

A language for the inward landscape

The Willson Lectures 2017

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I. A language for the inward landscape: resources from our tradition.

From Woolman's journal:

I was led to think on the nature of the exercise which hath attended me. Love was the first motion, and thence a concern arose to spend some time with the Indians, that I might feel and understand their life and the spirit they live in, if haply I might receive some instruction from them, or they might be in any degree helped forward by my following the leadings of truth among them.

Beloved words, and so full of wisdom that they repay often revisiting, and serve for guidance in many conditions. But what do "concern," "feel," "leadings," or "truth" mean, and what sort of spiritual path is this? ¹

§1.

The title for these two lectures is "A Language for the inward landscape,"² but what I hope really to explore is how we try to put into words our encounter with the quicksilver life of the Spirit, as it flows in and through the grosser stuff of humans (among other creatures). So much of the delight, and the tragedy of our lives springs from the process of incarnation, the inhabiting of matter by Spirit — and where is the boundary? The artificial distinction of body/spirit is dissolved by the word and experience of Life, which connotes growth, suffering, generation, travail/travel, companionship, and delights both inward and outward. It is that life I long to

¹ All references cited are listed at the end of Lecture #2

² See *A language for the inward landscape*, by Brian Drayton and William P. Taber, published by the Tract Assoc. of Friends, 2015

experience as fully and freely as possible, to incarnate; and I long for you to do so as well.

In this session, I purpose to explore Quaker "language" as a key into the spiritual resources of the Quaker tradition. For it has long seemed to me that too many of us, upon reaching some plateau in our spiritual lives, turn quickly to resources outside Quakerism — Julian of Norwich, Thich Nhat Hanh, Carl Jung, the Mages of Quantum Theory, or what have you, for nourishment, and never take the time to see what there may be within Quakerism which might help, and in the use serve both to encourage fresh growth, and to enrich our experienced understanding of Quakerism as a spiritual path.

This seems like a good thing to talk about, but, Friends, I am here this weekend under a burden that we as a people, if we are a people, have mostly not yet learned what it means for us to be free in the Spirit, free children of the Light. After all, the Scriptures cannot any more be assumed to be a common point of reference³ among us; more and more of us are convinced Friends or otherwise deprived of Quaker enculturation; and even books of Faith and Practice are less and less regarded. While any of us can probably name individuals — even including themselves, perhaps — who are living free, have found a way to embody Gospel freedom, it does not appear to me that as a people we have accepted the gift that God has given us, keeps giving us. In part, at least, this may be owing to a too-facile acceptance of terms like "leading," "spirit," and "continuing revelation, " and I believe that we thereby rob ourselves of a deep enough engagement with the dynamic work of Truth in and through us.

In New England, as elsewhere, Friends are feeling both energized and alarmed about the

³ In 1982, as Darcy Drayton and I were returning by stages from the World Gathering in Kaimosi, I once spoke in worship in a meeting in England. Phrases from Scripture were woven into the message, as does happen sometimes. Afterwards, a local Friend thanked me for the message, and said that she supposed I must have some connection with Earlham or one of those places. I said, Well, no, but why do you say that? She said, Because you were quoting from the Bible.

condition of the world and while stirred in mind, heart, and soul there is a daily invitation to despair. We long to speak prophetically, *"to be"* (as Thomas Ellwood said of George Fox) *"valiant for the truth, bold in asserting it, patient in suffering for it, unwearied in labouring for it, steady in testimony to it, immovable as a rock."* Is our experience of life with the Spirit, and in it our unity across time and place with other Children of the Light, robust enough, convicting and convincing enough, transforming enough, to enable us to live as we long to?

To approach this topic, I think I need to retail just a little of my own experience, as a way to explicate what I mean by "spiritual resources," and, I suppose, what I mean by Quakerism. In this era, we are all syncretists to one degree or another, and part of the challenge I want to return to in my second talk is precisely the problems caused by our being a community of spiritual polyglots.

§2

Before ever I knew about religious practice, I encountered wonder. My earliest memory is of standing on the threshold of my family's barn, on a summer's day, and looking up into the big space, crossed by shafts of light coming through the roof and sides, and watching barn swallows, dozens of them, dipping and swinging through the air, in and around the bars of light, chattering and creaking, their little voices and effortless aerobatics completely enchanting.

From the sea that framed my childhood world, I learned something about the age of things, experienced an impersonal, speaking power that was wholly other, that was playground, pathway, graveyard of fishermen, endlessly in motion, and seemingly eternal, with quiet and mystery beneath what I could see.

As time passed, while the primeval joys and implications of nature did not pass away, the life of humanity more and more took center stage, and religion mattered then.

§3

Now, I started out in the Episcopalian way, where I came up in love, and learned from the devout theater of the liturgy, imbibing a sense of the Church as a great edifice and school for souls. The pastor of my childhood was a first pattern of piety — Anglo-Catholic flavored, he introduced me at a childish level to desert spirituality — and gifted with a good Anglican eloquence in expounding the Scriptures. But the Eucharist and baptism, seriously as I took them, said little to me as I sought to come to terms with my self, my identity, and the Vietnam war which was for me then the evident project of evil.

I was most deeply moved by the Stations of the Cross, enacted during Lent, followed by the explosive light and music of the Easter midnight mass. No one told me, as they might have, that in the Passion story and Easter joy I could have learned some of how the Eucharist, baptism, and the rest could speak very deeply to war, and to the finding of oneself. But at least I spent some time, half-aware, peeking through the gates of Gethsemane at what went on there. Words were not the issue, nor were they the solution to my need, though *story* was, and the enactment of salvation drama by individuals, and a Christ nearer than Jerusalem (as James Nayler once put it). Erasmus, that advocate of copious words, once remarked that in human communication words are not enough and that much must be conveyed by a speaking deed — *factum loquens*.

§4

Further along the "trail of life," as Rufus called it, under the impartial nurture of a Jesuit high school, and of a family friend whose mentorship shaped me as much as anything else, I

learned new things about the worth of words. I read the Gospels (not yet Paul), learned languages, and began to feel the power of poetry and of dialectic as a path of discovery — Plato's dialogues, the see-saw debates of historians, and the colloquies of Erasmus.

From my teachers and mentors (especially if I include my mentors-by-reading such as Merton, Erasmus, Gandhi), I could probably construct a sufficiently amusing portrait gallery of characters — a Hogwarts faculty — but the deep lesson from such portraits is how central is *personality*: how malleable, and yet how stubborn it can be, and how much control it exerts over one's understanding of the world.⁴ It took the Victorian Quakers, however, to teach me another aspect of the profundity of personality as a spiritual factor — what's given, what's developed as one forges a character, and how it can be transformed, when it willingly is inhabited by the personality of Christ— yet another face of incarnation, the intimate personal work of the Spirit.

We who are still sinners...are each of us not "one" but many. For looking at me is the face of one who is now angry, and then sad, and a little later happy, and then disturbed, at times concerned with the things of God and actions leading to eternal life, but shortly after doing things based on greed or the glory of this world....there are as many persons in him as there are customs...(Origen 281¶787)⁵

And Erasmus helped me understand more: that our growth in the Gospel life depends in fact on our materiality, the gifts and costs of bodies, culture, and personality, as we collaborate with the inward work of Christ, whom he sometimes calls "Truth," to grow from our many-minded, divided selves, into unity.

Erasmus' morality was never a question of 'thou shalt not,' but rather it was 'thou shalt be conscious.' In this way, crucially, sin and even the flesh itself became an occasion of perfection. (Fitzpatrick pp 44-45).

⁴ William James (in *A pluralistic universe*) lets us in on the dirty little secret that philosophers' personalities play a far greater role than anyone likes to admit in determining what they accept as a telling argument or satisfying conclusion.

⁵ Origen cited by selection number from von Balthasar, 1984.

Indeed, I learned much about the importance of maintaining the simplicity of the Gospel by my efforts to understand what Erasmus meant by the "philosophy of Christ."⁶ He picked this term up from the early Fathers, most likely Clement of Alexandria, but, gifted as he was in irony, saw with penetration that the "wisdom of God," (among other things a name for Christ) must not be construed or re-constructed after the fashion of secular philosophy, however valuable that enterprise may sometimes be. The philosophy is in fact the life of servant leadership, of humility and patience, of (to borrow a phrase) wearying out exaltation and cruelty, or whatever is contrary to that Wisdom whose delight is in creation, in healing, and in the breaking forth of the springs of Truth.

Erasmus believed that the true meaning of the Cross was that we had to save ourselves by dying to the world and our worldly bodies. For him, Christ, in one sense, was consciousness of the truth of human existence, it was like an inner voice that knew the way of salvation. We could only be perfected by acknowledging, and then following this inner voice. (Fitzpatrick pg. 32)

It was under such teachers that I was prepared to confront the Vietnam war, in my measure, and to see war in its context, as an emanation of the spirit in which our society dwells and takes its meaning, and counter to the Gospel life, and so I first caught a glimpse of the Lamb's War, though I did not as yet have such language for it.

§4

Accompanied, encouraged, and instructed as I was, I still had not had the experience being gathered into a fellowship or called into a church . Part way through high school, hints of a way forward came my way: my mentor, out of the blue, gave me a copy of Rufus Jones's final book, *A call to what is vital*, my first encounter with Quakerism at all; and around the same time I

⁶ From the *Paraclesis*, introductory to his edition of the Greek New Testament: "here is no requirement that you approach equipped with...many troublesome sciences. The journey is simple, and open to everyone. Only bring a pious and open mind, possessed above all with a pure and simple faith...This doctrine in an equal degree accommodates itself to all, lowers itself to the little ones, adjusts itself to their measure... bearing, fostering, sustaining them, doing everything until we grow in Christ." in Olin, pg. 100

learned that the only other non-Catholic in the school was a member of Portland Friends Meeting — but not living in the city, and relying only on hitchhiking for transport, I never was able to get there for a sample. Still, these hints came from people who knew before I did that I needed to find a people to belong to. I was showing signs of being gathered up.

When I went to college, however, I went on my first free afternoon to find the Quaker meeting (which turned out to be Friends Meeting at Cambridge), which was, I heard, just over there. It being a Saturday, nothing much was on view, but now I had a concrete proof that Quakers, whatever they were, were a going concern.

When I came into the silent assembly there, well, I felt at home, for sure — but rather than entering a soothing fellowship of united minds, I found myself in an energetic, intellectually chaotic community where tough questions were as much, actually more, valued than solid (if provisional) answers. So many names for God, so many practices, so many caveats. So much seeking, and so little patience or dwelling with the finding. Yet in the vulnerable, powerful worship, and in the meetings for business, something like real unity was felt to a surprising and delightful degree: "What? Is the Kingdom of God come to be with men?" (or words to that effect) — and somehow I had a feeling that this might be a function of the diversity of the fishes brought to land in the Spirit's net.

In that searching, pluralistic, sometimes distracted community I felt drawn into a common life. I also started to learn of the tradition of Quaker practice and of thought, and to understand, a little, the notion of "humble learner in the school of Christ."

I also was able in that freedom, and in those days of my apprenticeship as a scholar and as a Friend, to finally formulate two abiding questions:

1. What indeed is the gospel and how can I know it? And

2. How is the gospel to take effect in the world?

§5

I wanted to hear these answered in Quaker idiom— I didn't want to go haring off to another way, when there were hints and indications that Quakerism had depths that I as yet knew not. Such questions, however, were not easy to give voice to in those days, in those places, as far as I could tell. I was seen to be curious, however, and to take delight in the meeting as a home, so Friends responded with the two great tools for spiritual formation most often wielded by modern Quakers – committee appointments and recommended reading.

Committee work was both fun and instructive, but as an approach to my problems, haphazard at best. I read the favorite authors of the day, but I was not for them – Fox's journal, Howard Brinton, whose sage 300 years I was ill– prepared to benefit from; Thomas Kelly, who provided a feeling of vague uplift, with occasional flashes of guidance; John Woolman, less strange than Fox but still conveying a sense of authentic experience embedded in a distinctive culture. I was glad to find Rufus Jones's autobiographical trilogy, and was in a mood for *Bildungsroman*, but I needed more guidance, you might say now I need both story and a theoretical framework: How did my story fit with these, and how did all fit together?

When all my hopes of finding a Quaker path forward were frustrated, then, oh then, I had a few crucial encounters. I read Brinton's book on Quaker journals⁷, and a little beat-up copy of Bownas's *Qualifications Necessary to a Gospel Minister*⁸. Around the same time, the Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder came to our Yearly Meeting, to talk about the *Politics of Jesus*,

⁷ Brinton 1974

⁸ now most easily available as Bownas 1989

and spoke of the Lamb's War. Excited, I asked him afterward what this was, and with a penetrating gaze he said, "It's *your* tradition! Go find out!" So I met James Nayler. These encounters opened the door to the realization that Quakerism possesses a treasury of complex, personal, unsystematic, yet powerful spiritual wisdom. Nayler connected inward, outward, personal and global, in a way that finally clicked, and helped me start to feel how all this was a way to understand my Big Questions: What is the Gospel, really, and how can it make a difference? I needed plainer words, first person accounts, which both told me what had happened, and what had changed in their lives and selves, and crucially, Why and How.

§6.

So I started reading journals, and also those powerful devotional works, the Braithwaite histories and Hugh Barbour's *Quakers in Puritan England*. I began to get a feeling for the great reservoir of experience that Bownas and Brinton synthesized, to read Woolman and others with more understanding, and to try to penetrate the life of the explosive First Generation. I began to reckon with a calling to teach and, well, to preach.

Then I met Bill Taber, whose talks on the Prophets and the Quaker connection, given at NEYM⁹, portrayed Quakerism as a practice and a discovery, and in the stream (the prophetic stream) of living revelation. I said to him, "I've been waiting all my life to hear someone speak like that," and unfazed he said, hearing a longing I had not until then really understood in myself, "Well, then, we'd better talk." When, a few months later, I told him I had been recorded as a minister, he gave a delighted smile, and over lunch we begin exploring how we might work together — and so I began another apprenticeship, of the sort that was a gift of his shared with

⁹ Published as Taber 1984

many, and one that went deep. There followed a series of weekends at Pendle Hill for Friends in ministry, during which I heard for the first time Bill's phrase, "a language for the inward landscape," as we talked about the "technical language" or spiritual vocabulary of the Journals. Bill explored this language with care and love for many years.

§7

It is common enough to read that some worthy Friend, say, Fox, was not a systematic thinker or writer; that some others, like Nayler or Burrough, are more logical and organized in their thinking and writing; at least there's Barclay... We know that a coherent, systematic exposition can be a powerful tool for preaching & teaching; but we also know that this line of critique is missing something important, which is reflected in the Language for the inward landscape. It's not just that you can't put God or spiritual realities into words, though that is true.

The problem is that Quakers seek to live under the direct guidance and tutelage of the Spirit, and it is a direct, unmediated and dynamic relationship. This is hard to maintain, it turns out, because members of our species are inveterate, distractible constructors of concepts and groups of concepts and images, and before we know it, we have, as Nayler says, substituted words or ideas *about* Christ for the real thing, so that our "[spiritual] birth is a meaning instead of the life of Christ..."¹⁰ But the difficulty is even deeper, because this Spirit moves in ways and times that we comprehend imperfectly at best. It bloweth where it listeth. So *attentiveness* is at the root of the work, or, better, *dwelling in watchfulness*. This is not the same as the "mindfulness" of careful and disciplined attention to one's condition, actions, and surroundings. It is an active availability for instruction or instructions, coming from an Other whose influence

¹⁰ in *What the possession of the living faith is*, in Naylor *Works* vol iv, pg. 88

we can most easily describe in personal terms, however incorporeal and impersonal our reason tells us this God person must be.

With interior experience being so essential to this relationship, we need to be careful watchers, and avoid the natural delusion that "my will is Thy will." I have always taken warning from the thought expressed in Psalm 50, where God says derisively, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself." Idolatry is so easy to fall into! Yet if we fall into it, we become inaccessible to the Spirit, or unperceiving of its motions.

Yet this Spirit wills us well — it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom of Heaven — and Christ continues to perform one of the offices most important in the gospel accounts of Jesus, which is that of teacher. Moreover, Christ teaches each of us in our present condition and capacity — as Clement of Alexandria says in the *Paidagogos*, "The Instructor [that is, the Word] being practical, not theoretical, His aim is thus to improve the soul, not to teach, and to train it up to a virtuous, not to an intellectual life." As this growth goes forward, the freedom of friendship is made possible, as we are changed so that "Thy will becomes my will."

§8

Friends tend to speak differently to insiders, that is, those who share the Quaker experience, than they do to outsiders, who are ignorant of or perhaps hostile to Quakerism as they understand it. (There is an interesting possible parallel to explore between this difference, and the development of public vs. retired meetings for worship in the first decades of the movement). Given the difference we all can attest between how it feels to do what we do, versus how we explain our actions, it is no wonder that when Friends are put under the searchlight of challenge, cast by theologically acute critics, the results are of mixed success, and

there is a small steady lament which recurs in certain intellectual circles (starting at least with A.R. Barclay) that Friends have never really worked things out theologically, even though the movement produced (and still produces) beautiful lives and courageous hearts.

But when Quakerism arose, the message was not, "Here's how to refresh old structures and accounts of Christianity." Rather, the message was, "Christ says, Come! With his power and his guidance we follow." The whole work of a Christian, says Penington, is to know Christ, and live out that relationship, which means to walk a path of transformation, learning what the Witness Light finds in our hearts, and under the paradoxical methods of the servant Lord, the conquering Lamb, to grow to allow Truth to arise and have dominion. This is apprenticeship, it is pedagogy, it is the conversation between material and artisan, the life of a pilgrim or of an explorer of an inward-outward landscape.

The resources you need on such a journey include guidance to help you keep oriented towards your destination; advice about inward and outward weather and environmental conditions; troubleshooting, and, crucially, how to manage this as part of a body of many members, whose connection is mystical, and whose autonomy is never compromised, either by each other, or by the Spirit, that takes its kingdom with entreaty, and keeps it by lowliness of mind. Neither roadmap, nor blueprint, the companionship with the Inward Teacher, Monitor, and Shepherd consists of a process of diagnosis, analysis, and guidance for one following an opening way, which takes its very shape in the act of following it (and indeed can only do so as we make the attempt). And it's we who are being shaped, as our path takes shape: We are both traveler and landscape, co-workers and raw material, and in the process of losing our self as we go further on this landscape, it is given back, with our individuality gradually prepared for consecration.

Now let us hurry to receive the heavenly manna, for in the mouth that manna takes on the taste

each one wants... Just as the quality of food in the nursing mother changes into milk according to the nature of the infant, or is modified by the physician according to what is beneficial for a sick person, or is prepared for a stronger person of greater vigor, so, too, does God change, according to each one's needs, the power of the Word, which has the function of nourishing the human soul... and the Word is by no means false to its own nature when it becomes food for each according to the capacity of each. (Origen 265-6, ¶¶728-9)

We can gain comfort, insight and inspiration in this journey from other wayfarers, in narrative, and in indications which bring both the weight of an individual's experience, and additional dimensions of engagement which allow us to connect with the mind, with the imagination, with the heart, as well as the soul. Indeed, it is with the Journals as with the Scriptures, or the ministry in a meeting for worship: We get benefit from them to the extent that we receive them in the spirit in which they were given, so that they become a means of our participation and experience. In this process, it is good to seek physical, Biblical, as well as "Quaker" echoes and nuances.

§9

In the first place, we must be brave enough to admit that our goal, as Friends have always understood, is *holiness*. Of course this can be named in different ways —righteousness, perfection, faithfulness, salvation, or "rest." (as in Matthew 11)

Where art thou? Art thou in thy soul's rest? Dost thou feel the virtue and power of the gospel? Dost thou feel the ease which comes from the living arm, to the heart which is joined to it in the light of the gospel? Is thy laboring for life in a good degree at an end? And dost thou feel the life and power flowing in upon thee from the free fountain? Is the load really taken off from thy back? Dost thou find the captive redeemed and set free from the power of sin, and the captivity broken... by the redeeming power, which is eternal? Hast thou found this, or hast thou missed of it? Let thine heart answer.

(Penington, vol 2: 202-3)

When first I was aware of my spiritual life, I was told to aspire to be a "good person." But what did that mean? Like young people in every generation, I could see how people who were esteemed in my community, and even in my church, betrayed serious flaws or struggles, or wounds, which shaped the way they treated others, the way they used "the creatures," the goals they strove for, and the achievements they valued. When I later came among Friends, I did not

hear much at all about the destination, or directionality, of the spiritual journey. I heard advice to "live up to the light that you have," or to "be faithful," but this language did not convey much to me about growth and development. I was not hoping for some ladder of attainment or initiation; on the other hand, I did want to hear about what it might mean to mature spiritually.

The Quakerism that I have mostly encountered is resolutely democratic, and leveling. Where this militates against the glorification of individuals, it seems healthy. But it also robs us of any understanding or discernment about spiritual authority. It makes an idol of comfort, and disguises the very reality that we can grow in our capacity to follow the light. After all, if Christianity is a practice, it is reasonable to assume that with practice we will get better at the skills, the understanding the wisdom associated with this practice. Doesn't practice make perfect? Pennington again (later in the passage cited above):

The gospel state is a state of substance, a state of enjoying the life, a state of feeling the presence and power of the Lord in his pure, holy Spirit, a state of binding-up, a state of healing, a state of knowing the Lord, and walking with him in the light of his own Spirit. It begins in a sweet, powerful touch of life, and there is a growth in the life (in the power, in the divine virtue, in the rest, peace, and satisfaction of the soul in God) to be administered and waited for daily.

§ 10

Of course, the point is not *my* growing up, but *Christ growing in me*. Quaker language has much to offer in this regard, and the most notable word perhaps is "seed." In the uses of this word we find important indications for the spiritual practitioner — whether novice or long-experienced, for indeed the disciplines of Christ are to preserve in essentials the condition of a child, which in one who is no longer a child in years will include poverty of spirit, readiness to mourn and to comfort the mourner, to long for and be available to reconciliation, to ask for what we need, accept what we are given with joy. Friends warn us to experience the seed as something little, tender, weak, and oppressed in darkness by the earth, even though in these little

appearings it is yet the presence and action of God's power, which we might be too ready to disdain:

the great deceiver of souls lifts up men's minds in the imagination to look for some great appearance of power, and so they slight and overlook the day of small things, and neglect receiving the beginning of that, which in the issue would be the thing they look for. Waiting in that which is low and little in the heart, the power enters, the seed grows, the kingdom is felt and daily more and more revealed in the power. And this is the true door and way to the thing: take heed of climbing over it. (Penington vol 1:125)

This is both helpful and challenging. It is helpful because it is concrete: Look for small motions, little openings, and do not look for or trust large "overturnings" or apparent sudden leaps to a new spiritual stature. As Samuel Neale says,

Let us keep to the feeling, let us travail with the seed, that we may know its arising in dominion; and then let us do what is shown us. (S. Neale, *Journal*, pg 11).

This is at the core of the work we do in worship, to wait until we are clear enough to perceive where the little sweet growing thing is. This is the Spirit, deeper than words, which helps us breath toward the divine life, and as we come into an awareness of its presence, we are enabled to conquer new territory, the life rises up, as Friends say, into dominion — not complete, not utter, because we are vessels in preparation, babes taking nourishment, children asking the divine Parent for bread; and that Seed is also the first opening of Christ's resurrection in your body and mine, in the bodies of his saints.

..all wait patiently in the power of the Lord.... that in the seed ye may be kept which is heir of the power...For that is it which will keep you out of the changeable things, and present your minds, souls, and spirits to the Lord; and there the seed comes up which is heir of the power, and of the wisdom which is pure from above... And your growth in the seed is in the silence, where ye may all find a feeding of the bread of life.

(Fox, ep. CLXXI)

Knowing that power, we then wait to see our measure, taking our measure from what we can

compass in action, and gain strength from our faithfulness thus far:

let your food be in the life of what you know, and in the power of obedience rejoice, and not in what you know, but cannot live (Nayler *Works* iv: 155)¹¹

Now, Friends from the beginning used "seed" in another sense. Fox and some others had in mind that "seed of the woman," the "royal seed," that will struggle with, and overcome, the "seed of the Serpent" (Gen. 3:15). identified very often with the "seed of Abraham," so *Seed* refers to "descendants," or to "a people sharing common parentage." These descendants are gathered by God's work into a shared relationship with the Father, brothers and sisters in the Spirit, and thereby sharing a common life:

To all the Seed of Abraham ... who are of the offspring of David, and of the Church of the first-born; who are the first fruit unto God; ye royal offspring of the Rock of Ages, who have come out of the everlasting washing, my dear brethren, called Quakers, who have eaten your bread with fear and trembling, whom your brethren have cast out; Oh how I love you; my soul is knit unto you; my heart and life breathes after you; I am one with you in suffering and in joy.

Howgill, 1678, pg. 28¹².

Writing from prison, during a time of intense persecution, William Dewsbury declares the stubborn endurance of this "royal seed," and calls upon his brothers and sisters to remember the sweetness of God's working, and the fellowship of all those who are of the royal seed:

Oh, you child of the morning of the pure eternal day of the God of Israel, hearken no longer to the enemy, who said, there has none traveled where you are [traveling,] neither drunk of the cup that you are drinking. He is a liar, who goes about to destroy your precious soul. In the word of the Lord God, I declare unto you, I drank the same cup, with my faithful friends, who are born of the royal seed, every one in their measure have traveled in the same path, and have endured the same temptations, and walked in the light of the same sparks, and lain down in sorrow, in the sense of the same misery as you mourn under this day. No longer lend an ear unto the enemy, and to the thoughts of your heart. Arise, arise, in the light of the covenant, and stay your heart; and the Lord God, he will throw down the enemy of your peace. (Dewsbury, from York Castle, 1661)

¹¹ *Milk for babes, and meat for strong men*

¹² "The first general epistle written to the Camp of the Lord."

By extension, *seed* can refer to a group of souls gathered, or ready to be gathered.

Ministers sometimes felt or saw this seed to be visited with encouragement, and in their writings about it, more than one meaning of *seed* can be heard:

I was favored with a secret evidence, that the Lord had a seed on that isle, which he designed to visit, and bring to the knowledge of himself, I was therefore thankful that resignation was wrought in me, to obey his will in going there[.] (Routh 202)

This brings real consequences for living in the Spirit: both the seed-as-growing-point and seed-as-people convey the unity of the life flowing through all who come to it, acknowledge it, and feel its condition in them selves and others. It is not *your* seed or *mine*, for we are all of one seed, and in the stillness of all flesh we feel how the Seed at the last is also our meeting place and bond. Hence, Friends have seen the process of "sinking down to the Seed" as both an arrival at a place of peace, and as a way to see where God's Wisdom is at the work of creation, compassion, and witness. This is how I make sense of the moment in John's Gospel when Jesus said, "My peace I give you, not as the world gives": Here is a little glimpse into the experience of God, in whom peace and dynamism are both at the center.

[The Lamb] having kindled the fire and awakened the creature, and broken their peace and rest in sin, he waits in patience to prevail to recover the creature and stay the enmity by suffering all the rage and envy, and evil entreatings that the evil spirit that rules in the creature can cast upon him, and he receives it with meekness and pity to the creature, returning love for hatred, wrestling with God against the enmity with prayers and tears night and day, with fasting, mourning, and lamentation, in patience, in faithfulness, in truth, in love unfeigned, in long suffering, and in all the fruits of the spirit, that if by any means he may overcome evil with good, and by this his light in the eye of the creature that the eye may come to be opened.... And thus he in his members many times wrestles and preaches to the spirits in prison, with much long suffering towards the world, a nation, or a particular person. (Nayler Works iv:4)¹³

Thus Nayler, but Friends for long understood that we are called to practice this radical paradox,

¹³ *The Lamb's war against the man of sin.*

of centering on the Presence, and, for the love of Truth, allowing Truth to confront and transform ourselves until we both feel and can live a unity with the Seed in all, and to grow into willingness to serve that Seed. Peter Yarnall says: " it is a mercy inexpressible, when made willing to suffer with the seed," and Mary Neale:

They met with low times and seasons, deep baptism of spirit; they travailed for and with the seed, and at times were set at liberty in the authority and power of Truth, to minister to the various, classes of the people. (M. Neale, *Journal*, pg. 76).

Feeling and knowing

"Oh, that you that read me could feel me!" exclaims William Penn.

One of the things that Friends have often been accused of, and indeed must be careful about, is mistaking our own preferences, impulses, tastes, and compulsions as motions of the Spirit. From the beginning, Friends claimed that anyone could (subject to God's gift and present action) know the will of God for them, and indeed at times, for others, even to the nations, in a way that many of their contemporaries found ridiculous, delusional, and dangerous (to the soul and to the nation). Unquestionably, God's will in general terms, and in essentials, was expressed in the Scriptures, and in certain respects in creation, but both creation and Scripture required interpretation, and neither was a device well-suited to answering today's specific questions — "Shall I take this job? Should I write this bill of sale for a slave? Is this the ship I should travel to America on?"

It is all very well for someone to talk about their spiritual growth with language like "Now the Lord did gently lead me along...", with reference to interior events which might be consequential (for good or ill) for the individual soul ; it is quite another thing to say something like this:

Then I concluded to go to London and take some employment amongst Friends ; and something was very forward in me so to do; but yet the Lord would not suffer me, but counselled me to stay

and wait, until he called me forth. So I waited a season, and at length the word of the Lord came unto me, which said, Thou shalt go forth into the south to be a witness unto my name, for which thou shalt suffer many things; but I will be with thee. (Ambrose Rigge, *Friends Library* vol 12 pg. 188)

Anyone who talks like that is raising some threatening questions — What makes you privy to God's will? What gives you any standing to judge whether some notion that comes into your head is divine guidance? Since when is God going about raising up witnesses, the way he once did in the prophets' time, or Apostolic times, after which it has been most comfortable to conclude that prophecy has ceased? Won't this kind of thing lead to total subjectivity, individualism, and chaos?

Now, the controversies and wranglings that ensued in the 1600s, and keep emerging among us even now, are probably not worth rehearsing here at this time, and I think any practicing Friend will understand them experimentally. The upshot was, however, that Friends emerged from all this roil with a fixed confidence in "the direct, immediate, and perceptible guidance of the Holy Spirit," as the NCYM(C) discipline still puts it.

How shall this be known? Friends developed an extensive practice of "feeling" which has never been foolproof, and yet is indispensable. This particular Quaker sense of feeling is a kind of knowing, a moment of clarity on a specific point, a heightened or intensified awareness of a situation, condition, or fact. We can say that when we come to the center where we are able to perceive the divine life, the inward teacher in action, *we have come down to the place that knows*. From agreeing that "I am easy with this minute," in a meeting for business, to holding back from an action because you feel a "stop in the mind," to having a sense of God's purpose taking shape, possibly including you in what is to come, either as herald,

as participant, or as a Joshua, upholding in prayer, Friends have received guidance, as part of the wisdom from above. We have also learned to act without knowing the consequence, though welcome evidence that the choice was right has not been wanting in many cases.

Of course, "feelings" can have many origins, and we can very well "feel" certain about something in which we are quite mistaken; Quaker annals are full of such cautionary tales. Discernment must include both "feeling" and thinking, often very shrewd thinking. As Hugh Barbour wrote, " Early Friends faced the daily job of recognizing the true from the subjective when they were led to speech and action. From Jeremiah's time to the present, men have known no absolute or easy way to tell a genuinely divine message from wishful impulses and false prophecy." (Barbour, n.d., pg 1).

How to keep up the daily watch, the daily feeling after life? Many Friends can give a valuable account of their practices, and there are usually more than one, because listening to the Light both gets easier with practice, and yet requires always being a beginner, since every day is a fresh one, and our inward weather is so changeable. It is very fruitful to talk with your Friends about their practice, if people get centered and in the place of trust feel free to acknowledge both how little or how much they do to maintain that state. Here are some glimpses of one person's repertoire, to encourage your own exploration and conversation with Friends.¹⁴

First, the quick inward retirement—a momentary pause, a brief period of mindfulness, in which God and the decision are both in my awareness. If no prohibition arises, then I feel free to proceed as seems best upon other considerations. I imagine that this is the commonest way

¹⁴ This, of course, refers only to individual discernment; community discernment includes various forms, though these individual practices underlie many of them.

Friends "check in" during the day, and it was discovered early among us. Hugh Barbour writes of it as part of the daily practice of Quakers even in the early period: "In some ordinary activities, no special guidance was looked for, and it was enough that Friends found within themselves no contrary balks or 'stops to their minds.'" (Barbour 1964, 114) This is the kind of listening that I try to do at work and around the house, and it can be a powerful if very simple tool for noticing places where I have allowed myself to become encumbered to the impairment of my spiritual health. A description of this in action that I love, concerns Loveday Hambly, a busy innkeeper:

Under many trials and sufferings she was very valiant and cheerful; she had a great family and God gave her a great measure of wisdom to order it. Her tables were plentifully spread and she took great care that all might have sufficient and that none of the good creatures which God had given her should be abused or wasted Many times in the day as she had opportunity she retired to her closet and many times came out amongst her family in a cool and tender frame of spirit as one whose strength was inwardly renewed. (Coale 1844)

Second, what one might call "sanctified debate." By this phrase I mean simply taking time to become deeply aware of the Presence, and then undertaking an intentional meditation and reflection on the decision, perhaps over many days. This allows my reasons pro and con to be examined in the consciousness of my deepest commitment, and thus to allow the Light to a certain degree to search my motives, fears, and hopes. I may find then that I refrain from something, because I see that to act on it on the basis of my most prominent motives would be a betrayal, large or small, of my sense of the divine truth that I have; or would serve to harden me against something that is uncomfortable but important—something that is making me less tender (and here I might include even just too much busyness).

Finally, "seeking the opening way." I have sometimes found that when I sit with a decision, there is no prohibition or stop that directs my choice (by eliminating an alternative). Nor do my reasonings produce clarity. If I feel I must act, then I have found it good to wait until I feel a path opening as I look in one direction or another, and a sense of release or freedom when I

contemplate taking that route. Then, even if I feel doubts or concerns, unless these intensify, I go ahead in trust. Bill Taber sometimes said that when faced with a choice, he would wait to feel which alternative had "more light on it." John Churchman, in his journal, speaks of this practice as well. Under Bill's influence, I have paid attention to this sense of light when in the throes of a decision; but it is laborious and forced if I have not been keeping up the daily watch.

Yet it is not only that we receive and then act. In our acting, or not, as the Spirit guides us, we receive affirmation or rebuke. We might say that it is the quality of the life that seems to open, under one option or another, that gives us the foundational guidance. Nayler writes:

It is the like of gentleness, meekness, patience, and all other virtues which are of a springing and spreading nature, where they are not quenched, but suffered to come forth to His praise in His will and time, who is the Begetter thereof, and to the comfort of His own Seed, and cross to the world.

(Nayler, "How Sin Is Strengthened" in *Works*, iv, p. 30.)

Wrapped up in a statement like this are several elements of this quality: truthfulness, even if in tension with our preferences or our self-image; gentleness, meekness, comfort, but also springing and spreading: growth and outward action, which has an integrity because of growing from within, in continuity with the divine Life.

Penington warns, "Do not seek to be more than God would have you be." You do not have to look far for examples in the journals of those who, no doubt meaning well, aspired to insight without exercising sufficient discernment or patience, and a desire to hasten to a condition that may seem exalted but is buttressed by insufficient substance. A quotation I love, from the journal of John Gratton, both makes clear Gratton's judgment, and the charity which can accompany such evaluation, rooted in the knowledge of how hard this all is:

Dear friends, let those alone who think they fly into the third heavens, and run into high things, great sights, and deep mysteries; yet love them, and seek peace as much as in you lies. And if any are offended at you, because you see not what they pretend to, bear it patiently, for they ought not so to be; the apostle Paul did not so, but became all things to all, seeking to gain all to Christ

Jesus; even so do all who abide in the same spirit to this day. John Gratton, Epistle to Friends in Pennsylvania.

We are rightly cautious about sudden insight and spiritual accomplishment, and yet if we are honest, we know that sudden change, too, is an important part of a lively internal life, and once again rules of thumb, the discerning heart and shrewd mind, are more valuable as cultivators of fresh life than rules about seasoning or process can be. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and so is every one born of the Spirit.

In closing this talk, and preparing for the next one, I want to revisit one of the most important, and most challenging phrases, and practices, available to us seeking to live in the freedom and lawfulness of the Gospel: *Living in the Cross*.

The Cross, and Living in it.

The Cross: I know Friends who have been Christian, who have despaired at the challenge of rescuing the Cross from the evils done under its sign. I know Friends who are allergic to any mention of the Cross, seeing it as the symbol of oppression. I was once rebuked by a Friend who was pained that I would mention the shameful things that had been done in Christ's name, and under the sign of the Cross. In retreats on the "Language of the inward landscape," the session on Living in the Cross is usually the hardest, and most productive, eliciting as it does a range of wounds, misgivings, and questions, as well as affirmations. This bitter-sweet mixture is our condition, and in part explains why so many Friends are glad to embrace one or another relativization of Christ which avoids the issue of the Cross completely. One study group¹⁵ says,

We look to Jesus, along with many other great figures throughout the ages, as wisdom figures, teachers of love and compassion,

¹⁵ New Story Group (2014)

and works to develop a panentheistic account which avoids any version of the Cross, but keeps its focus steadfastly on a vision of convergence between an idealized Science and an idealized Religion. A model of divine-human dynamics which sees an inevitable evolution towards universal harmony can rescue Christ from the consequences of centuries of Christian malfeasance and disgrace by just avoiding the Cross altogether.

From the point of view I am taking here, however, which construes Quakerism as an active relationship with the Spirit, such an abstraction, whatever its attractions, is no help in the daily dialogue with the Living One who calls and accompanies — whereas the Cross, as lived by Friends, is a very real help, and indeed represents an indispensable process and practice. The key is in the phrase "living in the cross," common among Friends from the beginning, with variants such as "it was in the cross to me. "

Of course, this language in part echoes Jesus' injunction to his followers to take up their cross and follow him. But Friends have understood that the transformation of self requires endings, choices, departures, and sacrifices, all arrived at by a process that includes learning, grief, and boundary-crossing. It is easy with a superior grin to accuse the earnest of a belief that "whatever hurts must be good for me," but the plain fact is that the stronger the resistance is to a change that seems necessary, the more importance is connected with the challenge. Moreover, will power is not usually enough: something more is needed, and Friends came to know that the power that brought them to such a stand was also at work to enable the change. Here is Richard Farnsworth, already deeply possessed of this experience in the earliest years of the movement, to Margaret Fell and her household, employing at least three nuances of "the cross":

“Ah! My dear hearts, prize the love and mercy of the Lord, and daily mind your growth into that which is eternal: and the everlasting love and power of the Lord keep you all in faithfulness to Him in what you know. Keep in the cross, and purity will grow; -- the safest way is in the cross: take up the cross daily; mind that which crosseth your own wills, and it will bring every idle word, thought, and deed to judgement in you; and so the old man will be crucified, with the affections and lusts thereof; and you shall find the Lord to sit as a refiner, to judge out all the old leaven, the old nature; and so the new man will be raised up...” (Richard Farnsworth to Margaret Fell (and household) 1652. in Barclay 1847, pg. 434)

Bill Taber often talked about the experience of living in the Cross, and of his discovery of the Cross of Joy. At one point, he "translated" the old language thus:

"living in the cross is, first of all, being keenly alert to the highest reality we know, in every moment, so that we are able to choose, microsecond by microsecond, the attitude and action most in line with the will of God. Living in the cross is akin to "nonattachment" because in this state of alertness we can be given the grace and the self-discipline to give up our own will, our own attachments, and our own prejudices through the incredible grace of God manifested through Jesus Christ. Living in the Cross of Joy is not a one-time experience. It is life-long and is an important symbol of soul's journey in this earthly life. Most of us keep learning throughout our lives about what this cross really requires in terms of personal growth and personal change." (Drayton and Taber 2015, pg. 61, from Taber 2002 pg. 10)

And I tried to gloss this thus:

To live in the Cross is a place of rejoicing and creation, because one passes through death to a newness of life, and in one's own measure and sphere participates in the drama of salvation whose great signs are Calvary and the empty tomb, but whose experience is the Lamb's war as you and I can live it, the growth in freedom and the experience of the power of love to remove fear and its oppressive kin. The source of the joy and liberation is the experience of the Presence, ever less veiled, which brings judgment and healing, establishes perspective, tends to humility and patience, strengthens compassion, and enriches our ability to perceive and rejoice in beauty, purity, and mercy—and just as keenly to perceive and reject self-inflation, possessiveness, defensiveness, grudge-holding, injustice, and anything that takes us out of earshot of the Shepherd's voice. (Drayton 2007, pp. 21-2)

§ Final

We aim to be, claim we are, a body gathered by the Light, whose most central act is the meeting for worship. and who seek to follow the leadings of the Spirit. In the companion lecture, I will reflect on the terms contained in that sentence, so important and so disputed: Light, Spirit, Body, and Worship.

Willson Lecture #2

Our speaking and our identity¹⁶

§1 Overture. Not just metaphors– or–there is no “just”

The “language for the inward landscape” is no help if in our exploration of it we stay at the level of description, and translation, of lexicography and paraphrase. The gathered wisdom of the tradition, of the people to whom we have been led, is not in the words, unless we recall and rest love with where the words come from, and recognize that their language was being used as a means to evoke in the reader or hearer an echo of an experienced reality, and to provide some instrumental help for them to feel towards the reality pointed to.

Wrestling with these terms and the issues they raise is critical, I think, to our survival, and by this I mean not only our definitional existence, our reason for being, but the processes by which our community develops, deepens, discerns, and responds in witness, and in walk.

It may be useful here to stop and reflect on the Quaker use of the word “baptism.” Of course, Friends early reached the position that the outward ordinances are not necessary, and indeed to be avoided as a habitual practice, especially since the baptism that John foretold would be the work of the Christ would be with fire and the Holy Spirit. Yet the word “baptism” is very commonly met in the journals. For example, Martha Routh reports

On sixth day, we were at the Branch, a trying meeting, attended with close secret baptism of spirit; yet encouragement was handed to the exercised travelers. (Routh, pg. 190)

Ann Crowley says,

¹⁶ Subtitles for the lecture: How does a dialogue with traditional Quaker language help us discover our own spiritual identity? What happens when classic Quaker terms have different meanings (or no meaning) when spoken by 21st century Quakers?

In this arduous journey, we travelled nearly 3000 miles, attended 241 meetings, and visited 627 families. Such an engagement required deep baptisms, to prepare for usefulness, in the great Master's time, doing or suffering according to His unerring wisdom; but by endeavoring patiently to bear these descendings, we were permitted, at seasons, mercifully to feel the renewed arisings of light and life... (Crowley, pg. 470_

John Griffith writes: It became indisputably clear to my understanding, that it is altogether impossible to administer, in a feeling effectual manner, to people's several states, unless we are baptised thereunto. (Griffith, pg. 43)

A common variant is "dipped," as in "dipped into sympathy." In almost all cases, the accounts imply an inward struggle, resulting in an unmerited and unpredictable increase in awareness and ability – an increase of life and wisdom arising from exercise, to put it in more traditional parlance.¹⁷ It is, I believe, a common experience for the spiritual traveler, especially one who feels under the weight of some concern, and it represents in microcosm of the Quaker progress of the soul – one might characterize such an event as an episode of the inward work of Christ in the exercised person. Such experiences are evidence that the person is attuned in some measure to the guidance of the Spirit, and in that attunement made aware of limits or boundaries of their availability under the pressure or longing to walk more closely with the Guide.

As an aside, I think we should bear in mind that most of the journals and the storehouse about the writing that we have from the early Friends were written by ministers, as part of their ministry (even as these lectures are). So perhaps it's useful to pause and ponder the minister's experience of his or her work.

John Griffith writes,

¹⁷ I find an interesting parallel with Origen's teaching on "aporia" or "impasse" in Scriptural interpretation. With his understanding of Christ the Word active among us, he moves past the established philosophical usage, and uses the term to describe a time when the mind does not see how to make sense of a passage; then the exegete relies upon the activity of the Logos, the living Word, to teach the seeker, who thereby grows in wisdom enough to understand the Scripture in fact in and through the Spirit that gave it forth. Von Balthasar, pg. 8, and see also P. Martins, *Origen and Scripture*.

The main design of gospel ministry is to turn the children of men to the grace of God in themselves, which will teach them to work out their own salvation, and diligently to seek the Lord for themselves, in whom, their strength being renewed, their spirits would unite, and greatly help and relieve the ministers in their gospel-labours. (Griffith pg. 128)

But the thing that drives gospel ministry is love. The minister learns from an apprenticeship in listening and following, and immersion in a soul-climate including both their own spiritual condition, and that of those they encounter. The minister in time, with experience, comes to know that love is the most important anchor for service, though it is not an easy lesson to learn and hold to; and since love is the fundamental commandment for us all, the minister's message first and last must be love, a yearning for the spiritual flourishing of others.

From an inward purifying and steadfast abiding under it, springs a lively operative desire for the good of others. All faithful people are not called to the public ministry, but whoever are, are called to minister of that which they have tasted and handled spiritually. The outward modes of worship are various, but wherever men are true ministers of Jesus Christ, it is from the operation of his spirit upon their hearts, first purifying them, and thus giving them a feeling sense of the conditions of others. (Woolman Journal, pg. 31)

Martha Routh, whose journal is full of valuable reports on her inward experiences during her service in the ministry, gives a glimpse of how she experienced this "feeling sense":

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. To know how the culturing hand should be turned upon these, in order to help, is indeed a weighty matter; and nothing short of that adorable wisdom, which alone is profitable to direct, can accomplish it according to the divine will.

(Journal page 215).

Perhaps it was Richard Bauman who said that the dilemma of the minister was that she was called to do everything the Spirit required, and nothing that it did not require. The core of the work is in listening – listening to Scripture, to the gathered meeting, to the condition of individuals, to one's

inward condition, and below, through, above all listening to the Spirit. Much of the language that one hears from the ministers includes a strong sensory component – even a phrase like “I felt a stop in my mind” conveys the feeling of being pulled up short, or coming against a wall. As a more recent example of this embodied perception, I offer a phrase that Bill Taber used, with a smile: the “minister’s belly.” I have heard from Bill, from friends, and from others, varying accounts of its origin. In one version, Bill was recalling the feeling of warm and tangible love in the fatherly hug of a portly, beloved minister. In another which you will read in that remarkable memorial prepared by Ohio yearly meeting, the phrase refers to visible tremors that the young Bill noticed in the substantial belly of a beloved minister as he felt the conviction that he was called to rise and speak.

One final nuance: in my last opportunity with him, Bill did a little diagnosis of my condition, and then gave this prescription–“Remember the sense of prairie like spaciousness that I felt walking the wide salt marshes of my childhood home. Get the feeling of that openness, that inclusive embrace in here (patting his stomach)– and you feel yourself opening wider and wider in love and caring and the sense of freedom.”

The work is challenging, but the reward is a joy that is not just a satisfaction of being faithful–it is the delight of the gardener or shepherd in fostering growth and the springing up of fresh life, and in the experience of baptism, of preparation under the daily cross, the joy is purified by the growing understanding that ability is furnished from beyond one’s own resources, though all that one has is more and more consecrated and ordered in and for that service. Bearing this in mind, I can read the sometimes dry accounts of the ministers of the past with more understanding, and compassion, and discernment about times when they appeared to me they have lost their way.

Our midweek meeting, a laborious travel of spirit, crowned with peace, for I did not give way to the current of drowsiness, but breasted it with all my might, but was sorry to see so many goodly Friends carried along with the downward stream, having always understood that it is the sick and

dead fish that swim with the current....J.J. (a neighbor, not a Friend) felt led to come to meeting, but not feeling well was going to stay home, when he) thought he heard a secret voice like this, "Present thy body a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is thy reasonable duty." ...in the course of meeting, our dear E.S. was led to speak from the same text most feelingly and practically, which appears to have made a deep impression upon J.J.'s mind. But what it will come to I know not, for many are called and few chosen; and I fear that J.J. is too much like myself, he talks too much. (Edward Hicks, *Journal*, pg. 179).

it is also for this reason that it is valuable to seek to understand, from a sympathetic, inside perspective, what experienced travelers have to say, since we may go far in our journey under the misapprehension that what we have seen and felt is all there is to say or know about the endeavor.

I pause here with another phrase of Bill Taber's, "more than a metaphor," which he used in speaking of the Light, which we will turn to soon, but it is relevant to our whole discourse here. Cognitive scientists, linguists and philosophers have discovered that "metaphors" are more than colorful turns of phrase or effective political or rhetorical tools. They are deeply rooted in our experience as organisms, they are indeed physical objects in our brain-body system, they engage open psycho-motor pathways laid down during physical activity, sensory experience, in thinking, and when one is caught up in narrative. They are thus concrete objects in the universe, as much as rocks or winds or beetles. Moreover, they are tied to scenarios, possible enactments, and they exercise power by their tendency to expand their reach to include related ideas, experiences, and processes. Let us turn to the great one, Light.

§3. Light

Mind the light. Hold in the light. Inner light. Light in everyone.

So much has been said and felt and argued about light as a Quaker word that it might be better to pass it by in a talk like this. Yet it is so central to Quakerism from first to last that one cannot leave it

unaddressed. It is easy to enter a conversation about the light by pointing out that early Friends identify the light very directly with Christ, while for very many Friends now "Light" is detached from that identification, and it is a placeholder for "the divine" or something even vaguer. This difference is an important fact.

But I wish to testify first that to a remarkable degree, even the most non-theist of Friends experience this debatable presence and power with freshness and reality. When we are not talking about this, but dwelling in it, however labelled, we can indeed be brought to humility, to comfort and challenge, to renewal, to confession, to unity. This is something to celebrate and acknowledge with reverence. Of course, for some people there is an actual sensation of light, for others "light" is what they call the experience of Presence. In any case, it is important to understand that in the original Quaker experience, the light was not, is not, a passive environmental condition. It is active, searching and challenging. It is an agent.

Friends came to this experience of Light when they had reached an impass, had reached the end of their rope, spiritually speaking – religion was not providing meaning, order for their lives, progress towards holiness, inner peace. Here is Anthony Pearson:

dear friend, I must tell thee I have now lost all my religion, and am in such distress, I have no hope nor foundation left. My justification and assurance have forsaken me, and I am even like a poor shattered vessel, tossed to and fro... as blind, dead, and helpless, as thou can imagine. I never felt corruption so strong, and temptation so prevailing, as now; I have a proud, hard, flinty heart, that cannot be sensible of my misery. When I deeply consider how much precious time I have wasted...my spirit feels a sudden fear; but then I am still flying to my old refuge, and there my thoughts are diverted. What it means to wait on God I cannot apprehend; and the confusions in my own spirit, together with the continual temptations from without, are so great, I cannot understand or perceive the small still voice of the Lord. (In Barclay 1847, pp.327-8)

Indeed, we are safest when we can not only live with the sense of "stripping," of desolation, but come to see it as a necessary, salutary condition to return to over and over again — so that "convincement" is renewed over and over in "conversion," whose progress is like that of the

incoming tide. It never hurts to return to fundamentals. In his "Short catechism for the sake of the simple-hearted," (*Works* 1:123-4) Penington rebukes his fictional discussion partner when they ask:

But hath not this Saviour a name? What is his name?

A. It were better for thee to learn his name by feeling his virtue and power in thy heart, than by rote. Yet, if thou canst receive it, this is his name, *the Light; the Light of the World*

Questioner obstinately asks

Why dost thou call him the light? Are there not other names every whit as proper, whereby he may as well be known?

A. Do not thus set up the wise and stumbling part in thee; but mind the thing which first puts forth its virtue as light, and so is thus first to be known, owned, and received. Yet more particularly, if thou hast wherewith, consider this reason: we call him light, because the Father of lights hath peculiarly chosen this name for him, to make him known to his people in this age by, and hath thus made him manifest to us. And by thus receiving him under this name, we come to know his other names

And how does the Light do its work?

Letting in the light (which convinceth of, and warreth against, sin), the life stirs and is felt; and the life leads to the Word which was in the beginning, and giveth the feeling of that also. And in the Word, the righteousness, the peace, the wisdom, the power, the love are felt; and he is made all these to those who are led into and kept in the light.

Q. But can I do any thing toward my own salvation?

A. Of thyself thou canst not: but in the power of him that worketh both to will and to do, thou mayst do a little at first: and as that power grows in thee, thou wilt be able to will more, and to do more, even until nothing become too hard for thee. And when thou hast conquered all, suffered all, performed all; thou shalt see, and be able understandingly to say, thou hast done nothing; but the eternal virtue, life, and power, hath wrought all in thee.

In some ways this is the most embodied form in which to encounter God. As visual creatures we have so much experience of light, and its varieties and its opposites—seeing/blindness, radiance, clarity, the paradox of rainbows emerging under certain conditions for white lights, as Unity in diversity. Light and heat. Finding a way versus stumbling in the darkness. Day and night, evening and morning, shadow/false-reflection/true and so on.

So central and visceral is light to our world – indeed it is something we share and know we share with the majority of living things – it is no wonder that many Friends have been glad to accept this near-universal experience, and lay aside the Quaker insistence on the light is a manifestation of Christ at work amongst us. I confess it is difficult for me to get into a mindset that does not feel or assume the equivalents, so as to see what is gained by it, or lost by ignoring or forgetting it. Perhaps the best way forward, for me, is to ask: what do I learn from considering, meditating on living with the possibility of relating the light is experienced with Christ as in the Gospel of John?

First, it is a challenge to individualism or self-sufficiency, because the light, considered as a divine, illuminates each of us as from a common source, and is no personal possession. It came as a surprise to Friends, and it was disconcerting or terrifying.

Second, flowing from a common source it is orienting– the direction towards or away from, warmer/colder., we can choose to collaborate with traveling in and towards it, or shun it; as Nayler points out the light is only a means of salvation if you accept its workings (*Love to the Lost*, in *Works* vol. 3 pp. 53-57).

Finally, John's introductory hymn starts with Logos, and quickly moves to make connections of that cosmic force with creation, life, and light; then adds judgment and the ability to claim our inheritance as children of God, and so accepting the equation of light and Christ, we are drawn experientially into the mysterious heart of relationships with a living other. So that is yet another way to fight free of idolatry, especially the almost irresistible tendency to worship one's own image, inclinations, and feelings.

A note on terror. When I read the chapter in Hugh Barbour's *Quakers in Puritan England* on "The terror and power of the light," I was deeply reached and opened to the possibility that I had not at all

understood the encounter with the Light., even though the source of the terror seemed inaccessible to me. Because I start with the assumption that human nature is the same, though culture changes, I have sought to feel my way to the places where our culture bases its deep sense of confidence, which if shattered would indeed bring terror. It is hard for 21st-century people – postmodern, post-Christian people, whose habits of mind are infected and informed by the language of Mammon, the great God economics, which defines value as wealth, freedom as choice, choice as purchase, individuals as consumers or factors of production, to get into a worldview in which the condition of our souls is a matter for existential anxiety, and to reckon with the idea that some things have value absolutely quite apart from their value in exchange or use. I suppose this is part of the secularization process, the disenchanting of the world, which has shaped modern religion, including modern Quakerism. (I am aware, of course, that there have always been people whose view of the world is so formed (at least, we have records of non-theism, materialist thinking since classical times, and biblical times for that matter. Atheism, or materialism, or nihilism, have always been around as options. "All they that see him laugh him to scorn.")). But there are fears that haunt us, and being cut off from life and alienated from bodies, selves, or others, these when confronted in their actuality are terrifying in such a state, it's new to know what it is we fear, to admit our own role – sometimes as cause or perpetrator, sometimes as sufferer, sometimes as both; to recognize that we are mortal indeed, and shall be forgotten– These remain sufficiently painful that a constructive, abundant, and love-filled response can be gratefully received and before that, to hear that one as possible, but there is a way to live and that is free of these terrors – that is good news indeed. To discover upon seeking that way the transformation is required–that the power comes each time we plant our next step, to affirm and enable us to take the next towards a source of greater life – that is good news, too.

§4 "Spirit " and The Spirit

God is spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

I remember the first time that I heard "Spirit" used as a proper name. A friend from Philadelphia yearly meeting came to live and work at friends meeting in Cambridge and upon returning from the general gathering in a messaging meeting use some such phrases as that "Spirit teaches. Spirit says..." This usage is becoming more and more widespread, and as has happened with "light," it has become a way to express a focus of devotion and reverence that has no necessary content or implication. In a time of theological deconstruction¹⁸ and seeking, this has a value in building bridges, reducing barriers to inclusion, and avoiding specific commitments. It is characteristic of a desire for constructive and loving engagement across boundaries. Indeed, once when I was serving as a recording clerk for our YM, a Friend came to me to let me know that my use of the phrase "*the* Spirit" was uncomfortable to them, because it reminded them of "the Holy Spirit," and all that Christian stuff.

It turns out that the use of "Spirit" in this way, without the definite article or other qualifier, is widespread outside modern Quakerism. It is interesting to see the range of communities that use it – neo-Pagans, Spiritualist, some groups influenced by Hindu mysticism, among others. Given the thousands of years in which people have contrasted "spirit" with "matter," it is not surprising that the term can carry so many meanings.

Which spirit do we seek? Do we mean what we say when we quote the "Peace testimony," with its uncompromising claim about its authority?

¹⁸ Merriam-Webster comment: *Deconstruction* doesn't actually mean "demolition;" instead it means "breaking down" or analyzing something (especially the words in a work of fiction or nonfiction) to discover its true significance, which is supposedly almost never exactly what the author intended.

the Spirit of Christ, by which we are guided, is not changeable, so as once to command us from a thing as evil, and again to move unto it; and we certainly know, and testify to the world, that the Spirit of Christ, which leads us into all truth, will never move us to fight and war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the kingdom of Christ, nor for the kingdoms of this world.

I think it does matter what Spirit we listen to, and if we are being guided by the Spirit of Christ, we will be able to tell.¹⁹ Moreover, by learning together to do so, we will be helped in these confusing times, these transitional times, to make use of other sources of guidance in a way that brings strength and coherence, rather than confusion. Those who have walked this path have noted many times characteristic effects, which indicate the work of the Holy Spirit, and while some of them are noted in conventional "Pneumatology," others are peculiarly Quaker, or at least Friends have put their own flavor on them.

A. The Spirit of Christ can bring into unity across time and culture

First, it is good to reflect upon the bedrock claim that God, whatever God is, is one. This may seem to go without saying, but the implications, which Friends preached boldly from the beginning, are still important to us today. As Job Scott said, "The gospel is no upstart thing of only about 1800 years standing."

He is only one. His operations, offices, relations &c., are many and diverse. His attributes, though many, do not divide, nor diversify him. He is good, holy, just, merciful, . He *has* or *is* wisdom, power, love &c. Yet his having and...exercising all these, prevent not his unity. It follows, therefore, that in strictness of expression, he rather is, than has, any of these...For his word is himself; his spirit is himself; so is his goodness, wisdom, power, love, justice, mercy, &c...He has no wrath, but what is, *in him*, the same thing as his love. *He is one*. The contrariety is *in us*....All the possible diversity that may seem to be in him, respecting us, is wholly in us.

¹⁹ Sometimes I think modern Friends don't realize just how Christocentric early Friends were. Their "Christology" seems to me very "high" indeed, one reason that I find such resonance with such figures as Origen and Erasmus, whose experience of Christ at work in the world is intense. There are indications from early Quaker controversies that their contemporaries noted this emphasis. Cf for example from Fox's Journal, when an antagonist, Col Lyne, admits that Fox is Christian, contrary to charges made, and says, "I perceive you exalt Christ in all His offices beyond what I have ever heard before." Nickalls, pg. 598.

The universal work of Christ, by many names, is a well-known implication, which Scott restates directly:

Were the heathen under the new covenant? I answer that so far as the law was written in the heart, and conformed unto, among the heathen, Jews, Mahometans, Negroes, Indians, or any other race of men whatever, and whenever, they were so far under the new covenant...There never has been but one way of salvation: this was, and is, *Christ* forever....[Jesus] declares, "before Abraham was, I am." As if he had said, "I am, not now only...I am through all time, the life of religion, the salvation of man, the everlasting covenant." (Journal 15-16).

This understanding may be in part responsible for the multiplication of names for God that we find in the Journals: Truth, the Inward monitor, Best Help, Adorable Wisdom – seeking to convey the attribute of God that is most evident in experience at the time.

In our struggles with discernment, however, the commitment to God as One casts an important light on our ideas about "continuing revelation," because it reminds us that the deeply satisfying unity we long for, and sometimes taste, is not a matter of "best fit" construction; and the difference is that the unity not only feels nourishing to us at the time, and removes a sense of constraint and discomfort, but enables us to see how the unity that brings life exists below or beyond or within the differences we see most easily.

But all this is, in a sense, reasoning from first principles, whereas Friends have felt the unity, many times, and seen it as a "covering" of the Spirit, because hearts were changed, hasty spirits were quietened, and words if spoken came with power and with sweetness, however few and halting they might be. Such times are, in Quaker parlance, baptizing times, when we are dipped into sympathy with each other. Such baptisms do not come as a result of our intent, but rather when we relinquish our need for control or victory, and are reduced or graced with a longing for clarity, and to sit together with our brothers and sisters in love. Have you not known times, when you feel yourself in exile amidst your

Friends, or your culture, or from yourself, and brought into a deep exercise of spirit, when no way forward appears?

This state of conviction, of being convicted, is a time when the judging part can come forward quickly, and our intellects cannot see the way to a solution. It may well be that for unity to be found again, we must go through long preparation of heart and soul, before mind and strength can be brought to bear. New England's story is good to recall: our separation in 1845 was a fruit of broken trusts, the exercise of power to compel uniformity, and some theological differences – but indeed also of wounds and anger, fear, and other perennial elements of human frailty. Reunification took 100 years, and it required that contradictions be addressed and lived past in love, and it took so long because individuals needed to be healed enough of inward conflicts, wounds, and fears that the yearning for outward unity – which has never since looked like unanimity! – took the lead; and indeed the conversion that began in the early 1900s, and took organizational form in 1945, has continued down to today; and the process must ever be renewed.

B. The work of the Spirit is also *timely* – We have found that it is to be relied upon from moment to moment, working always towards our salvation, our liberation. The early narratives of conscious wrestling sometimes feel almost formulaic, but, after all, it is the fate of each of us to reinvent many wheels as we each of us encounter the world as new individuals. Job Scott

Before I was 10 years old, the workings of truth grew so powerful in my mind at times, that I took up several resolutions (or at several times resolved) to amend my ways, and live a serious and religious life, though I was not one of the most vicious of my years.... it was the very power and spirit of God upon me that so condemned and distressed me for sin, and strove to redeem my soul from the bondage of corruption. (*Journal 27*)

When in this mood, he "began to take notice of what I heard read and conversed about religion" (*Journal* 28), and developed some desire to know God's spirit, as converts did in the days of the apostles.

But, like many others, I overlooked its lively checks and calls in myself; longed to be favored with it; but supposed it was some extraordinary appearance, different far from any thing I ever yet had been acquainted with.

Because the prompting of the Spirit can be overlooked, drowned out in its small promptings and beginnings, Friends have come to mark many phenomena of inward weather, of moment-to-moment experience with the Spirit, as we walk through our lives which have both inward and outward trajectories. I have spoken earlier about some elements of this, but there are additional ideas and experiences that are of importance for the active life founded in the listening practice of the daily watch.

In the following extract, John Churchman, a minister with long experience in watching for the small openings to duty, reports, in a sense, the genesis, continuation, and departure, of a calling that in the end came to nothing:

In the year 1736, one night as I lay in bed, my mind was uncommonly affected with the incomes of divine love and life, and therein I had a view of the churches in New Jersey, with a clear prospect that I should visit them. In that prospect and the strength of affection which I then felt, I said in my heart it is enough; I will prepare for the journey as soon as I can hear of a suitable companion, for I do not expect that I shall have a clearer sight than I now have.

I soon heard of a Friend who had a visit to New Jersey before him, and spoke to him about my concern, but he let me know that he knew of a companion, and they had agreed upon a time to proceed. After I had mentioned it to him and some other Friends, my concern seemed to die away; but I remembered the resolution I had taken up, and that I then thought I would not look to be bidden again, I was fearful something had drawn my mind from the proper attention to that opening, which was the reason it seemed to go off.

The more I strove to look after it, the duller it grew; and I then sorely repented that I had spoken about it, and thought it should be a warning to me in future; for I began to see there was a difference between seeing what was to be done, and being bidden to do the thing shown: besides this, I had to consider there was a time to bud, a time to blossom, a time for fruit to set and appear, and a time for it to ripen. (*Churchman Journal*, pg. 190)

Indeed, the experience was well worth reporting, even though "nothing came of it," because it provides an instructive window in to a minister's experience of attentiveness, of patience, of readiness for response, and for freedom in the letting go, whatever the cost to self-esteem. I note here also that *any* Friend may have such experiences, since we are all to be on our watch, during our daily choices to undertake or to refrain, to speak or to be silent. It is the daily practice of our faith.

The ebb of the spirit's tide can sink very low, as any Friend who's traveled in the ministry can attest. I remember well times when I felt a clear call to undertake some work in the ministry, and as the time approached, I felt drained and sterile. With experience we can interpret the lessons with less fear:

I am sensible that these stripping seasons have been very teaching to me: and when we look like fools to those who are foolish indeed, it is at such times we learn true wisdom; for in true silence we have the best teaching, even the Lord himself is our instructor. (Ruth Follows, in Skidmore pg. 53)

Indeed, now, when I undertake to follow a leading, such as these talks, I expect that as the time approaches all sense of self-confidence will be withdrawn, and I have come to welcome, indeed count upon that time of emptiness, when I know that I am a servant indeed; and I know also that if there is anything I can bring or offer to my Friends of instruction or encouragement when the time arrives, it will be made available to me, "for Thou art the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy," in the words of the Book of Common Prayer.

Spirit and Christ. While it is useful to explore the offices and operations of the Spirit, however, this goes only so far towards understanding whether the Spirit we stand in is the same Spirit that Jesus spoke of, and embodied, and shared with his friends and followers, accessible and alive even after his death.²⁰ That is a spirit of guidance and truth, surely, which Jesus says will provide continuing insight into the Gospel that he brought and lived. But if it is the Spirit of Christ, and we are no longer servants but

²⁰ After all, if we are being guided by the One, then later revelation should build upon the Gospel, not overthrow it.

friends, then as we come to know that Spirit, more of Christ's personality should be unfolded to us, made available so that we can enter into it, or feel it taking up living room within. So I would like to speak for myself here, about how I have come to see the Spirit in its present operation as the Spirit of Christ.

First I should stop and bring into focus an important Quaker term, or rather practice: *waiting*. Rather like "dwelling in watchfulness," which I mentioned earlier, "wait" in Quaker spirituality has an active quality. When we read Isaiah, "They that wait upon the Lord shall mount up as eagles," we realize that this is "waiting on" as in "waiting on table": it is the inward posture of one who is attending to the intentions or purposes of another person, who may at any time ask us to undertake some task or journey. Or again it is the waiting that happens when a learner is in the presence of a teacher, an apprentice with a master – looking and listening for teaching or demonstration or enactment, so that the attending soul can see or act in fresh ways, growing in capacity and freedom under the guidance of the active One.

"Waiting" is the operative term here, because I can say that my experience of the Spirit has grown in the waiting, not day to day, but also year to year. As I come into the Presence, I have been given the grace sometimes to wait to feel into that personality (to feel, too, where my personality and that of the Spirit are not comfortable together). It is as though I have come into a room, over and over, and become gradually acquainted with its shape, its dimensions, its furnishings, its atmosphere.

The Spirit that I have come to feel, to seek for, is one that makes me tender, malleable, so that I am as it were prepared for shaping, and free of concern about consequences, and direct as a child in my asking and receiving;

That Spirit confronts me with the challenge of the Law of Love, as well as the prophetic virtues of justice, care for the poor, openness to the stranger, worship of the One along, the ethic of Truth: the call to the beauty of holiness, and no final rest else;

When I am in that Spirit, I feel renewed in me the ability to mourn and to find comfort, to serve with whatever I can in the cause of compassion towards my neighbor;

In that Spirit, I am brought to feel Logos/Sophia, the coherence and lawfulness at the heart of this inconceivably messy universe, intricately bound up in its origination and its unfolding, as the first Word of Creation continues to be pronounced and take shape – Wisdom of God, delighting in the creation, and turning us through delight to the awe in which new lessons are learned, of complexity and of sorrow.

In that, also, I can feel kinship with the life of nature, of non-human beings, plants, animals, and the landscape itself, a joy and sense of reverence²¹, and a sense of freedom from a need to matter, to be importance, knowing that I am precious yet of not much account – so that I can feel and rejoice in the Folly to which Sophia brings us, freedom and delight – the life of abandon in the wind-like Spirit.

Waiting further, I can understand more and more the choice and the love shown forth in Gethsemane, and on Golgotha, and the grace of the empty tomb, and how it is nothing arrogant to accept that these in my measure should be my portion, also.

In this waiting, finally, I can at times feel indeed grafted onto a Vine fed and enlivened by a common life, in whose branches and twigs and leaves and fruit I participate in the unity, and rejoice in the growth, and the promise of the seeds for yet more.

The best single word to describe this spirit is Christ.²²

²¹ Thus Christ has the whole human race, and perhaps even the totality of all creation, as his body, and each of us is individually a member of it. "You are all brethren" (Matt. 23:8): "all" means the whole creation; and one and only one is Lord, Jesus Christ. (Origen 791-2)

²² I am not a Jesus Seminar fan, but I recall the informal description of the way they'd evaluate candidate sayings of Jesus: **Red: That's Jesus!** **Pink: Sure sounds like Jesus.** **Gray: Well, maybe.** **Black: There's been some mistake.** Using this method, as my understanding of the Spirit has matured, I've come to vote **red: That's Jesus!**

§5. Body

Is it not a measure of our assimilation to the values of the larger society that we tend to think and act as if our membership in the Society of Friends is a matter of personal choice? We're all familiar with the idea of the spiritual supermarket, in which the seeker is recast as a shopper, selecting one or another brand product. Many of us, in accounting for how we came among Friends, will report a sense of having been led, often unwittingly, towards a society of people who combine a reverence practice with commitment to a certain kind of ethic.

Early Friends taught that Christ is present now, "in the body of his saints, " as James Nayler said in one of his controversial works:

God and his word is now manifest in the bodies of his saints in the same manner and as freely as formerly he hath been; and that there he is a sufficient teacher and shield against sin, without any other help to all, according to the measure of their knowledge of him present. (Works 2:536)

It is in this indwelling that all are constituted as one body, not through our will, but through the work of the One, the Seed Christ in us. Fox speaks eloquently of how the power of God can be felt bringing order and unity; and indeed, you might say that, in discerning spirits, a spirit that scatters is to be distrusted, however much it might be welcomed by some as a truthful spirit. After all, God is not *either* truthful *or* orderly: God is all things at once, and encountering God-stuff, we encounter what feels like truth, or mercy, or justice, or conviction of sin, or comfort, or challenge — these are all different ways we experience the One.

Fox writes:

Because the Seed is one which is Christ and he is the Master...all brethren, who are in the Spirit, are one. You have all one Eye, which is the Light; one fire, which consumes all which the Light discovers to be evil; and one Spirit, that baptizes all into the one body, where there is no confusion, but pureness and oneness." (Epistle 46, in Jones 1989)

Even though we are led by an infallible spirit, stability and persistence in faithfulness as a people are a constantly maintained condition: homeostasis in the body of Christ. Fox continues: "Therefore, all Friends mind the oneness and that which keeps you in the oneness and unity..." Fox recognizes that it is possible to wander (jump, run) out of the Light, and thus out of the oneness: we can be led into oneness by minding the Seed, but we can separate again. The health of the body includes an inherent element of reconciliation and repair. There is a continuity between the order that arises when a person or a people are most open and obedient to the Holy Spirit, and the work of that same Spirit which enables us to see the need for reconciliation, and strengthens us to seek it, and live in it. Although the group can be led into right action, and the Spirit can help us discover community structure consistent with its guidance, the individuals are the living stones of the unity, the factors in the structure. *We must each dwell in faithfulness, if we hope to be led faithfully as a people.*

When we are living in this realization, we are led away from any temptation to see our unity in the body solely in terms of machinery (process) to be deployed to solve a problem, or intervene once something has gone wrong. While such processes and procedures can be powerful tools in the hand of a community or an individual in doubt or difficulty, they are not enough. Like any tool, they must be deployed at the appropriate time, and applied effectively to appropriate problems. To switch metaphors, medication is most helpful if you have a good diagnosis, and you have chosen the correct intervention and dosage.

A persistent challenge for us in our Quaker struggles is that our diagnoses and prescriptions often do not rest on good analysis of our condition. We can be distracted by the confusion of personality with revelation; we can forget that a crisis in a community has a gestation period, and that a disrupting or alarming event very often gains power from pre-existing, often unnoticed, conditions – individuals'

criticisms or doubts, crises of confidence or faith, unresolved grudges, hasty judgments, and a technical mindset that can perhaps close the lips of a wound, but not wait and work for healing.

If we do not allow ourselves to learn from the Spirit lessons about our condition, about our current ability to enact unity, and the things that hinder that acting, our intellectual and emotional labor, our discussions and reports, will not move us forward.

The Spirit by which we are guided, and which underlies all our separate concerns, longs for, persuades towards, our unity. A frequent attention to the community, and a waiting to feel where the unity stands (beneath all our diversity), is a gift to oneself and one's meeting. Gifts are not elicited by demand or strength, but are things received from love. The kind of prayer I am advocating is one in which our selves, and all the parts and actions of our spiritual body, are held lovingly and known at bottom to be deeply connected. As we make this kind of attention, or attentiveness, a steady thread of our practice, we can find our way, experimentally, into an understanding – and an ability – to see, and then to live, in unity, in some measure. We may well lose sight of the unity, but once we have had the taste of it we know that it can be found and felt again.

This unity may be expressed in many ways, and may well grow into a strong, shared vision for community life. We need to help each other remember that unity is not an accomplishment, or a product, but a process, a living process, which requires the nourishment and care appropriate to itself. A living body maintains its health, in the face of abrasive, down-tearing, consuming forces, by constant up-building, nourishment, rest, and creative action. The result is a sense of well-being, of flourishing, which speaks of a body and mind in balance. When we live as members of one spiritual body, and that body is flourishing, we and our body will give evidence: patience, love, mutual forbearance, eagerness for good works, courage in the face of doubt or trouble, compassion, simplicity, truthfulness, teachableness, joy.

If someone should examine our condition and find these alive in us, find them reliably to be true of us, then we can hope with some confidence that our flourishing has roots in the life of God flowing through us, the Logos, which is God's creating and healing power.

This in truth is the gospel, the power of God which works for our liberation, each of us, but also makes us know how and where we are one, and where we can be confident of that unity. Jesus' last commandment was that his friends love each other as he had loved them, but in his prayer at the last supper, he asked that all might be one, as Jesus and the Father were one, and with them. Where daily waiting in silence and expectancy comes to be characteristic of us as a people, we participate in the process of challenge and transformation which prepares us for the unity Jesus prayed for, and equips us for it.

The root of all this, as Friends have always known and claimed – seeing it from the beginning as one of the principal arenas for the Lamb's War against the Man of Sin – is worship, true worship, in which we see not only what we can become, but also what we are at the moment – what we know that we can live.

§6 True worship and the ministry that emerges from it, and facilitates it

We are most of us familiar with the story that Samuel Bownas tells on himself, as here followeth:

[O]ne First Day, being at meeting, a young woman named Anne Wilson was there and preached. She was very zealous, and I fixing my eye upon her, she, ... pointed her finger at me, uttering these words with much power: "A traditional Quaker, thou comest to meeting as thou went from it the last time, and goest from it as thou came to it, but art no better for thy coming; what wilt thou do in the end?" This was so suited to my condition that ... I was smitten to the ground, but, turning my thoughts inward, in secret I cried, Lord, what shall I do to help it? (Bownas 1839, 3)

I must confess that on many Sundays, I have been in his condition, and I have had suspicions that it's true of others as well. To be blunt, I have been in many meetings that are drowsy, comfortable, and serving as refuge or cushion from the harassments of the week, which can include committee work or

even service in the ministry, if one loses contact with the motion of life that can attend, sometimes does attend, the rightly assumed tasks and duties of life. In such a drowse, our inward eye and ear are closed to the wonders and terrors that surround us, and of course there are moments when this is therapeutic. Even on the night he was betrayed, Jesus permitted his disciples to sleep, when it was evident that they could do no other.

But if we wish to speak and live prophetically, and dwell together as a prophetic people who live and speak in the Truth, we must not fool ourselves about the quality of our worship, and disconnect that worship from our calling to holiness, to perfection as it is possible for humankind.

The true worship is in the spirit, and in the truth, and the true worshippers worship there; and such worshippers the Father seeks, and such worship he accepts; but all other worship is false worship, and all other worshippers are false worshippers; such worshippers as God seeks not, nor can accept their worship...he that worships out of the Spirit, he worships in that nature; but ... he that worships aright, must have his nature changed, and must worship in that thing wherein he is changed, in that faith, in that life, in that nature, in that Spirit whereby and whereto he is changed. For without being in this, and keeping in this, it is impossible to please God in any thing. He that is the true worshipper is a believer, and in his worship he must keep to his rule, the law of faith, the law of the Spirit of <35> Life in him, the law which he receives by faith fresh from the Spirit of Life continually. (Penington, "The way of life and death made manifest," *Works* vol i: 34)

If that is our goal, it is in worship that we learn what to listen for, and where to find again the springs of life we have found before. There, too, we start to understand how to follow in the way we have been shown, in which faithfulness our faith is more securely founded. Job Scott:

No soul ever was, or could be, saved without it, out of the life of it, or in ignorance of its redeeming power. It is never ideal, or speculative, but is always inward, vital, and experimental; and no man knows anything more of it, than he so knoweth it...Some suppose the gospel is unconnected with obedience in man. But it is ever connected with it, requires it, leads to it, and effects it....(Scott *Journal*, in *Works* vol 1:17)

In an episode of true worship, in which we taste in some measure the freedom, assurance, and generosity of the Spirit of Christ, we find our way to the Presence, to the Seed and place of rest. But once is not enough, nor is our starting place always the same — as our lives move ahead, and our condition changes. So we must feel our way back to the Seed from wherever we start, knowing from experience what we are seeking, and learning to feel when we are moving towards or away from it. In time, finding

our way from more and more conditions or starting points of awareness or deadness, till we can at any time move back towards the spring of life, we can learn to come home in an instant (or in a nanosecond as Bill Taber liked to say, perhaps acknowledging the distracting fullness of our days). This frequent keeping company with Christ is the Quaker response to Paul's exhortation to "pray without ceasing," to which other traditions offer other practices native to their own spiritual culture (though with care we can learn from them). Here's Pennington again:

Now this worship,...is continual. There is a continual praying unto God. There is a continual blessing and praising of his name, in eating, or drinking, or whatever else is done. There is a continual bowing to the majesty of the Lord in every thought, in every word, in every action, though it be in worldly things and occasions; yet the Spirit of the Lord is seen there, and <36> the tongue confesseth him there, and the knee boweth to him there. This is the true worship, and this is the rest or sabbath wherein the true worshippers worship. When the creation of God is finished; when the child is formed in the light, and the life breathed into him; then God brings him forth into his holy land, where he keeps his sabbath. (*Works* vol 1: 35-6)

If our worship does not work a change, so that we bear the fruits of the Spirit, and the marks of those who have met with a living power beyond and yet within them, then our worship is not yet true enough, and we will know that our worshiping is true of we learn more about it from the practice. For example, worshiping in truth day by day, and feeling in it our kinship and with our friends, and the place where unity can be found in our diversity, we can learn not to mistake the *benefits* of this powerful common living for the *essence* of it, fruits for roots – so that when we do not know joy, gentleness, meekness, and patience, kindness etc., we are not discouraged, or discount the power which makes for them. *From* that unity we can speak with power, act with endurance, awaken the sleepers, and invite others to the great work of living justly, creatively, and without fear, in balance with the nature forces upon which our bodies and our cultures depend. But we cannot manufacture that power, that truth, that fearlessness, if we are not living in unity. Now, therefore, in a time when our unity feels fragile, let us practice unity by seeking each other's well-being and faithfulness.

In recent years, Friends have grown more interested in, and active about, the seeing and welcoming the diverse gifts among us, but we have not yet gone far enough in this work. We are called further, to act on, act in, the expectation that all can be faithful stewards, for the gift's sake, and for each others'. As we are diligent in our own faithfulness, and worship more and more in truth, we will grow ever more aware of how our own callings are bound up with the common life, and we find more ways not only to assert that connection, but also to affirm and forward it in concrete and specific ways. Let us receive concerns with joy as the evidence of God's action in our time, day, and measures, and be eager in praying for and nurturing these gifts, loving our neighbor's concern as if it were our own. Let us challenge ourselves and each other often, asking, What concrete things have I done to welcome another's gifts, so that I rejoice to feel the growth of God's life in him or her, and feel myself nourished thereby? How often do I seek to feel how my service will nourish the growth of those in whom other gifts are active?

And here I think that the ministry has much unfinished work, and there are too few at it.²³ I have often said that one important function of a minister [whether officially designated so or not] is to serve as a guinea pig, an experimental organism, who at times tries things, or has things tried on them, as a way of learning on behalf of the body, along or across some frontier. "It is a living ministry that begets a living people,"²⁴ and one way that this happens is by the searching, attentive love with which the minister holds the gifts and service of others.

²³ Friends need to reflect on one message of traditional Quaker architecture. Old meetinghouses have a surprising proportion of their seating space dedicated to the "facing benches," with 10-15% of the seating set aside for Friends who have been encouraged by the meeting to exercise spiritual gifts of ministry and eldership on behalf of the meeting. The message is that we need a *lot* of Friends to be at this work, each according to their gifts and callings — working together on behalf of the spiritual health of the meeting, and encouraging the enactment of Gospel love in the world. We may use different mechanisms (tradition or new) to see, nurture, and welcome such gifts, but however we do it, we need to get to it, and also be willing to learn lessons from our historical experiments in practice.

²⁴ Testimony concerning John Banks by Somerset Quarterly Meeting 1711, quoted by A.N. Brayshaw in *The Quakers*, 1969 [1953], 247.

The end of the ministry is not only to gather, but also to preserve and build up what is gathered, even to perfection. And the soul being (especially at first, if not for a long time) weak and babish, not so fully acquainted with the measure of life (having had but some touches and demonstrations of it, but not being gathered fully into it, nor rooted and settled in it); I say, the soul in this state, hath as much need of the ministry to preserve, direct, and watch over it in the truth, as to gather it out of the world. (Penington, "Some queries concerning the order and government of Christ's church," in *Works* 2:367)

My longing, Friends, is that we not allow each other to live in the shallows, and fear or complain that we have not the stature, or the power, or the message needed by our times and conditions. Quakerism teaches that this sense of insufficiency is not overcome by an act of will. We have much to die to, as Job Scott said, but also much to learn about the many dimensions of life as a people, the Children of the Light, guided by a spirit of fire, of healing, of prophecy, of compassion and joy.

Then were our hearts inclined to hearken unto the Lord, and our ears, which he had opened to hear, were bent to hear what the Spirit's teaching was, and what He said unto the Church, who is the chief Shepherd and Bishop of the soul. Thus were we gathered into a right gospel exercise and gospel worship by Him, through whose name we had received the remission of sins past, and whose blood had sprinkled our hearts from an evil conscience, and who gave the pure water that washed and made clean. So that with true hearts many began to draw nigh unto God in the full assurance of faith, as the ancient saints did and were accepted, and had access by that one Spirit, by which we came to be baptized into one body, and so came to drink into one Spirit and were refreshed, and greatly comforted; and grew up together in the mystery of the gospel fellowship; and so we worshipped God, who is a Spirit, in the Spirit received from him, which is the gospel worship, according to Christ's appointment. John iv. 24. Burnyeat, *Jornal* pg 8; and in Friends Library vol 11, pg. 123)

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