

The Conservative Friend

A Publication of Ohio Yearly Meeting of Friends (Conservative)

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I know I am as He created me



I know that,
whatsoever God doeth
it shall be for ever.
(Ecclesiastes 3:14 AV)

I know I am as He created me;
I know you only see the one that dies:
The self I am is not the man you see.

There is One who is God the Only Free;
There is One who is God the Only Wise.
I know I am as He created me.

You judged Him an impossibility,
But thereby have you blinded both your eyes.
The self I am is not the man you see.

He dreamed me, and He then commanded, "Be!"
Then placed me in a world of vast surprise.
I know I am as He created me.

You heard the whisper of the enemy:
Because you dared believe the devil's lies
The self I am is not the man you see.

You locked your heart and threw away the key,
And so you only see the one that dies.
The self I am is not the man you see.
I know I am as He created me.

John Jeremiah Edminster
(Stillwater Meeting, OYM), 3/2025

Living in the Love of God



Early on in our journey as Friends, most of us who were not acquainted with Wilberite Yearly Meetings did not have the preparation to live in the life and power of our beloved Lord. We did not understand our need to truly relate to the Lord. At best we treated Him as a super politician or, even more repugnant, we attempted in our human power to coerce the Lord to satisfy our earthly desires. When we indulged in prayer, it was for the purpose of cajoling God to fulfill our wants, even though, more often than not, they were at variance with the Lord's will.

Fortunately, because our God is a loving ruler, He has moved us to contact individuals who have a relationship not only with the Lord, but with others who strive to obey the Lord in all ways. We praise the Lord for sending Gospel Ministers to us for the purpose of acquainting His seekers with the power of our creator. Then, and only then, can we have a relationship with our holy Father. As a result, we begin to obey and receive His Love, a love that embraces all people who seek His empowerment.

But ministers reminded me to acquire the faith I needed to wait on the Lord to hear to hear, and more important, to understand His communication. Because I am naturally impatient, my Friends stressed the need to be patient in listening to the Lord, while not expecting immediate responses from God. I have discerned responses at the most

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appropriate moment. Yes, I am still learning this aspect of His heavenly guidance.

In waiting on God, I became cognizant who our beloved Savior is and how Christ introduces His Friends to the Everlasting Gospel, a Gospel in which Jesus's love overcomes our need or desire for human supremacy. I was aware, though, of some of Jesus' outward teachings in addition to His relationship with His Mother and earthly father. This was helpful knowledge in my pursuit of Truth. But I was still ignorant of His function as our living Christ.

I am fortunate that God's patience prevailed, much to my great joy. God opened the Bible which reveals that Christ, and not the Bible, is the Word of God. Thru Jesus, we have life that overcomes despair. This life permeates our souls enabling finders of Truth like myself to live in His Kingdom with His Love and direction.

It is not that we do not have tendencies to resist Christ. But in our silence waiting on the Lord, Jesus overcomes our natural resistance and plants His seed of love within the gathered body enabling us to unify ourselves with His precious ministry. Small wonder, as we listen, Jesus gathers His Friends into communities

that aspire to hear our Lord and do what He calls on us to do. This Jesus instructs his followers to love each other as He loves us. Yes, we have learned to accept true eldering from our ministers because that ministry originates in Jesus love and power.

Once we surrender in Jesus's name, we hear and respond in His name.

Arthur Berk (Crossroads Meeting, OYM), 5/2007

Selection from John Wilbur's "On Plainness and Self-Denial"



...the Society of Friends from the first, found it needful to adhere to greater purity of manners than other professors had done, in order to be more perfect followers of his example, as well as of his doctrine of the strait and narrow way which leads to life; believing indeed

Welcome back to The Conservative Friend

After a few years on hiatus *The Conservative Friend* has return to print in a hybrid format. The goal is to publish two issues a year which will be posted on theconservativefriend.org. Then these two issues will be printed together on paper as an annual volume.

This issue contains the usual collection of newly written items, items written in the recent past, and historic items from early Friends.

Included in issue 59 are two poems, "I know I am as He created me" and "Quaker Worship", three contemporary Friends writings: "Living in the Love of God", "Fox, too, was Spiritual but not Religious", and "Christ's People"; and two historic Friends writings: selections from John Wilbur's "On Plainness and Self-Denial" and William Penn's "A Tender Visitation in the Love of God"

Submission for issue 60 are being sought. Newly written items and items that have been written by contemporary and historic Friends can be submitted. While open to receiving what someone is so led to share, generally, articles have a tendency to run 400-650 or 800-1,000 words. Longer articles might be divided across two issues and shorter ones included in a issue according to having multiple shorter ones in a issue.

Issue 60 should be out toward the end of 2025. Please seek to submit items by the late fall of 2025.

Wil Brant, Editor

the verity and truth of his sayings; and that his doctrines of the cross are unequivocal; and finding by practice too, that the bearing of his cross patiently and honestly, did in very deed, work to the mortifying of the deeds of the flesh; hence as a people we have seen more clearly than others the necessity of “always bearing about in the body, the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.” “For we which live, are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh” (2 Cor. 4:10-11).

Whatever then may be the practices or sayings of others, we feel bound faithfully to adhere to the commands and doctrines of Christ and his apostles as recorded in holy writ, as well as to the word of God’s grace in our hearts, to the denying of all desires after the maxims and manners, fashions and customs, of this vain world. And as this was a subject not unworthy of the Son of God, and his apostles, in his and their preaching and personal simplicity, none will do well in charging his more scrupulous followers with narrow-mindedness, because of their conformity to the doctrine and practice of Christ and his apostles; seeing that every one of his disciples should conscientiously keep his commandments, and follow his example of meekness and humility.

Nor let any one be deterred from the practice of a self-denying life because he may sometimes see traditional or hypocritical professors trusting in a form of godliness without the power; for there is not one of the Christian virtues, but attempts have been made to counterfeit it; and they also who make such attempts are enemies to the cross of Christ and him crucified, which is the power of God, and wisdom of God, and which also the apostle told one of the churches, he was resolved only to know amongst them.

There was I think more than one reason why the peculiar and primitive testimonies of plainness were given to, and upheld by the Society of Friends; and first, because they are congenial to the very nature of Christianity in its purest form, and agree better with its other testimonies. And secondly, because if conscientiously maintained, they would serve to exhibit this constant acknowledgment to the world, “I am the Lord’s!” And thirdly, because it would be an enclosure round about the tender plants of a rising generation; for by observing these peculiarities in language, manners, and appearance, there would not be that inclination to mix familiarly with others; and this has proved to our beloved youth a great preservation from the corruptions and vanities of the world. In this point of view, the benefit to our Society has been incalculable; for though it is not these peculiarities of plainness that cause us to be fruitful, yet by them as an enclosure, the fruit may be kept from being devoured. It is the good soil of the garden, well cultivated, that bringeth forth the fruit, but it is the fenced wall of God’s providence round about, that keepeth it from being devoured by the creatures without.

And so far is this testimony from being a burden or a hardship, it is through the gift of Him who helpeth, a choice blessing from his hand, and a blessing too, which if we as a people should begin to despise and lightly esteem, God will in his displeasure perhaps remove from us. Yea, and if the vine which he has planted, when he looked for grapes, should be found bringing forth only wild grapes, he will certainly remove this safe enclosure, and suffer the wild beast to tread it down; and he will also command the clouds that they should rain no rain upon it. And as a small leak, if suffered to continue, will sink a ship, however good and richly laden, and as a small breach in the enclosure of the vineyard, however fruitful, will let in the devourer, so I

believe if this testimony, (however small any may deem it,) should be abandoned, it would greatly endanger our safety.

“On Plainness and Self-Denial,” *Journal of the Life of John Wilbur* (1859), Appendix, Letter 6.

Fox, too, was Spiritual-but-not-Religious



There is this growing trend in the U.S. in the number of people who identify as “spiritual but not religious.” The Pew Research Center’s 2024 Religious Landscape Study reported that 83% of adults in the U.S. believe in God or a universal spirit, and 79% say there is something spiritual beyond the natural world, but a smaller share (64%) say religion is “somewhat” or “very” important in their lives, and just 33% go to church at least monthly. So it seems that while there is a large majority of people who believe in some aspect of God and see something of value in the concept of spirituality, few seem to be finding it in religious organizations or in attending churches.

Also this study showed that 47% of adults identified as both spiritual and religious. This means that they participate in a religious organization and engage in some type spiritual practices with the concept of “spiritual” meaning to have a connection to something “bigger” or “other” than oneself. 10% say they are religious but not spiritual, 21% say they are

neither spiritual nor religious, and 22% say they are spiritual but not religious. These last two, “neither spiritual nor religious” and “spiritual but not religious” are the areas that are growing. This correlates to the decline of the number of adults who have an affiliation with a specific religious group, which would be those in the “spiritual and religious” and “religious but not spiritual” groups.

It would seem that for some people in having a dissatisfaction with religion and/or spirituality, they are either dropping religion/spirituality as being of a concern/value/usefulness/purpose in their lives (neither spiritual nor religious), or they are going out on their own and seeking something that response to their spiritual desires outside of a continuous or extended participation within a specific religious group (spiritual but not religious).

This aspect of “going out on one’s own” is very much a part of the growing trend of viewing spirituality/religion as a personal thing. This view holds that spirituality is something that one experiences as an individual and is for them as an individual. While they may go to a spiritually-based group to have these experiences, these groups can be participated in as a collection of individuals having their own personal/individual spiritual experiences. These experiences can be spoken of as related to things like connecting with one’s true or inner self, finding inner peace/enlightenment, the individual becoming one with nature or ultimate being, etc.

Unfortunately there are Christian churches whose practices, whether intentionally or unintentionally, seem to feed this notion of individualistic smorgasbord spirituality in relation to presenting a feel-good and entertaining worship service and a surface-level pick-and-choose-once-or-twice-a-month-on-Sundays engagement in Christian spiritual life.

Recently a friend recounted an experience of overhearing someone in the grocery store inviting another person to their church by talking about the friendly people, good music (live worship band), and the food and coffee at the food court (it was a megachurch). This focus on the more physical/worldly aspects of the worship service and of the spiritual community was void of speaking about the spiritually beneficial/nurturing aspects that a worship service and participation in a spiritual community should provide. This encounter made my friend realize the very unfortunate state that the (religious) world is in—liking and promoting the worldly performance aspects of religion rather than fully rejoicing in and sharefully encouraging the spiritual manifestation of Christ in our lives.

Finding out that what churches are offering is not responding to what people are seeking, as well as churches focusing on and offering things that speak to the entertaining/physical/worldly aspects of life, is not anything new.

Though the terms would have had different meanings in his time, George Fox during his period of being spiritually unsettled and not finding in the church and its rituals what he was seeking or what would settle him, probably would have been considered “spiritual but not religious.” When he sought out consultation with religious leaders, their responses to him were along the lines of the physical/worldly: get married, smoke tobacco, try bloodletting with leeches.

Many new/revitalized religious/spiritual movements begin with a founder’s individual spiritual awakening. For Fox, the pivotal event was hearing, spiritually, a voice say, “There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition” which resulted in his heart leaping for joy, a confirmation of its Truthfulness.

Yet as many of these new movements begin with a spiritual awakening, such spiritual

experiences can move, in time, to a structure of religious codification of empty ritual. It seems to be much easier to tell people and for people to respond to being told what to do/is expected of them, then to support and encourage them in seeking out and engaging in a spiritual awakening and an on-going experience for themselves. Even some groups with a goal of spiritual awakening provide a step-by-step guide/ritual for “achieving” spiritual awakening, as opposed to providing encouragement and support related to one opening up oneself, one’s heart, and receiving it.

Continued on page 8

Quaker Worship



Deep within there is a place
Beyond the reach of time and space,
Where worries pale and demons flee
Confronted by Eternity.

And some one there who calls my name
Tells me like Him to be the same,
The body’s death is not a loss
When soul finds life upon the cross.

There is no need for spoken word
Where Christ’s own voice within is heard.
No choir’s hymn, no organ’s chord
But soundless anthems from the Lord.

Conrad Lindes
(Salem/Upper Springfield Meeting, OYM) 1/2025

Christ's People



Christians have the Spirit of Christ. [Robert] Barclay says that although Jesus is no longer with us in His flesh, He teaches and instructs us inwardly thorough His Spirit, and that the only means of knowing God is the revelation of God though Jesus' leading us. Barclay [in *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*] understands this as the essence of Christianity:

Christianity has become, as it were, an art, acquired by human knowledge and industry, like any other art or science. Men have not only assumed the name of Christian by certain artificial tricks, but they have even procured the honor for themselves of being considered masters of Christianity, even though they are altogether strangers to the spirit and life of Jesus. But if we make a definition of a Christian which is scriptural, that a Christian is one who has the Spirit of Christ and is led by it, we will have to divest many [so-called] Christians...of that designation.

When Christians are learned in all other methods of obtaining knowledge—whether it be the letter of the Scriptures, the traditions of the churches, or the works of creation and providence—and are able to produce strong and undeniable arguments from these sources, but remain altogether ignorant of the inward and unmediated revelations of God's Spirit in the heart, they ought not be considered Christians (p. 22).

Take away the Spirit and Christianity is no more Christianity than a corpse is a man, once the soul and spirit have departed. And a corpse is a noisome and a useless thing which the living can no longer stand and bury out of sight, no matter how acceptable it was when it was actuated and moved by the soul (p. 32).

Discussion Questions:

1. If someone confidently considers himself to be a Christian because of his knowledge of the Scriptures, but he is a stranger to the spirit and life of Jesus, what are the consequences—to him and to others?
2. When do we have the spiritual duty to tell someone he or she seems to be a stranger to the spirit of Jesus, even though he or she loudly claims to be a Christian?
3. What are the differences between being a “seeker” of Jesus and being a “finder”?
4. Is there an appropriate role for the “other methods” of obtaining knowledge? How do we know when we are pursuing such knowledge under the Holy Spirit's guidance?

From *Traditional Quaker Christianity*, Assembled and Edited by Terry H. Wallace, Susan S. Smith, John C. Smith, and Arthur Berk, (Ohio Yearly Meeting, Barnsville OH: 2014) Section 6.A, pp. 121-122.

Robert Barclay references from *Barclay's Apology in Modern English*, Edited by Dean Freiday, 1967. Note: this version is abridged. An unabridged version is available from Quaker Heritage Press.

Selection from William Penn's “A Tender Visitation in the Love God”



When you come to your meetings, both preachers and people, what do you do? Do you then gather together bodily only, and kindle a fire, compassing yourselves about with the sparks of your own kindling (Isa. 50:11) and so

please yourselves, and walk in the light of your own fire, and in the sparks which you have kindled, as those did in the Time of Old, whose portion it was to lye down in sorrow? Or rather, do you sit down in True silence, resting from your own will and workings, and waiting upon the Lord (Lam. 3:25, 26, 28), fixed with your minds in that Light, wherewith Christ has enlightened you, until the Lord breaths life in you, refresheth you, and prepares you, and your spirits and souls (John 1:9), to make you fit for His service, that you may offer unto Him a pure and spiritual sacrifice? For that which is born of the Flesh, is Flesh; and he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh, reap corruption. For flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. But he that soweth to the Spirit, shall, of the Spirit, reap life eternal, through Christ who has quickened him (John 3:6, Gal. 6:8, 1 Cor. 15:50).

What have you felt then, my friends, of this work in your hearts? Has Christ there appeared? What has He done for you? Have you bowed down before Him, and received Him in your hearts? Is He formed in you? (Gal. 4:19, 2 Cor. 13:5). Do you Live no more, but does Christ Live in you? For if you know not Christ to be in you, then are you yet reprobates, though you confess him in words, as the apostle said of old.

All you therefore, that hunger and thirst after the righteousness of God's Kingdom, which is an everlasting blessed kingdom, turn in, my friends, and come to Christ, who stands at the door of your hearts and knocks (Rev. 3. 20). He is the Light of the World, and it concerns all true servants of the Lord, to direct all men to this Light, else have they not a right discerning, nor true sight or taste of the things of God, viz., to turn men from darkness to light, from the kingdom of Satan, to the power, and Kingdom of God, from the dark inventions, and humane traditions of men, to Christ, the great Light of God, the High Priest, and Holy Prophet,

whom all men must hear, and out of whose mouth, the law of the Spirit of Life must be received (Rom. 8:2). By this He judges men in righteousness, and in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3). This is the High-Priest of all true Christians, and their chief treasure.

Happy therefore are all those that receive Him in their hearts, those that know him to be their Light, their Guide, their King, their Law-Giver, their Bishop, and their Heavenly Shepherd, who follow Him through all things, and through all persecutions, and sufferings, and that steadfastly love his cross (the power of God) and with all gladness embrace the reproach thereof, who have experienced, that without Christ they can do nothing (John 15:5), and therefore wait for His divine power, strength and wisdom, to govern and guide them. For such can receive no testimony from any preachers, except that testimony which is given from the holy unction, in and through them; because men, without Christ, can do nothing (1 John 2:20), as he has said: For men cannot preach, men cannot pray, men cannot sing as it ought to be; yea, men, without Him, can do nothing to the praise and glory of God. For it is only the Son of God that glorifies the Father through his Children.

And therefore let Him kindle the fire with the pure coals from His holy altar, and do you not offer to Him in your self-will. No, Jesus did not do His own will, but the will of His Father. So let us not do our own, but His Will (John 6:38, 3:11); He has done nothing but what His Father had made known unto Him, and we must all witness what Christ has declared unto us (1 John 1:3), and what He has wrought in us, or else we should be false witnesses.

"A Tender Visitation in the Love of God,"
A Collection of the Works of William Penn,
 Vol 1, Appendix no 20., 1726.

Fox, too (*continued from page 5*)

It is good for people to be spiritually seeking and even to be unsettled by what worldly religious practices have to offer. When one seeks from an open heart, God does respond. When one seeks from a human contrived plan/ritual, it can be much harder for God to work through and around that all that clutter. For those who are “spiritual but not religious,” this can be viewed as a difference between an engaging spiritual experience and an empty religious practice.

Quaker faith, as with all faiths, can become more of a religious practice thing than a spiritual experience. When we invoke understandings, stances, and positions as the only correct way, we can easily segue into religious dogma and to what those who identify as “spiritual but not religious” want to avoid. We can talk of spiritual notions that resonate with us individually, “experimentally” as Fox wrote, and share those experiences with others as a way to encourage and nurture them, but we need to be careful not to let this slip into the wild grapes of religious dogma.

One thing that differentiated George Fox’s spiritual awakening, and its unfolding into the Quaker movement, from other individual seekers and groups of individual seekers at that time was the aspect of spiritual seeking and engagement

being a community thing and not just an individual thing. It was not a group of people in the same place at the same time pursuing their own personal/individual spiritual seeking and engagement, but, while individuals, they/we are seeking and engaging as a community, a body of believers, and God ministers to us both as individuals and as a body. I know a Quaker pastor who initiates corporate prayer with “Let us bow our head” (singular).

A challenging thing for us when we encounter a “spiritual but not religious” seeker in the grocery store or visiting our meetings for worship is in their understanding of the spiritually flourishing aspect of being part of a spiritual community, the worshiping body. This can be especially true since for them the concept of community gets more tied to the shared dogma and ritual espoused by a religious group than spiritual community being a spiritual body that as a body is turning toward and opening up to God. Fox and many other current “spiritual but not religious” seekers have found the dogma and ritual not to be helpful and have rejected it. But, in the context of spiritual individualism, it might take some effort to help current seekers more fully realize the how and why of Quaker spiritual community.

Wil Brant (Crossroads Meeting, OYM) 05/2025

About *The Conservative Friend*

The Conservative Friend (theconservativefriend.org) is published under the care of the Wider Fellowship of Conservative Friends Committee of Ohio Yearly Meeting of Friends in Barnesville, Ohio (ohioyearlymeeting.org). Wil Brant (Crossroads, OYM) serves as editor.

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