many women who have exercised leadership and ministered powerfully out of the power of the Spirit. Mary Fisher, Mary Dyer, Elizabeth Fry and Margaret Fell are just a few examples. Many churches throughout Indiana Yearly Meeting have benefited from the ministry of women ministers. One female Friends pastor was once asked if God ever called women into the ministry. Her response was simple, "I just know that He called me."

That of God in Every Race

Deuteronomy 10:17-19

Decades before Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation freeing slaves, every Friends Yearly Meeting in America had taken a stand against slavery. While many were debating whether African-Americans had souls or were fully human, Friends recognized that they were created in God's image and should be treated with dignity.



An American Friend, John Woolman (1720-1772), is largely credited for helping Friends come to unity in opposition to slavery. Early in his life there was no general testimony among Friends against slavery. In fact, many wealthy Friends routinely held large numbers of slaves without thought.

Woolman traveled widely among Friends in America and spoke to many Quaker slave owners about the evils of slavery. He decried not only what slavery did to those enslaved, but also the manner in which it corrupted the hearts of slave owners.

Some responded thoughtfully to Woolman's suggestions. Others reacted angrily but Woolman persisted. Eventually "friendly persuasion" prevailed and Friends opposed the institution of slavery.

Conclusion

This session has only touched on a few examples where the Friends testimony of equality has had significant influence. Friends also have a history of humane and just treatment of Native Americans so noticeable that in 1869 President Grant turned to Friends to provide oversight and management of some Indian reservations.

Prison reform was initiated by Friends in London under the leadership of Elizabeth Fry as early as 1813. It focused on reforming and training prisoners who also had “that of God” stamped in their hearts. Soon this approach was welcomed throughout Europe.

Those suffering mental illness were often “punished” but Friends were among the first to initiate humane treatment for the mentally ill.

Certainly there are groups of people today who are given second-class treatment by our society. We continue to be challenged by the call to walk cheerfully over all the earth answering to that of God in everyone.

Equality

Answering to that of God in Everyone

“Walk cheerfully over all the earth answering to that of God in everyone,” is a quote from George Fox, founder of the Society of Friends. While Fox likely never intended this phrase to be a theological statement, it does give insight into how Friends view all kinds of people.

The creation story found in Genesis 1 tells us that God created mankind, both men and women, in His own image. Just as Jesus recognized the spiritual capacity of lepers, prostitutes, and reviled tax collectors, Friends are likewise quick to acknowledge that every person is made in God’s image. There is that of God in every person.

In the culture of 17th century England such a spiritual insight seemed foreign and was often deeply resented. Because Friends realized that all individuals were of equal value in God’s eyes they resisted customs that ascribed greater value to some and lesser value to others. Titles of honor such as “Your Holiness,” no longer seemed appropriate to Friends, so they refrained from such, and instead addressed all individuals simply. Likewise “hat honor,” the removal of one’s hat to another as a sign of honor, was a custom opposed by Friends.

More importantly, Friends recognized value in the segments of society that were normally treated as no better than second-class. Friends recognize that all individuals, no matter how fallen, are created first-class – bearing the image of no one less than God Himself.