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# *Universalist Friends*

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**The Quaker Universalist Fellowship** is an informal gathering of persons who cherish the spirit of universality that has always been intrinsic to the Quaker faith. We acknowledge and respect the diverse spiritual experience of those within our own meetings as well as of the human family worldwide; we are enriched by our conversation with all who search sincerely. Our mission includes publishing and providing speakers and opportunities for fellowship at regional and national Quaker gatherings.

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seems to be what we are meant to do, and what a grand effect we achieve together. Keep singing, Friends. □

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Frank Wood was Professor of Educational Psychology and Special Education at the University of Minnesota until his retirement. A native of Kansas, he attended Harvard, Haverford, and the University of Minnesota. He has been an active Friend for most of his life.

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when optimism—during a period of dreadful civil war in China—hardly seemed justified by the available evidence.

Besides reading and thinking, what do I do? I have spent seventy years working to do better, to live up to the expectations of myself and others. When I compare myself to some, I do not seem to be doing very much that is worth mentioning. When I compare myself to others, I seem to be doing more. I sometimes find it hard to resist saying, or at least thinking, “I don’t like your walk or your talk. Why don’t you walk my walk and talk my talk? You don’t appreciate my walk and my talk.” As soon as I begin judging others, I find my critical eye turned back on myself. I find a need to keep working on myself. This is healthy. Our real challenge is to contribute as we individually are called to contribute to God’s work.

Besides working on the “fixer-upper project” that is me, I seem to use a lot of my energy observing others; listening to others; supporting or assisting others in acting as they are led; sometimes trying to teach them what I consider better ways to act, or in some cases, occasionally acting for them, dealing with all the mental and emotional garbage that gets stirred up in the process—this is very difficult. Many of the tasks are not grand in conception or execution. A Catholic Worker told me that Dorothy Day once said to her, “If I could figure out the toilet paper problem”—the homeless people they welcomed to the House of Charity carried off the toilet paper for use in blowing their noses—“world peace would be a snap.” As Lao Tze’s friends said, “Not that, but this.” This is where it’s at.

You and I have places in a great choir, brought into being to witness to the world and to celebrate a marvelous divine creation. Sometimes we sing Hallelujah! Sometimes we sing the blues. This

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## *From the Editor*

by George Amoss, Jr.

In documents produced by first-generation Friends as part of the Quaker-Baptist dispute, we find abundant evidence of the universalism to which the Quaker experience gave rise. When a Baptist pointed out that, according to scripture, all salvation is accomplished through the name of Christ, James Nayler, then the leading Quaker in London, asserted that the name of Christ is formed not of letters and syllables but of righteousness, mercy, and judgment. The Quaker Humphrey Wolrich also insisted that the name of Christ is not words but holiness. And Thomas Taylor asked, “Is not his Name Spiritual, representing his Nature, yea, Spirit, Power, and Life?”\* To trust in the power of love was, for the first Friends, to be saved through faith in Christ, because God is love; what matters is the reality, which Friends often called the “substance,” not the name. Universalism was basic to the religion of the first Friends, and it remains essential to Quakerism today. In a world torn by violence among devotees of various sacred names, the testimony of Friends that names need not divide, that the reality of love relativizes all names, is as important as ever.

The mission of the Quaker Universalist Fellowship is to keep that crucial insight before Friends. Our methods of doing that may change from time to time, but the end remains constant. At present, the Fellowship is changing the means we employ, moving toward more reliance on electronic publishing to improve and expand our outreach while keeping within the limits of our resources. Page two of this issue explains our new approach to publishing and membership: we will focus primarily on Web publishing, asking people to subscribe at no charge to our Web site and to continue

So many voices. I like to think that our lives make music. In a talk broadcast last fall, Ray Bradbury, the author, said something like “We are here to witness and celebrate the Divine Energy’s marvelous creation.” I agree. I think all good-hearted, new-born persons make up a great choir, each of us with our own quality of voice and our own part to sing. Our task is to sing out—from our hearts—from our souls—from our centers—in celebration. When I am in an “orthodox” mental set, I have as much trouble appreciating the “noise” of this incredible chorus as I have appreciating some musical groups I hear on my radio. Like our great composers, the Divine Spirit likes to experiment with dissonance.

What else can I say about “my walk” and “my talk”? I seek to base my actions on an assumption that the quality of our individual actions toward others has unknowable effects that extend throughout the universe. That is a big statement, but I don’t know how else to say it. From my perspective, since ends are unknowable, choice of means is of first importance. In my heart I believe with the compilers of the Tao Te Ching that good ends can only follow from good means. My working hypothesis is that the quality of my actions towards others, my “means,” depends on the quality of my inner relationship with the Divine. “Hold fast to the great thought and all the world will come to you, harmless, peaceable, serene.”

The world will come to you, harmless, peaceable, serene. Will this happen if enough of us are able to reach and act from that deep center? We do not seem much closer to generating this kind of inner power at a sufficient level than the Taoists of 2,500 years ago. In one place they say sadly, “Everybody knows this, nobody uses the knowledge.” I know they mean to inspire rather than discourage each other—and us. They remained optimistic even

envisioned when he wrote the following in 1539.

The true Church is not a separate mass of people, not a particular sect to be pointed out with the finger, not confined to one time or one place; it is rather a spiritual and invisible body of all the members of Christ, born of God, of one mind, spirit, and faith, but not gathered in any one external city or place .... It is a Fellowship ... and communion of all truly God-fearing, good-hearted, new-born persons in all the world, bound together by the Holy Spirit in the peace of God and the bonds of love .... I belong to this Fellowship .... I love any man whom I can help, and call him brother whether he be Jew or Samaritan .... I cannot belong to any separate sect, but I believe in a holy, Christ-like Church, a fellowship of saints, and I hold as my brother, my neighbor, my flesh and blood, all men who belong to Christ among the sects, faiths, and peoples scattered throughout the whole world.

Franck lived just as new developments in printing provided an opportunity for knowledge of other peoples and cultures beyond the imagination of previous generations of Europeans. Today, because of further advances in world communication, we are amazed by our knowledge and at the same time humbled by our ignorance. With Franck, I aspire to belong to this invisible church “not confined to one time or place” that includes all “good-hearted, new-born persons ... bound together by the Holy Spirit in the peace of God and the bonds of love” who share with each other through music, art, and the printed word. I do not really care by what names the world may call them.

to support us with voluntary donations as they are led. Members who want or need “hard copy” printed materials can still pay a \$12 annual membership fee for the journal and pamphlet, and print copies of selected past publications will remain available. Your questions and comments are welcome; please address your correspondence to Richard Barnes. His postal and e-mail addresses are listed on page two. □

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\* Source: T. L. Underwood's *Primitivism, Radicalism, and the Lamb's War: The Baptist-Quaker Conflict in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford University Press, 1997).

# From the Clerk

by Richard Barnes

In my six years as Clerk of the Quaker Universalist Fellowship, I have had the opportunity to answer many inquiries regarding the beginnings of universalist thought within the Religious Society of Friends. Or as the critics and skeptics often ask, “When did universalism creep into our beloved Society?” Certainly, the Quaker Universalist Fellowship had its origins in the 1977 lecture, “Quakerism as Forerunner,” by John Linton, a British Friend, before the Seekers Association in London. A group of Friends, inspired by the lecture, felt the need of an organization to extend the message and to keep interested persons in touch. Thus was born the Quaker Universalist Group in Britain.

In 1984, Dan Seeger, who was then serving as the Regional Executive Secretary of the New York AFSC (later he served as Executive Director of Pendle Hill, and he begins this year as the new clerk of the Quaker Universalist Fellowship), gave an electrifying address before the Friends General Conference Gathering at St. Lawrence University. In response to his speech, special interest groups met daily at the Gathering, and soon the Quaker Universalist Fellowship was created. In his talk, “Is Coexistence Possible: Christianity and Universalism,” Seeger presented a view of the Religious Society of Friends as both Christian and universalist:

Contemporary Quakerism will not realize its true destiny if it retreats from its traditional reconciliation of Christianity and universalism and resorts

with the eye of my understanding and asked myself: “What is this thing?” And I was answered: “It is everything that is created.” I wondered how it could survive, since it seemed so little it could suddenly disintegrate into nothing. The answer came: “It endures and ever will endure, because God loves it.” And so everything has being because of God’s love.

As Friends, we try to help each other discover this experientially. I see engaging in this shared task as part of my walk.

Part of my walk involves time spent reading and reflecting. Among the helps to which I turn most frequently I will mention the Judeo-Christian scriptures; the writings of the Celtic Christians sharing their vision of the divine immanent in nature; Julain of Norwich, from whose account of her visions I have already quoted; and Sebastian Franck, a scholar and man of faith who lived and wrote in Basle in the early 1500s. I also sense kindred spirits among the writers of the Chinese classics, the Tao Te Ching, the Chuang Tze, and the I Ching.

You can see by the sources of support I have already cited that I am universalistic, or eclectic, rather than orthodox in my faith and practice. To be *orthodox* in the negative sense that I have just used it means to believe that there is one “right” way of thinking and acting—mine—accompanied by my withdrawing of respect and support from those who believe otherwise. The tendency toward orthodox thinking lurks everywhere: in scholarship, in science, in art, in the Society of Friends, and yes, in me. But I hope most of the time to be more generous, more universalistic in spirit. I want to reach out, beyond the community of those who are near and dear to me, to the faith community whom Sebastian Franck

# Walking the Talk

by Frank Wood

Like the rest of you, I try to live out my beliefs—to “walk my talk.” I am a disappointed idealist, a worried utopian—sometimes full of delight with “what is” but often painfully aware of the mess we make of things. The kingdom of heaven is all around us—but there seems to be so much different from what I expected. Vegetarian friends of my aunt and uncle who had made Schweitzer’s concept of “reverence for life” a central theme in their world view were horrified, when visiting him at Lambarene, to find that he kept a shotgun with which he and others at the jungle hospital killed monkeys and other animals to supplement the meager amount of protein available to them from other sources. Schweitzer wrote, “My knowledge is pessimistic, but my willing and hoping are optimistic.” The “good news” of the Gospel is that when we fall, which we do, we should get back up and go on with God’s work as well as we are able rather than brooding over our sin. As friend Walt Taylor says, “Optimism is essential for life even when it may not seem to be justified by the available evidence.”

I often recall a phrase Elizabeth Watson used when speaking to [Northern] Yearly Meeting several years ago: “Love is the binding force in the universe.” Poetry or metaphor, that phrase captures as well as words can a truth that I feel. Likewise, the radiant experientially-based faith of Julian of Norwich, a 14th Century Benedictine nun, reaches out to me across 600 years when she reports from one of her visions:

God showed me in my palm a little thing round as  
a ball about the size of a hazelnut. I looked at it

to a narrow, Christian sectarianism; or if it fails to attract, to admit into membership and to cherish non-Christians. But neither will it survive, I think, if there develops within Quakerism a climate which permits only such theological discourse among ourselves as might be admissible in a public school classroom. Quakerism’s extraordinary vocation in the common human task of structuring the new age which is struggling to come to birth lies precisely in its traditional capacity to be both Christian *and* universalist, and not merely one or the other. I feel uneasy about a tendency among some to gnaw away at the specifically Christian content of Quakerism, as if seeking gradually to reduce it to a form of ethical culture, as I do about Christocentric Friends who seem to seek to import into Quakerism the sort of dogmatism and chauvinism which has plagued so much of the rest of Christian history.

As to the origin of universalist thought among twentieth-century Friends, others have pointed to the annual meeting of the Lake Erie Association in Columbus, Ohio in 1953. Arthur E. Morgan read a memorandum he had written on behalf of the Yellow Springs Meeting on “Universal Brotherhood in Religion,” outlining the need for a world-wide religious fellowship transcending creedal and imperialistic barriers as a means to world peace and mutual understanding. Morgan’s memorandum and a subsequent report of the Lake Erie conference written by Teresina Havens, “Should Quakerism Include Non-Christians” were published in the October and November, 1953 issues of the *Hicksite Friends Intelligencer* (forerunner of *Friends Journal*):

What an amazing opportunity is presented to the Society of Friends today to endeavor to draw together these diverse disciples of nonviolence, of simplicity, and of silent-listening-to-the-Truth-Within, without compromising our special Quaker and Christian heritage. This opportunity has come to us more than to other Christian groups, first, because of our emphasis on the centrality of the *experience* of God or truth as more basic than the too often divisive creeds and verbal formulations of men, and, second, because of our practice of silent worship, which leaves each member free to respond to the light in his own way.

In answering the question as to whether Quakerism should include non-Christians, Teresina Havens suggested that the Queries on Friends conduct and behavior, and not religious beliefs should be the basis for Friends identity and membership:

What does appreciation of new and diverse horizons of belief mean for membership requirements in the Society of Friends? May a Buddhist, or a Jew, or a Navaho, or a Vedantist, join a Friends Meeting if he applies?

It would be utterly at variance with Quaker spirit and tradition to insist upon assent to any verbal statement of belief, and yet membership in a Friends Meeting should mean commitment to a certain way of life and faith. Is there perhaps a clue in the use of the Queries as a means of measuring ourselves and our Meetings, by the highest standards worked out for ourselves through 300

galaxies? No mute recognition of kinship in the gaze of an animal?

Isn't there some arrogance in this? Isn't the attitude that sees humanity at the center of all things the same one that leads to a civilization built on technology and genetic tinkering? Isn't it associated with our blindness to dying oceans, an altered atmosphere, and a wave of extinctions unknown for 65 million years? There is an even greater arrogance, of course. To find it we need only look at traditional religious creeds that shape an all-powerful, all-seeing God in the image of man himself.

By whatever name we call it—radical Quakerism, religious humanism, or nontheism—to worship human culture is to deny our rootedness in the universe. If we reject our ultimate identity with all of life, if we turn away from the mystery that gives rise to each breath and thought as well as to the intricate web of language that embraces thought, we will be courting oblivion. □

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A member of Twin Cities Meeting in St. Paul, Rhoda R. Gilman serves the Quaker Universalist Fellowship as a member of the Steering Committee and as pamphlet editor.

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The core of Boulton's present argument, however, can be found in his essay "What on Earth is Religious Humanism?" In it he surveys the decent, orderly, but uninspired landscape of 19th- and early 20th-century humanism with its rigorously intellectual unitarian and ethical culture movements. That scene, he concludes, "has a faded look about it, like an old trade union banner that has seen one too many demos." Indeed so. Yet even 19th-century hearts mourned the receding tide of faith and resonated to the cry of the poet: "Would but the desert of the fountain yield one glimpse—if dimly, yet indeed, revealed."

Boulton struggles to define and defend a new "radical religious humanism," which "feels free to draw on, to feast on, the best of our long, complex, diverse heritage of religious expression." There is an undeniable power in his appeal to the artistry, the creativity, and the majesty of the long line of human cultures that have been built on the scaffold of religious yearning. But it won't wash. Like the earlier humanism, which bloomed in a generation that was enchanted by science and confident of continued peace and progress, his new religious humanism fails to fill the void yawning before us as we contemplate the world destruction that may be wrought by humanity itself in the century ahead.

The crux of the matter, I think, is hubris. So long as humanists deny that there are questions the human mind can never answer—so long as they refuse to engage the ultimate mystery at the core of existence itself—so long will they remain irrelevant. In another essay Boulton says: "There is no such thing as wholly extra-linguistic experience, knowledge, or truth. The very act of experiencing is language-built. Language goes all the way down." — What, no wordless awe at the vast night sky, the sea, the intricate patterning of daisy petals? No silent wonder before an infinity of

years? Here is stated a clear standard of what we hold in common, without any attempt to dictate just how each member or family is to apply his understanding of what these standards shall mean in his life: The Queries formulate—not as a creed or rule but as a challenge—the faith and ethical aims which are supposed to characterize our Society. Could they not be used as a criterion of membership in the local Meeting?

If a sincere seeker is prepared to take on this challenge, to try to guide his life according to the Queries, does he not belong with us?

The Random House dictionary defines a universalist as an adherent of the belief that some traits or patterns of behavior are characteristic of all human beings. That all human beings, regardless of religious beliefs, have the capacity for unmediated spiritual communion and relationship with the transcendent Divine immanent within is reflected in the quotations of Friends for 350 years. John Woolman is probably quoted more often than any other Friend as the basis of Quaker universalism:

There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different ages hath different names; it is, however, pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion, nor excluded from any, where the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, of which nation soever, they become brethren.

Thus he whose tender mercies are over all his works hath placed a principle in the human mind

which incites to exercise goodness toward every living creature; and this being singly attended to, people become tender-hearted and sympathizing, but being frequently and totally rejected, the mind shuts itself up in a contrary disposition.

For Woolman, this “principle” is a basic or essential quality of being human. It is an intrinsic nature or natural behavior characteristic of all human beings, as common as the principle of self preservation. This “principle,” or what other Friends refer to as the Inner Light, exists in the human mind; it is pure and proceeds from God; it is inward and immanent; it is universal and transcends all religions, sects, and creeds; and when attended to and followed it is capable of creating unity, brotherhood, sisterhood.

OK, John Woolman was a well-read child of the Enlightenment. But what about George Fox? Certainly, universalism must not have had a place among early Friends; surely it hadn’t “crept in” among the “primitive” Friends? In my talks and workshops that I have given on Quaker universalism, I love to tell the tale of George Fox’s encounter with a orthodox Christian who denied that the Light and the Spirit was given to everyone. In his November, 1672 visit with William Edmundson to the Carolinas, George Fox gives us insight into his interpretation of the Light Within as a universal characteristic in all humankind (Nickalls, John L., Ed., *The Journal of George Fox*, p.642):

They had passed by canoe from Roanoke to Edenton “to a captain’s house who was loving, and lent us a boat, for we were much wet in the canoe, the water came upon us in waves; and in that boat from thence we came to the governor’s house; but the boat being deep and the water shoal

## Book Review

***REAL LIKE THE DAISIES OR REAL LIKE I LOVE YOU?***

**By David Boulton**

**Reviewed by Rhoda Gilman**

While in Britain recently, I picked up a copy of this small book published last year by the Quaker Universalist Group in association with Dales Historical Monographs. The title captured me. It refers “to a question said to have been asked by a child of her Quaker parents: is God ‘real,’ as things like daisies and elephants and mountains are real, or real like love, justice, beauty, and truth?” The subtitle is: *Essays in Radical Quakerism*, and the book is a collection of fifteen short papers and articles.

Although unfamiliar to me, David Boulton edited for a decade the magazine of the Sea of Faith movement and is well known in Britain. Another recent book by him, *The Trouble with God: religious humanism and the Republic of Heaven*, is reviewed in the current issue (No. 68) of *Quaker Universalist*. He has also written on early Quaker history, and two of the essays in this collection deal with the diversity in beliefs and testimonies that were at the very heart of Quakerism in the 1650s—a diversity that was later glossed over and repudiated when the Society of Friends circled its wagons in the face of persecution. The longest piece tells of Gerrard Winstanley, leader of the equalitarian “Digger” movement, who, like John Lilburne, the Leveller, influenced and eventually joined the Quakers. Winstanley, Boulton shows, was essentially a humanist.

standing, friendliness; if they will turn aside from all claims of super-men for super-rights and privileges, whether in religion, in politics, in industry or in society; then indeed we may renew and revive the purposes of prophets, statesmen, scholars, scientists, and good people since the world began.

This would be a real religion. □

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Jesse H. Holmes (1864-1942), a professor of religion and philosophy at Swarthmore College, was a leader of the Progressive Friends movement and a founder of the National Federation of Religious Liberals. He is perhaps best known for his letter "To the Scientifically-Minded," which was published by the Friends General Conference Outreach Committee, *Friends Intelligencer*, *The Atlantic*, *The Christian Century*, and *Harper's*.

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that our boat would not swim, I was fain to put off my shoes and stockings and wade through the water a pretty way to the governor's house, who with his wife received us lovingly. And there was a doctor that did dispute with us, which was of great service and occasion of opening much to the people concerning the Light and the Spirit. And he so opposed it in everyone, that I called an Indian because he denied it to be in them, and I asked him if that he did lie and do that to another which he would not have them do the same to him, and when he did wrong was not there something in him, that did tell him of it, that he should not do so, but did reprove him. And he said there was such a thing in him when he did any such a thing that he was ashamed of them. So we made the doctor ashamed in the sight of the governor and the people; and he ran so far out that he would not own the Scriptures.

A second question that I am frequently asked is, "If universalism has such a strong historical and philosophical basis in the Religious Society of Friends, why is there a need for a Quaker Universalist Fellowship?" As in all revolutions, there is a subsequent counter-revolution. The Second Great Awakening of the 1770s and 1780s and the preaching of John Wesley influenced many British Friends into accepting orthodox Christianity with its belief in the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ as a necessity for eternal salvation. Many newly convinced Friends became traveling ministers and brought their orthodoxy with them as they traveled in the colonies. The orthodox creedal statements that were pasted into the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's Faith and Practice of 1806 were later used against the venerable Quaker minister Elias Hicks

and were a root cause of the separation of the Hicksites and Orthodox in 1827.

Since most readers of the *Universalist Friends* are members or attenders of liberal, Hicksite, FGC-affiliated meetings, they might not be familiar with the Richmond Declaration of Faith of 1887 that remains in the Faith and Practice (“but it is not a creed!”) of every pastoral yearly meeting of Friends United Meeting. Most of these meetings were deeply influenced by the Methodist revivals and camp meetings of the 1870s and 1880s. (One observer has called them “Methodists without bishops.”) The Richmond Declaration takes direct aim at the idea of a universal “Inner Light” or “principle.” There is one light or illumination, and that is light of the Holy Spirit given only to those who have faith in Jesus Christ:

We own no principle of spiritual light, life or holiness, inherent by nature in the mind or heart of man. We believe in no principle of spiritual light, life or holiness, but the influence of the Holy Spirit of God, bestowed on mankind, in various measures and degrees, through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is the capacity to receive this blessed influence, which in an especial manner, gives man pre-eminence above the beasts that perish; which distinguishes him in every nation and in every clime, as an object of the redeeming love of God; as a being not only intelligent but responsible; for whom the message of salvation through our crucified Redeemer is, under all possible circumstances, designed to be a joyful sound. The Holy Spirit must ever be distinguished, both from the conscience which He enlightens, and from the natural faculty of reason, which when unsubjected to His

courage the passive acceptance of evil in a lost world, and a selfish acceptance of privilege on the part of the saved. I read in a recently published sermon in one of our great cities, “We should find it especially easy to be grateful to God, when we look abroad and see the miseries of war-torn Europe.” Another says, “Prayer is our chief defense”; and all unite in days of prayer for peace, which assume that God may be induced to stop the war if enough of us beg for it. Our religious institutions give practically no leadership for faltering, straying humanity. Praying God to stop war, they themselves support war in every Christian country; they read the Sermon on the Mount where condemnation of violence and of wealth are the most conspicuous elements, while they join in and encourage the forceful pursuit of wealth, neglecting or excusing the plight of the poor. They give no effective support or even understanding of the problems of labor, of political corruption, of class conflict, of race prejudice.

I am saying these things unhappily, knowing that I am myself in the groups I am condemning. Where I have said “they,” I should have said “we.” My own county has been governed by a criminal gang for half a century, and my own religious organization not only does not oppose it but actively supports it. In my neighboring city a few miles away remains year after year a place of filth, of vice, of deterioration. There are plenty of Christian churches all about. Cannot we do better? Cannot we find and develop among us a spirit of unselfish service, of loyalty to the oppressed, of responsibility for a richer, nobler civilization? If we continue to hide behind an alleged belief in a devil’s world, a lost humanity, an irrational and arbitrary deity, undeserved heaven and undeserved hell, there is nothing to be done. But if those who reject all this medieval rubbish will join heartily in a real world-wide effort for an uplifted humanity; if they refuse to continue systems which involve contests in indiscriminate killing and destruction; if they will dedicate themselves to a general cooperation in mutual service, refusing all incitements to seek power over each other; if they will accept the adventure of lives everywhere seeking harmony, good-will, under-

evil with a special magnetic attraction toward the good. The ancient Hebrew storyteller regarded this knowledge as evil and its attainment as a sin which has stained all human life. In fact, it is the great distinguishing feature of humanity. Of course, we hate it and long for the lazy irresponsibility of Eden and of the animal kingdom. We create institutions to relieve us of the need for making choices: religions which give us lists of Thou Shalt Nots, governments which give us laws, social institutions which give us customs. We are urged to regard these as sufficient and final. Many there be who gratefully sink back into the animal kingdom, accepting blind irrational conduct as the higher life, and calling the acceptance “faith.” But we still feel the drawing power of our new world, hear the “voice of God,” see the “inner light,” experience the super-happiness of following intelligible guidance toward foreseen and chosen ends. It is the old, old struggle of prophet against priest, of the free spirit of evolving humanity against the dead weight of our static institutions. It is light against darkness, growth against decay, life against death, the higher loyalty to the highest good against the lower loyalties of sects and nations.

We find it hard to maintain our higher loyalties, and we look in vain to our religious institutions for any thrilling call to adventurous and creative living. The ever active “evangelistic” revivals appeal primarily to the ignorant and miserable classes, who long for something picturesque and exciting and find it in vivid hells, heavens, and Judgment Days. They are easily induced to view life from the side lines, making ready for the final spectacle and the dividing of humankind into an aristocracy of irresponsible happiness and a democracy of everlasting misery—neither deserved. One may hear all this and worse preached to thousands or millions on the radio almost any time of the day or night. I have heard many such teachings presented by children in their teens, who state the “truth” with all the authority of an assumed infallibility.

The middle-class churches are more cautious about these absurdities, but they are implied and assumed if not asserted. They en-

Holy influence, is, in the things of God, very foolishness. As the eye is to the body, so is the conscience to our inner being, the organ by which we see; and as both light and life are essential to the eye, so conscience, as the inward eye, cannot see aright, without the quickening and illumination of the Spirit of God. One with the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit can never disown or dishonor our once crucified and now risen and glorified Redeemer. We disavow all professed illumination or spirituality that is divorced from faith in Jesus Christ of Nazareth, crucified for us without the gates of Jerusalem.

I am constantly reminded by Friends affiliated with Friends United Meeting that liberal, unprogrammed meetings are a small minority of Friends world-wide. In many respects, John Wesley, through the Second Religious Awakening of the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, through the Methodist camp meetings and the sending of missionaries through all parts of the world during the latter half of the nineteenth century, has had more influence on the present Religious Society of Friends than any other individual.

Howard Brinton wrote that the whole history of religion is a struggle between the mystics and prophets, whose leadings come from their direct experience of the divine, and the priests and theologians, who try to codify and control religious belief and practice and set themselves between the seeker and the divine. As I step down from being Clerk of the Quaker Universalist Fellowship, I am still optimistic that liberal, universalistic Christianity is growing within the Religious Society of Friends and that the mystics and prophets will prevail over the priests and theologians. Modern Biblical scholarship, as represented by Marcus Borg, Elaine Pagels,

John Dominic Crossan and others, is painting a portrait of Jesus as a Jewish mystic, prophet, and social revolutionary. One might call this the “Quaker Jesus,” or as one critic has called Borg’s portrayal, the “hippie Jesus.” Jesus’s life is portrayed as a life of daily prayer and experiencing the presence of God his father, and his teachings emphasize that when given a choice between being “religiously pure” and being compassionate, his followers are called to follow the path of love and compassion. The religion *of* Jesus which stressed personal religious experience and high ethical standards based on love and compassion is antithetical to the religion *about* Jesus that has been inculcated into the orthodoxy of the Apostle’s Creed, the Nicene Creed, George Fox’s Letter to the Governor of Barbados, and the Richmond Declaration of Faith. (If George Fox’s Letter to the Governor of Barbados was George Fox’s gospel, why were so many Quakers punished, jailed and accused of religious heresy?)

Quaker universalism, with its emphasis on the reality and universality of the Inner Light and the primacy of continuing revelation over scripture and doctrine, allows its adherents freedom to practice individual spiritual disciplines, such as yoga, mindfulness meditation, centering prayer, and *lectio-divina*, that are based historically in other religious traditions. Universalist Friends do not seek uniformity in religious beliefs, but we do seek unity in discerning leadings of the Spirit. Universalist Friends do not have a creed or uniform set of beliefs, but we do have a set of unique corporate spiritual practices for discerning spiritual guidance—silent meetings for worship and unprogramed ministry, meetings for business, meetings for learning, worship sharing, clearness committees for personal concerns, and the personal and corporate responding to Queries. Now the question is not “Are you faithful in your belief?” but “Are you faithful in your spiritual practice?” □

sential of Christian fellowship is “acceptance of Christ as God and Saviour.” None of the nouns is defined or could be, even to the satisfaction of those who coined the phrase.

I propose to a fairly intelligent people of a partially scientific age—a people easily carried away by words and phrases but feebly striving for meanings too—that all this is a sad mess of ancient and medieval superstition which should speedily be relegated to the storage rooms of the museum of history. We should stop the pretense of awe, or even respect, for teachings which lack even a slight amount of evidence or probability. We should substitute a religion based on actual repeatable, describable and testable experience, and which has some connection with the genuine values of life: not an absurd and impossible life in a stupid, idle heaven, but a rich, active, adventurous life in the world we live in.

But is such a religion possible? And is any religion even desirable? Certainly it is even indispensable, if it means active loyalty to the great values of life: to the highest possible happiness and development of humankind now and hereafter. Present-day religions do not further such loyalty, but rather hinder and condemn it, catering to that desire for freedom from responsibility which does so easily beset us. Our highest loyalties are due (1) to the struggle for understanding and for its statement in language for future testing and expansion, (2) to the increase of harmony and beauty in the world, both in material things which affect our senses—as in color, sound, taste and fragrance—and (3) above all to the constant remaking of ourselves to fit that world and our fellow human beings for greater happiness and greater growth. The accurate formulating of our ends and of the tested ways of attaining them is the function of philosophy and the sciences. The more difficult task of holding ourselves to the higher loyalties is that of religion. Not the discovery of truth but the patient using of it for the more abundant life is its task.

We humans have broken through from the meager life of the animal kingdom into a new dimension—the knowledge of good and

The third person of the Trinity—the Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost—is abroad in the world, being that element of the Divine being which deals with man in this world period. He takes little part in the large affairs of the human race—war, pestilence, famine, poverty—but is ready to comfort (not relieve) those who call on him. The preachers of Christianity never succeed in maintaining or understanding their own theology; their petitions are seldom addressed to the Holy Spirit but rather to the Father or to Christ, who are far more vivid and interesting.

“Christian” worship consists in flattery, promises and petitions, expressed often in terms of extreme servility. It has allied itself with splendid music, architecture, and the arts generally, all of which have led it into further alliance with wealth and luxury. Many Protestant sects made their start among the poor, as did the early church; and like it they tend to combination with the rich and powerful. Nearly every age has its missions for the poor, its spontaneous revival movements, which cannot be overlooked and usually settle into poor relations. These are adjusted to the need of excitement in dull lives, and to the longing for power felt more or less by all of us. A very low grade of preaching with loud promises of glory, and of the future misery of their enemies, is supplemented by music of about the same quality, and aims to excite the audience to noisy demonstration and to various forms of hysteria. The prosperous middle-class churches are usually dull and dignified, but assume the same irrational and irresponsible deity. He is benevolent and all-knowing, but He takes little notice of human suffering and misery unless it is especially called to his attention by prayer, when He may or may not relieve the situation. Thus days of prayer may induce him to stop wars or to end drought; or the wars may drag on for years and the drought ruin the lives of thousands. The Christian world is divided into hundreds of sects, many of them mutually hostile, each claiming to have the truth that will save humankind, and none of them able to tell just what they mean by “truth” or by “salvation.” The latest great gathering of representatives of most of the great Protestant sects with some others agreed that the es-

## “Our Christianity”?

by Jesse H. Holmes

*Editor’s Note: The following is from a typescript provided by Grace R. Holmes of Ithaca, New York. I have made a number of minor changes in order to make Holmes’s words, written many years ago, more sexually inclusive.*

As one who has listened to hundreds of radio sermons and read scores of sermon outlines in the Monday newspapers, I have been xzsdriven to the conviction that so-called Christian doctrine as now taught, and Christian churches as now organized and directed, are a handicap and a burden to our civilization. They seem to me to have lost, if they ever had it, intelligent and courageous leadership toward the great values of human life. Meaningless phrases and irrational theologies have been moulded into rigid, authoritative institutions perverting and stultifying the adventurous, creative spirit which distinguishes us from the rest of the animal kingdom. They turn our attention from the splendid possibilities of our mysterious life and toward a mythical, improbable life after death. Over all presides a despotic, unjust, and irrational deity of the medieval king type, who must be worshipped by flattery and blind obedience.

These are not pleasant things to say, and I have resisted for years the feeling that they must be strongly and publicly said. I regret that they will hurt or anger many for whom I have respect and affection. I ask them to believe that in the statement to follow I have tried to set down the truth as I see it; and that they answer not by epithet but in sincere effort to find and clarify the truth. If they believe the truth to be attained only by authoritative revelation I hope they will say so, and tell why they accept the authority and who is to interpret it.

I call attention to the fact that most of the selfish love of wealth and luxury, most of the political falsehood and corruption, most of the brutal and destructive wars, most of the race and class hatreds of the world center about the parts of the world where organized Christianity is the strongest and has had the longest time in which to exert its influence. Moreover it has seldom made any considerable effort to oppose these evils, and has often supported them. Neither wealth nor political corruption nor war have or have had anything to fear from the Christian church.

We do not often see attempted statements of orthodox Christian theology in plain unemotional terms for the purpose of getting at its actual meaning. I propose to try the dangers of making such a statement, and will welcome corrections.

God is an infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent being, wholly benevolent toward mankind, whom he has created in his own image. He consists of three “persons” but is of one “substance”; neither person nor substance is defined or definable. Neither of these terms, nor any hint of this doctrine appears in either Old or New Testament. The phrases turn up first in the controversies and heresies of the 2nd and 3d centuries, and the final statement was established after bitter conflict at the Council of Nicea in 321 A.D. The Greek words used by the Council were *ousia* and *hypostasis*, which were later loosely rendered into Latin as *substantia* and *persona*, and still later into English as “substance” and “person.” The original words overlap in meaning, and a reversal of the translations would not have made much difference.

The first “person” of the Trinity is “the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth” by the creed, although the Gospel of John says of the second person that “all things were made by him,” following a Greek instead of a Jewish concept. The human being was the climax of this creation, made in the Divine image by an omniscient and omnipotent being, knowing the future and able to decide it. Yet

Satan, who is one of God’s sons, spoils his plans, and the humans sin by violating God’s arbitrary orders. Although He is wholly benevolent toward the human beings, the omnipotent being has made them so badly that they fail at the test, and become “deceitful and desperately wicked” and pass that condition on to all their descendants. God would like to save all human beings, but cannot manage it; He arranges however an unjust and illogical scheme by which He can save a few—not because they deserve it but because He chooses so to do. I should hardly say “arranges” because it was all planned out from all eternity: sin, punishment, and salvation were all exactly what He had planned, and Satan was not his enemy but his servant and ally. The scheme for the salvation of a few is an intricate mixture of rituals from various theologies, and various medieval judicial procedures, centering on the incarnation and sacrificial death of the second person of the Trinity.

The second person of the Trinity is Jesus, the son of a Jewish married woman, asserted without any evidence to have been a virgin. The creeds say that his father was the first person of the Trinity; Matthew and Luke say “she was found with child of the Holy Ghost”—the Third person of the Trinity, and later trace his descent from David through Joseph. He was baptized by John the Baptist (or only announced by him according to the gospel of John), and lived for a short time the life of a prophet and evangelist, various miracles accompanying his career. He was arrested and put to death by the Romans as a dangerous claimant of the Jewish throne. The Jewish priests and their wealthy backers had demanded his death, but the common people had accepted him as a leader and perhaps as the Messiah. His execution was a great sin although it was absolutely necessary for saving even a small group of human beings. Without the actual shedding of blood God could not—because he would not—save any. He remains as a remote being, unreasonable, terrible and threatening, though a loving father, while Christ sits at his right hand with no special function until the judgment day.