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REVIEW OF BRIAN DRAYTON AND
WILLIAM P. TABER, JR. *A LANGUAGE
FOR THE INWARD LANDSCAPE:
SPIRITUAL WISDOM FROM THE
QUAKER MOVEMENT.*
PHILADELPHIA: TRACT
ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDS, 2015.

MICHAEL BIRKEL

Full disclosure from the start: It was a privilege if perhaps a bit unconventional to be asked to review this new book. What follows is less an academic assessment of a new volume than a spiritual celebration of the memory of a departed friend and an appreciation for the labors of a living friend who brought an incomplete work to a manuscript well worthy of publication.

Bill Taber was a much loved teacher, nurturer, and guide in the inward life. His ministries took various outward expressions, as a teacher in Friends schools, as a released minister among Conservative Friends in Ohio Yearly Meeting, and as a member of the faculty at the Quaker study center Pendle Hill. When Bill retired from Pendle Hill, he returned to Barnesville, where he established a center for retreats and carried on his ministries among Friends. Bill Taber opened the treasures of Quaker spirituality to a multitude of seekers through his speaking, his leadership of retreats and workshops, and his writing.

After Bill's death in 2005, his widow Fran, who is in her own right a gifted spiritual nurturer, invited me to visit her in Barnesville, to look over Bill's papers to see if there might be some unpublished thoughts that would enrich the lives of readers if brought to print. I identified two worthy projects. The first was a modest one and resulted in a Pendle Hill pamphlet (#406) in 2010, *The Mind of Christ: Bill Taber on Meeting for Business*. The second was both more unfinished and larger in scope: a study of what Bill called "a language of the inward landscape," an exploration of traditional Quaker terms to describe spiritual experiences. Bill had offered numerous talks and retreats on

the topic. At Fran's request, I happily contacted Brian Drayton, a dear friend of Bill's and someone who had traveled in the work of the ministry with him. Brian expressed great interest in this project, as "an act of *pietas*," as he put it—a work of loyalty, love, reverence, and gratitude for his spiritual mentor. The final manuscript is, by Brian's estimation, about 75% from his hand.

This book, then, is the outgrowth of a friendship between two—to use a phrase that Bill himself used—"ministers in the old style." Both Bill and Brian have played a role in the renewal of that kind of ministry and have spoken to the heart of many kinds of Friends. Both have helped universalist Quakers to grasp the Christian fundament of Friends and have aided pastoral Quakers to understand more deeply the practice of waiting worship.

As Brian Drayton confesses in the first footnote (8), this book is not a formal academic undertaking. As a result, readers should not expect critical interaction with the recent work of other scholars—in fact, what references are made tend to be to scholars of previous generations, such as Alfred Neave Brayshaw, Howard Brinton, and Geoffrey Nuttall. Instead, the reader is treated to a meticulous and unabashedly affectionate reading of earlier Quaker texts, many of them from the seventeenth century, but also journal writers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth.

The early portions of the work are valuable explanations of and reflections on central Quaker concepts, such as Light, Life, and Seed. Readers are gently invited to broaden the contemporary use of these expressions among Friends. The Light is a revealer of Truth that may at times be uncomfortable. The Light brings into unity with the Spirit of Christ and with the community.

The authors helpfully uncover meanings understood by earlier generations of Friends that are often unrealized by contemporary readers and do not shy away from terms that admittedly pose obstacles for some moderns. Whether a reader chooses to adopt such language or not, it is beneficial to gain a grasp of the distinctive use of such language among early Quakers.

Let us acknowledge that our culture, and our cultural tools and habits of mind, are different from those of Fox or Elizabeth Fry, or even Rufus Jones. As we reflect on our journeys across the inward landscape, we may nevertheless feel our way to a place where the truth of the older language of sin and sanctification can be allied

with our modern language about the self, the community, and the transpersonal. When we reach that place, we can then reckon with the challenge of righteousness and the process of sanctification as a result of the inward work of Christ through the Light, and as a necessary pre-requisite for service to God and God’s children. (45)

Clearly these words were framed with a pastoral intent. Similarly, Brian Drayton introduces a famous passage from Isaac Penington (“I have met with the Seed”) with these inviting words, born of patient study and of inward experience:

When one stills the clamor of inner voices and outer involvements, and comes to a quiet, open condition, one can sense a focus, or a clarity of attention, in which fear and striving do not seem relevant. Time also is not felt, and there is a dawning or fresh sense of possibility, change, and growth. Friends have loved to call this low, beautiful thing of potential and power the Seed. (39)

A key phrase to Bill Taber’s spirituality was “the Cross of Joy,” and that expression finds exposition in this book. Brian transmits this teaching of Bill faithfully and adds from his own personal experience.

The Cross for Friends has been experienced as a place, a process, and a state of being that is full of joy and power. For this reason, exploring the Quaker “inner landscape” can help modern Friends refresh their understanding of the Cross images, and feel where there is still abundant life in them. (55)

When we participate in the transformational work of the Light, accepting the truth it reveals, and as power comes, and we move into the greater faithfulness, there comes a sense of enlargement in freedom and in love that is not a reward for good behavior, but an increase in well-being that opens us to joy, because we have been healed in some way. We may experience at first struggle, disorientation, or deprivation—a straitened path—yet it sets the stage for a new birth through which the divine life has greater, more welcome scope in our personality and outlook. After some experience of this transformation process, we can come to embrace it when we feel it happening, knowing that it leads to joy, often in unexpected forms. (57-58)

Other fine moments of the book include its discussion of how meetings have spiritual conditions that reveal themselves to a minister such as Martha Routh:

While sitting under the renewal of baptism, I had to believe that the state of the meeting was very complicated. But it is only for thee to read, oh fellow traveler, thou who art able to do it, in a similar line, what it is to be so engaged, and how great the care and watchfulness which is necessary, even when under the holy anointing. The states of the people are opened like flowers in a garden, some appearing beautiful to the eye, and affording a pleasant savor; others of a contrary appearance yielding an offensive smell; others having little or no scent. (85-86)

Like Martha Routh, and perhaps even inspired by her and other ministers, Brian Drayton does not hesitate to address the reader directly, as in these words of edification:

Perhaps you, the reader, have had the experience that, after a time of settling in meeting, you find yourself, without losing the sense of inward openness, looking around the room and cherishing the faces of those you sit with. In such a clarified moment, when your own spirit is both very calm and very alert, you are most receptive to the states and wordless testimonies of the other worshippers. You can see each one clearly, and without denying anything you might know about them, good or bad, you can see how they are beloved, how they occupy their own right place in the people of God, how your own judgments of affection or disapproval are quite beside the point. Their sitting in meeting enables your worship. At such a time, your own face shines with the sort of love we strive so hard for—though like Moses returning from Sinai, you do not notice the light you are contributing to this focal moment. At such a time, your sitting is solid. You are settled in the Presence of the living Christ, and under the Spirit's hand. (87-88)

The lexicon that constitutes roughly the final third of the book is an alphabetically arranged glossary, from “baptism” to “witness,” of further terms that are encountered in reading works by earlier Friends. A brief description of each word is accompanied by an illustrative passage from one or more texts. “Baptism,” for example, draws richly from George Fox, Sarah Lynes Grubb, and Samuel Bownas. “Watering” is a similarly compelling entry. “Nudge” seems an unexpected choice for a book focused on the early periods of Friends history (a search in the Digital Quaker Collection does not yield evidence that it was used as a concept for the inward landscape), but readers acquainted with Brian

Drayton also know his playful spirit. As he notes in the introduction to this spiritual abecedary, the entries are best read without haste and with openness to their evocative power.

This volume may help, as good books can, give some readers words for their own experience. As they are led into an understanding of early Quaker experience, they may come to a sense of recognition as something feels familiar or akin to their own spiritual encounters. If so, then at least one of the central purposes of this good book will have been served.

