

A QUAKER'S RESPONSE
TO CHRISTIAN
FUNDAMENTALISM

Sallie B. King



Quaker Universalist Fellowship



Quaker Universalist Fellowship

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- 6 *Journal*, p. 34.
- 7 I am grateful to Stephen Angell for bringing the information in this paragraph to my attention. See his “Opening the Scriptures, Then and Now,” *Quaker Theology* #14 (<http://www.quaker.org/quest/issue14-angell-01.htm>).
- 8 *Journal*, p. 32.
- 9 In this they follow in the spirit of the postscript of the Epistle from the Elders at Balby, 1656, much cherished by contemporary, liberal Friends: “Dearly beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by; but that all, with a measure of the light, which is pure and holy, may be guided: and so in the light walking and abiding, these things may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not in the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.” See Angell, *op cit*.
- 10 *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon*, p. 8.
- 11 Epistle 19 (1652), *The Works of George Fox* (1831); reprinted: New Foundation Publication, George Fox Fund, State College, Pennsylvania, 1991), 7:27. Cited in Rex Ambler, *Truth of the Heart: An Anthology of George Fox 1624-1691* (Philadelphia: Quaker Books, 2001).
- 12 Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision* (New York: Harper Collins, 1987), Chapter Three.
- 13 Howard H. Brinton, *Friends for 300 Years* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1952, 1965), p. 40, citing Fox’s *Journal*.
- 14 A letter to “the Pope and all the Kings in Europe,” in *Journal*, p. 205.
- 15 Tennyson, pp. 43-47.

Editor’s Introduction

Sallie B. King is Professor of Philosophy and Religion at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia. She is the author of many books and articles on Buddhism, Quakerism, interfaith dialogue, and the cross-cultural philosophy of religion. She is former co-clerk of Valley Friends Meeting, former president of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, and a trustee of the international, interfaith Peace Council. She serves on the Christian and Interfaith Relations Committee of Friends General Conference and on the steering committee of the Quaker Universalist Fellowship.

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NOTES

- 1 This pamphlet began as a curriculum that I wrote for Quaker youth in Valley Friends Meeting, in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, an area of strong Christian conservatism. Many thanks to the youth in the Valley Friends Meeting First Day School, January to June, 2001, for their many real and substantive contributions to the curriculum on which this pamphlet is based. Some of their words are presented herein. Thanks to Chuck Fager and the Baltimore Yearly Meeting Religious Education Committee for important contributions made during the process of the editing of the earlier curriculum. That curriculum is: Sallie B. King, *A Quaker Response to Christian Fundamentalism: A Curriculum for Friends* (Sandy Spring, MD: Baltimore Yearly Meeting, 2003). Thanks to Daniel Seeger, Stephen Angell, George Amoss and Jim Rose for helpful comments on this version, some of which I have incorporated. The final version, of course, represents my views only and not necessarily theirs.
- 2 This pamphlet uses the New Revised Standard Version translation of the Bible.
- 3 *Journal of George Fox*, edited by John L. Nickalls (Philadelphia: Religious Society of Friends, 1985), p. 18.
- 4 Try typing “Pentecostalism Quakerism” into a search engine; there is a surprising amount of discussion of this relationship.
- 5 The Greek word translated as “Advocate” is *Paraclete*, which can also be translated as “helper” or “comforter.”

the fruits of the spirit are displayed, there the spirit must be—the Eternal Christ, the loving caringness of God expressed in time and in human form, but not to be equated *only* with the Carpenter of Nazareth. (Mary Barr, Quaker from about 1934, co-worker with Gandhi from 1932)

We live in a world in which there is great strain between races, cultures and religions, and the question of interfaith dialogue is, I would say, the most important religious question facing any person of faith. ... How can Friends play a part in this? My own feeling is that the conception of the light of Christ Within, which is also universal and in every single being, provides a theological resource and a theological way into constructing a kind of Christianity which is both true to its own inspiration and at the same time fully able to recognise truth and the workings of God in those of other faiths. (John Punshon, 1991)

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INTRODUCTION

Many Friends are unprepared to meet the challenges of Christian fundamentalism. When acquaintances, co-workers or neighbors accost us, insisting upon certain conservative or fundamentalist theological views, many Friends find themselves tongue-tied and do not know what to think or say. Instruction in Friends' beliefs, history and practices, instruction even in the Bible, while necessary, may not be enough. Some of us need to directly talk and think about the challenges we frequently receive from our Christian fundamentalist peers. It is to meet this challenge that I have written this pamphlet.¹

The objective of this pamphlet is to help Friends understand Christian fundamentalism and our differences from it, so that they will not be intimidated, overpowered or confused in their interactions with their Christian fundamentalist peers. The goal is not to enable Friends to argue better with fundamentalists, but to understand their own religious tradition better and to understand better what they think in response to the challenge of Christian fundamentalism. While they are likely to find many points of difference from their fundamentalist peers, they may also find some points at which they may be able to build bridges of understanding. Examining these issues is, in fact, a very good way to understand more deeply what our Quaker beliefs and practices are all about.

This pamphlet is a response specifically to Christian fundamentalism. By fundamentalism I do not mean the many other kinds of Christian conservatism or evangelism, and I certainly do not mean mainstream Christianity. I mean the kind of fundamentalism popularized by such televangelists as Jerry Falwell. I have in mind the set of views that includes biblical inerrancy and literalism, salvation through the substitutionary atonement of Jesus, strong emphasis on human sinfulness, and strict Christian exclusivism.

There are, of course, many Quaker responses to Christian fundamentalism. This pamphlet could not possibly represent all Friends' thinking and does not pretend to. It is written from the perspective of one Friend within the varied landscape of contemporary, liberal Quakerism. It is informed by my own, unique experience as a Friend, my reading of Friends' materials both historical and contemporary, input from other Friends, and my academic training as a scholar of religion. On the fundamentalist side, it is informed by my interactions with fundamentalist students at the university where I teach and by my exposure to fundamentalist radio and publications.

I believe that one source of some contemporary Friends' feelings of being at a disadvantage in discussions with fundamentalist peers is our Quaker avoidance of doctrine. We generally feel that religious truths cannot be put into words very successfully. While I highly esteem this attitude and the reasons for it in Quaker spirituality, it can make some of us rather tongue-tied when faced with fundamentalist peers who know exactly what they think and can put it into a few, clear words, delivered with a great deal of passion. However, I have come to the conclusion that we Friends actually are in a particularly strong position to understand what we think about fundamentalism and how we differ from it because of our emphasis on the Light Within. Once we bring this idea to bear on the matter, what seems at first to be a complicated subject becomes simple and straightforward.

WHAT IS CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISM?

What we call "fundamentalism" is a movement that began with a series of pamphlets published between 1910 and 1915 by conservative Church leaders who wanted to defend Christianity against the threat that they perceived in the encroachment of science and reason, especially critical biblical scholarship and Darwinism, upon religion. They drew up a list of "fundamentals," belief in which they considered to be essential to the Christian faith.

men has ever been done without the Divine word visiting the soul." The same Indwelling Spirit who has opened their eyes to behold the beauty of Christ, enables them also to behold spiritual beauty wherever it is found, whether in the great scriptures of the religions of the East, in the wisdom of their saints, or in the honest minds and humble, loving hearts of those who claim no religious allegiance at all. (Marjorie Sykes)

God enlightens every soul that comes into the world, communes by his Holy Spirit with all men everywhere, illumines the conscience with a clear sense of the right and the wrong course in moral issues, and reveals His Will in definite and concrete matters to those who are sensitive recipients of it. (Rufus Jones)

Every religious system has its 'Quakers'—those who turn from the outward and the legal and the institutional and focus their attention on the Divine that is within. There is much fellowship between Friends and the mystics of other religious systems. Let a Mohammedan or Hindu mystic teacher come to this country, and we realise at once how much we have in common with him. We believe that we have something to give him, but we realise also he has something to give us. (Gerald Hibbert, 1924)

We are conscious of Christianity as one among a number of religions competing for the allegiance of intelligent and spiritually-minded men, and the relationship between them exercises men's minds and hearts. The world is much smaller, much more interdependent than it used to be. ... An increasing number of people have had personal contacts with humble men and holy of heart in all walks of life of whom they dare not deny that they have been taught by God. (Margaret B. Hobbling, 1958)

I owe all to God in Jesus Christ and say so to all sorts of people, but if someone says he finds the same in Ram or Buddha, what right have I to say he does not? ... 'Where love is, God is'; where

company of such that God hath called, to walk in his light and life—of whatsoever nation, kindred, tongue or people they be, though outwardly strangers, and remote from those who profess Christ and Christianity in words and have the benefit of the scriptures, as become obedient to the holy light and the testimony of God in their hearts—there may be members therefore of the Catholic Church both among heathen, Turks and Jews. (Robert Barclay)

The humble, meek, merciful, just, pious, and devout souls are everywhere of one religion; and when death has taken off the mask they will know one another, though the divers liveries they wear makes them strangers. This world is a form; our bodies are forms; and no visible acts of devotion can be without forms. But yet the less form in religion the better, since God is a spirit; for the more mental our worship, the more adequate to the nature of God; the more silent, the more suitable to the language of the Spirit. (William Penn, 1693)

There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath had different names. It is, however, pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion nor excluded from any, where the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, of what nation so ever, they become brethren, in the best sense of the expression. (John Woolman, 1761)

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 be in any degree helped forward by my following the leadings of truth among them. (John Woolman, 1763)

They (Quakers) rejoice to find that of God in people of every caste and creed; they wholeheartedly agree with a great Christian thinker of the second century, Origen, that “no noble deed among

Those fundamentals included belief in the literal truth (sometimes inerrancy) of the Bible, the deity of Christ, the virgin birth of Christ, the bodily resurrection of Christ, the immanent second coming of Christ, and the substitutionary atonement of Christ's death. Note that fundamentalism can be differentiated from evangelicalism. The latter emphasizes being “born again” in Christ. Fundamentalism is theological; evangelicalism is experiential. The two groups can overlap but don't always.

The key point for understanding the differences between Quakerism and Christian fundamentalism is our respective views on human nature, on what a human being most fundamentally is. *Quakers emphasize the divine Light within. Fundamentalists emphasize human sinfulness.* Our views on human nature are virtually opposite. This is the key point because this is the starting point of thinking for both groups. From our beliefs on human nature, everything else in the two religious views follows, as we shall see.

We can illustrate this point by looking in the Bible. Biblical literacy, of course, is very helpful in interacting with fundamentalists. If one can point out that one's views are in line with biblical statements, a fundamentalist is going to be much more likely to take those views seriously. Liberal Friends' understanding of the Bible accords with the findings of modern biblical scholarship. Contemporary biblical scholarship uses the historical-critical approach which draws upon publicly available evidence (history, archaeological artifacts, philological evidence, etc.) as the basis for its findings. This approach is embraced by all mainstream and liberal branches of the Church, but is rejected by the most conservative branches of the Church, including fundamentalist branches.

Biblical scholars using the historical-critical approach have concluded that there are two accounts of creation in Genesis, Genesis 1:1-2:4a and Genesis 2:4b-3:24; the latter is the story of the Garden of Eden. If one carefully reads the two creation accounts side by side, one may notice certain differences between them. (This is one of the pieces of evidence for there originally being two separate accounts.) For one thing, the sequence of the creation events is different. In

the first creation account, God creates the plants, then the animals, then humans. In the second account, God makes Adam first, then plants, then the animals, then Eve. For our purposes, of particular importance are the accounts of the creation of humans. The first creation account states:

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...."
So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them. ...

And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. (Gen. 1:26-27, 2:2)²

The second account, in the Garden of Eden, states:

Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. ...

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." [God then creates various animals] ... but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.... (Gen. 2:7 and 2:18-22)

When we compare these two accounts we can see that in the first account, male and female are created together by a single act of God. In the second account the male is created first, then—eleven verses later—the female, by two very different creative acts of God. In the first account, importantly, humans are made "in the image

There are also passages in the Bible that seem to point in a non-exclusivist direction, in which correct belief plays no role in being on good terms with God. Let us look at some of these. In Mt. 7:21, Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven." Here it is not the one who professes belief in Jesus as savior who "gets to heaven," but the one who behaves morally. In Mt. 25:31-46, Jesus speaks of the end of time when people will be separated into two groups. In one group are those who did not feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome a stranger or clothe the naked. Those "go away into eternal punishment." But those who did feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome a stranger or clothe the naked will "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" and go into "eternal life." Here again, it is not belief that qualifies one for eternal life, but kind and merciful action. In Luke 20:25-37, a man asks Jesus, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" The answer is that one must love God with all one's heart, soul, strength and mind and love one's neighbor as oneself. When asked, "and who is my neighbor?" Jesus tells the parable of the good Samaritan, in which it is the Samaritan, the foreigner whose religious and doctrinal ideas are considered by the Jews to be all wrong, who is the neighbor and demonstrates how to "inherit eternal life" when he cares for one who needs his help.

What can Friends say on this subject? Friend Margot Tennyson has published a fine set of "Statements by Friends Regarding Other Faiths" in her book, *Friends and Other Faiths*.¹⁵ I transcribe some of these below. I have added one additional well-known quotation from John Woolman. We will end this essay with the words of these Friends.

Be still and cool in your own mind and spirit from your own thoughts and then you will feel the principle of God. (George Fox, 1658)

The Church (is) no other thing but the society, gathering or

When the landowner in this parable is interpreted as God, God is shown in a very non-judgelike light. In fact, this parable challenges legalistic approaches to spirituality. Here, the landowner (or God) gives and gives and gives without reckoning or judging, rejecting any notion of some people deserving one treatment and other people deserving another. The landowner/God just gives, gratuitously. This reinforces an idea of a loving God who gives to us just because that is the nature of God, out of spontaneously overflowing love. For many liberal Friends, God is not angry, judgmental and eager to punish. God is generous to all. This is not a God whom one has to appease. This is a God whom one can trust.

RELATIONS WITH OTHER RELIGIONS

As is well known, fundamentalist Christianity is strictly exclusivistic. That is, fundamentalist Christians believe that their views exclusively (alone) are true and that they, and those who agree with them, exclusively have access to salvation. Friends' Christianity, however, has a strong universalist stream. That is, Friends believe that others besides them—in fact, all human beings—possess the Light Within and therefore others' religious teachings also likely contain elements of religious truth.

The passage most frequently cited by fundamentalists to justify their exclusivistic view is Jesus' words in John 14:6: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." On the surface this statement may seem to validate Christian exclusivism. Is there, however, any other way to understand it, one that might be non-exclusivistic? Here is how Friend Samuel Caldwell resolves this problem: "It is really quite simple: Friends have always identified the Inner Light with the living Christ. Christ, in Quaker theology, is the Light." That means that John 14:6 can be understood as saying: "the Light is the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through the Light." The Light is present in all persons, not only Christians. It is not the exclusive property of any one religion.

of God." The second account does not say anything like this. It is unclear exactly what it means to say that humans are made in the image of God, but it seems to imply that humans are like God in some important way.

Also important for our purposes is the story of the Fall of humankind, which is found only in the second creation account, in Genesis 3. This is the familiar story in which Adam and Eve eat the fruit of the tree that had been forbidden to them by God and as a consequence are banished from Eden. One of the fruits of the Fall is that it brings about the subordination of women to men. The first creation story introduces male and female as equal; the two sexes are created together, in the same moment, alike in being made "in the image of God." It is in the second creation account, after Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit, as God hands out punishments to Adam and Eve, that God tells Adam that he must toil all his days in order to have food to eat, and says to Eve, "your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." Here we see the explicit subordination of female to male. We should note that it occurs only in the second creation account, not the first, and that it occurs after the Fall, and thus depicts the fallen state of humankind, not the ideal state. We should note in passing that nowhere in the story of the Fall is the idea of "original sin" mentioned.

My informal assessment of liberal Friends' views on creation is that they tend to be a combination of religious and scientific views. Most (not all) liberal Friends seem to feel that God or Spirit is at the root of the universe, that God is the source of life, sustains life and is immanent in us. On the other hand, few liberal Friends take either of the biblical creation accounts as describing in any literal sense how creation unfolded, generally preferring scientific accounts on this subject. Metaphorically, though, liberal Friends tend to feel more in harmony with the first creation account and the idea of humans being made "in the image of God," an idea that seems harmonious with the idea of the Inner Light. Quakers directly reject any notion of female subordination to males, as in the second account. Fundamentalists, on the other hand, do take the biblical account of creation literally.

Moreover, they do not believe that there are two creation accounts in the Bible but read the two accounts as one, emphasizing the seven days of creation in the first account and the creation of humans and the Fall of humankind in the second account. It is important to note that fundamentalists do not tend to emphasize that humankind is made “in the image of God.”

We see in the comparison of these two biblical accounts the first seeds of the divergent views of Quakers and fundamentalists on human nature. It is safe to say that among liberal Friends' few theological affirmations, the affirmation of the Light Within is one of the most, if not the most, important. It is what distinguishes us from other branches of the Church and it arguably forms the foundation for most of our testimonies and practices. Contrarily, among fundamentalists there is great emphasis upon the sinful nature of humankind. This central tenet of fundamentalist belief is essential to other major fundamentalist beliefs: humankind exists in a fallen state, from which we are utterly incapable of extracting ourselves; consequently, we need an external power (God/Jesus) to save us.

The creation stories in Genesis are only the first set of biblical passages offering justification for both these divergent views. The first creation account, with its language of humankind made “in the image of God” is relatively harmonious with liberal Quaker views. It suggests a closeness between humankind and God, a likeness between them and perhaps a shared goodness. The second creation account, and especially the story of the Fall from the Garden of Eden, is more congruent with fundamentalist views. It brings out the idea that humankind is disobedient and sinful; it separates humankind from God both with the expulsion of humankind from Eden and with God's anger towards Adam and Eve.

In sum, while there are two creation accounts, liberal Quakers tend to feel more in harmony with one and fundamentalists with the other. Both sides are selecting from the Bible certain points to emphasize that seem to agree with their understanding, and interpreting those points in the light of their understanding. Both sides de-emphasize or ignore the parts they disagree with. One

For good insight into two contrasting views of God pertinent to the issue of salvation, let us consider two parables taught by Jesus.

Matthew 18:23-35 is the parable of the unforgiving servant. In this parable a slave is unable to repay a financial debt to his lord. His lord initially ordered for the slave and his family to be sold and all their possessions seized, but the slave begged his lord to have patience and give him a chance to repay. The lord took pity on the slave and forgave him the debt. However, when the slave was released he came upon someone who owed him money and, although his debtor begged for mercy, the slave had him thrown into prison until he paid the debt. When his fellow slaves saw this they reported him to their lord, who became very angry and handed him over to be tortured until his debt could be paid. Jesus comments, “So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

This parable may be seen as expressing a view of God with which fundamentalism is sympathetic. In it, the king may be interpreted as God and the slave as humankind. In fundamentalist interpretation, this parable shows God as a judge and humans as sinners who cannot pay their debt. God gives us the justice that we deserve for our sins.

Very different is the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16). In this parable a landowner goes out early in the morning and hires laborers to work in his vineyard, settling with them to pay his usual daily wage for this work. He does the same thing again at 9:00, noon, 3:00 and 5:00. In the evening, he paid all the workers the same usual daily wage. When those hired earlier, who had worked longer, complained about this, the landowner replied, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?”

The parable of the laborers in the vineyard is entirely different in tone when compared to the parable of the unforgiving servant and portrays God in a way more in keeping with Friends' experience.

saved *from* in the fundamentalist sense. That is, they do not accept that we are inherently and inevitably sinners, that sinfulness is the fundamental nature of the human condition, that sin separates us from God and we need to be saved from it. For liberal Quakers, because we have the Light Within, we are not separated from God. Therefore, there is no need of something or someone external to us to intervene on our behalf to put us right with God.

Moreover, Quaker experience of the Light Within is salvation here-and-now. When we experience the Light Within and allow it to guide us we are “saved” (if we want to use that language). That is, to the extent that we live out of the Light Within we live in right relationship with God and in the fullness of our own human potential as beings made “in the image of God.” George Fox put it this way in a letter, “He that feeleth the light that Christ hath enlightened him withal, he feeleth Christ in his mind, which is the power of the cross of Christ, and shall not need to have a cross of wood or stone to put him in the mind of Christ or his cross, which is the power of God.”¹⁴ In other words, it is the inner experience of Christ that is the power of Christ and of the cross; that is, it is the experience of Christ or the light of Christ that is salvation.

The fundamentalist teaching on salvation, though, is not only about redemption from sin; it also speaks powerfully to human fear of death and, for many, assuages that fear. What do Quakers have to say on this subject? Once again, liberal Quakers don't talk very much about what happens after death and one can find many different views among Friends about death, often quite unformulated. Some liberal Friends take a scientific or materialist view of death. Others embrace a view like that found in mainstream Christianity. For many liberal Friends, death is not a worry because the experience of the Light Within is an experience of the presence of God. It is an experience that makes many feel confident that God is with us, that we are not separate from God. Many feel a confidence in this God, in whom “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Feeling this presence and confidence, we may feel that whatever happens at death, it will be all right, God will continue to be with us.

difference is that liberal Quakers will admit that they are doing this, while fundamentalists generally will not.

THE LIGHT WITHIN AND HUMAN SINFULNESS

I have suggested that the root of the difference between liberal Quakers and fundamentalists is in our greatly differing views of human nature: the Light Within for Quakerism and human sinfulness for fundamentalism. Let us explore the latter idea first.

What is “original sin”? “Original sin” is the idea that the sinfulness of Adam and Eve, their prideful disobedience of God, has been transmitted to all humankind as their descendants. That is, before we actually do anything in life, we are born in a condition of sinfulness, a condition of estrangement or separation from God due to pride and disobedience. This is the human condition.

We noted above that the words “original sin” do not occur in the biblical account of the Fall of humankind. In fact, this is not a biblical term at all, but one that originated in the theology of a great Church father, St. Augustine. According to Augustine (d. 430), prior to the Fall, human beings were able not to sin; after the Fall, we are unable not to sin. No matter what we do, we sin. This is our state of sinfulness. It is useful to know that this view was not accepted by all Church fathers or by the entire Church. A contemporary of Augustine, Pelagius (d. ca. 418) rejected the notion of original sin transmitted to us from Adam and Eve and argued that humans are able not to sin. The issue has been much debated over the centuries. The great theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-74)—the most important theologian for the Catholic Church—held that humans are able not to sin. The Protestant Reformation returned to the pessimistic view of Augustine that all of our actions are sinful. Martin Luther (1483-1546) argued for the total depravity of human beings, as did John Calvin. Both of these views, the optimistic and the pessimistic, have a long history in Christian thought and have many adherents today. Both sides are able to justify their views on the basis of their reading of the Bible.

Christian fundamentalism, which tends to be more Protestant than Catholic, derives its view of human nature from Augustine, Luther and Calvin. Thus Christian fundamentalism holds to the pessimistic view of human nature that it is not possible for human beings not to sin; we sin all the time, in everything we do. That is, for fundamentalists, we cannot avoid the fact that all our actions are shaped by our selfishness and desires. Before the Fall, they say, we lived in a condition of unity and harmony with God. The Fall was the beginning of our separation from God and God's will. Now we are separate from God, and so act on the basis of our own will, not God's will.

Quakers hold to the more optimistic view that it is *possible* for humans not to sin. This view is based upon belief in the Light Within. The classic biblical site supporting the Quaker view of the Light Within is the prologue to the Gospel of John. That gospel opens with John identifying Jesus as the Word, i.e., the Logos, the divine principle of reason that links the human mind to the mind of God. John goes on to say of Jesus, "What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (1:3b-5). This light "enlightens everyone" (1:9).

The light which Jesus brings into the world is what makes it possible for humans not to sin. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, "those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God" (3:21). In other words, since Jesus as the Word or Logos links humankind to God, humans are not so utterly separate from God that all our actions must be a manifestation of self. And since Jesus also brings into the world the light that enlightens all, humans are not so lost in darkness that all our actions must be corrupt. Some of the things we do are "done in God." This is a biblical view. Nevertheless, George Fox (the founder of Quakerism) had a difficult struggle on his hands when he argued against the view of inevitable human sinfulness. As he wrote in his journal, "the professors [those who profess belief in Christ but do not know Christ experientially] were all in a rage, all pleading for sin

is that the criminal has to pay a large fine to pay for his crime. If the criminal doesn't have the money, sometimes a friend or relative who does have the money will allow his money to be used to pay the penalty. This is similar to the idea of substitutionary atonement. In fundamentalism, all humans have committed the crime of sinning against God (through original sin). We are still sinful and therefore there is no way for us to pay God back, to make amends for our crime. However, Jesus voluntarily, out of love, has paid our penalty, which is death, for us, with his blood.

Unlike the idea of original sin, which is not biblical, the idea of substitutionary atonement is biblical. However, it is not found in the words of Jesus himself, but in passages written by some of his important followers whose writings are interpretations of the meaning of Jesus' life. Let us briefly look at two biblical passages that are cited in support of this view. First, in Romans 3:23-25 Paul writes,

since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed.

Second, the Letter to the Hebrews states that while formerly the Jews gave offerings to God through their High Priest once a year to atone for their sins and make themselves right with God, Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice that serves once and for all to atone with God for the sins of humankind (Hebrews 7:20-28 and 10:1-10): "it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

Turning to Quakerism, if one were to ask a group of liberal Quakers about salvation, they would probably draw a blank. In fact, liberal Quakers seldom talk about salvation. This is for a very good reason. Many liberal Quakers do not feel that there is anything to be

Do Friends and fundamentalists have anything in common in their views of Jesus, or are there any ideas that are close enough that a bridge of understanding might be built between us? Given the diversity and often unformulated nature of Friends' views on Jesus, this is difficult to answer. However, Friends should recall that the Light Within is frequently called the "light of Christ" by George Fox. Could there be any similarities in Quaker experience of the Light Within/light of Christ and fundamentalist experience of the presence of Jesus? Dialogue on this subject between Friends and fundamentalists could be surprising and rewarding.

SALVATION

Salvation is the fundamentalists' strong suit. It is the key to their religion. It is based upon the idea of *substitutionary atonement*. This doctrine goes back to the ideas of the Fall and the "original sin" occasioned by the Fall. Since all humans have original sin, we bear the guilt of disobedience against God, our maker. God is seen as a judge, one who gives out perfect justice. Since we are all sinners, and everything we do is tainted with our sinfulness, it is just for God to condemn us. We deserve to pay a penalty for our sins; we deserve the damnation we have earned. However, as an unearned, undeserved gift, God has given us his only Son, Jesus. Jesus is sinless and perfect. Jesus does not deserve death. Nevertheless, Jesus dies an undeserved death on the cross. Jesus' undeserved death is given as a substitute for our death, the death we deserve for our sinfulness. This free gift of Jesus' death for us is a kind of sacrifice. It is an *atonement*: amends given to God by Jesus for our sins, the sins of humankind. Jesus dies a sacrificial death, a *substitutionary* death for us so that we don't have to die. This atones, or makes up to God, for our sins. This pays the penalty for us. Thus, God's justice is preserved.

This idea pictures God as a judge and human life as similar to a criminal case in a court of law. In real life, when a person has committed a crime, they have to pay the price, some kind of penalty. It is the judge's job to make sure that they do. Perhaps the judgment

and imperfection, and could not endure to hear talk of perfection, and of an holy and sinless life."³

Does the Quaker belief in the Light Within mean that people never sin, that we never do wrong? Certainly not. Early Friends felt that it was essential to face and acknowledge their own sinfulness, that is, their own moral shortcomings, self-centeredness and wrongdoing. The diaries of many early Friends record their profound despair at the depths of the moral and spiritual depravity that they found within. However, they also believed that after facing all this it was essential to undergo an inward conversion away from this condition of moral and spiritual corruption to a condition of moral and spiritual purity by discovering and heeding the inward light of Christ that was able to lead them into a condition of truth and moral purity if they would attend to it.

Contemporary, liberal Quakers rarely, if ever, speak of spiritual "perfection." Liberal Quakers tend to think in terms of having a "measure" of Light, and sometimes remind each other not to "run ahead" of the measure of Light that they have been given. That is to say that the Light within us is something that we can be more or less in touch with, more or less living in, and living out of, as we go about our lives. Therefore, for liberal Quakers, people—including Quakers—can and do sin, but the point is that it **is possible** for us not to sin, to live and act purely and well. In the Quaker view, it is possible for humans not to sin because humankind is not separated from God. We have the Light within us. That is why, for Quakers, it is very possible for us to act without sin, in a godly fashion: because we are not separate from God, God is in us and with us. In fundamentalism, humans are separate from God and alienated from God, so all our actions must come from self, not from God, and are therefore sinful.

The contrast between liberal Quakerism and fundamentalism might be summarized something like this:

1. Liberal Quakers emphasize the Light Within. Fundamentalists emphasize the sinfulness of human nature.

2. Liberal Quakers emphasize that humankind is made in the image of God. Fundamentalists emphasize the story of the Fall.

3. Liberal Quakers see a principle of moral and spiritual purity within us. Fundamentalists do not.

4. Liberal Quakers take an optimistic view of human nature. Fundamentalists take a pessimistic view.

5. Liberal Quakers believe that we can do something good and pure, free of sin (though we also do bad things). To fundamentalists, all our actions are sinful, no matter what.

SPIRIT IN THE BIBLE

Fundamentalists do not have a monopoly on the Bible! Quakers get a great deal of inspiration and guidance from it, too! What sources in the Bible support the Quaker idea of the Light Within? In the Bible, what Quakers call the Light Within is often called the Holy Spirit or Spirit. There are many passages in the Bible that talk about the Holy Spirit. Let us examine some of these passages from a Quaker point of view. The following are only some of the passages that we might consider in this regard.

Mark 1:8

In this passage, John the Baptist is quoted as saying of Jesus, "I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." When Friends speak of being "baptized by the Holy Spirit" it means to have an experience of the Light Within. This may happen in or out of Meeting for Worship, but we particularly open ourselves to such experience in worship.

Mark 1:9-11:

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

humanness of Jesus and affirms that God is greater than Jesus, while at the same time preserving the sense of Jesus as more than just a man and great teacher. Borg suggests that we should see Jesus as a Spirit-filled man, a man filled to overflowing with the living Spirit of God. When seen in this way, Jesus is the ultimate manifestation of the Quaker ideal. Friends aspire to be filled with the Spirit of God. Jesus shows us what that is like when it is done to an ideal degree. George Fox espoused this view of Jesus. He quoted the Gospel of John (3:34) stating that God had given the Spirit to Jesus "without measure," i.e., in an unlimited way.¹³

What does it mean to say that Jesus was a man filled with the Spirit of God? In the gospels, we see little of Jesus' childhood, but what we do see conveys the impression that in his youth Jesus was a devout Jewish boy who knew the Jewish scriptures well and had considered them deeply. (Luke shows him as a youth in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem expounding upon the scriptures in a way that left his hearers "amazed at his understanding.") As a young man his life changed dramatically when he went, like many others, to be baptized in the waters of the River Jordan. Unlike others, Jesus emerged from the water with a dramatic spiritual experience in which he saw "the Spirit descending like a dove on him," after which "the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness" where he spent 40 days, presumably in prayer and religious seeking, encountering and interacting with both evil and good spiritual forces. His public ministry began immediately after this dramatic coming of the Spirit into his life. Thereafter, the gospels attest that Jesus frequently drew apart from everyone else in order to spend time in prayer. We may guess that a good deal of this prayer is some kind of contemplative prayer, as Jesus seems to feel an extraordinary closeness to God, whom he calls, "Abba," or Father. We also see many passages in which Jesus is able to heal, as he puts it, "by the Spirit of God" and to preach because, as he puts it, "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me." This is an understanding of Jesus that is entirely congenial to Quakerism. It gives us a Jesus who is fully human yet has divine qualities because Spirit is an overflowing presence in him

de-emphasize the humanity of Jesus. As a book edited by Jerry Falwell put it, "The deity of Christ is really the most essential fundamental of all."¹⁰ As God, Jesus merits our worship. He is infinitely superior to us. He is our salvation; by dying on the cross, he atoned for our sins. Finally, he is one who loves us deeply.

It is difficult to speak of Quaker views of Jesus. On the one hand, Friends' views of Jesus are very diverse, ranging from views very similar to mainstream Christian views to views of Jesus as entirely human, a spiritual teacher only. On the other hand, liberal Friends do not actually talk about Jesus very much; we tend to speak more of God and of the Spirit. Few Friends have tried to work out for themselves a very precise theology of Jesus.

Friends who emphasize the humanness of Jesus feel that one can and should differentiate Jesus and God, seeing God as greater than Jesus. Jesus himself says in the Gospel of John, "the Father is greater than I" (4:28). Some Friends put the emphasis on following Jesus and becoming like him, rather than worshipping him. They tend to see the humanness of Jesus and his role as a rabbi, a Jewish teacher. They often see Jesus as the ultimate spiritual teacher, one who embodied the spiritual reality which he taught.

Other Friends follow George Fox's lead in understanding the "Christ" part of Jesus' identity as virtually identical with the Inner Light. George Fox himself was clear that Christ is an inward, experiential reality. He wrote, "Keep within. And when they shall say, 'lo here,' or 'lo there is Christ,' go not forth; for Christ is within you. And they are seducers and antichrists, which draw your minds out from the teaching within you."¹¹ Here Fox is saying that those who focus exclusively on an external Christ, perhaps identified entirely with the person of Jesus, are drawing our attention away from the place where we can find Christ: within.

This Friend, like many others, has tried to work out an understanding of Jesus in which neither the human nor the spiritual dimension is lost. I have been highly influenced by Marcus Borg in this. Borg offers a view of Jesus that seems very Quakerly and is, in fact, embraced by many Friends.¹² This view recognizes the

Here the language is of the Spirit coming from without. Quakers often speak of experiencing the presence of Spirit. What we see in this passage might be similar, though the usual Quaker language is of something that comes from within; however, the first time one experiences such a thing it may seem so unlike what one has known before that it may seem to be other to oneself, i.e., coming from without. And are we not all the children of God?

Mark 1:12-13:

"And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him."

What is the Spirit doing here? Quakers have occasionally reported feeling an inner push of the Spirit, at times, to step out of their ordinary lives in order to wrestle with spiritual issues that weigh heavily upon them.

Mark 13:11

Jesus warns his disciples of persecutions that lie ahead of them. He advises them how to behave and then says:

"When they bring you to trial and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say; but say whatever is given you at that time, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit."

As Jesus tells it in this passage, the Holy Spirit is now within. It is a source of verbal witness. This is much like the Quaker practice of verbal ministry in Meeting for Worship, as well as Quaker witness and testimonies in our society from George Fox to Lucretia Mott to John Woolman to Friends today.

The original source of the idea of speaking the words that one is moved to speak by a divine source is found in the Hebrew Bible prophets. The Hebrew prophets are those who speak the words of God for God, as God gives those words to them to say. Thus the Hebrew Bible prophets are the forerunners both of Jesus' statement

in Mark 13:11 and of the Quaker understanding of speaking as moved by the Spirit. A typical example of this can be seen in the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 2:1-2):

[Jeremiah speaking:] The word of the Lord came to me, saying: Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, "Thus says the Lord:

'I [God] remember the devotion of your [Israel's] youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.'"

The words that begin, "I remember the devotion of your youth" are God's words, spoken to the people Israel from God's perspective; indeed, they seem like a very personal and intimate reflection on God's part. Jeremiah just voices these words, exactly as they "came to" him from God. The biblical books of the Hebrew prophets are full of examples of this kind of speaking of God's words for God.

Luke 11:9-13 (Jesus speaking):

So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? ... [H]ow much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

Quakers consider themselves seekers after religious Truth. This passage speaks very clearly to Friends of a promise of inner guidance from the Light Within. Thus, inner guidance from the Holy Spirit or the Light Within is a great gift from God.

We might consider what a fundamentalist might read in this passage. Language of seeking and finding might mean to a fundamentalist that we need to ask Jesus to come into our lives. It

record of revelation, not Revelation itself. We need to be able to respond to George Fox's challenge: "You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this; but what canst thou say? Art thou a child of the Light, and hast thou walked in the Light, and what thou speakest, is it inwardly from God?" If we rely entirely on the Bible for our spiritual guidance, we are, as Margaret Fell declared, "thieves." Thus, Quakers believe in ongoing revelation; if Spirit spoke through others in the past, why should that process have ended? Friends' experience is that that process is ongoing, as Spirit continues to inspire our words and actions.

In sum, comparing fundamentalism and liberal Quakerism on their views on the Bible, we note that fundamentalists believe that they are reading the Bible literally, while liberal Quakers tend to be aware that our various understandings of biblical passages are interpretations. Fundamentalists view the Bible as the Word of God; they reject contemporary biblical scholarship. Liberal Quakers accept the findings of biblical scholarship on the human role in the Bible's authorship and editing. For fundamentalists, the Bible is the Law of God, the "supreme and final authority." Liberal Quakers tend to want to be guided more by the spirit (and Spirit) of the Bible, as opposed to the letter (see 2 Cor. 3:6).⁹ Fundamentalists emphasize reading the Bible, knowing what it says and often memorizing passages from it. In contrast, some Friends know the Bible well, but others very little. Some liberal Friends have no interest in it or may even be hostile towards it. Others regularly read and meditate on it. Finally, to fundamentalists, the Bible is The Revelation. There is no ongoing revelation. To liberal Friends, as we have seen, the Bible represents past experiences and insights of spiritual Truth. There is ongoing revelation. We are challenged with, "What canst thou say?"

JESUS CHRIST

There are many different ideas of who and what Jesus was and is. We may begin again with fundamentalist views on Jesus. Fundamentalists see Jesus and God as the same being and tend to

often cite this passage as proof that all of the Bible must be inerrant or literally true because it is “inspired” or breathed out by God. We note that the passage does not in fact claim inerrancy for scripture, but only that it is useful.

The Campus Crusade for Christ, a fundamentalist organization, declares in its Statement of Faith: “The sole basis of our beliefs is the Bible, God’s infallible written Word, the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. We believe that it was uniquely, verbally and fully inspired by the Holy Spirit and that it was written without error (inerrant) in the original manuscripts. It is the supreme and final authority in all matters on which it speaks.” Here we see the profession of belief in the Bible as the inerrant, infallible Word of God and as the supreme and final authority.

How do Friends view the Bible? Not surprisingly, early Friends were not fond of 2 Timothy 3:16; moreover, a number of them did not accept the standard translation of this passage as correct. Early Quaker theologian Robert Barclay, among others, argued that an ambiguity in the original Greek version of the passage allowed it to be translated as, “Every scripture inspired by God is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” This translation opens up the possibility that only some passages in scripture are inspired by God, while others are not. Interestingly, the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible gives this alternate translation in its footnotes.⁷

For Quakers, the Bible is a declaration of the fountain, the Spirit, and not the fountain itself. Therefore it is not the principal ground of truth; direct experience of the Spirit is the principal ground. The Bible may give secondary guidance, but even to read it properly we need to read in the Light of the Spirit. George Fox said, “And I saw that none could read John’s words aright and with a true understanding of them, but in and with the same divine Spirit by which John spoke them, and by his burning, shining light, which is sent from God.”⁸

Second, for Quakers, the Bible is the record of others’ encounter with the divine, of the Spirit as it spoke through others. It is the

is Jesus that we are seeking and who will resolve all our questions for us. If we can see how this passage could be taken either way we might be ready to consider this: experientially, how might experiencing the Light Within and experiencing Jesus coming into your life be similar or different? This might be a rewarding subject for a friendly discussion between a Quaker and a conservative Christian (fundamentalist, evangelical or other).

Acts 2:1-21, 37-39

In the Book of Acts, Jesus has died and we see some of his disciples carrying on without him. Chapter Two contains the famous events on the day of Pentecost.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they [the disciples] were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. ...

[The disciple Peter spoke, saying:] this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy....’

Here the Holy Spirit descends upon people and causes them to speak, as in Mark 13:11. This is another passage that seems to justify the Quaker notion of being moved to speak in Meeting by the Spirit, though we don’t believe this happens in foreign tongues—or seems so chaotic! We do believe that this Spirit is given to all, as is declared here. As we have noted, receiving the Spirit experientially (again, not usually this dramatically) is what Quakers call “baptism.” In Acts 2:38, Peter says, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

The above passage in Acts may remind some readers of some other Christian sects, perhaps fundamentalist sects. Pentecostalism is, in fact, based on this event. Does this mean that Quakers have some kind of kinship with Pentecostalism? Indeed, this is worth considering as we do seem to have a kinship in Spirit, if not as much in theology.⁴

Galatians 5:16-26

In this letter, Paul writes to advise the young church at Galatia:

Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. ... Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. ... By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Here Paul is discussing the opposition or conflict of flesh and Spirit. What, however, is meant by the term “flesh” here? Paul’s use of the word “flesh” here doesn’t seem to correspond to our modern word “flesh”; this passage is not an anti-body statement. “Flesh” seems to refer to self-centeredness, selfishness, and the immoral behavior that follows from it. This is especially clear when the list of behaviors associated with the flesh is contrasted with the list associated with the Spirit. Those behaviors that are associated by Paul with the presence of the Spirit are more or less the same virtues that Quakers emphasize and expect of one who is filled with Spirit.

John 14:15-17, 26 (Jesus speaking):

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate,⁵ to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you....

to rise to an ever-higher standard. But note that these are moral ideals and principles, not rules *per se*. It is always up to us to determine how to live these ideals in our own lives, and this very much requires us to draw upon inner guidance. Similarly, the examples of famous Friends like George Fox, Lucretia Mott and John Woolman function much like the testimonies in holding up spiritual and moral ideals that guide us by challenging us in a very open-ended way. George Fox is said to have counseled the young William Penn, “Wear thy sword as long as thou canst.” Whether this story is true or apocryphal, Friends have long embraced it as demonstrating something important about Quakerism. Taking the story at face value, we should see that it is not saying that Fox in any way approved of carrying weapons. In fact, Fox was telling Penn that his approval was not the point; what was important was that Penn look within and be guided thereby. At the same time, Penn knew very well that Fox and the other Quakers did not, on principle, carry swords!

Quakers, then, while being inspired and challenged by the examples of Fox and other noteworthy Friends, do not feel that one can or should try to duplicate in their own particular circumstances what those Friends did. Just as Fox challenged those who relied excessively on quoting the Bible with, “What canst *thou* say?” these Friends’ lives challenge us with, “What canst thou be and do?”

In sum, religious education works among Friends by offering a balance of inner and outer guidance. However, within this balance, pride of place goes to the Spirit: we can *never* give up listening to our Inner Guide. If we were to give that up, we would lose what is most essential.

BIBLE

How do Quakers and fundamentalists view the Bible? Let us begin again with fundamentalism. Fundamentalists often cite 2 Timothy 3:16 as the foundation of their view of scripture. “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” Fundamentalists

all the more precisely because it is outside her experience. There are so many benefits of learning from many others. Socially, openness to many ideas helps us to include others and avoid alienating people. Practically, it helps us to be open to new leadings for a constantly changing world. Spiritually, recognizing that you don't possess all the truth can produce an appropriate modesty—the truth about God and the other great mysteries has to be greater than any of our ideas about it.

In addition, this Friend is grateful for the training in non-critical Friendly listening she has gained from Quaker spirituality. Many of us have received training in school and in our political life in an aggressive kind of critical listening—we have been taught to listen in order to find a weak point in the other's argument that we can attack in order to demolish his argument. How refreshing it is to be oriented towards listening for what can be learned from the other—including the other with whom I may initially disagree.

In addition to relying upon the Inner Light, Meeting for Worship, and Clearness Committees, another form of religious guidance used by Friends is the query. What kind of a thing is a query? For those who might not know, here is an example, from Query #1, on Meetings for Worship, from Baltimore Yearly Meeting's *Faith and Practice*: "Are meetings for worship held in expectant waiting for Divine guidance? Are Friends encouraged to share spiritual insights? Are special gifts of ministry recognized and encouraged? Do you come to meeting with heart and mind prepared?" Even a cursory consideration quickly reveals that these are not neutral questions. These queries simultaneously guide and question. They encourage us to seek, but in a certain way. Clearly, it is not the case that anything goes among Friends, that all views and spiritual approaches are okay among us. We are open, but there are limits. There is a definite and particular spirituality here, but within that framework there is a great deal of latitude for seeking, discovering and expressing.

What else guides, or sets limits, within which Friends can be creative? The testimonies—such as truthfulness, simplicity, equality and peacefulness—give us definite moral guidance and challenge us

[T]he Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.

Here Jesus states that the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, is being left with us after Jesus is no longer present in the world. Jesus tells us that the Advocate or Holy Spirit "abides in you" and this is how we know "him." This Advocate is the Spirit of truth and teaches us everything, keeping us mindful of Jesus and his teachings. This passage, which speaks so clearly to Quakers of the Light Within, is a good example of why John's is often called the "Quaker gospel"!

What is the take-home message from our reading of these passages on the Spirit in the Bible? First, no one owns the Bible, neither fundamentalists nor Quakers. No one has exclusive rights over it, or exclusive claim to it. The Bible can be interpreted in many ways. Second, Quakers can find as much justification for our beliefs in the Bible as any other group. The teaching that the Spirit exists, that it is in us and guides us, is eminently biblical. The view that only fundamentalist understandings of Christianity are truly Christian cannot be justified.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

What are the implications for religious education of Quaker belief in the Light Within and fundamentalist belief in human sinfulness? Does whether we believe in the Light Within or in human sinfulness make a significant difference in how we educate our children religiously? Does it make a difference in how we encourage our own spiritual growth?

In fundamentalist religious education, it follows from their belief in human sinfulness that the individual needs a great deal of external guidance from the church that s/he belongs to, the Bible as interpreted by that church and the church minister. In worship, you are given the words with which to pray and sing; you listen to what is read to you from the Bible and to the words of the minister. The focus is on Jesus and the Bible.

In Quaker religious education, we are invited to explore everything—certainly including the Bible and Jesus, but also nature, science, the teachings of our Quaker forebears and other great religious figures, and our own thoughts and feelings. You can trust the Light Within to guide you, but you do need somehow to discover that Light. This points towards Meeting for Worship as a process by which the Light Within educates and guides us.

What about authority in Quakerism? Are we saying that fundamentalists have several sources of external authority (Bible, minister, etc.) and we Quakers have none? What is religious authority among Friends? Is there one? Does anything go?

Authority for Friends is the Spirit *within* us and *among* us. It is within oneself but also in others. Thus, in Meeting for Worship, and elsewhere, Spirit teaches and guides us from within. Fox writes in his journal, “I was sent to ... direct people to the Spirit that gave forth the Scriptures, by which they might be led into all Truth.”⁶ That is, the Bible is produced by Spirit and hence secondary to Spirit, but we can be guided directly by Spirit guiding us from within. We also are guided from without, when other Friends rise in Meeting for Worship and give verbal ministry, voicing the guidance of Spirit as they have received it.

We cannot, however, always trust everything that we think comes to us from the Spirit. We could always be wrong in what we think we hear. There is the selfish “flesh” side of us that we could *think* is Spirit but might really be our own personal wishes. How, then, do we discern what is *truly* of Spirit? In practice, there is a balance between listening to the Inner Guide and listening to our Friends community. This is one function of the corporate dimension of worship in Meeting for Worship. This is also why we have Clearness Committees. A Clearness Committee in itself is a balance between inner and outer guidance. The members of a Clearness Committee are not directive; they do not directly tell the person whose needs they are considering what to do. Instead, they raise challenging and probing questions, bring out relevant considerations, and let the person who called the committee decide for him- or herself, as

guided by Spirit and in light of the insights and challenges raised by the committee.

Other than averring our belief in the Light Within, liberal Friends avoid doctrinal formulations of our beliefs. We welcome a variety of ways of speaking Truth. Fundamentalism, and mainstream Christianity, are just the opposite; they have creeds, clear doctrines, and frequently quoted scripture passages. They seem to have a unity that we lack. The variety of views that may come out during a Quaker Meeting for Worship (or in Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business) might seem to call into question the belief that our verbal ministry comes from Spirit. Should we not have more unity if that is the case? This concern should not trouble us. Perhaps these varying views are all different aspects of Truth. Or again, given that we all have limited “measures” of Truth, perhaps we all need further Light.

One may question whether Friends’ avoidance of doctrine and our openness to the different ideas and leadings that come out in Meeting for Worship and elsewhere are a weakness or a strength. We must admit that, as noted above, our openness to different views and leadings leaves many of us rather tongue-tied when we are challenged to say what we believe. We sometimes feel that our way is messier and harder, as there are always a lot of judgment calls to make, rather than a host of simple rules and doctrines to rely on.

Tolerating a diversity of views may make us look weak, but ultimately it is a kind of strength. These strengths are many and profound, though they may not initially be obvious; they include the following. It is a strength to learn from each other, from many people and not just one person. One of the most wonderful things about Quakerism is that we believe that the Spirit can speak through anyone—someone new to Meeting or an established Friend, someone young or old, etc. One never knows when and how Spirit will speak to us and we must therefore always be ready to receive its guidance. This Friend is immensely grateful to those Friends who rise in Meeting to speak about their personal relationship with Jesus, a form of testimony that she is unable to give, but which she values hearing