

7-2020

Chapter Two: Quaker Spirituality of Protestant Spiritual Traditions, Volume 2

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2. QUAKER SPIRITUALITY

INTRODUCTION: ARE QUAKERS PROTESTANT?

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) dates back to 1652 in England, a few years following a spiritual encounter George Fox (1624–1691) had with Jesus Christ after spending years seeking a deeper faith.¹ Of this experience, he reported in his *Journal*:

And when my hopes in [priests] and in all [people] were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could I tell what to do, then, Oh then, I heard a voice which said, 'There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition', and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy. Then the Lord did let me see why there was none upon the earth that could speak to my condition, namely, that I might give him all the glory; for all are concluded under sin, and shut up in unbelief as I had been, that Jesus Christ might have the pre-eminence, who enlightens, and gives grace, and faith, and power. Thus, when God doth work who shall let [prevent] it? And this I knew experimentally.²

Fox's experience forms the foundation for the Friends understanding of spirituality. It took place a full century after the events of the English Reformation and the formation of the Church of England, which had nominally been created alongside other Reformation churches due to perceived corruption in the Roman Catholic Church, which made possible the

1. This quote refers to an experience from 1647, but George Fox credits this experience as the turning point in his life, and it provided him the passion and certainty to preach the gospel, gathering seekers into what became a more solidified movement by 1652.

2. Fox, *Journal*, 11.

teaching of the priesthood of believers through the availability of the Bible in vernacular languages. While these reforms also contributed to the onset of Quakerism, the fact that England had already been “reformed” begs the question of whether or not Friends can be truly categorized as Protestant. Given that this essay appears in a volume on Protestant spirituality, it is important to address this question, and then turn to a description of the spirituality of this denomination.

The debate over whether or not Quakers should be categorized as Protestant rages among scholars in Quaker studies as well, although the question is generally posed in the form of original influences on early Quaker leaders. Scholars differ about whether Quakerism grew out of Puritanism,³ or whether it appeared as a mystical tradition, springing up through spiritual inspiration rather than as a logical evolution of thinking from one group to the next.⁴ A third viewpoint sees Quakerism as prophetic, combining mystical personal experience of Jesus Christ and connection to the biblical call for justice through love.⁵ This third understanding combines the other two, seeing Friends as participants in furthering the Reformation, as well as showing similarities to mystical traditions to which they are not directly connected except by biblical and spiritual ties.

On the one hand, early Friends can be clearly categorized as Protestants: it is a historically Christian group that is not Orthodox or Catholic, and that emerged in a country that had previously been part of the Western church. The Friends movement’s leaders were concerned about abuses of church polity and practice that they felt did not reflect the truth they found in Scripture. Reading the Bible themselves, due to the historical moment in which the printing press and translation of the Bible into vernacular languages made this possible for the average literate English speaker, Friends were able to reflect on what it means to be a follower of Christ, rather than receiving that information only through the mediation of a priest. Like other Protestant groups, early Friends de-emphasized salvation through the sanctioned church hierarchy and instead focused on personal faith, the grace of God, and the importance of Scripture.⁶ Friends ideas sound more similar to the Radical Reformation groups on the European Continent a century earlier than to the Magisterial Reformation groups, but in the sense that all these groups were responding to similar sociohistorical factors and seeking a more

3. Barbour, *Quakers in Puritan England*.

4. Brinton and Bacon, *Friends for 350 Years*.

5. Benson, “Comments on ‘Protestant Quakerism.’”

6. The five *solas* that came to define the heart of the Protestant groups emerging from the Magisterial Reformation were consistent with the theology of early Friends.

faithful expression of Christianity than they saw in the established churches of their day, Friends are clearly a Protestant group.⁷

On the other hand, Friends were protesting the Protestants, so they are one layer removed from the main Protestant Reformation. They took the ideals of the Magisterial Reformation to the extreme: rather than nationalizing the church hierarchy, as did the Lutherans, Anglicans, and Presbyterians, they removed the hierarchy entirely. Priesthood of all believers is a hallmark of the Protestant Reformation, but Friends extended it to the preacherhood of all believers, believing that God can and does speak through anyone, not only through those ordained by the proper church authorities.⁸ Additionally, Friends called their movement “primitive Christianity revived,” seeing themselves not as a continuation of a faithful portion of the Roman Catholic Church, but as reaching back through the intervening centuries to put into practice the kind of movement they saw among the very first generations of Christ-followers.⁹

Similarly to some groups in the Radical Reformation, Friends took Jesus at his word regarding the Sermon on the Mount’s call to peacemaking, not swearing oaths, and so forth. Friends rejected tying their faith to a specific government or nation, and have since been dubbed one of the historic peace churches. They see commitment to peace as a return to early church tradition, removing themselves from the stream of church traditions linked with state-sponsored churches and religious wars. Given their commitment to peace, it has been important for Friends in some parts of the world to identify as neither Catholic nor Protestant. In Northern Ireland, for example, their third-party status helped Friends create neutral zones where politicians and other leaders could come together to ease the conflict called the Troubles, which occurred between religious-political groups in twentieth-century Ireland.¹⁰

7. Barbour, *Quakers in Puritan England*.

8. I have to thank a seminary professor, James C. Deming, for this phrase, “preach-erhood of all believers,” when he was describing Quakers to our church history class at Princeton Theological Seminary in 2006. I thought it described well the way Friends take Protestant concepts to the extreme.

9. William Penn chose *Primitive Christianity Revived in the Faith and Practice of the People Called Quakers* as the title for his 1696 book.

10. Friends in Northern Ireland created the Ulster Quaker Service Committee, which helped families in danger due to conflict between two sides: on the one hand, Catholics and the Irish Republican Army; and on the other hand, Protestants and the government of the United Kingdom. Along with Friends in Great Britain, Irish Friends offered Quaker House Belfast as a neutral space where representatives from various sides could gather to try to come to workable solutions. Irish Friends also hosted Quaker Cottage, which brought wives of men from all sides together to get to know one

Perhaps the most important trait that sets Friends apart from other Protestant groups is the emphasis on personal and corporate listening to the Present Teacher, Jesus Christ speaking to and through individuals and gathered communities as they discern together by attending to the Holy Spirit. Other Protestant groups argued with Catholics and one another regarding the real presence of Christ in the communion elements and in the preaching of the Word. While Friends agree that Christ can and does appear to followers through bread, wine, water, and Scripture, early Friends claimed to have experienced Christ themselves—not in a mediated experience through a priest, sacraments, or the written Word, but directly: through the Living Word. Like George Fox, mentioned above, other Friends too knew “one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition,” and this they knew “experimentally.”¹¹

Although Friends form a unique denomination with some differences from the rest of the Protestant family, I do believe they fit in this volume on Protestant spiritual traditions, and they are better classified as Protestant than as belonging to any other major branch of Christian tradition. First of all, they share a sociocultural history with the rest of the Western church, and though they pushed Reformation ideas further than the original Reformers, they were continuing in the same direction as the main thrust of the reforms that affected Europe in the centuries prior to their emergence. Second, Friends ideas helped shape the denominations emerging later, as further waves of reform occurred in the Awakenings and revivals of centuries to come. (For example, as will be explained below, ideas about personal experience of God became commonplace in later centuries.) Third, while direct ties of influence are few linking the Radical Reformation peace church denominations to the Friends movement, the theological similarities to groups both earlier and later show that Friends ideas emerged in large part due to reading the Bible, and listening to the same Spirit at work in individuals from Bible times and their own time.

In the mid-seventeenth century, many pockets of loosely affiliated groups—including the Seekers, Ranters, Diggers, and Levellers—were expressing dissatisfaction with the dead and meaningless ritual they felt characterized the Church of England. These groups sought a deeper expression of their faith: a faithfulness that meant something—that would transform them.

another and hear one another's stories, and offered programming for their children as a respite and to help them build relationships with those from the other communities at a young age. By being perceived as neither Catholic nor Protestant, Friends have been able to do this ongoing work.

11. By which they mean experientially. Fox, *Journal*, 11.

George Fox proclaimed, "Christ has come to teach his people himself."¹² This radical notion of the direct spiritual encounter with the Risen Christ struck a chord with many in these disenchanted groups, and a powerful movement of these individuals claiming to be led by the Holy Spirit emerged in the English countryside in the second half of the seventeenth century, spreading to the so-called New World. Rejecting the need for physical sacraments or church-ordained priests, calling for equitable treatment of all regardless of social station, and inviting all into a radically transformed community, this group of Protestants to the Protestants formed a tradition based firmly on spiritual experience, rooted in the Judeo-Christian scriptural story of a God of love and a Prince of Peace.

VARIETIES OF QUAKERS

To tell of Quaker spirituality is to tell the story of Friends as a movement, beginning as a confluence of different people experiencing holy dissatisfaction, united in one Spirit, and later branching into streams of tradition with varying forms and theologies. Friends began as a group strongly identifying with Jesus, selecting the denominational name based on Jesus' designation of his disciples as "friends" in John 15:12–17.¹³ They attempted to live as followers of Christ rather than followers of the traditions that had grown up in his name. Early Friends gathered in homes, barns, and fields, waiting upon God to speak to and through them: the church was the people and not the building, and no matter where they gathered, they trusted Christ to be with them. From this practice, meetings for worship in the manner of Friends began in silent listening. George Fox would wait to begin preaching until he felt absolutely certain it was the right time, when the Spirit was moving powerfully in him and in those gathered.¹⁴

Over time, a form of waiting worship emerged, in which Friends gathered in silence, listening together for Christ to speak. During waiting worship, a Friend may feel the Spirit prompting them to share a message

12. This was a catchphrase of Fox's. He often used this phrase (or a variation) when he preached in new towns. Fox, *Journal*, 304; see also Fox, *Journal*, 8, 48, 80, 90, 98, 104, 107, 112, 149, 236.

13. It is less clear how Friends received their nickname, Quakers, but tradition says it was originally a pejorative term given to them by those who opposed their teachings, either because Fox instructed Justice Bennett to quake before the Lord when Fox was on trial before Bennett (Fox, *Journal*, ch. 4), or because Friends quaked in the presence of God (Fox, *Journal*, ch. 8).

14. E.g., Fox, *Journal*, ch. 10.

with the group; other times, the meeting for worship passes in silence with all Friends listening inwardly and communing together.

In the early decades of the movement, gathering together for worship outside the Anglican Church was illegal, and Friends were imprisoned for worshipping together, as well as for speaking against the teachings of the Anglican Church. Friends were also imprisoned for not offering hat honor—tipping or doffing one's hat—to those of higher stations (as was customary), acknowledging biblical statements about the equality of all people in the Spirit, such as Gal 3:28 and 1 Cor 12:13. When Friends were placed on trial for these actions, they refused to swear oaths in court, obedient to Jesus' instructions in Matt 5:33–37. Therefore, Friends were held in contempt of court and imprisoned.¹⁵ They felt Christ calling them to live faithfully the radical equality through love they saw exemplified in Jesus and his early followers, and to be transformed by the Spirit into the body of Christ (Rom 12). Due to their actions of civil disobedience and time in prison, Friends became early advocates for prison reform and for changes in laws relating to freedom of assembly and religion.

Friends' reading of Scripture, time spent in silent waiting on God to speak to them individually and collectively, and emphasis on following the letter and Spirit of Jesus' words relating to active love of neighbor and enemy led them to engage in social and political action. Their contemplative spirituality did not stop with an inward experience in a meeting for worship, but led them to evangelize about their faith, led them to disobey unjust laws and suffer the consequences in order to draw attention to injustice, and led them to allow women and laypeople to speak and preach.

After an initial explosion in numbers during the seventeenth century, based on Friends' enthusiastic witness to Christ speaking to people himself, eighteenth-century Friends gatherings were characterized by what today is often called Quietism.¹⁶ Friends emphasized proper order in members' lives and in the conduct of corporate worship and business, and vocal messages in meeting became frowned upon. Marrying outside the community was discouraged, and outward marks of one's adherence to community standards

15. Moore, "Seventeenth-Century Context."

16. This period of Quietism is viewed both positively and negatively by scholars, who note that it was an important time when the practice of inward listening and corporate discernment was well honed, Friends' systems of organization became established, and some groups of Friends were able to do a good deal of helpful social action. Women were able to continue to speak and offer leadership in a variety of ways. Some scholars (including myself) lament the move from a more passionate expression of radical faith in the seventeenth century to a more controlled worship form and community in the eighteenth. Dandelion, *Introduction to Quakerism*, 53–79. Healey, "Quietist Quakerism, 1692—c. 1805," 47–48.

were codified in books of discipline. While Friends maintained a worship practice focused on inward spiritual reflection, it was expressed in a much more staid and rational fashion than the previous century's combination of contemplation and action.¹⁷

However, some Friends continued to listen to the Present Teacher and encourage Friends to act in novel ways, in line with and expanding earlier Friends' understanding of equality: these included John Woolman (1720–1772), Anthony Benezet (1713–1784), and others who urged Friends to abolish slavery.¹⁸ Woolman, whose journal is now seen as a classic piece of American literature from his time, felt increasingly convicted by the Spirit to not participate in the slave trade in any way. He refused to write wills that passed on slaves as an inheritance, only purchased products that did not require slave labor, and began traveling to Friends meetings up and down the Eastern Seaboard to share his message of abolition, eventually traveling to England under this concern, and dying there in 1772. If Woolman stayed at the home of a slaveholder, he often stayed in the slave quarters and paid the slaves for their work on his behalf.¹⁹

At first Friends attempted to change internal Friends policy and the moral understanding of individuals regarding slavery, appealing to the consciences of individuals and to biblical passages on equality. As the abolition movement grew, Friends and others joined collective efforts to boycott products made using slave labor, petitioning governments in speech and writing to change laws about slavery. Though abolition was not a consistent belief among Friends, many of the important abolitionists from the mid-1700s through the American Civil War were (or had been) Quaker.²⁰

17. Trueblood, *People Called Quakers*.

18. They were not the first Friends to oppose slavery: the first petition to end slavery in the Colonies appeared in Germantown Friends Meeting in 1688, but Friends at the local level could not agree to recommend it on to the quarterly and yearly meetings. A few Friends continued to speak out against slavery in the intervening decades before Woolman, Benezet, and others began seeing some momentum building among Friends for abolition, following Woolman's tract *Some considerations on the keeping of Negroes*, and Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's *Epistle of Caution and Advice, concerning the Buying and Keeping of Slaves* (probably written by Woolman, Benezet, or both) in 1754. See also Cazden, "Quakers, Slavery, Anti-Slavery, and Race"; Moulton, "Introduction," 12–13. For Woolman's tract *Some considerations on the keeping of Negroes*, see Woolman, *Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, 198–209. For Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's *Epistle of Caution and Advice*, see Bryn Mawr College's website: http://tritych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/1544/.

19. Woolman, *Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, 58–60.

20. Cazden, "Quakers, Slavery, Anti-Slavery, and Race." Friends were sometimes disowned for their abolitionist stances, so although it is clear that many Friends saw abolition of slavery as a natural outgrowth of Friends beliefs, their voices were often in

Quakerism influenced and was influenced by the Great Awakenings in England and its colonies, which eventually became the United States, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Changes in broader Protestant beliefs and practices impacted intra-Quaker relations. The first real schism among Friends occurred in 1827, between Hicksite and Orthodox Friends—between followers of the ideas of Elias Hicks (1748–1830) and Joseph John Gurney (1788–1847).

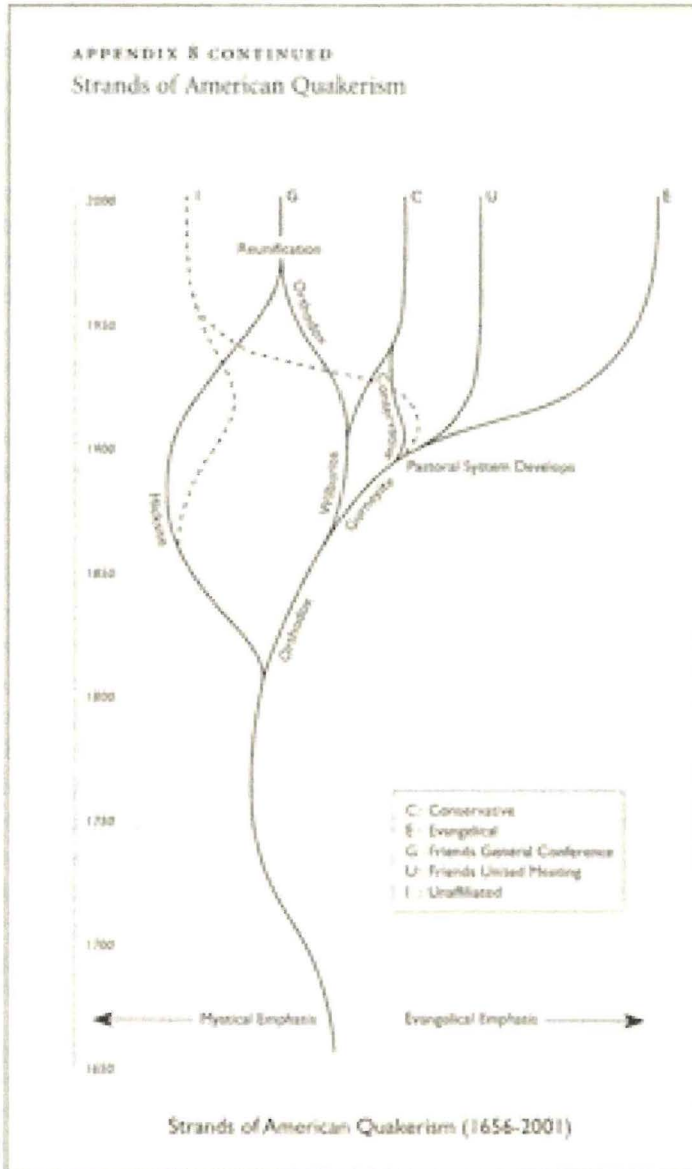
While many factors impacted this split, a major point of contention was the Friends understanding of the Inward Light and the divinity of Jesus, a controversy that was an ongoing source of debate, first appearing in the Keithian controversy in the late seventeenth century.²¹ Friends had previously maintained a precarious balance between an almost mystical experience of spirituality and identification with the same God spoken of in the Bible. Hicks understood Jesus as a human being who had lived a perfect life and had therefore been adopted as the Christ, while Gurney and other Orthodox Friends identified more fully with a Nicene interpretation of Jesus as a coequal part of the Godhead.²² Hicksite Friends disagreed with the Gurneyite emphasis on right belief and focused more on living like Jesus rather than on measuring one's faithfulness based on a profession of sound doctrine. Orthodox Friends feared Quakerism would lose its central tenet of Christ coming to speak to people himself if the connection between listening worship and the biblical Jesus was not stated clearly. Both considered themselves the rightful heirs of Quakerism, but looking back on that time period, it can be seen that both were correct and also both were missing a piece of the historical Friends witness. Holding concurrently the inward experience of the Light of Christ and a connection to the biblical tradition were central to the message and experience of early Friends. In the 1827 split, one branch of Friends became more focused on legalism and dogma than the original denomination, while the other branch became enamored

the minority in their day. Disagreements about the speed of abolition and responsibility of Friends to change national laws also divided Friends in the nineteenth century. Many also struggled to include freed slaves and others of African descent in the life of their meetings. See McDaniel and Juley, *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship*.

21. The first such split in Quakerism is termed the Keithian controversy and occurred in the late seventeenth century, when George Keith—though he believed the Spirit continues to speak to us internally in what Friends call the Inward Light—expressed disagreement with the way Friends practice the Inward Light. Keith noted with concern that the authority of this inward sensibility could too easily be given primacy over God and Christ in the Bible and the history of the church. See Keith, *Some Reasons and Causes of the Late Separation*.

22. Dandelion, *Introduction to Quakerism*, 83–91.

with personal experience as more important than accountability to the Judeo-Christian tradition.



Strands of American Quakerism (1656-2001), from Pacific Yearly Meeting's Faith & Practice (2001), Appendix 8, used by permission.

In a later section, the direct connections between Friends and the Methodist and Holiness movements will be described. It is important to note that as Friends experienced the Great Awakenings, coordinated with people from other Protestant denominations in movements for abolition and women's rights, and moved across the newly formed United States with the frontier, Friends' understanding of spirituality reflected these sociocultural influences. In the late nineteenth century, some Friends groups began hiring pastors and holding services with music and planned sermons. These groups were often the only church options in small frontier communities. New arrivals in these towns, especially if they had been converted during revival meetings just before moving west, found themselves more comfortable in churches with pastoral leadership. They wanted to understand their faith more fully, so they needed pastors to educate them.

In the twentieth century, four distinct groups of Quakers emerged, with a fifth branch of independent yearly meetings (see Fig. 1).²³ These four groups are called Conservative, Evangelical Friends Church International, Friends United Meeting, and Friends General Conference. Friends in each of these groups hold different theological positions and practice a variety of worship styles.

Conservative Friends are so called because they profess to hold most closely to the original form of worship and beliefs of early Friends: they meet in silent worship, waiting for the Spirit to speak through one of the gathered members, and they are Christ centered, believing Jesus to be the Son of God as described in the Bible. They consider themselves to be more connected to the Orthodox branch of Friends than to the Hicksite branch, but they did not adopt the pastoral model along with other Orthodox Friends.²⁴ Conservative Friends make up the smallest branch of Quakers and are found in the United States and Canada. This group also continues to conserve some early practices of Friends, such as plain dress and plain speech. Therefore, they appear more similar to the Amish, Conservative Mennonites, and some branches of Brethren than they do to other Friends. Plain speech and dress are outward marks of the Friends testimonies of simplicity and equality.

23. The "Strands of American Quakerism" graphic is used by permission from the clerks of Pacific Yearly Meeting, granted by email June 16, 2019. See Pacific Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, *Faith and Practice*, 255 (appendix 8).

24. Orthodox Friends split into Gurneyite and Wilburite branches under the influence of John Wilbur (1774–1856) in the mid-nineteenth century. The Wilburites focused more strongly on the Quaker understanding of the Light of Christ than did the Gurneyites, who leaned more toward a position that resembled other Christian groups developing out of the Great Awakenings and the Holiness movement. Dandelion, *Introduction to Quakerism*, 92–101. Hamm, "Hicksite, Orthodox, and Evangelical Quakerism."

Friends United Meeting (FUM) descends from the Orthodox Friends viewpoint of Joseph John Gurney, and while FUM Friends focus on Jesus and the Bible, Friends in this group do not identify as closely with evangelicism, and they generally place a greater emphasis on their Quaker heritage than do more evangelical Friends. Most FUM meetings have pastors and have at least semiprogrammed²⁵ worship services, similar to other Protestant groups. FUM meetings do not practice physical sacraments, believing as did early Friends, that baptism by the Holy Spirit and communing together with the Inward Christ form the heart of these sacraments.²⁶ FUM conducts missionary work at the global level, and they also support education, social service, and peacemaking projects.

Evangelical Friends Church International (EFCI) formed through splits in the Orthodox Gurneyite branch in the early twentieth century due to the fundamentalist-modernist controversy in the broader culture. Friends groups that eventually became EFCI emphasized a more literal reading of Scripture, and groups that became FUM continued the Quaker practice of reading Scripture through the illumination of the Spirit. The Evangelical Friends tradition places Jesus at the center of its belief, and deemphasizes a connection to unique aspects of the Quaker tradition, though many still find their Friends heritage important. Their worship gatherings look very similar to those in other evangelical or nondenominational traditions. Many Evangelical Friends continue to not practice physical sacraments but instead to spend a few minutes in silence during their worship gatherings. This silence is called open worship and is for the purpose of communing with Christ together directly. It takes the place of serving communion elements in other churches.²⁷ Evangelical Friends tend to emphasize right doctrine, a stance differing from the early Friends' refusal to profess creeds.²⁸ Like other evangelicals, EFCI places great em-

25. Semiprogrammed services usually include twenty to thirty minutes of silent listening (open worship) and also may include music, Scripture reading, vocal prayer from a pastor or leader, and/or a brief message or sermon.

26. Some yearly meetings belong to both FGC and FUM. Jointly affiliated yearly meetings include both programmed and unprogrammed worshiping communities, and their members tend to be more Christian than Liberal Friends and more focused on Quaker beliefs and practices than some aligned solely with FUM and EFCI.

27. Some Evangelical Friends now practice baptism and communion using physical elements.

28. Early Friends felt that professing a creed made religion a matter of belief rather than experience. While they generally agreed with the content of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, they felt that it offered a limited understanding of what it means to be a friend of Jesus: we are Jesus' friends if we do what he commands, which is to love one another, not to state a list of beliefs.

phasis on personally accepting Jesus as one's Lord and Savior, living by the principles in the (Protestant) Bible, and sharing about one's faith with others in local settings and through global missions. The corporate work of EFCI focuses mainly on supporting missionaries.

Quakerism spread through missionary work in the twentieth century, particularly in East Africa and Latin America, and most Friends outside the United States and the United Kingdom are part of FUM or EFCI.²⁹ Most Friends worship services in Latin America and Africa more closely resemble services in Pentecostal churches than the still and quiet meetings for worship that Friends are associated with in England and the United States.

Friends General Conference (FGC) practices unprogrammed, silent worship, and many FGC members call themselves Liberal Friends. They focus on inward spiritual experience, and they also place importance on peace, social justice, and equality—emphases connecting them to earlier Friends. As descendants of the Hicksites, Liberal Friends do not necessarily believe in the divinity of Jesus, and some identify as Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Wiccan, or even agnostic or nontheist Friends. Since they do not emphasize belief in a particular doctrine but instead focus on individual and communal mystical union with the Divine, they do not do much in the way of evangelizing about their religion and do not engage in international missions work.

Each of these groups sees its spiritual practices as in line with the heritage of the Quaker tradition. Conservative Friends attempt to conserve the original form of Quakerism, and in so doing they look very similar in worship, dress, and speech to Quakers from earlier generations. They listen to the Present Teacher together in silence and attempt to live out what they hear as a community. FGC Liberal Friends feel that early Friends used Christ language because it was the language their culture used to describe spiritual experience, but they do not feel it is necessary to identify these spiritual experiences with Jesus. On the other hand, Evangelical Friends feel the most important insight of early Friends was a focus on personal experience of Jesus, a belief that has become common in evangelical circles. They focus mainly on this personal aspect of spiritual experience, and many do not connect as readily with the social activist tendencies of Friends. FUM sees itself as a middle ground between Liberal and Evangelical Friends, adapting with the times by becoming pastoral and engaging in programmed worship,

29. Individual unprogrammed meetings connected to Liberal Friends also exist in places other than North America and Europe, and the following yearly meetings are unprogrammed, Liberal Friends: Aotearoa/New Zealand; Australia; and Central and Southern Africa.

but holding to Friends beliefs and practices about the biblical Jesus and his call to lives of faithfulness that include social reform.

In the twenty-first century, a group called Convergent Friends has emerged, and several new splits have occurred among Friends. Though Convergent Friends are not affiliated with one another in any formal way, Friends from all branches feel they are *converging* on the heart of Quakerism. They find hope in connecting with one another in person and online to share about their attempts to live as faithful Quakers.³⁰ Institutional splits so far in the twenty-first century have occurred only nominally because of disagreements about the legitimacy of queer marriages and ministries. (Groups have withdrawn from or been forced out of EFCI and FUM yearly meetings and are so far independent.) The bigger factor in such separations has been disagreement about Scripture interpretation and about who holds authority among Friends.³¹ Often in these splits, one group has generally been more concerned with literal interpretations of Scripture and places a focus on being Christian before identifying with the Quaker heritage. The other group holds strongly to the Quaker heritage of the inward experience of the Light of Christ and of the Spirit as an interpreter of biblical truth. Many members of this second group identify with Convergent Friends and express a spirituality of inward experience and outward action, deemphasizing literalistic Scripture interpretations and emphasizing the law of love.

This history is instructive for understanding the spirituality of Friends across time and today because the origins and splits showcase a conversation among Friends about the group's identity. Is the central characteristic of Quakerism the form of worship in silence or the practice of social justice activism? Is it an emphasis on personal spiritual experience, and is it important that the spiritual experience is understood to be an encounter with the God of the Christian Bible? Does the Bible have ultimate authority to set right beliefs and practices, or does the Spirit speaking to us today? How does one approach biblical interpretation? With so much theological diversity within today's Quaker community—from Evangelical Friends verging on fundamentalism to Liberal Friends who may be universalists or even non-theists—can a particularly Quaker spirituality be identified?

In the view of this author, a consistent spiritual tradition does exist among Friends across history, but it is by no means practiced consistently by any group or generation of Friends. It can mainly be discerned by looking

30. Daniels, *Convergent Model of Renewal*.

31. New groups include the New Association of Friends in and around Indiana, North Carolina Fellowship of Friends, and Sierra-Cascades Yearly Meeting of Friends in the western states; Wilmington Yearly Meeting (WYM) in Ohio has also experienced a split, although the congregations leaving WYM have not formed a new organization.

backward historically and attempting to live as faithfully as one can within the tension between tradition and continuing revelation, personal and communal discernment, connectedness to the person of Jesus and wideness in recognition of mystical encounter with the Present Teacher. Each of the splits among Friends has occurred due to differences of opinion about biblical interpretation and the location of authority to name correct interpretation within this nonhierarchical group.

A Quaker myself, I personally identify as Christ centered. I appreciate Convergent Friends as a community with whom to journey as we all attempt to live as Friends of Jesus in our own branches of the denomination. I do not represent all Quaker viewpoints, but I will attempt to shed light on some of the main characteristics of Quaker spirituality that have developed in this broad tradition.³²

MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF QUAKER SPIRITUALITY

The Real Presence of Christ

One of the main hallmarks of Quaker spirituality is the insistence on the real presence of Christ in the individual and in gathered worship, but without the need for mediation by a priest or elements such as bread, wine, or water. Protestant theologians such as Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin debated with one another and the Catholic Church about the way in which Christ was or was not actually present in communion elements, and the human authority figure who could serve as a mediator or invoker of that presence. Due to George Fox's experience of Christ speaking to him directly, Friends spoke out against the necessity of the priesthood and specific physical sacraments. Christ is present not only in the moments when we receive the sacraments, but each moment is a potential encounter with the holy.³³

32. I recognize that as a member of this religious group, I am biased regarding which of these streams of thought is closest to the heart of Quakerism—of course I am going to think my own group is best. Nevertheless, based on my study of Quaker history and my experience with Friends from all branches, I find that Convergent Friends are attempting to hold together the original iconoclasm and intense personal mystical encounter with God with the radical practice of Christ-following. This means that the form of worship and the specific ways that the Friends tradition is lived out in the twenty-first century and in various parts of the globe is necessarily different from what it looked like in seventeenth-century England, because Christ continues to speak to our condition today. I await Friends of the future who can evaluate whether we are faithfully leaning into the heart of Quakerism.

33. A beautiful resource on this is Kelly, *Testament of Devotion*.

While God sometimes chooses to work more powerfully through certain individuals than through others, these individuals are not selected by human beings, and the power of the Spirit cannot be bestowed upon a person at the behest of a church hierarchy. Instead, the Spirit blows as it wills; it cannot be controlled or manipulated.

Early Friends pointed particularly to the passage in Acts 2:17–18 (referring to Joel 2:28–29), which states that the Spirit will be poured out on everyone: sons, daughters, young, old, men, women, slaves—that all will prophesy and receive visions and dreams. Friends interpreted “the last days” (Acts 2:17) to refer to the era after Jesus’ ascension.³⁴ This meant that anyone may be given a prophecy, vision, or dream from the Spirit, and the community would benefit from hearing from God through whomever God chooses to speak, rather than only through a hierarchically ordained minister or priest. If God wants to speak through a person, who are we to prevent it?

Therefore, for Friends, communion is the act of communing spiritually, listening together, and waiting eagerly for a message to arise through those gathered. Where two or three are gathered in Jesus’ name, he promised to be with them, and Friends take this seriously. Likewise, Friends do not practice water baptism but speak of baptism by the Holy Spirit. This is based on Jesus’ teaching to Nicodemus in John 3:5, in which Jesus says that one must be born by both water and the Spirit. Friends interpret this to mean that we are born of water in our original human birth, and it is a spiritual rebirth that must be experienced in order to be Jesus’ disciple.³⁵ Jesus likens this to the wind: you do not know where it comes from or where it goes, but you can recognize it when you experience it. One cannot force a person’s baptism simply by sprinkling or dousing with water, nor is communion with Christ limited to the moments when one receives blessed bread and wine. These moments can be sacramental and can signal our willingness and intention to participate in the life of the church and in the body of Christ, but it is the Spirit who does the work, not a legacy of rightly ordained priests, and the Spirit does not necessarily make the Spirit’s self known just because we select a date and time for a ceremony. When Quakerism is practiced rightly, this means Friends can experience a deeply sacramental life, attending to the presence of Christ in each moment, and responding to the promptings they hear.

34. At first, Friends were fairly apocalyptic, believing that they may indeed be in the last days before Jesus would return; this direct apocalyptic fervor died down within a couple decades, but they continued to see themselves as living in the “last days,” in a more extended sense of the time period following Jesus’ death and resurrection, and as participants in a partially realized kingdom of God.

35. Barclay, *Apology*, Proposition XII.

Not practicing specific sacraments can, on the other hand, diminish the chance for Friends to draw awareness to that present Spirit because there are no set times to remember to do so. Historically, Friends did not celebrate holidays or other special days, believing that no one day is more holy than another. Friends do not practice baptism with water, and baptism with the Holy Spirit is more difficult to celebrate, and it is also difficult to know for certain that one has experienced this rite of passage. Rather than releasing Friends to celebrate each moment and to live in the reality of an eternal outpouring of the Spirit's baptism—living each moment in holy communion—the rejection of rituals can itself become ritualistic and meaningless. Quakerism becomes a dead form when it is not practiced with attentiveness to the Spirit.

When open to the Living Christ, Quakerism can be creative and generative, breaking down empty rituals and dead religiosity and drawing the community into deep and true communion with one another and with God. At times, Friends experience a *gathered* meeting for worship, in which communion is particularly sweet. Early Friend Francis Howgill (1618–1669) describes such experiences thus:

The Lord of Heaven and earth we found to be near at hand, and, as we waited upon him in pure silence, our minds out of all things, his heavenly presence appeared in our assemblies, when there was no language, tongue nor speech from any creature. The Kingdom of Heaven did gather us and catch us all, as in a net, and his heavenly power at one time drew many hundreds to land. We came to know a place to stand in and what to wait in; and the Lord appeared daily to us, to our astonishment, amazement and great admiration . . . And from that day forward, our hearts were knit unto the Lord and one another in true and fervent love, in the covenant of Life with God. . . . And thus the Lord, in short, did form us to be a people for his praise in our generation.³⁶

Because of the recognition that each one can connect with God themselves and understand Scripture only through inspiration by the Spirit, Friends believe in continuing revelation, and also in universal salvation. Robert Barclay states that God speaks in every age, and this revelatory experience of the Spirit is available to everyone.³⁷ When John Woolman visited the Delaware tribes in 1761–1762, he experienced the presence of the

36. Howgill, *Testimony Concerning Edward Burroughs*, 6.

37. Barclay, *Apology*, 25. By this, Barclay does not mean that everyone necessarily receives salvation, but that it is available to all.

"Holy Ghost" in their midst. A Native leader, Papunehang, said through an interpreter, "I love to feel where words come from."³⁸ Though Woolman and the Native Americans spoke different languages, they sensed the same Spirit at work in one another. Woolman even stated, "In mine own eyes I appeared inferior to them."³⁹

In the understanding of current Quaker groups, those who identify as Christian believe that all have access to the Light of Christ, the historical Jesus still working in us spiritually, while Liberal Friends also emphasize universal access to the Inward Light that enlightens each one. Friends from all branches aver with George Fox that there is that of God in every one, and it is this inward connection with the Divine that allows for unmediated communion as well as deep spiritual connection with one another.⁴⁰

The Kingdom of God and the Lamb's War

One of the most distinctive aspects of Quaker belief is pacifism, which is based largely on the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' own example of non-retaliation, as well as passages such as Rom 12:14–21.⁴¹ The first written expression of the reason behind Quaker pacifism occurs in 1651 in the early days of George Fox's ministry. He was thrown in Derby Prison for blasphemy (speaking out against some of the teachings of the Anglican Church), but he won over many of his jailers with his preaching. They wanted to make Fox a captain in the Commonwealth Army. He refused and therefore had to remain in prison. His reasoning was, "I told them I knew whence all wars arose, even from the lusts, according to James' doctrine; and that I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars."⁴² He believed the power of Christ would guide him—and others—to live in such a way that war was not necessary. Through reading the Bible and listening to the Spirit, Friends across the history and breadth of the tradition have felt a deep spiritual calling to take Jesus at his word and so to resolve conflicts in ways other than through violence or warfare.

38. Woolman, *Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, 133.

39. Woolman, *Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, 134.

40. Fox, *Journal*, 263.

41. Friends, of course, have pacifism in common with other historic peace churches: the Mennonites, Brethren, and Amish, as well as some later groups such as the Seventh-day Adventists. Extant literature indicates that the first several hundred years of Christians also practiced pacifism.

42. Fox, *Journal*, ch. 4.

Fox and other first-generation Friends did believe in spiritual warfare, and they called it the Lamb's War, which they took from passages in Revelation (particularly Rev 17:14; cf. Rev 14:1–5, 15:3).⁴³ The Lamb's War is not a war of flesh and blood, and it is not fought with outward weapons, but with the armor of God (Eph 6) and with love of neighbor and enemy. It is not simply a spiritual battle, however: it encompasses and connects both the spiritual and the physical experience. It is not a battle over the final destination of souls but includes living in "virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars": treating people equally and justly in this life, and living in right relationship with God, others, and selves as an expression of the Greatest Commandments (Mark 12:3–31; Luke 10:27).

Fighting the Lamb's War means participating in bringing the kingdom of God into historical reality as much as one can through one's life and actions. Friends generally practice a partially realized eschatology, in which one who is being transformed by Christ can see and participate in the kingdom here and now, although it will never be fully realized in human history. The kingdom of God is now and always: it is not simply a physical reality to expect in the future (though most Christ-centered Friends do believe in heaven); neither is it an outward institution or nation. It is an inward state—but not an individual one. It is in this time, and it is in all time, and it is outside time. Luke 17:21 says, "The kingdom of God is among you," or "within you," depending on the translation.⁴⁴ It is not something you can point to and say, "Here it is!" or "There it is!" It is "among you," and in Greek this is the plural *you*. The kingdom of God exists where two or three are gathered in Jesus' name (Matt 30:18–20). Friends tapped into this biblical understanding of the kingdom, that it is accessible to each one through inward revelation, and that it is realized through reconciling and transforming community.

Living in the already/not yet kingdom of God means the kingdom will never be fully established on earth, but that we can participate in it now by living as faithfully as we can. This is not accomplished through personal piety, but one's personal spiritual transformation includes enacting just power systems, possibly by advocating for equitable laws and interrupting discriminatory social customs. Bringing forth the kingdom means working toward redistribution of wealth and power in ways that may require

43. E.g., Fox, *Journal*, ch. 8; Nayler, "Lamb's War" in *Works of James Nayler*. Accessed January 2019, www.qhpress.org/texts/nayler.

44. NRSV, NIV respectively.

personal suffering for those from more powerful social stations—that may entail prison time, social stigma, and sometimes martyrdom.⁴⁵

Friends' understanding of the Hebrew Law follows Jesus, seeing the Law as for the purpose of creating a safe and equitable community built on love and holistic peace—*shalom*. In the best moments of Friends history and current practice, building a *shalom* community that enacts the Spirit of the law occurs through orthopraxis more than orthodoxy: Friends are noncreedal because of Jesus' command to not swear oaths, and also because Friends believe that agreeing to a list of beliefs does not make one a follower of the Jesus Way. Following the Way revealed by the Inward Light requires spiritual journeying—both inwardly and outwardly—into a deeper expression of the kingdom of God.

Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business

Growing out of the Quaker practice of meeting together to listen for the direction of Christ, the Present Teacher, Friends developed a distinctive way of conducting the community's practical affairs. Friends think of business meetings as another form of worship, since all of life is sacramental. Business meetings are, therefore, called meetings for worship with a concern for business, and these are conducted at the local level on a monthly basis, and at the regional level on an annual basis.⁴⁶ It is essential for those present at a meeting for worship with a concern for business to attune themselves to the Spirit speaking in themselves and through those gathered. The goal is to discern God's direction.

Some think of Quaker business process as an attempt at consensus, but this is incorrect. Consensus would be arriving at a solution that everyone liked and agreed with. In a meeting for worship with a concern for business, Friends believe they can receive direction from God when they listen together. Therefore, business meetings include times of silent listening as well as opportunities for each person present to offer their perspective. Each person has the ability to hear God and to have the Spirit

45. Guiton, "Kingdom of God, Quakers, and the Politics of Compassion."

46. Friends polity is based on the frequency and geography of these business meetings, so local congregations are called monthly meetings, and regional groups are called yearly meetings. Some groups also have smaller regional gatherings called quarterly meetings; in quarterly meetings, groups located in a smaller area gather four times a year, and Friends United Meeting used to be called Five Years Meeting because all the yearly meetings gathered each five years for one large gathering for worship and business. Yearly meetings are more or less autonomous, even if they are part of one of the umbrella organizations: EFCI, FUM, or FGC.

speak through them, and therefore, all present at a business meeting are listening for the voice of the Spirit through one another. A clerk guides the meeting, bringing items of business for the community to discuss and orchestrating times of information, silence, sharing, and decision-making. The clerk does not make the decisions but names the sense of the meeting. The *sense of the meeting* is the clerk's best attempt at putting into words the guidance the group has received from the Spirit. The clerk will state their understanding of the sense of the meeting and ask if the gathered group agrees. Sometimes the group disagrees with the clerk, and others present may attempt to help name the sense of the meeting, or the group continues to listen and share until more clarity emerges.

Quakers in all traditions continue to practice meetings for worship with a concern for business with an emphasis on listening together for the sense of the meeting. To my knowledge, no Friends groups vote as a decision-making strategy. Voting is based on human preference, while Quaker business is an attempt to discern the will of God; therefore, voting is seen as antithetical to Quaker practice. While different groups have divergent understandings about where the sense of the meeting comes from, all consider it to be a spiritual process. Some look for a sense of the meeting based on the Holy Spirit and consistent with the teachings in the Bible, while others hope to orient themselves toward an Inner Light that guides them collectively toward truth, and which cannot be limited by a book.

The central intention is the same in each meeting for worship with a concern for business across the branches of Friends: to become attuned to the Spirit together and to move in the direction that Spirit is leading.⁴⁷ Each Friend is a valued participant in this process, and Friends understand that others may hear a different facet of the Spirit's leading from their own. Similar to the famous metaphor of three blind people describing an elephant by feel, Friends trust that even if their descriptions of what they are hearing from the Spirit seem vastly different, it is likely that each individual is seeing only a part of the broader picture. Friends also recognize that this process takes immense humility, and at times one may be expressing one's own opinion and preference rather than a leading from the Spirit. Careful attentiveness and a willingness to take the time for spiritual discernment are necessary in order to make this form of doing business work.

When Friends do not trust one another to let go preconceived notions, cultural assumptions, and personal preferences, the Quaker business

47. As I discussed earlier, the identity of that Spirit is not always agreed upon across branches or between individual Friends, and ranges from the Spirit connected with Jesus in the Bible to a unifying Spirit toward whom all religions are pointing to the human spirit that these Friends call the Inner Light, and everywhere in between.

process cannot occur. Historically, Friends often attempted to follow the teachings of Jesus radically and counterculturally because they were listening to the Spirit's guidance rather than adhering to one or another side in the culture wars of their day. While the Friends ideal of listening to the Spirit together can be beautiful and powerful when done well, it can also be easily abused and lead to division when Friends do not practice it with profound trust, humility, and patience.

Quakers and the Holiness Movement

It is likely that readers may be thinking that many of the tenets of Quaker spirituality described in the preceding sections do not sound wholly different from teachings or customs other Protestant denominations in the twenty-first century, and they would be right. These common traits stem from three main factors: (1) as more people read the Bible for themselves, different groups came to similar conclusions through disparate reform movements; (2) Robert Barclay's theology had a major impact on the theology of John Wesley, which made its way into the Wesleyan, Holiness, evangelical, and even pentecostal movements of the last two and a half centuries;⁴⁸ and (3) Friends were also influenced by the Great Awakenings—some moved toward the Holiness expression of Christian faith, and others reacted against it.⁴⁹

The first point is likely a consistent theme in all forms of Protestant spirituality. The series of movements for reform, awakening, and revival in the last five hundred years have often been characterized by people reading the Bible themselves and experiencing an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, who invites renewal, personal experience of God, and what is perceived as a Spirit-led desire to break away from unhelpful forms and rituals within the currently available organized church.

Interaction between Quakerism and Methodism, as well as between Quakers and other groups that formed out of the Awakenings in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is historically significant and helps make sense of nineteenth-century expressions of American Christianity even today. Regarding my second point above, it is fascinating to note that John Wesley edited and reprinted large chunks of Robert Barclay's text in order to summarize and emphasize his own theology, and Wesley also reprinted an antislavery treatise by Anthony Benezet as his own.⁵⁰ Wesley said he

48. "About the Apology," in Barclay, *Apology in Modern English*, xxxiv–xxxviii. Thunberg, "Quaker Mission and the Holy Spirit Churches in Western Kenya."

49. Spencer, *Holiness*.

50. Freiday, "About the Apology," John Wesley heavily edited sections from Quaker

agreed with eight out of fifteen of the propositions in Barclay's *Apology*, and thought they were scriptural.⁵¹

While Barclay had written in the seventeenth century, by the time the Wesleys arrived on the scene, Quakerism had moved into a period of Quietism in which, as I mentioned above, meetings for worship were almost always silent, and it was frowned upon if someone rose to speak, and books of discipline strictly controlled the Quaker community. John Wesley, and to some extent George Whitefield, respected the ideas of the Friends but did not find meaningful their practice of meeting in silence.⁵² In many ways, the Great Awakenings and the Holiness movement brought back some of the vitality that had characterized the early Friends, breaking in against the fixed forms of the Quaker culture that had grown up in the interceding century.⁵³ The Great Awakenings again emphasized the present Spirit speaking to and through those of any gender, class, or education level, and began to make in-roads in breaking down racial barriers.⁵⁴

The Holiness movement's emphasis on perfection matched the Friends perspective to some degree: the Wesleyan emphasis on sanctification by the Holy Spirit as a necessary part of the life of a Christian held similarities to the Quaker claim that Christianity is but an empty corpse without the Present Spirit. The focus on sanctification as a particular moment, after which one could practice perfection due to the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit, was somewhat different from Quaker thought up to that point, however. Quakers viewed perfection as a process, a moment-by-moment experience of being in the presence of the Spirit, and a journey toward seeking the Inward Light.⁵⁵

The Great Awakenings also catalyzed movements for social reform, such as George Whitefield's campaign to raise funds for orphans, and Charles Finney's attempts to provide alternatives to women having to be sex workers. Friends, with their long history of social reform, were well situated to join with others working on these projects. Friends saw such

Robert Barclay's *Apology*, reprinting them in 1741 as *Serious Considerations on Absolute Predestination, extracted from a late author*. Friend Anthony Benezet published *Some Historical Account of Guinea* in 1771, and Wesley published the same text under the title *Thoughts Upon Slavery* in 1774. (Individuals of that time period had much different understandings of plagiarism than we do today.)

51. Freiday, "About the Apology."

52. Freiday, "About the Apology"; Spencer, *Holiness*.

53. Spencer, *Holiness*.

54. On the role of women in the Great Awakening see Lindley, *You Have Stept Out of Your Place*, 39-47.

55. Freiday, "About the Apology"; Spencer, *Holiness*.

work as a continued expression of their spirituality, a lived practice of the biblical truths they read about and the convictions they received from the Holy Spirit. Therefore, many Friends began collaborating with those from emerging Protestant denominations, eventually working toward abolition of slavery and women's rights.⁵⁶

Another important factor was the settlement of the western frontier. While we may now critique Friends and others moving west and claiming land that had been forcibly taken from American Indians, Friends saw this expansion as an opportunity to establish faithful communities in new regions. Friend William Hobson felt a leading from the Spirit to explore areas in the Pacific Northwest in order to establish a Quaker community. He eventually chose the region that is now Newberg, Oregon, where he hoped to establish "a garden of the Lord": his decision led directly to the Quaker community in which I grew up.⁵⁷ As Friends established communities along the frontier, they often made up the only worshiping congregation in an area. They found that others moving to the region expected a pastoral model of church leadership, and many also did not have much education in the Christian faith. Many had had powerful religious experiences at a revival but had little to no knowledge of the Bible or Christian teachings. Therefore many Friends began to hire pastors and hold worship services that looked similar to services other Holiness movement churches.⁵⁸

In some ways, this adaptation expressed Quaker pneumatology, in that Friends were meeting a felt need of the context in which they found themselves. In other ways, pastoral Friends departed dramatically from earlier expressions of Quaker spirituality: by hiring pastors and emphasizing the need for Christian education in order to interpret the Bible and live rightly, they were reinstating a religious hierarchy and no longer emphasizing the responsibility of each individual to seek after the Inward Light. In seeking to be open to the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the revival movements of their time, breaking open their old forms so the Spirit could again act more freely, Friends also lost their distinctive traditions and practices, their particular ways of calling the rest of the church to radical personal responsibility and corporate submission to the will of the Present Teacher.

Hicksite Friends did not identify as strongly with the Holiness movement as did Orthodox Friends. The theological division relating to the divinity of Jesus and the balance of authority between the Bible and the Spirit widened even further as many Orthodox Friends began hiring pastors

56. E.g., Faulkner, *Lucretia Mott's Heresy*.

57. Hobson's *Diary* quoted in Beebe, *Garden of the Lord*, 30–31.

58. Spencer, *Holiness*.

and worshiping in ways more consistent with other Protestants, particularly evangelicals, Methodists, and groups forming in the nineteenth-century revivals. In a way, Friends theology became mainstream with the advent of the Holiness movement: the main Quaker tenet of individual spiritual experience was no longer considered unusual or heretical. Encountering Methodism, however, highlighted tensions within Quakerism that had previously been held in a delicate balance.

Location of Authority

Ultimate authority among Friends comes from the Inward Light: for Christian Friends, this is synonymous with the God of the Bible, and for Liberal Friends this Inward Light is an interior guiding principle or Spirit whose particular identity is less important than simply being aware of its presence and following what is heard. Authority to discern and name the guidance being received is the purview of each individual, and also a communal process. Friends have a fairly high view of human nature compared to other Protestant denominations, focusing mainly on the image of God in each one.⁵⁹ Friends resonate with the biblical idea that the law is written on our hearts, that we can recognize God's law of love when we encounter it, and through the discerning and transformative power of the Spirit we can follow it. However, each of us is only one member of the complete body, so when we listen to the Spirit together, we can gain a better understanding of right action. Each person holds the potential role of prophet, calling the community to faithfulness when the group is getting off track. Likewise, each individual is accountable to the group, submitting to the authority of the group's discernment when the sense of the meeting is different from an individual's preference. This mutual submission, when practiced well, allows checks and balances, avoiding the pitfalls of both individualism and groupthink.

Quakers understand the roles of prophet, priest, and king differently from many other Protestant traditions. While other groups may preference priest and king with authority to interpret what right belief and practice are, minimizing the prophet's role until priests and kings have strayed too far, Friends flip this understanding. The Quaker tradition creates a people of prophets. In unprogrammed traditions, the role of priest is removed completely so that the only mediator is the Inward Light. In programmed traditions, the pastor does not serve a priestly function since there are no physical sacraments and the presence of the pastor is not necessary in order

59. Barclay emphasizes that Friends still believe in human depravity. He rejects Pelagius, and says we cannot choose good on our own. Barclay, *Apology*, 68.

for communion or other connections to the holy to take place. Friends look with extreme skepticism on the mutual sanctioning of priestly and monarchical roles. Friends see the role of the individual and the community to be speaking prophetically into the imbalance of power often created when churches and governments collude. Seeing each person as a potential prophet also creates space for women and other marginalized groups to be recognized agents of the Holy Spirit. Authority is given by the Spirit, not by human-sanctioned hierarchies.

While this prophetic understanding of the role of the individual and community can be empowering and liberating, identifying whether personal leading or group discernment is in line with the Spirit can be very difficult. How one identifies the work of the Spirit, the source of leading and discernment, distinguishes Hicksite from Orthodox Friends and accounts for wide diversity in Quaker beliefs and practices.

Liberal Friends extended Hicks's understanding of personal accountability to the Inward Light to its logical conclusion—that while the example of Jesus may be useful and inspirational, belief in Jesus is not necessary to experience the Inward Light. The mystical experience of some spiritual force can be sensed by all, but people the world over have different names for and understandings of this spiritual power. Jesus followed the Inward Light well, and we can do so too. Liberal Friends still meet in silence and await messages from the Inner Light, and they also emphasize the Friends testimonies of equality, peace, and justice consistently as an expression of their spirituality. The Spirit present in them is also present in others, making all people equal, and inviting everyone to live in light of that mystical union at all times.

Gurneyite Friends created programmed meetings with pastors and worship experiences similar to those found in Wesleyan and evangelical traditions. They hold to traditional Quaker beliefs in the connection between the Inward Light and the Christ of the Bible, checking any personal spiritual experience to make sure that what is revealed from the Spirit is in line with the biblical witness. Ultimate authority lies with the Spirit as interpreter, but it will not contradict the Bible.

Friends hold a range of beliefs about the testimonies of peace and equality: Liberal Friends tend to emphasize these Quaker traditions more readily than do many Friends in the pastoral Gurneyite traditions. Pastoral Friends place more emphasis on evangelism than do Liberal Friends, and evangelism was a major practice of the earliest Friends. In this way, Quaker spirituality is still being practiced: as pastoral Friends encounter the life-giving power of Christ and the Holy Spirit working in them personally and corporately, they desire to share this with others. While some

Friends mission work has reflected the same cultural imperialism as mission work sponsored by other Protestant denominations in the last two centuries, Friends have also managed to do some good work by respecting Indigenous populations, looking for what God is already doing there, and joining with that work.⁶⁰ Quaker missionaries' willingness to join in the preexisting and ongoing work of God in another culture reflects their belief that all have equal access to the Spirit, that anyone can follow Christ by attending to the Inward Light.

Mysticism and Activism

While Friends did not consider themselves mystics until the late nineteenth century, the Quaker understanding of contemplative spirituality coupled with outward action fits most clearly within the stream of Christian tradition that includes many individuals and schools of thought considered mystical.⁶¹ For example, Ignatius of Loyola's instructions regarding discernment are resonant with Friends teachings, and many Friends in the first two centuries of the tradition read and reprinted a treatise by Catholic mystics Madame Jeanne Guyon, Francois Fénelon, and Miguel de Molinos called *A Guide to True Peace*, about inward prayer.⁶²

As Friends became more self-reflective about their mystical bent, Rufus Jones (1863–1948), a prominent and prolific Friend, wrote about Quakerism and actively lived out its principles.⁶³ He understood Quaker mysticism to be in line with affirmation (or *kataphatic*) mysticism rather than negation (*apophatic*) mysticism, or knowing about God only through what God is not. Jones noted that rather than confronting unknowing and mystery, early Friends knew mystical union through personal experience. For Jones, "Mysticism is an immediate, intuitive, experimental knowledge of God, or one may say it is consciousness of a Beyond, or of transcendent Reality, or of Divine

60. Thunberg, "Quaker Mission and the Holy Spirit Churches in Western Kenya."

61. See footnote 23.

62. Birkel, "Leadings and Discernment," 252.

63. Jones was from the Hicksite (Liberal) tradition, and therefore his ideas are considered suspect by many Christ-centered Friends. He did not focus on the historical Jesus but considered Christ a metaphorical figure pointing to an eternal truth. However, his work to name the mystical elements within Quakerism are considered helpful and important, particularly in the development of a Liberal Quaker theology, but also for Friends in general. He was active in the instigation of the American Friends Service Committee, through which he put his mystical understanding of Quakerism into action. See Vining, *Friend of Life*.

Presence.”⁶⁴ The Friends understanding of mysticism has moved back and forth over time from a prophetic, mystical experience of union with the Inward Light of Christ to a more philosophical, intellectualized understanding of mysticism.⁶⁵ The prophetic, intense, personal, Christ-centered, experiential mysticism of the early generations of Friends—and distinct individuals in the tradition since then—is the intended meaning of the Friends message, in the opinion of this author and of many others.⁶⁶

This type of prophetic, affirmative mysticism leads Quakers to outward action on the part of others. Quaker Howard Brinton, following Albert Schweitzer, termed this *ethical mysticism*. “By ethical mysticism,” says Brinton, “I mean that type of mysticism which first withdraws from the world revealed by the senses to the inward Divine Source of Light, Truth, and Power, and then returns to the world with strength renewed, insight cleared, and desire quickened to bind all life together in the bonds of love.”⁶⁷ The central tenet of Friends spirituality is this binding together of withdrawing into mystical union and being led out into loving action in an ever deepening cyclical motion.

Jones emphasizes three strands of religion that need to be woven together in order “to carry it into *the whole of life*”: the mystical, the rational, and what he terms “the distinctive Faith-tendency of the Reformation.”⁶⁸ Catholic theologian Dorothee Sölle comes to a similar conclusion about the need for a combination of mysticism and action: while she identifies that religions need an institutional and an intellectual aspect, she deems the mystical thread also necessary.⁶⁹ This mystical element entails not simply withdrawing into individual prayer but includes political resistance and perhaps even revolution. Sölle sees mystical relationship to God and ethical action as two sides of the same coin, which we often try to separate, but when we do so, both become dead: “If it is true that God is love, then the separation of religion and ethics . . . is self-destructive for religion and ethics because it empties religion, reducing its basis for experiencing the world. It turns ethics into arbitrary arrangements of individual tribes and hordes.”⁷⁰

64. Jones, *Flowering of Mysticism*, 251.

65. Bassuk, “Rufus Jones and Mysticism,” 11.

66. Jones seems to fall more on the philosophical side, but he also interprets Fox as a prophetic reformer. Works by Friends scholars who have named a more prophetic interpretation include Nuttall, *Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience*; King, *George Fox and the Light Within*.

67. Brinton, *Ethical Mysticism*, 5; Schweitzer, *Out of My Life and Thought*, 235.

68. Jones, *Quakerism*, 82–83 (italics original).

69. Sölle, *Silent Cry*, 1.

70. Sölle, *Silent Cry*, 5.

She states that everyone is (or can be) a mystic, an opinion very similar to Quakerism, and she cites individuals from a number of religious traditions, including Friend John Woolman. For Sölle and for Brinton, the foundational element of mystical encounter is love, which both comforts and heals us inwardly and calls us outward into right relationship.

For Friends, the practice of gathering in expectation of individual and corporate mystical spiritual experience did not begin with an intention of creating a group focused on social justice activism, but advocating for equality as an expression of love has become a hallmark of the Friends tradition. Such expressions of love have grown out of Friends' leadings from the Inward Light of Christ, Bible reading, and personal experiences of injustice. Over nearly four centuries, Friends' mystical spirituality has led them to certain ethical testimonies, which Friends consider to be the outward expression of inward and biblical revelation. Early Friends first collectively stated the peace testimony in their letter to King Charles II in 1660: "this is our testimony to the whole world,"⁷¹ meaning that taking a stand for not using violence is an outward way of living their interpretation of the gospel message. Britain Yearly Meeting's *Faith and Practice* guide states: "The word 'testimony' is used by Quakers to describe a witness to the living truth within the human heart as it is acted out in everyday life."⁷² And Quaker theologian Rachel Muers suggests the following definition for *testimony*:

Testimony for Quakers consists of patterns of action and behavior:

- that are understood as an individual and collective response to God's leading and call;
- that are shared, intergenerationally sustained, communicated in stories and deliberated collectively, and that develop over time;
- that are located in everyday life, rather than (only) in specified liturgical contexts;
- and that work in communicative, challenging, and transformative relation to a wider context.⁷³

71. "Declaration from the harmless and innocent people of God, called Quakers," signed by George Fox, Gerald Roberts, Henry Fell, Richard Hubberthorn, John Boulton, John Hinde, John Stubbs, Leonard Fell, John Furley Jr., Francis Howgill, Samuel Fisher, and Thomas Moore. 1660. (<http://quaker.org/>)

72. Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 23.12.

73. Muers, *Testimony*.

A Friend's entire life is their testimony, a physical living out of their sense of spiritual calling.

In recent decades, some Friends have listed specific testimonies within the broader picture in order to name the directions Friends have felt led in the past. These have become known by the acronym SPICE(S), based in part on Brinton's explanation of the types of ethical action Friends have consistently been drawn to across time.⁷⁴ SPICE(S) stands for Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality/Equity, and Stewardship or Sustainability. While some try to steer away from identifying with this acronym too strongly because it can limit the types of actions Friends expect to be called to (and because defining these specific testimonies rather than one's life overall as a testimony can be limiting), the acronym can be useful as long as it is used descriptively rather than prescriptively or proscriptively. These testimonies describe the types of ethical action Friends have felt led to in the past, and these areas have proven to be consistent in the work of Quakers. These ethical actions are the fruits of lives lived in mystical union with the Divine and within a spiritual community, the firstfruits of the kingdom of God.

The final S, Stewardship or Sustainability, has been added since Brinton's time and is becoming a more prominent theme in the worldwide Quaker movement as the climate changes due to human action has become a more urgent issue. The idea of stewardship of our resources fits to some extent in the testimonies of simplicity and integrity, and the implications surrounding stewardship of creation and sustainability are contained in all the testimonies—therefore there is some disagreement about whether we need to include a second S, or whether stewardship and sustainability flow naturally out of the other five testimonies. However, including the second S shows how these testimonies can change and adapt, and how Friends' understanding of them can grow over time if the tradition continues to be careful to describe the types of ethical actions Friends are being drawn to, rather than remaining calcified in archaic understandings of the work we were called to do hundreds of years ago.

In the case of stewardship of creation, Friends are currently in the process of discerning what faithfulness looks like in this time and place in relation to caring for the planet. This is a living example of the ethical mysticism described by Brinton, and shows the prophetic, affirmation mysticism described by Jones. Friends from all branches are experiencing God through creation in mystical connectedness, and experiencing a sense of

74. Brinton and Bacon, *Friends for 350 Years*. (Brinton wrote the original version, *Friends for 300 Years*, which originally appeared in 1964, and the book was updated by Margaret Hope Bacon for the 2002 edition.)

leading to advocate for just laws and equitable action to care for the planet in which we are embedded. Like John Woolman, who felt a leading to speak out against slavery and to act in ways that would disrupt the institution of slavery;⁷⁵ like Elizabeth Fry, who felt led to offer education in prisons and then to advocate for prison reform;⁷⁶ like Lucretia Mott, who experienced gender discrimination as she lived out her abolitionist calling and then also responded by helping organize the women's rights movement,⁷⁷ Friends today are feeling a spiritual leading to care for creation more sustainably.⁷⁸ This work is expanding Friends' understanding of justice and equity to include all creation, not just human beings, and Friends in developed nations are feeling convicted by the Inward Light to live the radical message of Jesus rather than a comfortable approximation of it.

Quakers' Relationship to the State

Quakers relate to the state in a way that differs from historic mainline Protestants, Catholics, and other peace churches. Most of the original mainline Protestant groups began as state churches, intertwined with the emerging power of nation-states. In this understanding of authority, God appoints human leaders, and following one's government is an expression of following God. Whereas Catholics understood that the pope has such authority in the worldwide Church, mainline Protestants granted authority to governments and church leaders in separate nation-states.⁷⁹ For Friends, the belief that each person has the ability and the responsibility to attend to and follow the Light of Christ within made this connection between authority and Christianity untenable. From the earliest times until today, most Friends have placed and still do place responsibility for right action with the individual and the community, as all discern God's calling. The person who simply

75. Woolman, *Journal*.

76. Fry et al., *Memoir of the Life of Elizabeth Fry*.

77. Faulkner, *Lucretia Mott's Heresy*.

78. Bock and Potthoff, eds., *Quakers, Creation Care, and Sustainability*; Gwyn, *Sustainable Life*.

79. The two-kingdoms ideas of Augustine and Luther indicate that the state is always an executor of God's authority; authority for discerning right action falls into the hands of the governmental or ecclesial authorities. This absolves the individual, who follows orders. While Luther offered somewhat more freedom of conscience for individuals regarding interpretation of scriptural mandates than did Catholics, he continued to advocate for a state church. Quakers differed from this view, placing responsibility within the individual to discern what is right and wrong, and to hold one's religious and political authorities accountable to creating just laws and enforcing them equitably.

follows orders from someone in power is not by virtue of this obedience absolved from taking responsibility for his or her own actions.

Although Friends beliefs are similar to those of other peace churches regarding Jesus' call to peacemaking, loving neighbors and enemies, and using means other than violence to resolve conflict, Friends have expressed these beliefs differently from the ways members of other peace church traditions do. Mennonites, Brethren, and Amish originally created their own separatist communities in hopes that their withdrawal from the world would allow them to stand as a city on a hill, representing the kingdom of God to others.⁸⁰ These communities also allowed themselves to create their own group norms and laws with only minimal intervention from the broader society.

Friends took a different path: from the first, Friends were outspoken critics of unjust laws, publicly bearing the consequences of their disobedience to unjust laws, as was mentioned previously, particularly relating to honor for those of higher socioeconomic station and laws surrounding freedoms of religion, assembly, and swearing oaths. They petitioned English monarchs, spoke with Oliver Cromwell (the Lord Protector of the Commonwealth), and experimented with forming a government in Pennsylvania. George Fox refused to become a leader in Cromwell's army when requested. He saw himself as a member of the Lord's army, fighting the Lamb's War, and could not fight violently for a nation or political cause.

Quaker theologian Robert Barclay stated in a letter to King Charles II that rulers were given a position by God from which they can see the world more clearly, and many people look to them for guidance. Therefore, Barclay requested the king stop persecuting Quakers for conscientiously held beliefs to, listen to his own conscience, and not to restrict others' freedom to act in ways of conscience. To the extent that he does this, he is a godly ruler.⁸¹ Barclay lived at the end of the first generation of the Quaker movement and witnessed oppression firsthand by his Christian nation against this peaceable people, and so the main point in his systematic theology's section on civil authority is freedom of conscience. He says there is a realm over which the government does not have authority, and that is the realm of the conscience. In this way the church separates from the state: the conscience is that which guides us in God's truth, a kind of natural law illumined by Christ, which those who do not profess Christ have access to dimly—it is how they recognize God's call. Those who do know Christ can access this

80. Mennonites and Brethren now have a range of practices for integrating into or with withdrawing from today's society.

81. Barclay, "Unto Charles the Second, King of Great Britain."

Christ-imbued conscience more readily because of recourse to biblical revelation and practice in discerning the Spirit of God in their lives.⁸² Government has no jurisdiction in this area.

Early Friends felt it was their responsibility to speak truth to power: to listen individually and corporately for God's guidance, and then to do what they heard, regardless of the laws in place. They practiced the law of love (Rom 13:8–10), believing this law to be of more importance than human laws. If a ruler was rewarding good and punishing evil (Rom 13: 3–4), then that ruler was carrying out authority from God, but if the ruler was not practicing this basic point of governing, this ruler should be drawn back to awareness of the law of love. As Friends listened to the Spirit speaking and directing them, they found it possible to discern loving action. Today, living out this law of love as much as possible within society as well as in one's own life is important. But such love should not be coerced. Each person should be free to follow their own conscience.

Quakers' experiment with starting their own government began when William Penn (1644–1718), a Quaker from an aristocratic family, received a sizeable chunk of colonial land in 1681 as a repayment for debts that the Crown owed his father. Penn also purchased the land from the indigenous people of the region that became Pennsylvania.⁸³ He embarked upon a "holy experiment," creating a space where everyone was free to practice the religion of their choosing, and where each white, propertied male had a voice in the governance of the region. (While we might wish he had a little bit larger vision, this level of representation was a step in the right direction.) Penn wrote "Frame of the Government of Pennsylvania" in 1682, which served as a starting point for many of the ideas that later were included in the United States Constitution. He based his ideas largely on Rom 13:1–7, which states that governments should not be a terror to good consciences but to bad, and they are in place in order to reward the good and punish the evil. Penn had a high view of the "divine right" for the existence of government—as long as it carried out these roles, treating all people with equal dignity and respect.

At first, Quakers held a majority of the seats in the Pennsylvania General Assembly, even as the percentage of Quakers in the colony decreased, but it became problematic for Friends to hold office in a representative democracy in which their non-Quaker constituents desired to go to war.⁸⁴ During the French and Indian War, six Quaker members of the General Assembly

82. This of course assumes that what one's conscience tells one is not something that harms others, or forces others to do something that is against their conscience (Barclay, *Apology*, 68–69).

83. Baltzell, *Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia*, 114–15.

84. Young, "Evolution of the Pennsylvania Assembly," 154.

stepped down in 1756, stating, "Many of our constituents seem of the opinion that the present situation of public affairs call upon us for services in a military way, which, from a conviction of judgment, after mature deliberation, we cannot comply with."⁸⁵ In other words, their interior spiritual conviction to resolve conflicts through means other than violence could not be upheld if they remained in office, and they also felt they should not coerce others to follow Quaker religious convictions. Rather than trampling others' freedom of religion or going against their own discernment of spiritual guidance regarding violence, Pennsylvania Quakers gave up political power.

Friends see speaking truth to power and advocating for just laws and governmental practices as outward expressions of an inward spiritual calling. The "holy experiment" of Pennsylvania helped form the representative democracy of the United States, and it also shows the difficulties Friends face when attempting to live out their sense of calling in the public square. Other Friends have held political office since then, but Friends more often offer a prophetic voice from outside the political arena: remaining engaged in society, advocating for justice and equity, and working toward peaceful resolutions to conflict as embodied expressions of faith.

FRIENDS SPIRITUALITY ANTICIPATES CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

Comparing early Friends to theological streams in the twentieth century yields surprising similarities between early Quaker theology and a group of theologies now located under the umbrella of *contextual theology*. Contextual theologies emphasize a dialogical motion between scriptural text and context, between reading the Bible in light of personal experience, and reading context in light of the Bible and church history.⁸⁶ As far back as 1967, the editor of *Barclay's Apology in Modern English*, Dean Freiday, sounds a similar note: "In the seventeenth century casuistry had already yielded to contextualism for Quakers."⁸⁷

Although early Friends did not yet fully apply their ideals of equality to people of different races, cultures, gender identities, or sexual preferences, and although early Friends did not clearly incorporate care for other species or for the rest of creation into their theology (as contextual theologies are advocating today), nevertheless early Friends' emphasis on personal experience in connection with awareness of social concerns resonates with

85. Quoted in Brock, *Pacifism in the United States*, 146–47.

86. Bergmann, *God in Context*.

87. Freiday, ed., Barclay, *Apology*, xxviii.

contextual theology. Both place importance on praxis, the interaction between spirituality, action, and reflection.⁸⁸ Both point to themes of radical equity and love in the Bible, refusing to let the Christian tradition be co-opted by human power structures.⁸⁹ Both see Christ's call as one to radically reorder human society to preference the poor and marginalized, and see this as the church's work in the here and now, not simply in a future heaven.

Friends in the earliest generations placed Scripture, church tradition, present context, and personal experience in dialogue, noting unjust social and religious structures and calling for just laws and relationships.⁹⁰ They critiqued rigid expressions of dogmatic church teachings that twisted Christ's message of good news into justification for treating people unjustly. George Fox criticized "hireling" ministers and teachers for going through the motions of religiosity without having experienced spiritual transformation.⁹¹ Many Friends across history have called for radical adherence to the liberative and experiential aspects of the Christian faith, have paid attention to their context and to the Spirit at work in their time and place, and have joined with the life-giving power of the Present Spirit.

While not all Friends today work within a model of contextual theology—some would be concerned about its focus on Christianity and the Bible while others would be concerned with the emphasis on social justice rather than salvation of souls—the heart of Quakerism expresses a very similar reading of Scripture and understanding of the Spirit's calling, as do contextual theologies. Friends do not always practice this well, and they have much to learn from theologies emerging from contexts by which Quakerism has not previously been informed. However, Quakerism and contextual theologies seem to be tapping into the same spiritual stream, based in the wisdom of Scripture and attentiveness to the Present Spirit.

CHALLENGES FACING TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY FRIENDS

As Friends look toward and beyond our four-hundredth anniversary, there is much in the legacy of Quaker spirituality about which to be proud, and

88. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*; Gerloff, "Theory and Practice of the Holy Spirit."

89. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*.

90. Daniels, *Convergent Model of Renewal*.

91. Fox first railed against hirelings at the end of ch. 2 in his *Journal*, and then uses the term in chs. 5, 8, 10, and 11.

there is also much work to do. As a member of this community, I wonder about the following questions:

1. Does a distinctly Quaker expression of spirituality continue to provide something important?
2. Does a viable heart of Quakerism remain as Friends splinter into more and more groups?
3. With the majority of Friends now hailing from the Global South, in what ways does Quakerism's understanding of its spiritual tradition need to shift, expand, or refocus?

Regarding the first question, since the main insights of the early Friends relating to personal spiritual experience have largely been adopted by many Protestants (and Catholic and Orthodox individuals, I might add), perhaps the particular emphasis of Friends spirituality is not as necessary as it was in the mid-seventeenth century. Christians the world over feel it is important to have a personal relationship with Jesus. It is also now somewhat common, at least in mainline Protestant and radical Catholic circles, to couple mystical experience of God with outward action for social justice. These particular insights and connections are not solely carried by those who call themselves Quakers.

As an insider to this group, it remains important to me that the Religious Society of Friends is a peace church. Advocating for nonviolent resolutions to conflicts and for just relationships between people, God, and other parts of creation is a part of Friends spirituality that has not become a mainstay in other religious traditions. The call to radical peacemaking that early Friends heard from the Inward Light of Christ, and that generations of Friends have continued to follow, lies at the heart of Quaker spirituality, grounded as it is in the transformative power of the Spirit to reconcile all creation to God's self. The Quaker perspective on both personal and corporate responsibility for discernment, and on speaking truth to power, is not in evidence in the same way in other Protestant spiritual traditions, and this author feels these testimonies represent an important contribution that the Society of Friends can continue to make to the Christian community.

The second question—whether there is enough of a critical mass of Quakers who hold to these distinctive traits of Quaker spirituality to make the movement viable into the future—remains open. In the past decade, thriving yearly meetings in the United States have split, and one group in each split is more focused on continuing to express Christianity in a particularly Quaker fashion while the other group is more interested in missionary and evangelism work, so that it is difficult to differentiate this second group

from other evangelical groups or from nondenominational churchgoers. Many of the local meetings and yearly meetings in North America and Europe are declining in numbers. Yet Quaker gatherings continue to thrive where meetings for worship and business in the manner of Friends occur and the Spirit is very present.

There are also Friends who subscribe to Convergent Friends ideas, and this is where I see the most hope for a revitalization of the Friends tradition in the Global North. If Friends can converge toward the heart of Quaker spirituality from the various streams of tradition, and if we listen well to the guidance of the Spirit, perhaps there is important work for us yet. We have always been small and have made an impact beyond our numbers, presumably because of our unique emphasis on prophetic and Spirit-led action. However, if we are not willing to have the courage and the contemplative foundation to truly engage in prophetic action in our time, we are likely to wither and die as a group—and we should, because our usefulness will be at an end.

The third question, about Friends in the Global South, is incredibly important, and the crux of this question is whether Friends' particular take on spirituality has been well communicated to Friends in Latin America and Africa. Since most Latin American and African Friends groups were started through missionary endeavors by those very much influenced by Evangelicalism and the Holiness movement, and since these churches grew up alongside growing Pentecostal churches in their areas, is there a distinctly Quaker spirituality in these groups? Just as the robust expression of peculiarly Quaker faith varies in monthly and yearly meetings across North America and Europe, so in Latin America and Africa too, based on my own experience, the strength of Quakerism varies from group to group. I have met Friends from Latin America and Africa who have a strong connection to the history of Friends, emphasize discernment, and subscribe to the Friends peace testimony. These Friends are hungry to learn more about Quaker history, because it is not something that has been emphasized in their communities. If they are representative of other Friends in their regions, and if they spread their passion of and knowledge about the distinctive Quaker teachings and practices, then the essence of Quaker spirituality may continue to thrive in the Global South even if the worship practices look vastly different from silent meetings.

Friends (including I myself) have important work to do in the coming decades in order to learn from Friends in the Global South, and to really listen to and with these Friends to how the Spirit is speaking to them. Friends in the Global North are struggling with internal conflict, lack of commitment to listening together, broken trust, and too much comfort with

and within our divisive and overconsuming cultures. Although we are used to being the ones with the prophetic voices, I sense that it is time for Friends in the Global North to practice humility, listening to the Present Teacher speaking through those from a different cultural paradigm.

For present-day Friends to claim to be a Spirit-filled denomination, offering authentic insight and understanding of our personal and corporate connection to God through experience and spiritual discernment, we must allow the Spirit to break forth powerfully again. We will need to recognize the ways we have made idols of our own forms of worship and other group norms, just like early Friends criticized the Anglican Church of doing. We (particularly in the Global North) will need to do the hard work of decolonizing our theology—of recognizing the ways we have followed unhelpful practices, of recognizing the ways our lifestyle harms people and creatures around us.

This kind of work is the heartbreaking, painful, internal, counter-cultural work of mystical union with a God who calls us to love through ethical action. Doing this work requires being flexible and nimble as we as a global (Quaker) church figure out what church looks like in this day and age. In each generation, our calling is to grow in our ability to love one another and do the work of reconciliation, learning how to be peacemakers in interpersonal and systemic aspects of our lives, and contributing to building the shalomic kingdom of God wherever two or three are gathered as Friends on the Jesus Way.

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