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## "On Seeking the Truth (and being found by it) – A Christocentric Double Search" (Chapter 11 of *Befriending Truth: Quaker Perspectives*)

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

“On Seeking the Truth (and being found by it)—  
A Christocentric Double Search”

Paul Anderson

The Religious Society of Friends emerged in great synergy with “the Seekers” of Northwest England three-and-a-half centuries ago, and they still have a great deal to offer the seekers of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In a day and age where more and more young people are registering as “none” when it comes to their religious affiliation, there nonetheless abides a deep hunger for spiritual reality, which some religious institutions fail to deliver. Because a Quaker spirituality of education envisions the classroom as “a meeting for worship in which learning is welcome,” the quest for truth is a part of all disciplines, with student and teacher alike seeking to be led into liberating truth by the Present Teacher, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (Jn. 14:6). In that sense, it is not only the student and instructor who seek the truth, but each one is also being sought by the Master—as Rufus Jones described it: *A Double Search*. Seeking the truth and being found by it was the calling of early Friends, and it continues to be the vocation of contemporary Friends whatever tradition they embrace and whatever the context in which they serve.

### 1. The Seekers of Westmorland and Seekers Today

Early on, Friends connected with those who called themselves “Seekers,” and after a century-and-a-half of religious political strife in England, one can appreciate the hunger of many to experience authentic spiritual reality rather than subjecting themselves to the leveraged platforms of established religious groups. Christopher Hill (1972) lumps Quakers together with other dissenting groups of the day, describing their concerns as factors of the proletariat’s dissatisfaction with the

domination of religious and political powers, but this analysis fails to account for the authenticity of spiritual depth at the heart of the Westmorland Seekers' concerns. They believed that authentic religious experience—the reality encountered by the first Christians—was possible, and even normative for genuine believers. They also had experienced, amidst the conflicts between the Anglicans, the Catholics, and the Puritans, the distortion of religious principles and authority in the furthering of political goals by means of force. Therefore, along with Ranters, Familists, Separatists, and other dissenting groups, the Seekers opposed established religious forms in favor of a vision of life-producing spiritual reality.

While many of the Seekers and other Dissenters were tried for heresy or disloyalty and punished or put to death, they saw themselves as seeking to recover Apostolic Christianity. This too became the concern of Quakers, and William Penn described their central concern as “Primitive Christianity Revived.” Believing the established church (both Catholic and Protestant) had departed from the religious vitality of the Apostles, Friends met together in silence, without liturgical forms, seeking to be led by the Holy Spirit in vocal ministry. Much of this spiritual interest, of course, had profound Christian roots. As Henry VIII disbanded the monasteries of England when he changed the Catholic Church of Rome to the Church of England, a good deal of their contemplative approach to spirituality found a home in the rural settings of northwest England. And, as the Geneva Bible (1560) and the King James Bible (1611) became available to the masses, biblical Christianity took root powerfully in the popular cultures of 17<sup>th</sup> Century Puritan England. Within these and other influences, a passionate concern for authentic spirituality and abiding in and living out of the truth of Christ became central concerns of the people called Quakers, and receptivity and responsiveness to the truth of Christ became the heart of their message and religious experience.

As a result, the experience and message of early Friends pointed centrally to Christ as the way, the truth, and the life (Jn. 14:6), embracing the belief that the Spirit of Truth would guide people into all truth (Jn. 16:13), which itself is liberating (Jn. 8:32). The truth of Christ is conveyed directly to persons without the aid of religious or priestly intermediaries, as his reign is one of truth, and those who belong to the truth hear his voice (Jn. 18:36-37). Rather than being indebted to priests or preachers, George Fox discovered that there was “One, even Christ Jesus,” who could speak to his condition, and upon feeling himself addressed directly by the risen Lord, he reports: “my heart did leap for joy.” Further, early Friends took seriously the conviction that the light of Christ is accessible to every person (Jn. 1:9), and appealing to “that of God” within each person—the inward light of Christ—became the focus of Quaker witness. Believing that Christ is come to teach his people himself, early Friends thus not only sought to abide in the truth of Christ, living responsively to it, they also sought to engage the truth of Christ within the other, willing to receive instruction from others as well sharing their own

measure of what they themselves had received from Christ through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, seekers of truth also became finders, and a robust confidence in the liberating power of truth empowered the vision of Friends, and formed the backbone of their mission.

## 2. Quakers, Truth, and Discovery

The power of truth in the modern era, however, extends beyond religious concerns; it also includes scientific inquiry and rational discourse. In 1648 the forces of Oliver Cromwell in England defeated those of King Charles I, who was sentenced to death and beheaded the next year. In Cromwell's view, this signalled the transition from the divine right of kings to the power of Parliament and the people, although the monarchy was restored in 1660, and somewhat limited political power was thereby restored to the throne. On the Continent, the Thirty Years War came to an end also in 1648, and with the Treaty of Westphalia a somewhat lasting peace was carved out between Protestants and Catholics, as Imperial States were given the right to decide which religious path their provinces would choose. Within the larger public discourse, however, religious authority suffered an irreversible setback. As a result, the role of the church was countered by the authority of reason and scientific inquiry, affirmed by empirical measures of factual evidence. Therefore, the authority of truth in the modern era shifted from religious claims from on high to evidentiary measures from below. Politically, belief in the capacity of the masses to discern the divine will gave rise to democracy, and the conviction that truth claims could be tested and confirmed or disconfirmed in ways compelling to all gave rise to the scientific method as an objective basis for the modern quest for truth.

Within that transition, Quakers also played significant roles in the advance of grounded approaches to truth. Out of a commitment to abiding in the truth and authentic living, a Quaker's "Yes" meant yes, and "No" meant no (Mt. 5:37), following the way of Christ. And, addressing others with plain and personal speech ("thee" and "thou") versus elevated flattery (the plural, "you") and false honor, Friends affirmed the full humanity and worth of all parties within a conversation. In terms of clothing and presentation, Friends advocated plain dress rather than ostentation and treated others as equals regardless of social status or class. Quakers were also willing to suffer for the truth, and when a series of anti-Quaker laws were passed in the early 1660s Friends suffered not only for their convictions, but also for their refusal to meet secretly or to hide their practices. As the nineteen-year-old Quaker martyr, James Parnell put it in his letter to Friends from prison: "Be willing that self shall suffer for truth, and not the truth for self."

Because Friends were excluded from formal institutions of higher learning, they set up practical schools of trade, skill development, and conventional learning. Joseph Lancaster also sought to provide free education for children, and as a result



of the large number of pupils, older students were drawn into service in teaching younger ones; as a result, their education was also furthered as a tutorial system of learning developed as an effective approach to learning. Friends also played major roles in establishing first-rate educational institutions. In Britain, ten excellent primary and secondary schools provide outstanding educational experiences for young people, including Ackworth, Lisburn, Bootham, Sibford, and Leighton Park Friends Schools; some three dozen Friends secondary schools provide excellent educational experiences for students in North America. In the United States, leading Quaker colleges and universities include Haverford, Bryn Mawr, Swarthmore, Guilford, Malone, Wilmington, Earlham, William Penn, Friends, Barclay, Whittier, and George Fox, while such institutions as Cornell, Johns Hopkins, and Azusa Pacific Universities have Quakers among their founders. Many more Friends schools and training centers are found around the world, but what they all share is the conviction that truth matters, and that an important way to impact the world is to deepen our formation in the truth.

Friends have also found ways to triumph over adversity, and sometimes to make advances because of it. Because Friends had refused subservience to the established church from the beginning of the movement, their births, marriages, and deaths had to be recorded within Friends Meetings, as they were not accorded official status or place by the Church of England. As a result, Friends became first-rate record keepers, and because of their honesty and skill, they were among the first accountants, bankers, and insurers against risk in England. Such firms as Barclays and Lloyds still bear the names of the Quaker families that founded them. Likewise, because of their commitment to inquiry and discovery, Friends were among the leaders of the Industrial Revolution, and for over a century, Quaker industrialists in Ironbridge and Coalbrookdale developed the technologies that opened the way into nearly a dozen industries, including iron, rail, tile, ceramics, and bone china. Seeing divine assistance as empowering discovery and problem solving, Quakers became leaders in technology and industry.

Because of the interest in the truth and openness to discovery, Friends also became leaders in science, medicine, business, and healthcare. Believing that all truth is God's truth, and that believers are called into partnership with Christ as his "friends" (Jn. 15:14-15), Quakers advanced the truth in ways that bettered the lives of others. In technology, Robert Ransome improved steel used in plows and is credited for inventing interchangeable parts in farming equipment. In chemistry, John Dalton discovered the law of chemical combinations and atomic weights of elements, and Kathleen Lonsdale made advances in crystallography, becoming one of the first two women to be elected to the British Royal Society. Jocelyn Bell Burnell contributed to the discovery of the Pulsar—an advance in astrophysics for which her supervisor received the Nobel Prize. Also an astrophysicist, Arthur Eddington discovered the limits of luminosity, and was also a leading interpreter of

Einstein's general theory of relativity. William Allen founded the Pharmaceutical Society of Britain, and John Eliot Howard contributed to the development of quinine—a leading advance in the fight against malaria. In medicine, John Fothergill made advances in the discovery of the smallpox vaccine, and John Coakley Lettsom founded the Medical Society of London. The first care facility for the mentally ill—the Retreat of York—was founded by William Tuke in 1796. Friends in America had earlier established the Pennsylvania Hospital, and following the pattern of Tuke, Thomas Scattergood established the Friends Asylum for the Insane in Philadelphia a couple of decades later. Joseph Fry produced soaps as a means of furthering hygiene, and Joseph Lister advanced antiseptic surgery and other breakthroughs in preventive medicine.

Joseph Jackson Lister (father of Joseph) made advances in the development of the microscope, and his Quaker fellow microscope researcher, Thomas Hodgkin, discovered the blood disease that came to bear his name. Thomas Tampion and George Graham produced clocks and instruments of precision, and the Darlington and Stockton Railway was known as “the Quaker line.” Quaker biscuit makers, such as Huntley and Palmer's, made food products that were both nutritious and convenient. Quaker chocolate firms such as Rowntree, Cadbury, and Terry provided cocoa-based alternatives to more addictive products. Quakers also advanced justice causes, ranging from the abolition of slavery to prison reform to women's suffrage, and Levi Coffin was called “the President of the Underground Railroad.” In addition to providing humane working conditions for their employees, Quaker industrialists also built model living communities for their workers such as Bessbrooke in Northern Ireland and Bournville in England. Quakers far outnumbered comparative populations in the Royal Society of scientists in Britain,<sup>1</sup> and much of the disproportionate featuring of Quakers among leaders in innovation and discovery roots in a robust sense of God's truth being accessible and welcoming to all.

In reflection on why Quakers have been instrumental far beyond their number in innovation and discovery, the spiritual character of truth and an interest in its discernment clearly plays a role, involving several elements. First, seeking and minding the truth is seen as central to the human-divine relationship, and a belief that Christ is present, seeking to lead people into truth, is seen as a genuine reality. Second, an integrated worldview sees all realms—physical, social, emotional, and intellectual—as spiritual and connected to each other. Therefore, rather than separate one form of knowing from others, a comprehensive approach to truth-seeking brings various modes of inquiry together in unified ways. Third, a sense of vocation and mission has resulted in frugal uses of resources, often reinvesting

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<sup>1</sup> Raistrick (1968) sees the number of Quakers in the Royal Society as forty times higher than comparative populations in British society. Many of the examples listed above, as well as many others, can be found in his important book.

assets in ways that engender missional advance rather than frivolous waste. Fourth, convictions that humans are equal in the eyes of God has led to showing extra care for laborers and their families, leading to welfare concerns, which also have produced greater health and well-being, contributing also to worker satisfaction and productivity. Fifth, in minimizing involvements in industries contributing to war efforts and harmful ventures, Friends have found themselves uncovering unforeseen venues of service and work, leading to prosperity as a result of adversity. In these and other ways, Friends have been extensively involved in the quest for truth and the venture of discovery within the modern era, although challenges of the present age persist.

### 3. On Knowing and Being Known—Truth and Transformation

Despite impressive advances in science and technology, the modern age faces and ever-growing new set of challenges. On one hand, the human capacity to do good continues to grow, but so does the human capacity to harm. And, while new discoveries of energy and technology use emerge, natural resources continue to be diminished, creating concerns regarding the environment and the right sharing of global resources. Further, while objective approaches to truth have led to impressive advances in our understanding of truth, truth is beyond mere facticity (Küng, 415-16). Therefore, personal understandings of truth must accompany other measures. Parker Palmer (1983) addresses this great incongruity of the modern era, displaying the contradictory tension between people's belief that things are getting worse in society at large, while at the same time feeling that their lives are moving toward progress and success. Within that existential tension lies the conviction that technology and progress will continue to problem-solve, making things better even while new and more complex problems continue to arise. Further, the fact that modern approaches to truth have been by-and-large effective contributes to the leveraging of positions and views bolstered by appeals to scientific authority, sometimes in forcible ways. As a result, the myth of progress itself is called into question, and multiple perspectives on important issues call into question singular, modernistic answers to contemporary questions.

Rather than simply resort to postmodern relativism, however, Palmer offers a spiritual basis for conducting the modern quest for truth. After all, truth is indeed objectively known—making use of sensate facts and empirical measures, but truth is also subjectively known—making use of sensible impressions and aesthetic measures. If indeed all truth is God's truth, the forced dichotomy of only-the-facts reasoning versus conscience-based reflection must be rejected. With Blaise Pascal, "The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing." And, with Paul Tillich, God's truth ever transcends existence; it also includes essence and being.

Therefore, modern approaches to truth must include subjective and personal realms of knowledge as well as objective and abstract realms of knowledge. To



embrace one of truth's features but not the other is to limit oneself to a skewed understanding of the truth, leading to a fragmented approach to life. This is where a spirituality of education makes a pivotal contribution.

Believing that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life (Jn. 14:6) and that all truth is liberating (Jn. 8:32), when God chose to reveal Godself to humanity, this was done in the form of a person, not an abstract code, form, or principle. Therefore, God's saving-revealing Word—God's self-communication to humanity—is, in biblical terms, conveyed in the form of a living, breathing, human being. In the person of Jesus Christ we see most clearly the truth of God's character, goodness, and love. Put otherwise, if Jesus as the Christ is to be equated with truth, as one comes closer to the truth one comes closer to Christ; and, as one comes closer to Christ one comes closer to the truth. Further, while Jesus is the light of the world (Jn. 8:12; 9:5), the light of Christ is universally availed to all people (Jn. 1:9), availing access to God's saving-revealing truth across cultures, epochs, and even religions. Thus, the reason that Jesus is the only means of access to the Father in John 14:6 is not a factor of divine regulation. Rather, it is a result of the fact that no one has seen God at any time—except for the one who is at the Father's side. This one reveals the love of the Father to the world, full of grace and truth (Jn. 1:18). The tendency of humans, of course, is to trust in their own devices and initiative, but the only hope for the world is the divine initiative, inviting a response of faith to what God has done and is doing, in revealing life-producing truth to the world.

The implications of Christ being the way, the truth, and the life are therefore several. First, if Christ and truth are to be embraced together, truth is informed as Christomorphic; truth is understood in the form of Jesus as the Christ. Therefore, in the self-sacrificial way of Jesus—in his healing work, his embracing the outcast, his challenging of legal and formal measures of righteousness, his centered approach to God's laws, his emphasis on the dynamic character of God's reign—the loving ways of God are known. Perhaps even the laws of the universe cohere with God's truth revealed in the incarnation, as receiving life results from its release, positions among the first and the last are often reversed, and the ways one would wish to be treated pose a fitting pattern for how one should be willing to treat others. In loving one's enemies, spirals of violence are ended, and new possibilities for a peaceful world emerge; in the feeding and clothing of others, believers become partners with God in the meeting of the world's needs; in forgiving readily, even before it is requested, reconciliation happens and relationships are restored. In this way, a Christomorphic approach to truth assists in both the pursuit and the discernment of truth.

A second feature of embracing truth and Christ together is that one's understanding of Christ is *alētheic*—rooted in the truth. Over a thousand years ago, Anselm of Canterbury posed an ontological argument for the existence of God:



God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived. If something is greater than God, then it must be considered God—by definition. However, authority in the modern age is not a matter of greatness; it is a matter of veracity—truth. Therefore, an alethic proof or approach to the existence of God is to affirm that God is that than which nothing truer can be conceived. Therefore, if science really does lead one to truth, that principle or insight will not be at odds with one's understanding of God, as revealed in Jesus as the Christ. Likewise, if art, music, or nature lead one to glimpse the beauty and glory of God, one's knowledge of the one through whom the created order came into being is thus magnified in its appreciation. If truth is Christ and Christ is truth, religion has no need to fear science; the question is whether it is good and solid science rather than an inconclusive venture. Therefore, God's book of nature is drawn into dialogue with God's book of scripture, as both point to and reflect God's truth in Jesus as the Christ.

A third feature of seeing Christ and truth as one and the same is that our calling to be seekers is transformed as we ourselves become open to transformation. Therefore, it is not only we who seek the truth in our spiritual and educational quests, but if the truth is personal and dynamic in Christ-centered ways, it is also the truth that seeks us out. Therefore, in our learning ventures, the focus not only revolves around the question of how we might know the truth, but how we might also be open to being known by the truth. Or, as the Apostle Paul puts it: "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known." (1 Cor. 13:12) This involves a Christocentric double search; it is not only we who seek the truth, but Christ, through the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, also simultaneously seeks us (Jones, R. 1906). In that sense, we seek the truth ... until by it we are found. This involves personal transformation.

#### 4. Truth and Liberation

As Jesus said to his followers in days of old, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (Jn. 8:21-32). But what did he mean by that, and how does truth function in liberating ways? Indeed, within the context of John's narrative, discussions with religious leaders revolve around judging by human standards instead of being open to revelation. The Jewish leaders are offended that Jesus has performed a healing on the Sabbath, and yet Jesus points out that if circumcision is carried out on the Sabbath (for the health and wellbeing of the recipient), why not welcome the healing of the whole person rather than just a part (Jn. 5:1-18; 7:19-23)? This leads to debates about Moses and the Law; if Moses wrote about keeping the Sabbath, did he not also predict that God would raise up a prophet like him, who would speak not his own words, but God's words (Ex. 20:8-11; Deut. 18:15-22; Jn. 5:45-

46)? On the last day of the Jerusalem feast, Jesus promises that people will receive the Holy Spirit, and that out of their innermost being will flow rivers of living water; this evokes debates over whether Jesus might be the predicted prophet and what sort of a spokesperson for God the Messiah might be. Surely he cannot be a prophet from Galilee; the Messiah comes from David's town—Bethlehem (Jn. 7:37-52). In these conventional ways of conceiving of God's workings, religious leaders have it wrong. To embrace God's illuminative work through the revelational work of the Son is to know the truth and to be liberated by it.

Truth also liberates persons in other ways, as well. Personally, to see ourselves as we really are—imperfect yet embraced, fallen yet loved, contingent yet sustained—is a powerfully humbling reality. As the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, leads people into truth about themselves and their authentic condition, we are convicted of sin as well as righteousness (Jn. 16:8). We see how short our best endeavors go, and yet we glimpse a renewed sense of calling as to how we are to be. Friends have called this personal process of transformation “convincement.” Rather than converting to religion (or, in the Apostle Paul's case, being converted away from religion and becoming a follower of Jesus, Ac. 9), a life-changing encounter with God's truth about ourselves leads to a humbled place of dependence on God, which is followed by receiving the gift of grace—God's undeserved love—which is impossible to imagine without divine revelation. So, personal transformation is the first order of truth's liberating power, and by it humanity is invited into convincement whereby one receives the gift of God's grace, and through the Holy Spirit the empowerment to live into the implications of that transformative reality. This is what it means to be born from above (Jn. 3:5).

Truth also liberates humanity in terms of worship. As we are afforded but a glimpse of the truth about God, we cannot do other but to be drawn into worshipful praise and adoration. That being the case, authentic worship is independent of place or form. It is in neither Samaria nor Jerusalem; it must be in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:21-24). Further, praising God is not a gimmick employed in order to appease the Divine Being, nor a device to be used in order to evoke a personal feeling. It is the only conceivable spontaneous response to glimpsing the truth of God's beauty, grandeur, and love—indeed, the only imaginable result of having encountered the presence of God. Therefore, praise and adoration are the truest responses to the truth of who God is and what God has done. Worship is thus impressive as well as expressive. In terms of impression, we seek to focus on the divine presence and to receive from God but a glimpse of what God's presence is like and what we are therefore called to do in response. In terms of expression, our sharing a message or even a song of praise puts into words the joys of the heart to be celebrated in community with others. This expression, however, continues

throughout the week, as the transformed life of the worshiper is inspired and empowered in ministry as a result.

Seeing the truth of the other lies also at the core of Christian ministry, as ministry ever involves identifying a human need and going about seeking to meet that need, energized and empowered by the love of Christ. In that sense, ministry will involve programs, but at the root of program and personal effectiveness is seeing the truthful condition of the other. In our conventional world people get put into impersonal categories based on gender, ethnicity, social status, and other false measures of being. As a result, it becomes all too easy to fail to see the authentic condition and need of the other—worse yet, to resist the other as alien rather than seeing all of God's children as they really are, members of the same human family. Therefore, seeing the other in truth and love rips us loose from our dehumanizing categorizations, allowing us to see the authentic state and condition of the other. And, when that happens, we can no longer remain indifferent to human suffering or need; we must spring into social action and ministry as a means of addressing and meeting the needs of the other. Thus, seeing the truth of the other liberates our perspective, and it becomes a call to ministry as persons are rehumanized by the loving truth of Christ at work within the lives of his friends.

The way of truth also liberates leaders, then, in seeking to address the world's needs in ways that are in keeping with the loving way of Christ and the truthful character of God's reign. Because Jesus' kingdom is one of truth, disciples cannot fight to further it (Jn. 18:36). Therefore, neither the truth nor God's reign can be established by violent means, and those who attempt such transgress the ways of God. God's goodness and truth can never be furthered by violent or evil means, and there is never a time where there are no alternatives to violence. Rather, given that conflicts and challenges will always be present realities, the key to discernment-oriented leadership is to remember that people are not the problem; the problem is the problem. What effective leaders do is to draw various parties together around the common task of problem solving, seeking to discern the truth about the character of the challenge as well as potential ways forward. Believing that God is also at work, seeking to lead people into truth and sometimes even unforeseen solutions, organizing individuals and groups around the common task of understanding the truth of an issue, as well as what should be done individually and collectively in addressing it, is the better part of all effective leadership. In these and other ways, discerning, knowing, and obeying the truth is liberating indeed.

##### 5. The Meeting for Worship in which Learning is Welcome

The central conviction of George Fox and the early Friends is that *Christ is come to teach his people himself*. Does that conviction, however, apply only to the meeting for worship, or does it extend also to the common ventures of life—even the workplace, the research lab, and the classroom? Put otherwise, perhaps it is



best to see these and other contexts as settings of worship, into which the unceasing prayer of the friend of Jesus seeks both to discern the will of the Master and also to carry it out. If that is the case, if every setting into which one enters is seen as a context of worship, prayerful preparation for and participation in that context will have transformed one's perspective as well as one's demeanor and being. Perhaps this is what George Fox was getting at when he counselled Friends in 1656:

Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.

In the workplace, seeking to abide in the truth and to serve the truth affects the ways one sees one's service to others. Therefore, in business, charging a fair and set price for goods lets the customer know what to expect. When early Friends put such convictions into practice, even against some customary practices, a child could be sent to the Quaker merchant to buy a loaf of bread because that merchant could be trusted. Also, seeking to serve customers well, and truthfully, insures the business man or woman will work extra hard in fair treatment of one's clients; the bottom line is not financial profit but authentic and meaningful serving of the other. As Friends have put such values into practice, their businesses have been well patronized (not surprisingly!), and caring for the welfare of workers and their families has insured loyalty and commitment, which paradoxically have tended to contribute to long term financial buoyancy as a result. It is said that Quakers went to Philadelphia to do good ... and they did well. If such is ever the case, serving the truth in the workplace is a key factor in such an outcome, though not its motivation.

Within the research lab, the library, and the field of study, a commitment to seeking and embracing the truth is the keystone of scientific discovery and academic authority. Although such an endeavor is not couched in religious terms—and indeed the results of one's inquiry should be evident to all regardless of religious persuasion or the lack thereof—study and research are deeply spiritual endeavors, rooted in the quest for truth. In that sense, prayer-imbued inquiry lies at the heart of many a scientist's lab work, and field study is conducted at its best when it is open to new glimpses of truth above and beyond accepted measures of it. Further, it may be that the greatest single factor in the phenomenology of genius is less a matter of one's intelligence quotient and more a result of sustained fascination and curiosity. Many brilliant minds fail to launch world-changing discoveries; many world-changing discoveries, though, are stumbled upon by

deeply curious inquirers into truth, who are captivated by an issue or a problem, and who invest boundless energy and focus in seeking to find plausible ways forward. Perhaps discovery is itself a matter of God's revealing and disclosing work. And, a great feature of academic and scientific discourse is that personalities, programs, and platforms are finally insignificant; the single determinative factor is the degree to which a theory approximates and conveys the truth.

Within the classroom, how do we as instructors facilitate attending to, discerning, and heeding the leadership of Christ, the Present Teacher, who desires to lead his followers into liberating truth by means of the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth? That venture implies spiritual preparation for learning, inside and outside of the classroom, but the corporate setting of learning itself should be seen as a meeting for worship in which learning is welcome. If such is the case, the meeting should be prepared for and participated in authentically and prayerfully, and teachers should create the space within the classroom for truth to be caught as well as taught. Therefore, moments of silence or pauses for reflection are not "dead spaces" to be avoided in the flow of a lecture or discussion; rather, they may be among the most important elements of a class session, for therein are glimpses of insight most fruitfully garnered and gathered. Further, insights into truth may come from students as well as teachers and their texts, as they too are involved in primary research into the subject. As all features of a subject are engaged experientially and theoretically, it is often the case that fresh eyes and ears contribute fresh insights and questions whence better answers come. And, as impressions are weighed analytically and critically, the most important benefit of a class may be developing the skills and wisdom to make sound and compelling judgments—being deepened in wisdom and discernment. Therefore, when the classroom is seen as a meeting for worship in which learning is welcome, the goal of the instructor is not simply to be heard or believed; the goal of all truth-oriented instruction is to facilitate the work of the Present Teacher in and beyond a given subject in service to the advancement of truth and the healing of the world.

### Conclusion

As the quest for truth is the primary charism of the modern era, this quest is essentially a spiritual venture rather than a solely academic one. The quest for truth involves subjects as well as objects, and while our capacities to know are limited—seeing through a glass darkly—in the world beyond we hope to see things face to face, as they really are. We also serve a God who would be known, and who at many times and in many ways has been disclosing the divine will to humanity, revealed with time-changing clarity in the face of Jesus as the Christ. In looking at Jesus the character and way of the Father are revealed, and in embracing the will and direction of Christ we become his friends and partners in his ongoing healing and redemptive work. And yet, as Friends have believed and as scripture testifies,

the light of Christ shines beyond the limitations of time, space, culture, and faith traditions, and in that sense is at work as a universal reality leading people into truth if they will but be receptive and responsive to the divine word, wisdom, and light. This is where a befriending of the truth finds its most transformative and liberating effect. As followers of Jesus seek to discern the truth and abide in it, that witness invites others into a fellowship of discernment and radical discipleship.

And yet, the desire to embrace this quest is itself a gift from beyond; it is not of ourselves, lest any should boast, for even the desire to know the truth is already an indication of grace extended and received. As Blaise Pascal put it in his *Pensees*: “Be of good cheer—you would not seek Me if you had not found Me.” In that sense, in the quest for truth, it is not only we who seek the truth, but the truth also seeks us ... for within a Christocentric double search, we seek the truth until we are found.

Discussion questions:

1. What is the sense of “truth” in the “Spirit of Truth” or “Truth of Christ” that is “conveyed directly to persons” and to which Christians “belong,” to which Paul Anderson refers in section 1 of his essay? Must we perceive of truth in a way that is broader, or deeper, than in its common, modern epistemological sense to understand how truth functioned for early Friends? If so, what might be the relationship between truth in this other sense and truth as we generally employ the term today?
2. Anderson provides both a review of, and a rationale for, a number of important contributions that Friends have made in a variety of fields. Might the Quaker view of truth, that has facilitated these works, also stand in the way of other kinds of developments and innovations, perhaps in areas not mentioned here? What might these be, and why? How does our sense of what we take truth to be affect what we seek when we seek truth, and consequently what we might find under this name?
3. According to this essay, what does the personal, incarnation of Truth in Jesus Christ provide us with regarding truth that truth revealed across abstract principles could not? How important are these aspects of truth to our lives?



4. The Biblical/Quaker idea that coming to know the truth is not only a matter of seeking it, but of being open to being found by it, is perhaps strange to modern ears. How would adopting and applying this notion change our relationship to truth? What implications would the adoption of such an idea have for our spiritual lives, our scientific work, and our day to day living?
5. Anderson claims that the “impersonal categories based on gender, ethnicity, social status, and other false measures of being” are often an impediment to our seeing “the authentic condition and need of the other,” and thus as a block to effective ministry. In what ways is Anderson’s claim valid, and in what ways is recognizing and acknowledging of these identity markers in others necessary to affirming and ministering to them as they are? (E.g., recognizing that certain racial minorities have been systematically oppressed might be part of the “truthful condition” of a member of such a minority.) How might we navigate this tension between individuals as individuals, and the belonging of individuals to certain categories of people, where the latter is a constitutive part of their individuality?
6. If we are to think of the classroom experience as “a meeting for worship in which learning is welcome,” as Anderson suggests, how would that change the way we teach and learn, and what different outcomes might we expect?