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Comments

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Comments

JOHN YUNGBLUT

At the outset of my response I must confess my prejudice, that the reader may be forearmed. But since the editor was aware of this prejudice in eliciting my response, I need make no apology. The preaching and writing of Rufus Jones were formative in shaping my own spiritual pilgrimage. Because the witness of his own religious experience seemed to me authentic, I simply undertook to follow his reiterated counsel: "If you seek reality in religion, read the mystics."

This said, of course I want to be all the more attentive to what the author of this very thoughtful article is saying. I have profound respect for Daniel Bassuk and admire the spirit of his meticulous scholarship.

The initial assertion of the paper, reflecting as it does a recurring theme in *QRT*, stumbles me afresh: "Rufus Jones' interpretation of Quakerism . . . was mistaken in its central thesis; the very life of contemporary Quakerism is therefore founded on an egregious misunderstanding." "Egregious" is a strong word, though apparently chosen with care. Webster defines it, "remarkably bad; flagrant." If this be so, the concession that Jones's interpretation did "much to revive and reshape a moribund Society of Friends earlier in this century" would seem a feckless tribute. The revival, so the author seems to be saying, had a false basis that must now be disowned. There could scarcely be a more sweeping condemnation or a more uncompromising call to the undoing of an unhappy influence. A whole school of thought has sprung up these past two decades with this as its rallying cry. Granted the validity of some of the points that have been made, including a number of new ones in this present writing, one is compelled to ask: does any defense remain for the position espoused by Rufus Jones, despite its historical inaccuracies and inadvertent inconsistencies?

I am not scholar enough to know just how conclusive are the arguments of Geoffrey F. Nuttall, to whom Bassuk refers with regard to the claim that Jones was mistaken in inferring a direct influence upon George Fox by Jacob Boehme and the Cambridge Platonists. I am prepared to accept this judgment, confirmed as it has apparently been by a number of other scholars. No doubt Quakerism was "an outgrowth of radical Puritanism rather than of the mystical movements of the continent," at least in any sense of direct influence. But we must still ask the all-important question: is not mystical experience a hardy perennial that characteristically springs up full-blown, without any traceable direct descent? To put it another way, what about the mysterious but demonstrable factor of synchronicity? Has this no relevance?

Our critic has caught Rufus Jones in some contradictions in the course of a lifetime of prolific writing, much of which centered on his central interest, mysticism. He did not remain consistent. He abandoned close adherence to a distinction made in an article for *ERE* in 1917. He used "mysticism" later to refer to mystical experience as well as to "the theologico-metaphysical doctrine of the soul's possible union with Absolute Reality," despite his earlier counsel to the contrary. Who was it who said, "Do I contradict myself? Very well, then, I contradict myself"? He who in life could so readily laugh at himself would not have missed the humor in this predicament of embarrassment.

It is perfectly true that, as his prodigious study of mystical experience ripened with the years, Rufus Jones was saddened by the realization that mystical experience had often been marred by aberration and vagaries. Along with Albert Schweitzer, he distinguished between life-negating and life-affirming varieties. But he continued throughout to corroborate the finding of the other great contemporary researchers in this field, Evelyn Underhill, E. Herman, Dean Inge, Baron von Hugel, William James, Rudolph Otto, and Walter Stace: mystical experience amounts to a new form of consciousness in evolutionary perspective and is religion in its most intense, intimate, and authentic form. I think he would not have been averse to applying to it the currently popular phrase,

“consciousness-raising,” with reference to the sphere of religion. An interesting sidelight, worth mentioning here, is that all of these other researchers also saw Quakerism as standing within the mystical stream in our heritage. If Rufus Jones was wrong in this basic perception, he was in good company.

When our author says Jones rejected the metaphysical “doctrine of the relationship and potential union of the human soul with Ultimate Reality,” I think we need to be more discriminating. Certainly he had “a preference for an experiential mystical event which is concrete and vital and leads to positive action.” But did not Jones’s emphasis on the concept of the Inner Light imply a “relationship and potential union of the human soul with Ultimate Reality” in some form?

Jones’s considered position that Fox was a mystic as well as a prophet would still be defended by most students of mysticism, though they would also agree that Fox’s mysticism was “not of the ecstatic type but of the active, humanist, affirmative type.” Many would agree with the appraisal Bassuk attributes to Jones: “The essential message of George Fox was a rediscovery of the truth of the divine immanence in man.”

It seems to me confusing when the author alludes to Lewis Benson’s insistence on the existence of two traditions in Quakerism, “the prophetic and the philosophical,” and then proceeds to equate the prophetic with the mystical and the philosophical with mysticism, however plausible this may be in light of Jones’s very early distinction. Certainly Rufus Jones did not intend an apology for philosophical mysticism.

Though “Rufus Jones seldom referred to the Inner Light as the Christ Within,” this does not mean he would not have equated the two if directly interrogated. Bassuk charges that “Jones’s interpretation of the Inner Light is Greek-philosophical and not biblical-prophetic.” One hears again an echoing and re-echoing theme in *QRT*. I think Bassuk is right in asserting that “for Jones the Inner Light came to signify the spiritual potentiality in human life and the essence of God within man” and that this position may be traced “back to the Platonic movement in philosophy” and “the evolving religious worldview of the Greeks.” It is true that Fox agreed with Barclay that the presence in man of the Inner Light was not integral

to human nature but a divine addition by intervention. But a very strong case can be made that the author of the Fourth Gospel, on which early Friends based many of their convictions, did believe that this Light was inherent in the nature of man. The cause is not far to seek. This author had been strongly influenced by Greek philosophical thought. The great confluence had already taken place between Hebrew and Greek thought before the canon of the Bible was closed. Therefore the recurring theme in *QRT* that would contrast Greek-philosophical thought and biblical-prophetic thought must come to terms with the facts that Greek-philosophical thought also has claim to being biblical in however limited a sense and that the Fourth Gospel has had prophetic influence, notably on the Society of Friends! Do we really want to revive the old controversy as to whether the "Light that enlighteneth every man" is a part of his nature or not?

I suppose a deeper question that confronts contemporary Quakerism is whether the Spirit calls us to a renewed advocacy of the views of Fox and Barclay or to an affirmation of fresh revelation insofar as we are given to know new truth through experimentation, confirmed by the gathered company. Which is truer to the Spirit that animated Fox?

One final point. Schweitzer says of St. Paul that he had "a mind great enough to accept defeat at the hands of a paradox." If, as G. K. Chesterton claimed, religion sings the paradoxology more consistently than the doxology, perhaps we need not be so troubled by the recurrence of paradoxes in Jones's attempt to understand the phenomenon of mysticism. What continues to be relevant to contemporary Quakerism is Jones's insight that the prophetic element in George Fox and in early Quakerism sprang precisely from and was rooted in positive, life-affirming, mystical experience. Christ had returned to teach his people himself through the Inward Light individually and in the gathered company, whether this Christ be identified solely as the Jesus of history or as the eternal God in human terms. The Inner Light revealed in Jesus is present in all men.

J. FLOYD MOORE

In his paper on "Rufus Jones and Mysticism," Daniel Bassuk makes two claims which appear to cancel out his basic argument. Most of the paper is devoted to the theory that Rufus Jones led Quakerism astray by his emphasis on its mystical character. Then he washes out his carefully constructed theory by concluding that "Rufus Jones's 'affirmation mysticism'... is not mysticism at all." If he really believes in his own conclusion, then he should perhaps revise the body of his paper to show either (a) that Rufus Jones did not lead Quakerism astray, since his position was not really mysticism, or (b) that he led it astray in some other direction. If the latter is the case, Bassuk should clarify his interpretation of Jones's non-mysticism and why Jones dealt such a body blow to Quakerism. It would also help if Bassuk had given two positive definitions of his own, one of Quakerism and the other of mysticism, in order to indicate the incongruity of Jones's views. What he does in his paper, putting it succinctly, is to say that Jones's Quakerism is neither this nor that: *Neti, Neti*.

It is somewhat puzzling also to note Bassuk's claim in his introduction that there has been no "fair and adequate" critique of Rufus Jones's mysticism. In order to make this claim, one would think, Bassuk would first analyze carefully all of Jones's own major writings in this field, then review the relevant critical scholarship. The six primary sources are Jones's *Studies in Mystical Religion* (1909), *Spiritual Reformers in the 16th & 17th Centuries* (1914), *New Studies in Mystical Religion* (1927), *Some Exponents of Mystical Religion* (1930), *Mysticism and Democracy in the English Commonwealth* (1932), and *The Flowering of Mysticism* (1939). Then one should turn to thirteen additional books which complement these six: *A Dynamic Faith* (1901), *Social Law in the Spiritual World* (1904), *The Double Search* (1906), *Quakerism: A Religion of Life* (1908), *Spiritual Energies in Daily Life* (1922), *Fundamental Ends of Life* (1924), *Pathways to the Reality of God* (1931), *The Testimony of the Soul* (1936), *The Eternal Gospel* (1938), *New Eyes for Invisibles* (1943), *The Radiant Life* (1944), *The Luminous Trail* (1947), and *A Call to What is Vital* (1948).

To these should be added many relevant editorials from the period of 1894 to 1912, when he was either editor or chief editorial writer for *The American Friend*.

Bassuk cites examples from seven of these volumes to support his views, but omits the supporting historical interpretation by Jones in his studies of Quakerism, such as the "Introduction" to Braithwaite's *The Beginnings of Quakerism* and *The Faith and Practice of the Quakers*. While the "Introduction" was omitted from the second edition of Braithwaite, Henry Cadbury made sure that it was included in the Rufus Jones centennial volume in 1963, *Quakerism: A Spiritual Movement*.

In addition to considering the views of critics whom he cites and with whom he agrees, he could have provided a stronger foundation and broader context for his views if he had also considered the evaluation of Rufus Jones by Mary Hoxie Jones in her short biography, *Rufus M. Jones*; by Harry Emerson Fosdick in *Rufus Jones Speaks to Our Time*; by David Hinshaw in *Rufus Jones: Master Quaker*; by Elizabeth Gray Vining in *Friend of Life: The Biography of Rufus M. Jones*; and in at least three other doctoral dissertations – E. L. Dwyer's "The Principle of Authority in the Theology of Rufus Jones" (1951), W. A. Alsobrook's "The Mysticism of Rufus M. Jones" (1954), and J. F. Moore's "The Ethical Thought of Rufus Matthew Jones" (1960) – and my Ward lecture, *Rufus Jones: Luminous Friend* (1958). It is not only surprising that he does not take into consideration the work of Alsobrook on the same subject. How could he possibly disregard Howard Brinton's *Ethical Mysticism in the Society of Friends*?

Is Bassuk saying that none of these, especially Alsobrook's, is either fair or adequate? What does he really think of Alsobrook's analysis? How does he evaluate the views of such able Quaker interpreters of mysticism as Thomas Kelly, Howard Brinton, and Douglas Steere, who knew Rufus Jones and his thought intimately? Are they non-mystical and non-Quaker?

For such a study as this, it should be basic that Bassuk clarify his own understanding of Quakerism, especially what he considers to be unique or distinctive about George Fox's interpretation of Christianity. Rufus Jones thought that George

Fox and Quakerism revealed true religion to be that type in which Christ has historically demonstrated the communion of God and man directly, without any necessary intervention or intermediary.¹ He found this authentic religious experience in the Hebrew prophets, in the life and epistles of Paul, in the Gospel of John, and later confirmed partially in the experience of Plotinus, Clement, Meister Eckhart, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Browning, and a good many others, including John Woolman and many "unknown saints." The biblical foundation of Jones's religion may be summarized in two texts: Prov. 20:27 (KJV): "The spirit of man is the candle of the LORD," and 2 Cor. 4:6 (RSV): "For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." These express both the universality and the particularity of the divine-human community.²

Was Jones wrong in believing that the meeting place for the divine possibility — the *shekinah* — in the individual has important historical, social, rational, ethical, and prophetic dimensions? The fact that Jones distinguished the philosophical, metaphysical doctrine of "mysticism" from the "affirmation mysticism" which he regarded as the distinctive mode of worship for Quakerism should not disturb Bassuk. On the other hand, he should show, if possible, that this was neither characteristic nor distinctive of the religion of George Fox and early Friends, or of Quakerism in its evolution. His paper nowhere seems to do this.

Bassuk does cite the views of Palmer, Benson, Nuttall, and King. He could have added others, such as Hugh Barbour, to support his claim that Rufus Jones placed Quakerism in the main stream of mysticism in Western Christianity rather than in the Puritan reformation in England. This position requires two comments: The first is that anyone who has studied Jones carefully will know that his major life work as a scholar was devoted to a study of the whole of mystical religion and not merely to Quakerism. He certainly made efforts to place Quakerism within that spiritual movement in human history whose authentication is not based upon the authority of a single theory, book, person, church, or society, but upon man's

own first-hand experience of the divine. He attempted to relate this movement to every major Christian mystic and to some aspect of the religious experience of many of the world's saints, whether Christian or not.³

Jones did not claim to demonstrate a direct, confirmed line of antecedency which would convince others that Fox was literally the disciple of Jacob Boehme or other mystics. He never claimed to be constructing a perfect, irrefutable system of Quaker *hadiths*, such as Moslem scholars are called upon to do in justification of the authoritative teachings of Mohammed. He made this clear at the outset of his studies: "It is not yet, and probably will not ever be, possible to prove that George Fox and the other leaders of this special movement *consciously* adopted their ideas and methods . . . from the Separatist sects which swarmed about them, and which were the product of many centuries of striving after an inward way to God."⁴

While Braithwaite showed, and Jones was fully aware of, the Puritan soil from which Quakerism sprang in mid-seventeenth-century England, he confirmed and supported Jones's point of view in chapters 1 and 2 of *The Beginnings of Quakerism*. He acknowledged the general mystical influence of the Family of Love and of the writings of Jacob Boehme and Thomas Taylor but made clear, as did Jones, that there was no direct contact evident with either the Familists or the Boehmists.⁵

This leads to the second observation: Was Jones fundamentally wrong or right? Was this helpful or harmful? Did he reach the heart of the matter or not? My own conclusion is that his position was fundamentally sound and, further, that his basic direction provides one of the best hopes that Quakerism as a spiritual movement can speak to the condition of all men. This does not mean that the mystical experience is the only aspect of Quakerism that is important or that all Friends must agree on its nature and influence. It cannot be understood nor can it survive in a vacuum. Rufus Jones's religion was a religion of the *whole* man for the *whole* society. It requires the keenest attention to reason, education, history, nature, science, social organization, revelation, faith, and work. It stems originally from Judaism, with its prophetic depend-

ence upon the direct revelation of God, and grows specifically from the Catholic and Protestant response to the presence of the Holy Spirit as realized in the incarnational person and character of Jesus of Nazareth as the eternal Christ. But it is not therefore limited to the eighth-century B.C. prophets, the first-century A.D. disciples, the sixteenth-century reformers, nor the *Journal or Epistles* of George Fox. It is a religion of experience, which means that it must grow and evolve with man's own experience in every age. It does not negate the experience of Israel, the gospels of Christ, the nurturing mother church, the freedom and responsibility of the Reformation, nor the prophetic proclamation of Fox. Nor does it cast aside its roots in Greek idealism, German rationalism, or more recent social change. It has much to learn from Buddha, Lao-tzu, Shankara, the Sufis, Gandhi, and the empiricism of native African religion.

The kind of Quakerism which tore the Society of Friends apart in the early nineteenth century has perpetuated itself in various individuals, creeds, monthly meetings, and even yearly meetings today. It is no doubt meaningful to those Friends who find an adequate expression of their own views in George Fox, Joseph John Gurney, Elias Hicks, or John Wilbur. Others have found such a liberating, inspiring faith in Rufus Jones. But this is not enough, whether Fox or Jones. Neither of these would be satisfied to have us stop at such a single point.

Quakerism as a truly religious society of friends should involve us continually in the "double search." It should use every possible resource, whether biblical, theological, ecclesiastical, or ethical. But the aspect of Quakerism which, for me, sets it apart from the rabbinical authority of Torah, the papal authority of the church, the Protestant authority of the Bible, and the rational authority of humanism, is its social and ethical mysticism. It is the coming together of all of us to seek the divine presence, not only individually but socially, intellectually, emotionally, and, at the center, profoundly spiritually. It is experienced and expressed by the divine love which invades our minds and hearts and is demonstrated by the justice of our life in the world community.

Without this dimension, Quakerism tends to be another Protestant sect. This dimension provides the basis for an authentic relationship with all men everywhere. It can be truly the nexus of the divine-human community. This, in my judgment, is what Rufus Jones was saying. It is Christian mysticism at its best. In this sense it has potential for all mankind. This is why it is a wholly justifiable and liberating evolution of the religion of George Fox. It must not stop with Rufus Jones, any more than it should have stopped with Fox. But the contribution of Jones moved the narrow, Puritan Quakerism of the nineteenth century into the world community of the twentieth, where it now has the potential to communicate with all mankind.

In conclusion, it appears to me that the position taken by Bassuk represents a tendency to preserve Quakerism as a static, exclusivistic seventeenth-century Protestant sect rather than a growing, liberating spiritual movement which can find a meeting place of the divine with all humanity. I would invite him to take the next step beyond this thoughtful, conscientious study of Rufus Jones by considering him not merely in the context of scholarly analysis but also in the framework of the future of the Society of Friends in the world community, showing the potential of Quakerism as a corporate, ethical, Christian mysticism. Rufus Jones pointed us in that direction.

Notes

1. See *Christian Faith and Practice in the Experience of the Society of Friends* (London: London Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, 1960), chapter 3.
2. J. Floyd Moore, *Rufus M. Jones: Luminous Friend*, Ninth Annual Ward Lecture (Greensboro, N.C.: Guilford College, 1958), pp. 19-20.
3. See Rufus M. Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1909), and Rufus M. Jones, *Spiritual Reformers in the 16th & 17th Centuries* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1914).
4. Rufus M. Jones, "Introduction," in *The Beginnings of Quakerism*, by William C. Braithwaite (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), p. xxv (hereafter referred to as Braithwaite, *Beginnings*).
5. Braithwaite, *Beginnings*, p. 40; see also Howard H. Brinton's 1967 Pendle Hill Pamphlet, *Ethical Mysticism in the Society of Friends*, John Yungblut's 1974 Pendle Hill Pamphlet, *Quakerism of the Future: Mystical, Prophetic, & Evangelical*, and the response to Yungblut by Richard Allen in *The Friends' Quarterly*, Vol. 19 (January 1976), pp. 205-212.

LEWIS BENSON

Anyone who desires to understand Quaker thought in the first half of the twentieth century will find much that throws light on that period in this essay by Daniel Bassuk. It is commendable that Bassuk is able to convey to us something of the heroic stature of Rufus Jones. In spite of much criticism from Friends in his early years, he was able to introduce his own personal faith, which he called affirmative mysticism, to a large segment of the Quaker world. He succeeded in getting it accepted for more than a generation as a definite type of Quakerism.

Bassuk calls our attention to the basic distinction made by Rufus Jones between mysticism and mystical experience. "The doctrine of mysticism," says Jones, "is essentially a metaphysical problem," whereas "first hand, or mystical, experience is primarily . . . psychological." The appeal of mystical experience for many Quakers was based on Jones's claim that it is not derived from metaphysical theory but is simply firsthand experience. But the choice is not as simple as that. The metaphysical mysticism of the great mystics does not exclude experience, and Rufus Jones's own particular form of mystical experience, affirmative mysticism, does not exclude metaphysics. Rufus Jones's affirmative mysticism was postulated on a view of the nature of man that owes more to the religion of the Greeks than to the Judeo-Christian view of man. The soul, he says, "possesses a ground of certitude in spiritual matters, and it *sees* what is essential to its life with the same directness as the mathematician sees his axioms."¹ "Man," he says, "is essentially related to God . . . and never sundered from the deeper world of spirit."² "I am going to stand for the inalienable powers and capacities of the soul, whatever happens."³ He was well aware that this view of man had its roots in a very ancient metaphysical tradition as well as in a more modern metaphysical theory — German idealism. "The self-demonstration of spiritual experience is essentially right," he says. "It is in harmony with the profoundest philosophical movement in the modern world."⁴ "This divine-human relation may be and has been proved by explicit reasoning and held by a great group of

modern philosophers.”⁵ He is referring here to the philosophical idealism of Kant, Hegel, and others. “Immanuel Kant,” he says, “is next to Plato my guiding philosopher.”⁶

It is strange that an interpreter of Quakerism who repeatedly referred to his debt to Plato, Plotinus, Kant, and Hegel should commend his interpretation to us on the ground that it is non-metaphysical.

In commenting on my pamphlet, *Prophetic Quakerism*, Bassuk suggests that there is an analogy between the two contrasting Quaker traditions that I describe, prophetic and philosophical, and Jones’s two kinds of mysticism, experiential and metaphysical, because “the prophetic is mystical while mysticism is philosophical.” I cannot agree that this is a true analogy; there is a vast difference between Jones’s affirmative mysticism and the prophetic Quakerism I described. Jones’s affirmative mysticism is different from the metaphysical mysticism set forth in the landmark books of Inge and Underhill, but it is nonetheless a species of metaphysical mysticism. Bassuk concludes that Jones’s affirmative mysticism “is not [metaphysical] mysticism at all.” I would say that it is not prophetic Quakerism at all.

Along with Jones’s new interpretation of Quakerism came a new theory of the place of the Quakers in history. Under Jones’s influence Quakers began to think of the Christian mystics as their spiritual ancestors. By carefully checking the sources Bassuk has clearly shown that, in order to make the Quakers appear as spiritual descendants of the mystics, Jones portrayed these mystics as much closer to his own affirmative mysticism than the facts warrant.

Bassuk notes that there has been a gradual abandonment of Jones’s mystical theory of Quaker origins, which seemed so firmly established forty years ago. He asserts that “recent scholarship has established other origins.” By this I assume he means the Puritan theory of Quaker origins. Perhaps the word “established” is a bit strong for the less than total acceptance of the theory that the Quakerism of the seventeenth century was essentially a Puritan phenomenon. But at least it can be said that this theory now leads the field.

What is relevant to our present situation is that neither the mystical nor the Puritan theory of Quaker origins helps us to understand the reason for the explosive power and rapid growth of the early Quaker movement. The mystical theory had the merit of being part of a whole new interpretation of Quakerism that inspired hope in at least one generation of "new Quakers." The Puritan theory, on the other hand, is not causing young men to see visions nor old men to dream dreams. It puts the early Quakers as far from the present and future as Puritanism itself – and this is very far indeed. This may be one of the reasons why our present leadership has failed to bring us any closer to the power that erupted in the seventeenth century and launched the Quaker revolution.

While we are being treated to a fascinating series of theories about how Quakerism got started, we lose sight of the sources that are available to us. The facts about Quaker beginnings are much more impressive than the most cleverly devised historical theories that have yet appeared. The first Quakers had a clear sense of who they were and what their mission was in history. Their story is a great spiritual resource that could be the means of recovering the power and the vision that made them history-making men and women. It could show *us* how to be history-makers also.

Notes

1. Rufus M. Jones, *Social Law in the Spiritual World: Studies in Human and Divine Inter-Relationship* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Co., 1904), p. 171 (hereafter referred to as Jones, *Social Law*).
2. Rufus M. Jones, *The Eternal Gospel* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938), p. 90.
3. Rufus M. Jones, *The New Quest* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), p. 39.
4. Jones, *Social Law*, p. 171.
5. Rufus M. Jones, "The Quaker's Conception of God," in *Beyond Dilemmas: Quakers Look at Life*, ed. S. B. Laughlin (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1937), p. 37.
6. Rufus M. Jones, *The Radiant Life*, 4th printing (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1945), p. 78.