

The Conservative Friend

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Free Gospel Ministry



Each year, when we answer the query, “Do we maintain a ... free gospel ministry?,” we are quick to answer in the affirmative. We do not charge anyone to join us in worship to hear whatever message may be given, and we do not pay anyone to give messages. It’s free. Yet seldom do we consider the true meaning of ministry, let alone open the question of what the gospel is.

“To minister”, in King James’ English, would be stated as “to serve” today. So “free gospel ministry” means freely serving the gospel. So far, so good. But how is it to be served? Too often, we Friends tend to treat “the gospel” as a precious relic, entrusted to us by our forebears. We serve it by keeping it safely guarded in a display case as an object of mystery but high esteem, regularly dusted and polished, but considered as something so peculiar to ourselves that we hesitate to let anyone else know it is here, let alone how valuable it is.

What if, instead, we understand the gospel to be a delicious feast of everlasting life, which we have in ever-refilling platters, a feast that we gladly, freely serve to all who come? What if we throw open wide the doors of our meetinghouses

and our lives, so that the sweet odor of this feast wafts forth to freely serve all around us? What if we sit down with our guests and join hands in an awestruck, joyful prayer of gratitude for this feast of holy, eternal life which the Lord freely serves all who will let it nourish them?

Conrad Lindes
(Salem Upper Springfield, OYM), 11/2025

Artificial Intelligence



For me, Artificial intelligence (AI) poses challenges to Faith and Truth. AI suddenly seems everywhere—and seems posed as inevitable.

Perhaps AI is inevitable. I know in my own work, some AI can help. However, the apparent *fait accompli* does not obviate serious inquiry into how AI affects Faith and Truth; and, I pose, how Faith and Truth should affect AI.

I pause to note that I am not arguing against (or for) AI. Instead, I argue that, for me, caution seems prudent. I have both programmed AI systems and used AI systems. I saw first-hand the marvels (when they work) and the hair-tearing frustrations when they do not (and not always knowing why the failure).

AI, perhaps surprisingly, has been around for at least a century. However, in 2022, a new breed of AI arose using neural networks and deep

learning. The new systems generated, for example, large-language models (LLMs). Suddenly, ChatGPT, GROK, and other LLM-augmented AIs became household words. Suddenly, AI was seemingly and relentlessly everywhere.

About a decade before (2014), I took a course from Professor Geoffrey Hinton (deemed the godfather of AI) on something called neural networks. I programmed primitive, neural networks in that class and marveled at these strange systems and their apparently uncanny capabilities.

Yet, I most recall Dr. Hinton's cautionary comments made then (and largely true today): we really do not know how these AI-systems do-what-they-do. In other words, science and commerce unleash something (cf. bioengineering) without perhaps knowing the consequences. We may implement and deploy AI—but we do not necessarily understand what we implement. That should cause pause as people already use these systems assuming safety, privacy, reliability, and accuracy.

Newly-elected Pope Leo XIV promptly expressed concern about AI. *The Wall Street Journal* recently printed a story about a physicist cautioning on un-checked AI development—and apparently supported by many high-profile individuals. An interfaith group, aiandfaith.org, discusses AI implications for some faith traditions. Companies in the AI sector hire ethics experts. Yet, cohesive analysis of the societal-effects of AI seems to lag behind both the AI implementations and the breath-taking race to AI-everything. It seems only some quiet alarms toll on the periphery.

Certainly, the obvious societal effects such as AI displacing workers or creating systems that unintentionally, or intentionally, disfavor certain outcomes remain very disturbing. Using AI to market products using AI-derived persuasion techniques threatens to drive people into more debt (a recent flap criticized an airline for alleged, AI-manipulated pricing and at least one company actively markets AI-use in sales).

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Saying “Thy Kingdom Come” and Meaning It



Many people pray “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done” routinely, without much thought as to what it means. It means, first of all, “Be my King,” which means, “Tell me what to do, make it possible for me to obey, and I’ll do it.” And then, “From now on, whenever my will conflicts with Yours, let Yours, not mine, be done.”

Put that way, it can sound a little scary. Well, more than a little scary: Luke tells us that even Jesus, on the eve of His crucifixion, sweated blood over it (Luke 22:41-44). But consider: We all have to die at some time or other, and if we are on good terms with our heavenly King, we can ask Him for whatever deathbed comforts might make our passage out of this world tolerable. And because He loves us, and is almighty, and is the Cleverest and Kindest Person Ever, you may expect Him to do it. If you doubt that He is all these things, ask Him to convince you. He can.

O.K., that is the hardest part. Then there is that secret vice of yours. George Fox wrote in 1652, “Whatever ye are addicted to, the Tempter will come in that thing” (Epistle No. 10, in *Works*, v. 7, p. 20). “Oh, no!” you may cry. “Does that mean I’ll have to give up *that*?” Again, if God is your King, He will find the best and easiest way to conquer your pet addiction. And He may also show you that it is not your worst vice! Let me ask: Do you secretly curse

people who have hurt you? Or do you laugh at cruel jokes about the kind of people you hold in scorn? Let Him cure you of your unforgiveness and your “othering.” These traits mar your perfect beauty in His eyes.

For God loves perfect beauty. And that is why He made a beautiful creation, and then made human beings in His own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26), with a love of beauty, and a delight in sharing it, just like His own. (Think: Why did God give us color vision rather than black-and-white, and such a love of music?)

Now perhaps, if you grew up in the United States, you were raised with a distrust of kings and kingship, especially if the word “king” conjures up the image of a straight white male bully with a lot of human flaws. (And please forgive me for having been one myself; I am asking my King to wash me clean of all such bullying, arrogance, and selfishness.)

But about kings: According to Scripture, when the Lord spoke to Samuel in 1 Samuel 8:7-9, He did not say “Kingship is a stupid idea,” but “They have not rejected you, Samuel, but they have rejected me, that I should not rule over them.” In fact, God had been King over Adam and Eve once; but then they decided to experiment with liberal democracy, where “everyone did as he saw fit” (Judges 21:25). And what their choice brought them was death—preceded by a life of pain, fear, ignorance, and “othering.” Yes: the first thing Adam did after they were caught was to blame Eve—to “other” her.

This is not to speak ill of liberal democracy, but democracy, just like monarchy among fallen humans, can only promote the common good to the extent that neighbors love neighbors as themselves. As for *loveless* Christendom’s historical associations with *loveless* monarchy, with its wars, enslavements, and genocides, I like to think of myself as a follower of George Fox, who regarded the weaponization of the Christian Church by Emperor Constantine (306-337) as just another chapter in the long history of the Church’s “apostasy” from the gentle, forgiving Spirit of Christ. Yes, just as Adam and Eve’s

progeny had grown ever more distant from their Creator’s goodness with each generation, so had the progeny of Jesus Christ’s first flock.

But Christ had now come, in Fox’s words, “to teach His people Himself.” Or rather, as the early Friends discovered, He had always been there, indwelling us as the Light in our conscience, encouraging the good and reproofing the evil in all human beings. And in that self-revelation, Fox held, Christ would also resume His rightful office as our King—if only we would invite Him to!

For Scripture rightly tells us (Rev. 3:20) that He stands at our door, knocking for admission. I, who had squandered decades of my life half-pursuing “enlightenment,” heard from the Holy Spirit, as I turned 45, “Not enlightenment—obedience!” And two years later, after mentally laying self-will down on His altar and asking His help to thenceforth live in accordance with His will always, I began to be rewarded with manifestations of His likeness before my mind’s eye, His voice in my inward ear, and His palpable guidance in quandaries. Now 82, I count myself a sinner-in-recovery whom my King has never asked to do the impossible. Oh, fellow sinner, do you hear Him knocking? Do let Him in.

John Jeremiah Edminster
Stillwater (OYM), 11/2025

Our Relationship(s) with God

We are subjects of the King, bonded-slaves/servants of the Master, children of the Father, sheep of the Shepherd, students of the Teacher, friends of the Christ, and partners in a divine covenant. While there may be seemingly points of difference between these things, to live into and to live out the fullness of our relationship with God, we should not hold these in tension with each other but in harmony as differing notes are held together to make a rich and full chord.

Wil Brant, Crossroads (OYM), 1/2026

Morality not be Relied on

Joseph Pike (1657-1729)



My mind having thus gone astray from the Lord, it displeased him, and caused him to withdraw from me. So I did not enjoy the sweetness and comfort of his Holy Spirit as I had done before. Yet for loving those things that offended him, he took it not from me but it became my judge and condemner and so the terrors of the Lord often seized me. I could well remember, from the strength of my natural memory, how it had been with me when I was in favor with the Lord. By his holy Light I saw how I had lost the living sense of the sweetness I had formerly enjoyed. This made me sorely lament my present condition.

From this experience, I have learned to understand the vast difference there is between what is natural comprehension and memory, and what is the present, living, experiential witnessing of the life and power of Truth upon the soul, by which the soul is kept alive to God. Solomon, from the strength of his memory, could not forget how excellently he had prayed to the Lord by the Holy Spirit, at the dedication of the temple. Yet he lost that living and divine sense of it, when afterwards he went into idolatry. The world has the former; and by the strength of their natural reason, comprehension, and memory, they read, they study the learned languages, and acquire knowledge, or rather gather notions, being thus furnished and equipped for what they

call divinity. But, alas! true divinity is quite another thing, and learned quite another way, even by the Lord's Holy Spirit, and which consists in the enjoyment of his sweet presence in our soul. I say this, in measure from my own experience, for when I was obedient to his holy Light and Spirit in my heart, and was taught by it, it led me, though but childish in my natural understanding, to the holy hill of spiritual Zion, even to the enjoyment of his living comfortable presence. But when I declined from it, though I grew in natural knowledge and understanding, I lost my innocent condition and the spiritual communion I once had; so that, instead of his Holy Spirit being my comforter, it became my judge and condemner. These things now livingly flow into my mind, and I give them forth as a testimony for the Lord and to the operation of his Holy Spirit.

Thus stood my inward condition, from about the age of fifteen to eighteen, during which time I maintained a pretty good character amongst Friends and others. For, through the Lord's great mercy, I never fell into any gross or scandalous evils nor did I keep bad company, but was generally beloved, so as far as I knew, by all that were acquainted with me, notwithstanding which, I was gone from, and had lost my inward communion and fellowship with the Lord that I had formerly witnessed. This leads me to caution all, whether young or old, against valuing or justifying themselves based upon the morality of their conduct, and depending upon it, as I have known some to do. For though a man cannot be a right Christian without being a good moralist, he may sustain a moral character and be very far from being a true Christian and acceptable to God: this I can speak from my own experience.

From Some Account of the Life of Joseph Pike, Joseph Pike, in *Friends' Library: Comprising Journals, Doctrinal Treatises, and Other writing of Members of the Religious Society of Friends*, edited by William Evans and Thomas Evans, Joseph Rakestraw, Philadelphia 1838; vol 2, p. 360.

What Does the Phrase "That of God" Mean?



For the past century some Friends have been using the phrase “That of God” in reference to the Peace Testimony and other facets of Quaker theology. George Fox first used that expression in his epistles and some other writings. Shortly after Fox’s passing, Friends seemed to abandon that phrase until Rufus Jones revived it towards the end of the Nineteenth Century. Needless to say, Jones’ interpretation and use of this concept was much different from Fox’s understanding.

Let us examine Fox’s reference to “that of God” that appears in two early epistles: “And dwell in the power of God, and stand in it, which comprehends the whole world that through it ye may answer the witness of God in every one....” and “Be faithful, and spread the truth abroad, and walk in the wisdom of God, answering that of God in everyone...”

According to George Fox, that of God—the Holy Spirit, the anointing within—is a witness of God in the human souls directing us in the righteousness of the everlasting Son, Christ Jesus. In other words, God is witnessing in our various consciences in the same Inward Light. We humans are receiving the same Light that our brothers and sisters receive from the Holy One.

This light, in addition, enables us to respond to the “witness of God....” That power enables us to elucidate error in our fellow humans and direct them to God’s light within them to confirm the truths we espouse in our allegiance to Christ.

What God affords us is His witness, His communication, that endures after our physical demise. Of course, God may have different

messages for His listeners but they do not contradict each other because God is Truth. But we may have different weaknesses that the Lord confronts us in His grace. But Fox never implied that God is a living being within us. To the contrary, each one of us is a creation of the Lord.

Today some Friends, in unity with Rufus Jones, claim that God directly lives within us—even stating that if we kill someone we are destroying our Creator. Of course, it is contrary to the Lord’s will when we become violent towards our brothers and sisters. But we do not annihilate our Creator by acting in disobedience. We disappoint our loving Lord when we do sin. But God has sent His Everlasting Son to expurgate our sinfulness, and He does eliminate our sinful rebellion when we listen and obey Him.

Let us welcome the witness of God within to serve Him in all aspects of life in Christ.

That phrase is not merely an individual revelation of God’s communication with and in individuals souls but, more important, it relates to the Lord’s contact with the body of Christ. When we meet as a community of believers and empty ourselves from our human illusions, God promulgates what His friends need to comprehend, spiritually speaking often leading us to share Jesus’s Truth with humans who have not received Christ.

In this gathering, God affords us the inward talent to minister to our friends when needed in addition to acting as a group witnessing to the needs of individuals who may be suffering from economic poverty or family troubles. At our best, we are Jesus’ community waiting on His benevolence in His everlasting community.

Arthur Berk
Crossroads (OYM) 2/2007

2026 Ohio Yearly Meeting Annual Sessions

Eighth Month 4-8, 2026

Info will be at ohioyearlymeeting.org

God's Old and New Covenants with Humanity



Outward gatherings and godly individuals. In the Christian understanding, there have been two outward gatherings of God's people. The first gathering was that of the Old Covenant, while the second is that of the New Covenant.

These covenants express an intentional relationship between God and groups of people, not merely individuals. Throughout the Old Testament, there are stories of individuals who were obedient to God's Spirit but who were not part of God's Old Covenant people. God's physical gathering of a people does not deny God's activity in the lives of individuals outside the group. Rather, it illustrates that what God intends to convey to humanity is a message and a Spirit too great to be contained within individual lives. God's message requires the shared life of a gathered people. A gathered people can show forth more divine power than a collection of individuals, and being part of a gathered people provides clarity, power, and community to the individual.

The Old Covenant. Under the Old Covenant, God gathered people as a religious nation. There were religious rites and ceremonies, and there were governmental laws and regulations. There were kings, judges, and priests. There was an army.

This religious nation carried the message that there was one God. This religious nation carried the message that God required justice. This religious nation earned many messages Christians continue to this day. But this

religious nation was limited in the messages it could carry. It was limited by its being a nation. Nations make war. Nations defend territory. Nations include criminals and innocents. Nations police and punish.

The New Covenant. Before the life of Jesus, God's Spirit was at work in individual lives, but under the New Covenant, Jesus makes possible a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This greater gift of the Spirit marks a difference in degree of relationship with God. It is the same gift, but more of it. It is the same Spirit, but more of it. The New Covenant is the gathering of God's people directly by God's Spirit. In presenting the New Covenant, God offers to His church the same relationship He offers to individuals: to be led by His Spirit, to be the temple of His Spirit, to be His visible body. The New Covenant focuses on the spiritual life of a gathered people rather than on individualized spirituality. The New Covenant is open to everyone who accepts it.

Believing Jesus to be the Messiah, Christians understand the New Covenant to be a more complete revelation of God's will than the Old Covenant. Friends have referred to specific scriptural descriptions of the New Covenant in highlighting our understanding of it.

The eighth chapter of Hebrews, where the New Covenant is described, reviews God's promises (in Jeremiah 31:31-34) to forgive the sins of His people, to write His laws directly upon their minds and hearts, and to be so intimately known by each of His people that there is no need for His people to teach one another—all of God's people will know Him directly and personally. Friends emphasize being taught by God directly and personally. We are all to know God. This knowledge is Eternal Life (John 17:3).

In Acts 2, the New Covenant is portrayed as the outpouring of God's Spirit upon all of humanity. It is promised that all God's servants, both men and women, shall "prophesy"—that is, shall outwardly reveal messages that have been inwardly received from the Holy Spirit. Friends'

worship and witness to others are understood as prophecy, in the sense of obeying God’s Voice within us in order to manifest God’s will to others. Friends expect both men and women to participate in vocal ministry during worship, to be active in explaining our faith and practices to others, and to live lives that exemplify our beliefs. In addition to a “gender-neutral” expectation for the expression of our faith (“in Christ there is neither male nor female” Gal.3:28), another implication of the Spirit being poured onto everyone is that we have a connection with everyone we meet. Christ’s promptings are within each human being. Friends often refer to this connection as the Light of Christ that “enlightens everyone” (John 1:9).

The Light of Christ reveals to us our darkness—our sinful attitudes and actions that block the Light. But the Light also reveals how we can be saved from these sins, which is to follow Christ’s promptings within us—to call upon and follow Christ as Lord. The journals and other writings of Friends express both the pain of recognizing the darkness within them and the clarity of recognizing the Light as they were obedient to Christ’s leading.

The New Covenant also introduces changes in the manner of worship. Jesus declares in John 4:23-24, “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24). No outward ceremonies or rites are required for the worshiper to be accepted in God’s Presence. Instead, faithful people are to practice fairness, loving kindness, and humbly doing what God directs (Micah 6:6-8).

Finally, the group of people gathered into the New Covenant is not a nation but the Church, the body of people drawn together in following Christ. The people of the New Covenant do not engage in physical violence characteristic of warring nations, but they are willing to use love, faith, and hope against forces of evil and

darkness. (1 Thessalonians 5:8; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; John 18:36; Matthew 26:52-53)

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 1.B, pp. 8-11.

Artificial Intelligence

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AI now apparently appears in insurance, medicine, finance, and other critical systems—even driving cars.

AI-decisions already eclipse fundamental human needs. In 2024, Microsoft announced a contract to re-start the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant because AI requires phenomenal amounts of energy.

In 1979, I lived due-east of the TMI reactor within the anticipated plume-area. I recall the absent classmates whose families fled and the frantic days of watching the steady-drumbeat of terrifying special-reports on TV anticipating an imminent “nuclear explosion.”

Is AI so important that we re-start nuclear reactors to power AI while placing millions at risk for centuries? Does re-naming TMI as the “Crane Clean Energy Center” pose any issues of Truthfulness?

While the societal issues disturb, perhaps more insidious is AI seemingly attacking Truth itself. For example, AI clouds the simple distinctions between doing-my-work and doing-“my”-work-“augmented”-by-AI. If AI produces outcomes that I ask for but might not even understand, is that my work? We already

see this conflict unfolding with copyrights and in classrooms.

The unanticipated, and Truth-related, implications also apply to the models themselves. AI models are not “neutral” despite claims by the models’ developers. These models get “trained” on information. That information-corporus, and predicate selection thereof, shapes subsequent model output.

For example, say I train a large-language model (LLM) using the corpus of traditional Bible commentaries but omit any materials from Friends. Inquiries (prompts) to the resulting AI LLM model pull from this “learned” material to generate responses. Yet, the model outputs would likely miss the understandings of Friends. Perhaps worse, the LLM might fabricate (hallucinate) responses and attribute those fabricated responses to Friends without any qualification.

My overall point is: AI raises fundamental issues of Truth. Now augmented by AI, Truth seemingly reduces to relativistic “truth.” As AI pervades our lives in media, televisions, mobile phones, cars, electronic “books,” refrigerators, electric meters, banking, and medical offices, AI fosters dependence on the products of these systems as authoritative “truth.” (I see analogy

to common quips in the 1970s, “that’s what the computer says.”) Is this reliance warranted? Can we even know if reliance is warranted?

AI continues a distressing trend, in my opinion, where Truth becomes mere many-“truths” and blithe acceptance of that relativism. When AI “needs” weigh restarting a nuclear reactor (on the site of a major nuclear accident) above the residents, I pose that there is a problem with Truth. When AI data centers pose micro-climate changes due to heating, I pose a Truth issue. If AI systems manipulate or destabilize consumer pricing or financial markets, I pose there is a problem of Truth. When we can no longer know if any photograph, any audio, any video, or any news story is authentic, I pose there is a Truth problem.

Shall we reject all AI? That may no longer be feasible without rejecting our increasingly complex society (but perhaps we need to rethink the complexity of our society). But, I think we can raise Faith-consistent voices to thoughtfully and prayerfully challenge the current “benign-paradigm” of AI and the staggering race to AI-ify everything.

Shannon Brown

Regular Attender of Seeker’s Haven WG (OYM), 1/2026

About The Conservative Friend

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