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Margery Post Abbot

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LIBERAL FRIENDS’ RESPONSES TO OTHER FAITHS

MARGERY POST ABBOTT

The consequences of the divisions that started in Philadelphia in 1827 are quite evident in 1996. Many groups of Friends see themselves as inheritors of the faith of George Fox. Yet as a direct consequence of the separations, they have grown to emphasize different aspects of early Quakerism. In the process each branch has adopted new beliefs and practices which push them further apart. A question close to my heart is “how can we all rightfully claim to be Friends?”

My research on this question centers on those Quakers who belong to yearly meetings open to a diversity of belief. For want of a better term I am calling them “liberal Friends.” I use the word liberal to mean open to a wide range of belief. I specifically do not use the more common term “unprogrammed Friends.” Most liberal Friends worship in unprogrammed meetings which are closest in form to early Friends’ worship of waiting on God. However, I want to stress that “waiting” or “open” worship is not inherently linked to a “liberal” theology. All Friends can benefit from a rediscovery of the full meaning and practice of the testimony of waiting for guidance of the Spirit in the silence which is such a central part of Friends’ heritage.

Liberal Friends are a minority within the Religious Society of Friends. Their yearly meetings—those that do not have a clearly defined statement of belief in their Faith and Practice—include North Pacific, Philadelphia, Britain, Baltimore, and Canadian, among others. Within such yearly meetings worldwide, one can find individuals and meetings that are quite evangelical as well as Meetings for Worship where the word “Christ” is never heard. These meetings are often politically liberal, but not always, and a few monthly meetings hold programmed worship and have pastors. They are perhaps a third of North American Friends and a small fraction of Friends worldwide.

Tom Hamm has issued a challenge: “If Friends can accommodate virtually any belief, then what does it mean to be a Friend?” The
book that is the larger context of my research is one response to this challenge. It is organized around four central topics: Mysticism, that is, the individual and group encounter with the Divine; Belief, or the ways people speak about God; Testimonies—the witness of God’s action in daily life; and Community, or how Friends live together as a people of God. The core of my research is a set of over 60 interviews with Friends in three quite different liberal yearly meetings—Philadelphia, Britain, and North Pacific. Individuals were chosen in part because of their active involvement in leadership positions or in interpreting Quakerism through writing and teaching. They were also chosen to give a sense of the range of beliefs present in those yearly meetings.

This paper speaks to the ways in which other great religions of the world have reshaped the beliefs of liberal Friends, particularly some of the ways in which shifting understandings of the universal nature of Christ has allowed many Meetings to accept non-Christians into membership. This was unheard of before the twentieth century and probably before the second world war. It is a practice rooted in the universal nature of the Light expressed so fervently by early Friends.

Robert Barclay, the seventeenth-century codifier of Friends practice and belief, established a clear alternative to the predominant views of his time in stating that:

[Christ] is the “real light which enlightens every man” (John 1:9 NEB). And makes visible everything that is exposed to the light. And teaches all temperance, righteousness and godliness. And enlightens the hearts of all to prepare them for salvation.

The first generation of Friends were radical in believing Jesus Christ was universally available to all people. This allowed them to approach individuals of other religions in ways that recognized and respected those who responded to the Spirit of Christ in all cultures and all religions.

Over the centuries, this initial opening has undergone many changes. In the 1970s a few liberal Friends, first in Great Britain, then in the United States, created formal organizations based on a concept of “universalism” which some see as independent of the Christian message.

But this is not an easy blend. John Punshon and Elton Trueblood are among the prominent Friends who have challenged this diversity in belief and decried a universalism that is not grounded in Christ as
untrue to Quakerism. The place of Christ has also been a difficult issue for liberal Friends. The truth is they don’t even agree on what is meant by “universalism.”

In the late twentieth century, the liberal yearly meetings no longer assume its members believe in Jesus Christ as savior. This is one result of the incremental loosening of doctrine since 1827, reversing the tightening that occurred in the years prior to the first separations. The most significant change in the early twentieth century was the major revision of the format of Faith and Practice, starting in London Yearly Meeting. The new format incorporated individual statements of faith of a wide range of people in place of a few central statements of doctrine which had included George Fox’s letter to the Governor of Barbados. This letter is still a central statement of faith for many evangelical yearly meetings. The Faith and Practice revisions were part of a significant revitalization of the Society and signalled an influx of new energy and a fresh vision of faith.

These changes reflect some of the ways in which Friends have adapted belief and practice to contemporary life in a multicultural, complex world. Liberal Friends have accepted greater diversity of belief than other Friends today or in the past. This has opened possibilities to see the breadth of God’s hand in the world. It has also opened serious questions about the degree of loss of a crucial portion of the original message early Friends knew. I find myself seeking a deeper inner discipline which might help build and expand what we have to say to each other and to the world. And, I ask, “How does living in a culture of comfort affect our faith?”

I. THE CHANGING NATURE OF QUAKER UNIVERSALISM

Three reasons help explain this openness to accepting a diversity of beliefs. These are: the traditional Quaker hostility to the established institutions of Christianity; a firm belief in continuing revelation; and the way in which Friends have responded to shifts in Western culture.

A. Hostility to the Institutions of Christianity

One source of the new universalism is the hostility of Friends to institutional Christianity. Various Friends I interviewed made statements
such as “Some longtime members would still say that Quakerism is not a Christian religion,” or, “I believe many joined [Friends] in the past 30 years finding the beliefs and/or practices of their church were not meaningful.”

Disillusion with the established church and with a Christianity that relies on form alone has a long tradition among Friends. This disillusionment led Fox to search until he “found one even Christ Jesus who could speak to his condition.” The inward experience of Christ infused early Friends with a fervor that led them to a radical way of life and expression of their faith in ways we refer to today as the testimonies.

This disillusionment with traditional Christianity remains real and strong well into the 1990s. The difference lies in the fact that Fox rejected the institutional church and embraced Christ as his salvation. Today, Meetings provide a refuge for those wounded in, and angry at, Christian churches. At times that anger governs the ongoing ministry in worship. Meetings also provide a welcome home for those who find a powerful message in Jesus and seek to worship in a community that takes faith to heart and seeks to live it out. These Friends often hesitate to speak about Christ, even if Jesus is central to their lives, because of the pain and resistance they feel from those who have been wounded.

Several people I interviewed came to Friends after an extended search for a faith “that could speak to their condition.” More than one Friend, like George Fox, found that what the pastors of their youth taught felt like death. Among Friends they found Life. Like Fox, they find the reality of God present in the world. They seek to live in accord with divine guidance. One interviewee stated with certainty that most Friends “are radically Christian, trying to live in the Divine presence and in accord with Divine guidance...even though most use non-Christian language.”

B. The Nature of Continuing Revelation

A second reason for new Quaker interpretations of faith is in the concept of continuing revelation. Steve Cary, a Philadelphia Friend and for many years the head of AFSC, described it this way:

We also believe in continuous revelation—not that God once spoke and vouchedsafed all truths—but that God still speaks and
continues to be available to us. We are imperfect, but new fragments of truth are always available. This makes Quakerism a very positive and hopeful faith in that one implication of continuing revelation is that human beings are perfectible; the kingdom of God is realizable within history, and not only beyond it. This is important in keeping Friends from thinking they have all the answers. Becoming a Friend is the beginning of a search, not its end.  

A number of Friends see Quakers growing in their concepts of God as part of the process of continuing revelation. Barclay’s concept of the light that is available to all makes more visible the surprising and varied ways in which God is at work in the world. Attention to the Inward Teacher gives Friends an ability to see the world in fresh ways and not be defined solely by tradition or cultural norms. This has led Friends periodically to take actions or make statements vilified at the time, but seen as insightful by later generations.  

This was clearly true over three hundred years ago, when George Fox recognized the truth present in other religions. Fox knew the Koran and quoted it extensively in his correspondence to Muslims. In 1680, Fox wrote to the king of Algiers, pleading on behalf of Quakers and other captives who were being tortured and even killed. In stark contrast to others of his day, he appealed to the king on the grounds of the moral laws expressed in the Koran. He called the king to accountability by the standards of his own faith, stating:

And Mahomet saith, that God guideth not the Wicked, chap. 19, page 115. And again, he saith, Alms is appointed for the Poor for them that recommend themselves to God, to redeem slaves, and such as are in Debt, in the same chap. p. 11. I say then, according to your own Alcoran, God hath not been your Guide to be so wicked.  

Fox also urged Friends in Algiers and elsewhere to learn the local language and to respect local culture and religion, “that they might be the more enabled to direct them to the grace and spirit of God in them.” He even noted that Friends in Muslim countries had more freedom to worship in their own manner than Friends in England at that time had. Thus, Fox embodied a true respect for others, even those whose actions he despised. He sought for the Seed in each and challenged each person to respond to the inward Spirit. At the same time, Fox was clear and forthright about his faith in Christ and sought
to bring the Muslims to know that salvation was in Christ, not the Koran.\textsuperscript{15}

In the early and middle part of the twentieth century Rufus Jones, a member of the Orthodox New England Yearly Meeting, epitomized among Friends this open spirit of acceptance of other faiths within the missionary context. Rufus and Elizabeth Jones made several trips abroad on behalf of various missionary efforts, both Quaker and interdenominational. Jones prepared for each trip by reading extensively in advance and went with an attitude of learning, rather than as one who “knew all mysteries and all knowledge.” From his trips to Japan, Jones came to see Buddha as second only to Jesus as most clearly revealing and living a life of love and tenderness.\textsuperscript{16}

The belief that God can direct our actions and words today, gives us an openness to fresh understandings of the world around us. By listening for the voice of God in ourselves and in others we meet, we have both the ability to reinterpret our faith anew as well as the challenge of discerning what is Truth. As one Friend said, “Surely the good news can’t be that most people aren’t saved” is a strong impetus for a belief that Christianity is not the only path to God.\textsuperscript{17}

C. Responses to Changing Culture

Attitudes toward Asian religions are a helpful means to trace the relation between Anglo-American culture and liberal Friends’ understanding of their faith. Friends had increased direct contact in India, China, Korea, and Japan with Hinduism and Buddhism particularly through their mission work and the Friends Ambulance Corps starting in the early part of this century. The interactions have been complex and mingled with wider changes in American and European culture. For instance, Ham Sok Hon, a member of Seoul Meeting in Korea has influenced many and has become known as a “Korean Gandhi.” A fervent Christian who touched many American Friends during his sojourn at Pendle Hill, he saw religion as taking on a new form. In a 1969 article he expressed a widely accepted sense of the need to infuse a new Asian perspective into Anglo-American culture and religion:

The basic truth of religion cannot change, but every age demands a new expression of that which is eternal….And since the Western classics have been “used up,” we are forced to
examine more closely our own Eastern classics. A renewed appreciation of the East will furnish the key to the revitalization of the stagnated Western culture.18

A member of University Meeting in Seattle, who is both Buddhist and Quaker, responded to my question about Christ by saying, “Being Buddhist and being Christian are like a right leg and a left leg. Both are connected to the same body, the Inner Light.” Over the years, various knowledgeable individuals have noted similarities between Zen Buddhism and Quakerism. In 1957, Teresina Havens prepared a study guide called Quaker and Buddhist Experiments with Truth on behalf of Friends General Conference. She chose Buddhism as a tool for understanding Eastern religions because “Buddhism is an Oriental religion, and hence a bridge to the understanding of all Oriental religions, but at the same time it is more like Quakerism than any other.”19 Similarly, Yukio Irie, a member of Japan Yearly Meeting, wrote in 1973 that “broadly speaking, in these religious main points, Zen Buddhism has much in common with Quakerism.”20 Thus Buddhism is a natural strand to follow, serving as an indicator of the response of some Quakers to other faiths.

Looking back to the last century, we find that Buddhist texts were first translated into English in 1826 in a minimal, romanticized way. Serious introduction of Buddhism into Western culture began in the late 1800s. The Theosophical Society, established in New York in 1875, did much to popularize Buddhist concepts.21 By the early twentieth century, this trend had penetrated Quakerism in both the United States and England.22

Asian religion was one of many areas of concern related to the “Mystical Awakening” addressed at the 1914 Llandudno Conference in Great Britain. The advance document for this conference states: “The vogue of Theosophy, Buddhism, Spiritualism, the Bahai Movement, etc., indicates the yearning for a spiritual experience, and for a more certain knowledge of the unseen world....” This conference, however, rather than looking toward opening up to other religions, sought to ground Quakerism in the historic Jesus. Participants took care to note that “inward experience is not alone sufficient to give us the message that our generation needs. We have a religion which goes back to historical facts, and we can, and must, draw out inspiration from these....”23

In mid-twentieth century, fascination with Eastern religions continued to grow both in the general culture and within the Society of
Friends. Thomas Kelly is one widely influential Friend who spent time researching Asian philosophy and religion. Kelly took advantage of a teaching position in Hawaii to steep himself in Chinese and Indian philosophy and developed a course in each of these fields for Haverford College. Kelly, a passionate Christian, combined his Evangelical Holiness roots with a universalist understanding that the "cosmic Light of Christ...is found shining in some form in the lives of all persons in all cultures."

Early formal involvement of Friends in interfaith cooperation started in India in 1949. Horace Alexander and Donald and Erica Groom were among those who brought together Friends and members of other faiths for worship in the manner of Friends. This apparently was in response to a suggestion of Gandhi. Gandhi suggested to Horace Alexander that one of the most valuable things the Quakers in India could do in response to riots in Calcutta and Delhi was to bring together Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs to rebuild trust. As the idea was developed, Alexander tested out with Gandhi the possibility of a "union of hearts, a fellowship in which men of each faith—Hindu, Buddhist, Parsi, Muslim, Christian—may find themselves as one because they are seeking together to practice the truth of God in the world." Gandhi saw Friends as able to provide such a meeting ground, if they were prepared "to recognize that it is as natural for a Hindu to grow into a Friend as it is for a Christian to grow into one," a quote given prominence in several articles.

The Fellowship of Friends of Truth, while not formally connected with the Society of Friends, was influential among Friends. It was formed with the purpose: "Far from asking any one to water down his Faith, or to abandon its essential features," the Fellowship of Faith "invites him rather to become more faithful." This perspective marks a significant shift from earlier Friends who expressed respect for other faiths but still saw Christianity as the primary faith to a vision of Christianity as an equal among the world’s faiths. Marjorie Sykes and other Quakers in India, however, cautioned against "grandiose and self-conscious talk" about Quakerism being a bridge between faiths. Setting up such an ulterior motive she saw as destructive of human relationships and that it is more appropriate to "enjoy God" and let anything further develop naturally.

In Great Britain, a significant change began in the same years. In 1948, London Yearly Meeting refused to allow a Swarthmore Lecture to be given under that name at its annual session. According to Elton
Trueblood, who was present at these sessions, the invited speaker had “included the separation of Quakerism from the Christian faith.” In 1980, by contrast, in what some have called a watershed Swarthmore Lecture, Janet Scott stated, “Thus we may answer the question, ‘Are Quakers Christian?’ by saying that it does not matter. What matters to Quakers is not the label by which we are called or call ourselves, but the life.”

This shift seems to be part of a much wider cultural change. In 1959, Marjorie Sykes, a convinced British Friend who became an Indian citizen, wrote: “The Quaker interest in other forms of religious experience is part of a general movement of thought.” She placed this in the context of the opening up of travel and means of communication in the aftermath to the second world war. She also suggested the increasing sense of failure of science and “progress” as further impetus to a search for hope in Asian religions.

Throughout the post World War II period, the interest in a deeper understanding and acceptance of other religions continued to grow among liberal Friends. In 1967, Friends World Committee for Consultation hosted a conference in Japan for Zen Buddhists and Christians and a similar gathering in India for Hindus and Christians. The Quaker Universalist Group was founded in England by John Linton in 1977 on the basis “that spiritual awareness is accessible to men and women of any religion or none and that no one Faith can claim to have a monopoly of Truth.” The Quaker Universalist Fellowship formed on similar grounds in the United States soon after.

This trend toward other religious philosophies reflected broader cultural currents. Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance was a popular book twenty years ago. It was one popular expression of the influence of various scholars of Asian religions on the Beat generation and the hippie movement. In the mid-1970s, American Buddhists were rapidly growing and represented a cross-section of middle-class/upper middle class America, although perhaps more educated and intellectual than the average. This socioeconomic profile is similar to what may be seen among those joining many liberal Friends meetings.

In 1996, there are Friends who hold membership in a monthly meeting and see themselves as Buddhist, Jewish, or Anglican. A Quaker who is also a Zen Buddhist priest speaks of growing up unchurched, discovering faith through Buddhism, then finding in
Friends the revelation that he could also find a faith home in a Christian community. He states that Quakerism and Zen practice both nurture his faith, in similar, but differing ways and that both are essential to him.\textsuperscript{34}

This would not have been possible in the past. For the first two centuries, there was an assumption of unity of faith among Friends. Only in 1806, under the pressure of the evangelical revivals sweeping the U.S. and Quakerism, did Friends in Philadelphia feel the need to expressly include in their *Faith and Practice* a provision stating that denial of the divinity of Christ, the immediate revelation of the Holy Spirit, or the authenticity of the Scriptures was grounds for disownment. This provision was continued in both the Hicksite and Orthodox disciplines published immediately following the “great separation” of 1827.\textsuperscript{35}

Joint membership in another church was not even considered a possibility. In fact, marriage to a non-Friend was grounds for disownment through much of the nineteenth century. New England Yearly Meeting continues the traditional position of rejecting dual membership in its 1985 book of discipline. Other yearly meetings, such as North Pacific, are silent on the matter in their discipline, and in practice some monthly meetings accept dual membership.

Openness to the prospect that God works in multiple and unexpected ways is changing Quaker practice. It also gives hope and encouragement to those who seek to find a unity that reaches beyond words. The 1995 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting *Faith and Practice* adds a suggestion that clearness committees ask each prospective member, “Are you comfortable with a Society whose unity of spirit coexists with a diversity of beliefs?”\textsuperscript{36}

II. GROUNDS OF A DEEP FAITH

Much of liberal Friends’ response to a world where multiple faiths and cultures mingle is vital and creative, but some aspects of traditional Quaker understanding have been lost in the process. Reexamination of the roots of faith can restore balance and richness. I raise two questions here: How do Friends who detach themselves from the Christian tradition find the grounding and discipline that are essential to spiritual maturity? And, how do Friends find spiritual depth and strength in a culture based on material comfort and ease?
A. Grounding in Tradition

When I asked the Friends I interviewed, “How do you define Quaker Universalism?” the surprisingly strong reactions made clear it is a poor term to use. Only a small number of Friends define universalism in a way similar to Barclay. Perhaps the most widely accepted definition of universalism among liberal Friends would be as Betty Polster phrased it:

I would define a Quaker universalist as one who believes that God has left no culture without an avenue for seeking and finding the divine. In this view, Christianity is one such avenue, not the exclusive one.37

Many, many respondents were quite sure that it was not acceptable to see Quakerism as distinctly non-Christian, but see too many Friends who speak of “universalism” in that fashion. Others saw a significant problem in detachment from any deep tradition. As Janet Scott, a British Friend, explained, “There are those who call themselves universalists (they are a bit quaint). I expected them to have a lot of interest in a variety of faiths, but found them not interested in any particular faith, but looking for a new one and not well-grounded.”38

Various individuals have stated or implied that Friends must, as a body, be well grounded in a faith if they are to have an effective witness in the world. Adam Curle wrote about it this way in Tools for Transformation:

...my wife Anna and I had joined the Society of Friends (Quakers) in Ghana a decade earlier, and this association was and has remained a valued source of support and purpose, indeed much of my peace work has been carried out under Quaker auspices. However, I felt the need for more inner guidance than Quakerism, probably through my own fault, had given me; I now set out to look for it. The path I followed led me through several stages, each illuminating, to Vajrayana, the Tantric Buddhism of Tibet.39

Curle decided to seek outside the bounds of Quakerism and Christianity for a spiritual discipline. He raises a warning that liberal Friends as a whole have lost a widespread knowledge of the Quaker heritage of spiritual practice and discernment.
Curle found the grounding and spiritual discipline he needed in Buddhism for the intense experiences in international mediation, development and education which have formed the basis of his work. Other Friends find their grounding in recovering traditional Quaker practices, some in learning of the ways of the Catholic mystics. Marjorie Sykes blended a deep Christian Quakerism and intensive study of Hinduism as she taught in India and was active in the Gandhian movement for Indian independence. Looking closely at Friends who make a visible difference in the world, it is usual to find a pattern of spiritual discipline, study, and prayer which ground their work.

B. The Place of Suffering in a Culture of Ease

Another question for Friends relates to the material affluence that surrounds many North Americans, accompanied by a political system that allows great freedoms. Some Friends feel that the strength of Quaker witness can only be known when it is tested. Today, Friends are too often comfortable, middle-class and do not have to face harsh decisions or the pain that is all too real for much of the world. A Seattle Friend, Maurice Warner, stated it this way:

At the present time, we are not forged by martyrdom. There is a significant difference when we are forced by adversity into hard positions. My experience acting on the testimonies was in a community where there was a sense of ostracism....I was directly faced with making decisions at the razor’s edge. Are you willing to do that kind of work? What if your job is at stake? Power is lost when we have the ability to waffle.40

Yukio Irie had attended six Zen-Christian Colloquia in Japan at the time he spoke at Australia Yearly Meeting in 1973. In his lecture, he summarized each of the Colloquia and presented from them important questions for Friends:

Our discussions centered round the following two points: (i) Where is God or Buddha, within man or without? .... (ii) Is a real religion possible at all without presupposing some desperate agony and life and death struggle to cleanse oneself of sin in vain, only to experience despair and complete surrender on the part of man?

The second question was raised not only by the evangelical Christians, but also by the Zen Buddhists, because Zen
Buddhists believe that, although they do not believe in Original Sin, they know human follies, ignorance and sinfulness, and that their Awakenment is to be attained only through some severe physical and spiritual training, perhaps equal to Christians’ agony and suffering with the consciousness of Original Sin, while Quakerism seemed to them very easy-going, when considered according to their understanding of “the Inner Light.” Thus both these questions directly concerned the Quaker Faith.…

Blended into this are the questions related to the outward confrontation which comes from physical want or being at odds with the norms of society. The nature of marriage and the offer of sanctuary to illegal refugees are two concerns that have come before a number of Meetings in the past decade. Both of these concerns have forced Friends to struggle with questions about our relationship with the legal system, with the nature of authority in our Meetings, and with long accepted definitions of morality. Equally important is the inward wrestling with our individual failings. Some Meetings have learned the complexity of the hurt generated when Friends come face to face with the fact that their own membership is not free of child abusers. Many are willing to struggle with these frightfully painful questions when they arise, yet Friends have not always succeeded in responding clearly and without rancor in the face of evil.

The lack of a common theology of sin and evil thankfully allows Friends to avoid the easy answers. It is not possible to simply lay the burden on the offender and dismiss them from our midst. The hard struggle to find unity in the face of difficult questions, while challenging, is the way in which Friends do encounter the life and death issues Yukio Irie raised: the encounter with Cross is in relations with one another and in the doing, not in the abstract. The challenge to know spiritual discipline and an ability to face suffering with compassion, humility, and recognition of human limitations is one that is relevant to Friends of all traditions.

CONCLUSION

In reflection, several points arise relating to the expanded concept of the universal nature of our faith which has arisen among liberal Friends in the twentieth century. This overview of our interactions
with other faith traditions indicates several points that illuminate who liberal Friends are today.

First, Friends refuse to accept profession of belief without a living faith visible in actions as well as words. What is new in the twentieth century is the willingness to look at a person’s life and see that they live a life faithful to what God requires, without judging the way they express their beliefs. As a consequence, some Meetings admit into membership individuals who are expressly non-Christian in their beliefs.

Second, the hostility to organized religion in most of its forms has a long tradition and is part of drawing off all the world’s conventions and turning to the household of God. Turning toward God draws hearts into healing and compassion. The anger toward the past does not provide a sound base for a community or for faith. Being a Friend involves forgiveness and a fresh approach seeking new understanding and relationship.

Third, the belief that God is continually interacting with humanity allows an openness to the presence of Truth in multiple faiths. In the words of one interviewee, “authenticity is in the meeting of the mind and heart with God, it is a continuing story which needs to be told in contemporary language.” \(^{42}\) However, the belief in continuing revelation puts a special charge on each person to take time to listen for and come to recognize the voice of God. Not all the voices in our heads are of divine origin, and many resources are available to help in the spiritual growth which is part of coming to know and respond to the Inward Teacher.

And fourth, Friends must be able to speak afresh to each time and culture if we are to have a vital and living faith. Over the course of the past two centuries, liberal Friends have sought to incorporate and respond to the findings of science and the increasing mingling of cultures around the world in a creative way. The challenge is to engage in the struggle to respond to these outside forces from a deep understanding of faith—a place of passion and of spiritual discipline. If not, Friends are shaped by them rather than shaping other by responding through the reality of the Inward Light.

Friends do have a unique witness to the world. Some of this is retained in each branch of our faith. I am one who believes we can all grow in the encounter between the branches when we are willing to meet at the ground of our faith. To aid in that process, I seek to articulate afresh who we are in my tradition. \(^{43}\)
The descriptions of Friends’ belief in the 60 interviews I conducted are like the tiles of an elaborate Roman mosaic I once saw in England. This mosaic was buried for a long time and now is only uncovered every decade or so. As the dirt is removed, portions of the image become clearer and clearer. Each tile brought to light gives further hint of the nature of the whole. When completely uncovered, there are still gaps, so portions of the image are still a mystery. That is how I see individual perceptions of faith combining to reveal a beautiful whole permeated with mystery. My work for the next couple years is in uncovering this mosaic and seeking to articulate the whole.

NOTES

1. Richard Bauman, Let Your Words Be Few: Symbolism of speaking and silence among seventeenth-century Quakers (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1983), pp. 120ff., describes the meetings of “public” Friends where they would exhort large crowds often at great length and the meetings of believers where Friends came together to wait upon God without much use of the spoken word.

2. These yearly meetings include all those North American meetings once labeled as “Hicksite,” and those that resulted from the reunification of Hicksite and Orthodox meetings. Other yearly meetings of liberal Friends have been created in this century. Some of these have joined Friends General Conference, some remain independent. Most European yearly meetings fall into this category, as do the meetings in Australia and New Zealand.

3. Thomas Hamm, address to the annual meeting of Friends World Committee for Consultation Section of the Americas, St. Louis (March 1994).

4. Interviews or questionnaires were obtained from 65 individuals in 1994 and 1995. The interview format used a series of 15 questions, which were mailed to the individuals in advance along with a description of the project. The interviews themselves lasted between one and three hours in a private setting comfortable to the interviewee. Extensive notes were taken, and the interviews were taped.

The interviewees were selected as individuals who are active in their yearly meeting or monthly meeting, or else known because of their writing and speaking. They included clerks, yearly meeting staff, Pendle Hill and Woodbrooke faculty, and others active in a variety of Friends organizations. Through consultation with individuals familiar with each yearly meeting, I attempted to find people whose beliefs would span the range of beliefs present. Approximately 20 individuals were interviewed from North Pacific, Philadelphia, and Britain yearly meetings. Several other individuals from other yearly meetings responded to the questions in writing.


7. Interview responses varied greatly. Some see themselves as universalist and had a broad definition of what that means. Others see themselves as universalists in the Christocentric
mold of Barclay and Fox. Several either did not attach any meaning to the term or used it in a derogatory fashion as implying lazy, overly intellectual, or meaning “anything goes.”

8. In 1980, Kenneth Ives conducted a study which showed that “at least four percent of new Friends in the United States came from non-Christian background or belief. Many of these were relieved that they were accepted into membership after these beliefs had been shared with their [membership] committees.” Kenneth Ives, *New Friends Speak: How and Why They Join Friends (Quakers) in the mid-1970s* (Chicago: Progresiv Publishr, 1980), and *Non-Christian Quakers: Their Faith and Message* (Chicago: Progresiv Publishr, 1983), 59 pp., p. 1.


12. I put this in the context of Western, Christian religion and culture, acknowledging that this kind of generalization has severe problems. For instance, Dr. S. Krishnaswamy has stated, “Hinduism exhibits extreme tolerance. It does not show contempt for other people’s religion or for the wide variety of variations within its own religious ranks from the most illiterate to the most highly intellectual. Since our present global society must cultivate both these gifts of freedom and tolerance of differences, Hinduism has much to contribute to the present world.” As cited by Douglas Steere in his travel report from the 1967 Hindu-Christian Colloquia hosted by FWCC. See below for specifics.


16. Elizabeth Grey Vining, “Rufus Jones and the Far East,” Annual Quaker Lecture to the High Point Meeting of Friends, High Point, NC (October 19, 1958), pp. 9-10, 13. This entire section on Jones draws primarily from the lecture by Vining.

17. Anonymous #3, interview with author, November 1995. The theme that Christianity is not the only way came up again and again in the interviews among those deeply Christian as well as those skeptical of Christianity.


22. There is evidence that Friends were interested in Buddhism prior to this. One letter in the possession of the author, written in the mid-eighteen hundreds to her Hicksite great, great, great grandparents speaks of Krishna and Buddha as equal to Christ. The trends I am examining are as they relate to published material. A much more extensive search of the questions raised is needed to create a full history.


28. As reported by Elton Trueblood, in *Quaker Life* (December 1977), p. 15. The records of the Swarthmore Lecture committee gave no official reason for the decision. The speaker, Tony Piccard, gave the lecture, received the honorarium, and it was published as normal, although all without the official imprint of the Swarthmore Lecture. Several other possible explanations of the decision have been offered by various Friends. One other indicator of the change among British Quakers is the fact that in 1965 their *Faith and Practice* was called “Christian” whereas the 1995 edition is entitled “Quaker Faith and Practice.”


33. Layman, *op. cit.* pp. 258-259. Zen Buddhism was seeing something of a boom in the 1970s, with many attracted to meditation, but also with a high dropout rate. Tibetan Buddhism and the Theravada Buddhism of Southeast Asia were also growing, and perhaps overtaking Zen (p. 30-31).


   Philadelphia also states as the basis of membership, “Ideally, membership is an outward sign of an inward experience of Christ, the ‘Light which lightest every man that cometh into the world’ (John 1:9)….The emphasis [of the visit to a prospective member] should be on making sure he understands that he is entering a Christian fellowship.” (p. 155, 156) The rejection of dual membership continues in the proposed new *Faith and Practice* “presented 1995 for full approval 1996 by the Revision Committee.
of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Drafts approved as Called Sessions of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1991-95.” In this new version, there is more sense of diversity of belief and the quote from John 1:9, while retained, is prefaced by “for generations of Friends” and recognizes a “transforming power named many ways.” (p. 25) The quotation in the text is on page 27.


41. Yukio Irie *op. cit.* p. 11.


43. Central aspects of this from the author’s perspective are:
   — The living nature of our faith: We are bound into the living Word. The Word as of John, that was before creation and that is still vital and present today. The Word that is inexplicable and indescribable. The Word that is Christ. The Word that is Sophia and the root of all wisdom. The Word, the Light, the Seed, that is present for all people and in all faith. Yet this Word is “rejected of men” and can lead to much outward struggle and suffering when we accept its leadings as the basis of our life.
   — The communal nature of our mysticism: We profess that as a group we can reach an understanding of what it means to live in the Light, to know God’s way and respond to it faithfully. We believe we can do this as individuals and as a community.
   — The integrity of life: Faith has no meaning without our words and our lives. As we know God—the Word, the Light, the Ground of Our Being, Christ Jesus, the Holy—this knowing must permeate all we do and all we say. Relationship with God is only fully known in our relationship with the world around us.
   — Ultimately, symbols and rituals limit our understanding of God. True worship is not dependent on any particular form, place, or words. Only in the stillness of the soul can we truly hear the Word of God.
   — Calling ourselves “Friends” implies an intimacy, a relationship, a responsibility to and love of the Holy that is mutual, constant, faithful, self-giving, and forgiving of the inevitable failures inherent in being human.