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Introduction to Issue #21

This is a packed issue, full of high-content, substantive thought and reporting. First there are two updates by Associate Editor Stephen Angell on the continuing conflict in Indiana Yearly Meeting. They continue our detailed coverage of this significant episode, a record not available elsewhere.

Yet a preoccupation with current foibles can easily become a kind of group narcissism. So from Angell’s Indiana we skip back more than two centuries to Sarah Werner’s illumination of the life and thought of William Bartram, a pioneering Quaker botanist who found, named and drew many native plants. Bartram’s journeys are interesting enough in themselves; but more apt for our purposes, he also reflected on how his travels beyond the “civilized” settlements of colonial America, particularly among the native groups, affected — and reshaped — the received religious ideas of his day. They pointed him in some surprisingly modern directions.

From Bartram’s musings, which included foretastes of the basis of a liberal outlook among some Friends, we next take up Guy Aiken’s examination of two figures often thought of as pillars of twentieth century liberal Quakerism, Rufus Jones and Thomas Kelly. But is this uber-liberal designation accurate? Aiken argues that it is overdrawn, at least somewhat in the case of Jones, and more so for Kelly. Read it and decide for yourself.

Our reviews in this issue likewise range widely. One considers a summary of forty years of sociological research on protestant religion in America; among the findings is a formula for church growth that deserves Friends’ careful attention. The other review takes the measure of an environmentalist call for all-out war on industrial civilization, and the billions of people who live in it. Is such a war in our future? Is it one that Quakers should join, actively or passively?

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Chuck Fager,
Editor
September 11th. Is there a more ominous date on the contemporary American calendar?

Now, 9-11 has become a landmark date for Indiana Yearly Meeting (IYM), in a manner eerily reminiscent of its traumatic meaning for society at large.

On September 11, 2012, IYM Meetings were notified that the long charade of a peaceful “reconfiguration” into two bodies, dubbed “IYM-A” and “IYM-B”, is to be abandoned as of September 29, when the IYM Representative Council meets. It will be replaced with a plan leading to the simple expulsion of those meetings unwilling to accept the dictation of the top officials of IYM. The meetings in the crosshairs are those which could loosely be called “liberal,” above all West Richmond (Indiana) Meeting.

Of course, the Council will have to ratify this plan, and as the report that follows here shows in considerable detail, there is widespread unease about both the 9-11 proposal and the entire process which it culminates and exposes.

Yet as our reporting on this sorry saga has also shown, at each the several previous moments of confrontation, when the chips were down, there have been no dissidents with courage enough to stand firm and vocal in opposition to the purge. Thus, the odds are that the faction that has been driving toward expulsion of the “liberals” will get their way. They have shown a steely determination, while opponents have mainly whispered and dithered, letting themselves be steadily pushed toward the unceremonious bum’s rush now looming up behind them.

But setting aside the bad taste of the purge announcement’s September 11th timing, the long pretense now concluding has had one grim advantage: it has given this journal the chance to chronicle a distasteful and unbecoming episode in detail as it unfolded. This is coverage unavailable anywhere else. As a result, while some advocates may still be promoting the notion that dragging the expulsion process out for nearly two years and repackaging it as “reconfiguration” somehow makes it
acceptable, “Christian”, or “Quakerly,” these accounts remain available to make clear its true character, with chapter and verse.

In one sense, this drama has had a pronounced unreal, even absurdist aspect. That’s because the actual protagonist of the whole fiasco appears to be the Man Who Wasn’t There: Phil Gulley, the controversial pastor from Western, the Yearly Meeting next door to IYM. Much of the current IYM leadership was deeply involved in the multi-year charge to strip Gulley of his pastoral credentials in Western, based on his publicly-stated universalist theological views.

The failure of this purge clearly rankled, and several anti-Gulley meetings left Western. Now, the IYM crusade looks most like a reactive strike by some of the losers in Western, to preemptively rid the body of any proto-Gulleyites. If the ordeal to which IYM is being subjected is not a graceless spectacle of delayed revenge, it’s hard to see what else it could be.

The underlying hypocrisy involved is made even more stark by the account here of the IYM leadership’s response when faced with several meetings which have been offering outward sacraments. Such observances are flagrantly, inarguably contrary to IYM’s Discipline. Yet faced with open defiance from evangelically-oriented meetings, the IYM leadership fretted and huffed a bit, and then did – nothing. But when West Richmond Meeting dared to openly welcome gays and lesbians, a position by no means so clearly contrary to the Discipline, out they must go, and any sympathizers with them.

So be it. The avid evangelical “B-ites” in IYM talk much of evangelism and church growth, no doubt sincerely enough. One frequently hears from that quarter that if all this controversy could only be cleared away (by banishing the uncomfortable diversity), way would open to bring in a great harvest of souls.

Never mind that the historical record of such purges runs largely in the other direction. Contemporary survey research confirms their dismal record, even the work of such evangelical pollsters as the Barna group. (See, for instance, their “You Lost Me” series at: http://www.barna.org/)

So the IYM militants will likely have their “reconfiguration.”

And they’ll also carry the specter of their own 9-11.

Take that, Phil Gulley. I guess they showed you.

– Chuck Fager
Regular readers of this journal will be familiar with the outlines of the ongoing saga of Indiana Yearly Meeting and its attempts to cope with its divisions within. The current train of events was sparked most obviously by the discernment of West Richmond Meeting to adopt a minute that welcomed and affirmed gays and lesbians, in June 2008. Many other Friends in their Indiana Yearly Meeting disagreed strongly with West Richmond’s action in this regard, and labored with them, through the Yearly Meeting’s Ministry and Oversight Committee, to get West Richmond to change their minute and to take it off their website, but years of discussion did not result in any change.

In October 2011, the Yearly Meeting’s Rep Council controversially approved a minute for a “deliberative, collaborative reconfiguration,” proposed by a task force specially formed to respond to the conflict, and thus the Yearly Meeting set itself the task, and charged a reconstituted Task Force with the hard labor, to set up two yearly meetings within a year’s time, with the two yearly meetings distinguished by their differing views of yearly meeting authority, and also of the authority of Scripture. (See QT #18; 19; 20 at: www.quaker.org/quest)

In April 2012, after considerable feedback on an earlier draft, the Task Force finalized its descriptions of two potential yearly meetings. “Yearly Meeting A” defined itself as an “association” of Christian meetings who seek to be “mutually accountable to one another,” but it would not expect its constituent meetings to undergo “subordination” to the organizational structure of the yearly meeting. By way of contrast, “Yearly Meeting B” would be “a yearly meeting of Christ-centered Friends (Quaker) meetings who value the authority of Scripture and mutual accountability, embracing the current Faith & Practice and organizational structure of Indiana Yearly Meeting.” It would claim continuity with the founding (1821) discipline of Indiana Yearly Meeting “providing for subordination of . . . monthly . . . meetings to the yearly meeting.” These descriptions were then distributed to the
Monthly Meetings of IYM, and each was asked to discern, by a
deadline of September 1, to which Yearly Meeting they would
wish to belong.

As of September 4, 52 of Indiana Yearly Meeting’s 62
monthly meetings had responded. Of the responses I have
examined thus far, they fall into the following categories: 37
indicate some sort of preference for Yearly Meeting B; 19
oppose or critique the reconfiguration process, of these 19, 6 also
indicate that they are “B-type” meetings, while 9 indicate no
preference between YM-A or YM-B; and so far 4 meetings,
Englewood, West Richmond, Friends of the Light and
Williamsburg, have discerned a preference for YM-A. One
(Dublin) has been unable to discern any direction in this task.

(Whatever happens, the United Society of Friends
Women will not be part of any reconfiguration. USFW in
Indiana plans to maintain a united organization for Quaker
women from however many yearly meetings issue from the
current Indiana Yearly Meeting.)

Meetings seem to recognize the solemnity of this task.
One sign of this: two meetings, Parker with 3 members and
Peaceful Valley with 15 members, seem to have had all of their
members sign their respective letters.

It would be worthwhile to examine these letters briefly
in order to see if we can ascertain any patterns in their responses.

Yearly Meeting B

Many of the meetings which have favored Yearly
Meeting B are small, rural meetings, but not all. The largest
meeting in the yearly meeting is Wabash, and it chose Yearly
Meeting B. Westfield Meeting, another large meeting, has also
sent in its letter in support of IYM-B.

Yearly Meeting authority and the authority of Scripture
were the two most oft cited reasons for a monthly meeting to
choose Yearly Meeting B. Little Blue River Meeting put these
points succinctly when it justified its choice of B, because “we
desire to be part of a yearly meeting that ‘has the power to set
bounds and exercise authority over subordinate monthly
meetings.’ We value the authority of Scripture and mutual
accountability.” Marion Meeting was “saddened” by the need for
such a process, but hoped that “in the future the exercise of
yearly meeting authority [will] be as careful and gracious as it
has been recently without sacrificing our core values or changing the truth of Jesus Christ the Bible lays out for us.” Upon declaring a choice for B, Rural Friends Meeting took “this opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the supremacy of Scripture.” Upland Friends church helpfully restated its understanding of B as “a more tightly organized uniting of Friends churches and meetings that recognized the authority of Scripture and the need for mutual submission.”

As to which particular aspects of Scripture most speak to the Yearly Meeting B experience, diverse possibilities are offered, and some passages recur on both ends of the spectrum. The Task Force description referenced the two “Great Commandments” (love God and love your neighbor, Matthew 22:36-40), which are also a favorite of Yearly Meeting A folks and those opposed to reconfiguration. Placing an emphasis on evangelism, the Task Force description also referenced the “Great Commission,” Matthew 28:18-20. One meeting that chose B, Van Wert First Friends, and a meeting that opposes reconfiguration, Parker, both referred to Jesus’ admonition that “If a house is divided against itself, it cannot stand.” (Matt. 12:25; Mark 3:23; Luke 11:17) Parker Friends Meeting sees IYM division as something which is yet to come and which can be prevented, if only Friends lay aside the reconfiguration process: “By dividing the IYM we are dividing God’s house.” On the other hand, Van Wert Friends see IYM division as an already accomplished fact, and hence reconfiguration as the only healthy way forward: “The reconfiguration of IYM into two separate meetings is not an option but is vital to the spiritual health and future of IYM.” Lynn Meeting cites 2 Timothy 3:16: “All scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. We at Lynn Friends take this to heart and believe it to be the truth.”

While Lynn Meeting’s reference to 2 Timothy reaches to the issue of Scriptural authority in general, part of the reason for action by IYM meetings identifying with B is often a conviction that any Christian reader of Scriptural passages such as Romans 1, using proper methods of interpretation, would have to criticize or condemn homosexual practices. This is, of course, a view strongly disputed by IYM meetings identifying with A, and it would take another essay to explore all of the ramifications of this dispute between YM-A and YM-B Friends. However, if one grants this basic contention by YM-B Friends, then a set of
queries, like the following from Amy Smith Dennis, would naturally follow: “What does accountability look like in a group like ours? Isn’t accountability supposed to be that when someone goes outside the guidelines (the Bible, *Faith & Practice*) that others tell them about it to bring them back in? So what do you do when the meeting or individual doesn’t seem to want to be held accountable?”

The status of IYM’s *Faith & Practice* is a vital concern to all IYM Meetings, including meetings affiliating with IYM-B. The instructions accompanying the outlines of IYM-A and IYM-B urged local meetings to review “the current *Faith & Practice* of Indiana Yearly Meeting” at the start of the process, with the Richmond Declaration of Faith, the current “Questions for Spiritual Growth,” and Section 108 on order and authority within the Yearly Meeting to be a particular focus for their attention. Undoubtedly meetings choosing B were inspired by the phrase in Section 108 that IYM is to be a “means of common protection” for its constituent monthly meetings. (See QT #20) Meetings choosing B understood *Faith & Practice* as giving the YM the power to set bounds and exercise authority over subordinate meetings. Knightstown finds useful “behavioral guidelines” in *Faith & Practice*. The issue was addressed in some depth at the April Rep Council Meeting. Representing B-type meetings, Greg Hinshaw believed that it will be necessary to amend the current *Faith & Practice* to “clarify some things.” From a similar viewpoint, Dave Phillips proposed that IYM-B would need to clarify what is meant by “accountability,” but suggested that any changes in *Faith & Practice* would not be major.

The Monthly Meetings’ concern with West Richmond’s affirmation of gays and lesbians is a thread that runs through many of these letters to the Task Force. Vermilion Friends observe that “the issue of homosexuality is a very divisive force in our world today, not just in IYM. While we know that God loves all his creation and seeks to draw all to Him who will be obedient, we do not believe that God intended or approves of this lifestyle.” In their letter, Bear Creek Friends cite the 1982 IYM minute stating “homosexual practices to be contrary to the intent and will of God for humankind” and declare their Meeting’s opposition to “any efforts to destroy Indiana Yearly Meeting or to abdicate its authority on issues of morality.”

The surrounding American culture comes in for critical comment in these letters. It was while IYM meetings were
deliberating on these letters that, for the first time, a sitting American president, Barack Obama, announced his support for marriage equality. In choosing B, Bethel Friends provided this oblique comment on such shifts in the broader American culture: “Change is inevitable. However, how we change is crucial. IYM has always prayerfully maintained Scriptural Truth with cultural shifts or societal changes. They have remained conscious that God’s will must not be compromised by either human desire or that His Holy Word be amended to keep current with cultural trends or personal preferences. The issue isn’t whether we can make God relevant to our culture, but whether we can keep our culture relevant to God. In a culture with seismic shifts occurring, this is no small task.”

Not mentioned in the monthly meeting letters, but very much on the minds of Indiana Yearly Meeting leaders who favor option B, is the way that a similar controversy over an attempt to remove Phil Gulley’s recording played out in Western Yearly Meeting not so long ago. Quaker Theology gave extensive coverage to this issue. (See QT #s 9, 14, 16, 18; all online at www.quaker.org/quest) The attempt to remove Phil Gulley’s recording failed, and subsequently six evangelical meetings withdrew from Western Yearly Meeting. Other meetings with a conservative or evangelical perspective remained within WYM, however. In the IYM Rep Council of April 2012, IYM Superintendent Doug Shoemaker reflected on his 25 years of pastoral experience in WYM: “I come to this task with vivid memories of gut-wrenching conflict, based on differing views of Scriptural interpretation, church authority, and homosexuality. I have seen the negative effects of chronic conflict.” After WYM’s Clerk discerned no sense of the meeting to remove Gulley’s recording, Shoemaker reflected that “Western Yearly Meeting underwent significant organizational damage. Western Yearly Meeting has reconfigured, although not deliberately. I have watched in horror as Indiana Yearly Meeting is poised to replay the same conflicts.”

In an August meeting at New Castle Meeting, speaking to mostly opponents of reconfiguration, Task Force member Dave Phillips made a similar argument. He asked, “How do we do this reconfiguration in a loving, collaborative way where we don’t destroy each other? Look at Western Yearly Meeting. They would not have the hard conversation, nor make the hard decision. Our Yearly Meeting (IYM) is dying because we have
not made the hard decisions. I want the will of God. It’s hard. It’s really hard.”

Meetings declaring for B are generally anxious that reconfiguration be accomplished with minimal disruption, both to themselves and IYM-B. Peaceful Valley speaks for many of the meetings choosing B when it “prays that with this reconfiguration, there will finally be peace among all meetings. We would like to see the constant strife that this has caused to end. . . . It does not seem necessary to discontinue Indiana Yearly Meeting, but ask those meetings that want to break away to rename themselves.” And not only should reconfiguration happen with the minimum of disruption, it needs to happen quickly. According to Lynn Friends, “There is also a consensus within our Monthly Meeting that this needs to be accomplished before the end of 2012. Prolonging this process will only add to the division within the YM.”

Meetings Opposing Reconfiguration

At least 19 Monthly Meetings in IYM have finalized letters to the task force questioning, critiquing, or opposing the ongoing Reconfiguration Process. For many meetings, there has been a clear sense that proper Quaker process has not been followed, or IYM never would have undertaken reconfiguration in the first place. Winchester Friends stated, “We never felt clearness for the Task Force’s Model #4 or Model #5, nor gave approval for them when they were considered in Representative Council.” Greenfield Meeting made the same statement in its letter to the Task Force, and the same point is prominent in discussions at Friends Memorial in Muncie (many of whose members initially attempted to stand in opposition to the Reconfiguration at the October 2011 Rep Council Meeting – by the end of the meeting, they did not persist in their objections – and whose members continue to oppose reconfiguration.) Moreover, the same point comes up repeatedly in discussions at West Richmond Meeting, which has never expressed a desire to leave Indiana Yearly Meeting, and if it eventually does leave, will leave only with the greatest reluctance.

With IYM’s finances already in great peril, several meetings raise the cogent concern that the reconfiguration process will only make the financial situation much worse. Back Creek Friends Meeting writes, “We are concerned that a split of
IYM would mean two smaller yearly meetings with fewer members and less operating funds and this would severely affect the available financial support for Quaker Haven, Whites’ Institute, and Friends Fellowship Community. We consider these entities as vital to our mission as Friends . . . . We are concerned about the conflict within IYM regarding whether a newly set off yearly meeting would be entitled to a cash settlement as part of the split. We are concerned about increased financial costs for the above named organizations if their articles of incorporation should need to be rewritten to accommodate a split of IYM.” (Despite such concerns, Back Creek Friends have subsequently declared their strong support for IYM B.) Spiceland Meeting has raised the same point in very similar terms. Anderson Friends wrote to the Task Force, “We do not believe two separate but equal yearly meetings that share common resources is a tenable long term solution.”

Neither do Friends knowledgeable about IYM finances, even ones affiliated with meetings that have opted for B. One such Friend is Marion First Friends’ Kim Manwell, longtime clerk of the IYM Committee on Stewardship and Finance. At April’s Rep Council Meeting, Manwell made an impassioned plea for IYM Friends to take a serious look at their finances before proceeding with reconfiguration. He noted the difficulty that individual monthly meetings already have in meeting their assessments. The meetings that form the smaller yearly meeting will have especial difficulty with their finances. “I’m having trouble figuring out the bottom line,” he proclaimed. “This whole process makes me sick. We’re all Friends. We disagree about a couple of things, but that’s been true forever.”

The Task Force is not oblivious of these financial concerns. In its FAQ sheet on the reconfiguration process as presented at yearly meeting sessions, it soberly observes, “Reconfiguration will undoubtedly mean the creation of two bodies with fewer resources. After the division is complete, it will be for each to determine what their resources are and how they should best be used.”

Such practical considerations were the basis for Jericho Meeting’s hesitations about reconfiguration: “Although we prefer Model B, we greatly fear the action of disbanding IYM to form two groups will greatly weaken our religious organization.” Before making any decision, they wish to have a better understanding of the “details concerning the financial
implications as well as the organizational structure of any model.”

Meetings that oppose reconfiguration also perceive homosexuality to be a more complex issue than those that opt for B in an unqualified fashion. West Richmond and other meetings opposing reconfiguration are much more likely to look to a 1995 IYM minute on the issue for guidance, rather than the short, blunt 1982 minute cited above. The 1995 minute recognized “a diversity of beliefs” within IYM as to how Friends should interpret Scriptures on homosexuality. Then IYM called “for the fair treatment of homosexuals and their full protection from physical and verbal violence, and effectively encouraged meetings to welcome gays and lesbians into their midst.”

One of Spiceland Meeting’s reasons to oppose reconfiguration is that “we have multiple families who have children [or] relatives that are gay and lesbian, and it is our feeling that we would welcome them to worship with us and be a part of the monthly meeting.” Spiceland’s approach toward gays and lesbians does not go so far as to embrace the “affirming” part of West Richmond’s “welcoming and affirming” minute. Still, they clearly value West Richmond’s participation in IYM: “we do not want to dissolve those relationships [with West Richmond] or to see IYM dismembered.”

Richmond First Friends reports a sense of “confusion, lack of clarity, and discomfort” in their own monthly meeting and elsewhere in IYM “around the matter of homosexuality and religious authority.” This experience has been “painful and challenging” for them, but it has also deepened their commitment to Spirit-led waiting: “the Yearly Meeting needs to sit with these issues with more patience and prayer and wait for God’s leading and a broader and deeper sense of clearness from the membership as to a way forward.” Friends Memorial of Muncie writes, “We believe that by truly minding The Light, we will be led into unity, not division.”

Those meetings opposing reconfiguration do not assign blame for the crisis only to West Richmond. Rather, they also look askance at those meetings within IYM that emphasize the speed with which reconfiguration ought to be completed, or they will leave IYM willy-nilly. Spiceland writes, “It seems to us that both West Richmond and the monthly meetings who are threatening to leave are holding the entire yearly meeting ‘hostage.’” Back Creek minuted its agreement with Spiceland on
Above all else, the Friends opposed to reconfiguration want more time to work to resolve IYM’s knotty issues, and a commitment to stay together in the meantime. Winchester Friends note that they have “asked IYM to allow God enough time to help us resolve these issues and remain intact.” The goal of taking time is to achieve a deeper sense of clearness, as Richmond First Friends notes: “On issues of great significance, Friends have always been led by ‘God’s time’ rather than by the often rushed and shortsighted clock of our world.”

Michael Sherman, pastor of Raysville Friends Meeting, believes that the crucial point, too often missing from these discussions, is Indiana Friends’ (lack of) trust in God: “IYM B asks us to put our trust and future security in the Yearly Meeting office while IYM A asks us to put our trust and future security in the diversity of its people. Neither articulates a future of trust and faith relying upon God.” Thus, Raysville Friends “do not choose A or B and are currently opposed to the proposed reconfiguration. Neither A or B offer Raysville a home where we feel the Spirit of God will be the primary voice of a healthy life-giving future. . . . Splitting is too easy to be the Godly thing to do.” Muncie Friends observe, “It is our position that a healthy, thriving Yearly Meeting needs guidance from members of all ‘Types’ of Friends. It is our diversity – not our similarity – that results in a more clearly thought out position of discernment.”

Meetings opposing reconfiguration tend to interpret *Faith & Practice* in a very different light than B-type meetings. Winchester highlighted Section 108, Part C, in which “the Yearly Meeting recognizes the freedom of the Monthly Meetings and the validity of their prophetic voices. Each needs the other to be strong and vital, and both need the mediation of Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.” Greenfield also cites this passage as an especially meaningful part of the *Faith & Practice*. Neither meeting goes far to explicate the importance of this section, but Section 108, Part C, was put forward by West Richmond Meeting as something which would permit a welcoming and affirming minute such as the one they adopted.

Among Meetings opposed to reconfiguration, even those which say they would choose IYM-B if forced to choose, there is considerable nervousness about the changes an IYM-B might make to *Faith & Practice*. This was a focus of Walnut Ridge Meeting’s minute: “While we do not believe ‘reconfiguration’ is necessary or even beneficial, we cannot accept plan A because of
the potential for interpreting God’s Word according to worldly norms. Therefore, if reconfiguration goes forward, we would be accepting of Plan B by default, as long as Plan B continues to follow the current IYM *Faith & Practice*, and it is applied equally to all levels of the Plan B structure.” In this brief minute, Walnut Ridge managed to criticize three things: IYM-A, IYM-B, and the reconfiguration process itself. Here what they say about IYM-B is of most interest. While they could accept membership in IYM-B by “default” (i.e., if they had no other choice), they would only be able to do so under the “current” *Faith & Practice*. Presumably they would cast a jaundiced eye on the amendments other B-type meetings might want to make. The final clause, asking that *Faith & Practice* be applied equally to all levels of the Plan B structure, may be an allusion to the fact that heaven and earth has been moved, in effect, to chastise West Richmond Friends Meeting (although of course IYM leaders would disclaim any such intent), while meetings offering physical sacraments, clearly a violation of *Faith & Practice*, are allowed to proceed with only occasional yearly meeting admonishment.

(On the latter point, we might refer to Tom Hamm’s succinct summary of some protracted IYM deliberations: “The yearly meeting did spend considerable time on the subject of dealing with meetings offering outward sacraments. The Yearly Meeting M&O did visit and admonish some of them. But the yearly meeting was never able to reach unity on anything. Ultimately, however, it probably says something that Doug Shoemaker’s proposed solution was to change yearly meeting policy to accommodate the ‘waterites,’ some of whom have been among the most strident critics of West Richmond (Upland, for example). That also failed.”)

Even if the document of *Faith & Practice* remains the same, a different way of applying it to individual monthly meetings would also be of concern to IYM meetings opposing reconfiguration. Thus, Winchester observes that “we have gladly abided by a covenantal understanding of IYM’s current *Faith and Practice* for decades, and we have no interest in departing from that commitment. We call upon Meetings who consider the *Faith and Practice* to be a binding contract, or to be merely a set of non-binding suggestions or guidelines, to reconsider those assumptions and their impact on spiritual community.”
In response to the FAQ, “Will belonging to a yearly meeting with authority to discipline subordinate meetings result in an increase in yearly meeting intrusion into the affairs of monthly meetings?” the Task Force offered this response at IYM sessions: “This is not the intent of this reconfiguration, however, meetings blatantly disregarding the Faith & Practice of YM B need to understand that the yearly meeting has the right to exercise appropriate discipline should it choose to do so.”

Like the IYM-B Meetings, the Bible is of great importance to the IYM Meetings opposing reconfiguration. Both Greenfield and Winchester Meetings cite Ephesians 4: 2-3: “Be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” In general, IYM Meetings opposing reconfiguration find great meaning in the Biblical passages urging love and reconciliation.

Meeting minutes aside, the Bible and its interpretation has been one of the most thoroughly explored topics on the Indiana Yearly Meeting Facebook Discussion Page and elsewhere. One of the most persistent examiners of this topic is Richmond First Friends member Doug Bennett, also President emeritus of Earlham. In the June-July 2012 issue of Friends Journal, Bennett writes, “The rupture over the Bible is the deepest schism of all among Friends. . . . . We need to value the Bible together as a font of spiritual authority.” Bennett has written extensively about his conviction that “the homosexuality-is-a-sin reading” of the Bible is a “harmful” one, albeit convincing few Quakers in Indiana who identify with IYM-B on this matter. Nonetheless, many in IYM who oppose reconfiguration join Bennett in his elevation of the two Great Commandments of Jesus to love God and to love our neighbors, over any of the Biblical passages which address homosexuality. Bennett concludes, “We can find our way in unity to a loving understanding of homosexuality, but only if we will read the Bible together.”

Meetings that oppose the reconfiguration often have diverse memberships. For many meetings in IYM, often the smaller ones, the opportunity to choose a yearly meeting with a clearer and sharper identity, such as either IYM-A or IYM-B, is a welcome one. Not so for the diverse meetings, who often feel that the yearly meeting is merely pushing its problems onto
First Friends Richmond eloquently gives voice to this aspect of the situation: “You have asked us to declare what kind of Meeting we self-identify with (‘Yearly Meeting A’ or ‘Yearly Meeting B’) as it relates to matters of authority and scripture. We have members at First Friends who believe that ‘Yearly Meeting A’ is fully in conformity with our current Faith & Practice and other members who believe that ‘Yearly Meeting B’ is fully in conformity with our current Faith & Practice. This may be confusing and call for prayerful attention in the future, but it is truthful and we should recognize that fact.

“While many in our Meeting identify readily with the characteristics and attributes listed under ‘Yearly Meeting A,’ others identify readily with elements of ‘Yearly Meeting B.’ We are by no means a homogenous and single-minded faith community. This diversity, we believe, has been a great and longstanding strength at First Friends. We see the proposed division as a false choice and fear it may even force an internal split within our own Meeting. It is as if you are asking a parent to choose one child over another. These are not Spirit-led choices. We are all God’s children.”

For several of the monthly meetings opposing reconfiguration, the bottom line (in the words of Spiceland’s minute) was a “request that the task force offer another option for moving forward that does not involve splitting the yearly meeting, but allows meetings to leave who do not wish to remain affiliated with IYM.” Back Creek, Greenfield, and, more generally, Friends Memorial of Muncie, Richmond First Friends, and West Richmond, have agreed with Spiceland on this point. Richmond First Friends asks that “the Yearly Meeting do what Quakers have done since the time of George Fox when matters of great importance are not clear. Wait. Pray. Talk. Listen. As Way opens, we will come to the Righteous path by walking it patiently together.”

Friends of the Light, West Richmond, and Williamsburg Meetings

Thus far, four IYM meetings seem to have expressed a desire or a willingness to join IYM-A Yearly Meeting, should such a yearly meeting be formed: Englewood in Ohio; West
Richmond and Williamsburg in Indiana; and Friends of the Light in Michigan. Englewood is a special case, so we will look at it in our next section. Friends of the Light had considered the matter of reconfiguration in meetings for business in April and August and both times opted for IYM-A. According to Harriet Jones, Clerk of Friends in the Light, their minute “basically said FOTL is a live-and-let-live meeting and our affiliation would be with YM-A. Not much more than that.” That message was communicated to IYM in a letter dated August 31.

Williamsburg is a meeting nine miles north of Richmond. In the words of its clerk, Joyce Crull, “our meeting is now small with mostly older people.” Like other Indiana Friends, they are devout and take their Scripture seriously: “We read our Bibles, believe in the scripture and how it can console each according to their need.” While it is small, it is also a generous congregation. “We donate what we can and work hard to help our friends in sadness and in health. . . . In particular, those with mental and physical handicaps have brought us to deeper understanding with God, and their words are not forgotten. We try to welcome all and hope that if they need guiding they will find peace with us. We believe Christ can transform us in thinking and in living.”

While Crull’s letter is not specific on this next point, openly gay and lesbian persons are among those who have found a welcome at Williamsburg Friends. Some Williamsburg Friends think of themselves as “welcoming and affirming” toward gays and lesbians, while others see that issue somewhat differently. In any case, they love each other deeply, and a baseline conviction among Williamsburg Friends is that differences over Scriptural interpretation about homosexuality should never be a bar to fellowship within the congregation. And if it is not a bar to fellowship within the congregation, neither do Williamsburg Friends believe that it should be a bar to fellowship with other Friends churches who have achieved clarity on a “welcoming and affirming” policy toward gays and lesbians, which is not something God has led them to yet.

Crull’s letter is clear about the decision that resulted from Williamsburg’s discernment process: “We find it difficult to understand how the divisions in Indiana Yearly Meeting have led us to this point. We wish we didn’t have to make such a decision. Nevertheless, at our business meeting on August 12, we decided, guided by the Holy Spirit, that Yearly Meeting ‘A’
best represents our position. We pray that the transitions being made will go smoothly and lead to a sense of unity in spite of our disagreements.”

Turning to West Richmond Meeting, they, too, like Williamsburg, have felt considerable anguish about the “reconfiguration/separation,” which is a course of action that they have never favored and yet has been forced upon them. One of the myths articulated by some Friends who favor IYM B is that West Richmond brought on this crisis, because they wanted to leave IYM. Nothing could be farther from the truth. When West Richmond Meeting approved their “welcoming and affirming” minute in 2008, they thought that it was in accord with IYM Faith and Practice, and also with IYM’s 1995 minute on welcoming gays and lesbians into Friends Meetings. During the past few years, it has become very evident that there are many meetings within IYM who disagree with West Richmond on such matters, but for reasons explained more fully in the past three issues of *Quaker Theology*, West Richmond was never convinced that it was wrong on any of these matters. Nor are they protesting IYM’s stand on homosexuality, nor the stances of any meeting within IYM. They have fully paid all of their assessments to the Yearly Meeting, for example. The reconfiguration process has always proceeded on the principle, that all Meetings should be free to choose their future affiliation, and that none will be forced out. But West Richmond Friends will be pardoned if they sometimes feel, despite everyone else’s best intentions, that they are being forced out anyway.

Like the meetings opposing Reconfiguration, West Richmond prominently states its “substantial amount of concern, objection, and regret about the prospective reconfiguration/separation. We are not of a single mind about this concern; but for various individuals it includes such matters as (1) regret over the inglorious, long history of fractiousness and schism in the Christian church as a whole and Quakerism in specific, (2) a strong desire to maintain ties of history, service, friendship, and affection with our sisters and brothers in IYM, (3) concerns about some actions of IYM leaders that have seemed to be predisposed to separation and exclusion of our Monthly Meeting, and (4) a process that has been rushed, forced, and lacking in Friends’ characteristic patient listening for God’s leading. We reiterate to all Friends in IYM and to all observers in the world that we have never sought division or separation in any form; nor
have we sought to impose any demand, request, or expectation upon other Monthly Meetings or upon IYM to take the position to which we have been called over a long period of prayer, study, and deliberation.” A weighty statement indeed, one that eloquently and accurately summarizes West Richmond’s role in the debates that have consumed IYM in the past few years.

West Richmond’s statement continues: “As a Monthly Meeting that has been called into affirmation and full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons, reflected in our minute of June 2008, WRM believes that such affirmation and inclusion are compatible with our current membership in IYM. Yet recognizing the realities of the reconfiguration process that is underway, we clearly state that WRM as a body recognizes that our identity is as described in the Task Force characterization of Yearly Meeting ‘A’ rather than Yearly Meeting ‘B’.

“While we affirm our witness expressed through the WRM minute that has brought to the surface a much broader group of serious disagreements within IYM, to which separation has been one response, we reserve for the present our future options about organizational affiliation. It is not entirely clear to us that immediate affiliation with a group known as IYM ‘A’ will be the wisest or best choice for us, although it might be. We are open to other possible models of yearly meeting or affinity group affiliation.

“We are also mindful that a significant number of other Monthly Meetings have been led not to choose either A or B, expressing reservations like those we express in this minute. We know that Friends are meeting to pray, discuss, and support one another in this leading, in the hope of the emergence of options for reconciliation that have not yet been included in the process. WRM remains open to the possibilities to which this movement might lead.

“Finally, we express our care and concern for all our fellow Monthly Meetings in IYM, both those which reached a decision about reconfiguration and those that have been led not to choose. We feel sadness for struggle, anxiety, and internal division that might have been elicited in any Monthly Meeting as an unintended result of our action.

“We send this report with our love and blessing for peace, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Emphasis in the original)
So West Richmond Meeting sends out an olive branch to all of the meetings in IYM. In addition, it is especially interested in seeing how it can work together with IYM Meetings that have found themselves unable to make a choice in the current reconfiguration process; or, to speak more plainly in good Friends’ fashion, West Richmond suggests that the word “separation” might be appropriately used in this context.

Many meetings, while not clear about being welcoming and affirming themselves, cherish their relationships with West Richmond Friends and would like for their relationships to be ongoing; understandably, these meetings tend to fall into the category of those that have articulated criticisms of the reconfiguration process. As Jeff Hinshaw from Raysville Meeting said at the August gathering at New Castle, “West Richmond, we love you. . . I could not personally support your welcoming and affirming minute. But I support your right to make that minute. There are many things that I appreciate about you. You are very honest. You say when you are in disagreement with IYM, and you provide links to IYM minutes when you are in disagreement.” He emphatically disputed any notion that West Richmond was the “cause” of IYM’s proposed reconfiguration.

Antioch Chapel, Englewood, and Penn

In this section we look at an ideologically diverse grouping of meetings that either have used the occasion of this controversy, or have initiated a monthly meeting deliberation that happened to coincide with the controversy, to seek out a new Yearly Meeting affiliation, with already existing Yearly Meetings. Antioch Chapel and Penn have chosen to leave IYM to affiliate with the Canton, Ohio-based Evangelical Friends Church-Eastern Region; and Englewood has been accepted into membership with a yearly meeting affiliated with Friends General Conference, Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting. The dually affiliated Englewood maintains membership in IYM.

The separation of Antioch Chapel in Van Wert, Ohio, seems to have been accomplished rather quietly; I have found little reference to it in yearly meeting records. But yearly meeting leaders have had to spend considerable time and attention in their responses to Englewood and Penn Meetings, as the whole rest of the YM simultaneously is in crisis.
Penn Friends Meeting, nestled between Quaker and Penn Streets in Cassopolis, Michigan, (the southwest corner of Michigan – Cassopolis is a few miles north of South Bend, Indiana) has experienced significant new growth during recent years, drawing in both new converts and persons who had been attending other congregations. It has a long history, being founded in the 1840s. Its current attendance averages about 150 persons per Sunday. It is an isolated meeting – the two nearest IYM meetings, one in Dewart Lake, Indiana, and another in the opposite direction, Traverse City, Michigan, are both very distant.

In August 2011, Penn Friends hired a new pastor, Steve Witzki, whose roots are in the Battle Creek, Michigan, congregation affiliated with Eastern Region Friends. Prior to pastoring in EFI, Witzki was a Free Methodist, and he appears to maintain his Free Methodist ordination as his ministerial credential. In the opening months of 2012, Doug Shoemaker, the Yearly Meeting Superintendent, got wind that Penn Friends wanted to withdraw from IYM. Yearly Meeting Executive Committee minutes allege that Witzki “has led the charge to leave IYM.”

On May 1, at the request of Shoemaker, Witzki confirmed that Penn Friends were “out of unity with IYM Faith & Practice” (presumably because they were offering outward sacraments) and that the congregation intended to withdraw from IYM. According to the minutes, Shoemaker “asked for Steve’s resignation and requested that the decision regarding withdrawal be delayed.” Witzki and Penn Friends refused to comply with these requests, instead deciding by majority vote to withdraw from IYM. Shoemaker was in contact with a minority in the congregation loyal to IYM, and this small group of Penn Friends felt that formal intervention by IYM in their local meeting’s affairs would “not be helpful.” Shoemaker was in contact with Wayne Evans, a part of Eastern Region’s yearly meeting leadership team. Evans had sought to convince Witzki not to leave IYM, but Witzki had not heeded Evans’ advice any more than he had heeded Shoemaker’s.

At a called executive committee meeting, Shoemaker proposed that IYM “communicate our concerns to Penn Friends, noting that they are out of unity with Faith & Practice, making them understand that this was made without the proper Friends’ procedures, and pointing out that there were people outvoted
who were not in agreement with the decision to withdraw.” Shoemaker recommended a variety of conditions should they persist in their desire to withdraw, including insistence that they pay up their back assessments, that they repay grants given to them under the Ministerial Excellence Initiative, that they wait until 2013 before joining Eastern Region so that they would have a chance to consider their withdrawal from IYM, and “we might want to ask for their historical records as well.” However, Shoemaker did not recommend a “very costly and maybe ugly legal process” to keep them in the yearly meeting fold.

Upon the suggestion of Tom Hamm, the IYM executive committee approved setting up another meeting with Penn Friends, but “if they refuse, Doug’s suggestions will be taken into action.” The Executive Committee then minuted its appreciation to Shoemaker for his “leadership” in a very tough situation. Subsequent Executive Committee minutes disclose that Witzki responded promptly to IYM Clerk Greg Hinshaw’s invitation to resume the conversation, but Witzki stated that Penn Friends were not willing to “have any further discussion.” Hinshaw emphasized “that Penn lacked some integrity in not paying assessment but asking for grants from IYM.” Penn Friends replied that they desired “to leave IYM in peace, withdraw on their terms, and affiliate with Eastern Region.” Executive Committee then concluded that, after consulting with IYM legal counsel, IYM could then “give [Penn] the terms for intervention/withdrawal.” Penn did ultimately repay some or all of its Ministerial Excellence Initiative grants.

Englewood is a much newer meeting, located in the northwest suburbs of Dayton, Ohio. It was founded by IYM in 1976, using some money in its missions budget to plant a congregation in a new area for IYM, but fairly closely adjacent to IYM meetings in Richmond, Indiana. Its early pastors came from a variety of theological perspectives within the yearly meetings. Its current pastor, Rick Miller, is a graduate of the Earlham School of Religion. Englewood’s meetinghouse had been purchased with IYM funds, but in time Englewood Friends were able to reimburse IYM for this expense. Its deed does have a reversion clause to IYM.

Over the years, it grew modestly. Theologically and spiritually, it seems to have grown closer to the perspectives of the Richmond meetings than of the evangelical meetings elsewhere in IYM. Some of its newer members were
enthusiastic, at least initially, about participating in IYM, wanting the full Quaker experience, and understanding well that the local meeting was not an entity totally in and of itself, but was part of a larger network of Friends. One such new Friend, a young adult who generally inclines toward a liberal Christian theology, had great hopes of engaging IYM Friends, but when he attended yearly meeting sessions, he found that his ideas were scorned and he felt unwelcome. He recalled that the experience was so painful that he came home in tears. (Incidentally, it is not only liberal Friends who have experienced pain from IYM's chronic conflicts. Task Force member Dave Phillips, an advocate for IYM-B, recalled that in his more youthful years he found yearly meeting sessions so painful that he stayed away for many years, and resolved to return only much later.)

When West Richmond adopted its “welcoming and affirming” minute for gays and lesbians, Englewood Friends found themselves in agreement, but they knew full well that an expression of agreement would not go over well in IYM as a whole. Some Englewood Friends were tempted simply to lie low and to attempt to avoid IYM’s notice, but others differed with that approach, and the Meeting eventually reached a sense of unity that not to confront the important issues on which they differed from the Yearly Meeting lacked integrity.

In 2010, Englewood invited Phil Gulley to speak at their meeting. When they sent notice of this event to the IYM of this event, however, this news was not printed in IYM’s newsletter or otherwise disseminated to other IYM meetings as Englewood had intended. Subsequently, in the fall of 2010, Englewood sent a letter to IYM that, in the words of its former clerk Russell Wheeler, “pointed out some of our concerns,” including the failure to notify other Friends of the Gulley event at Englewood. The letter went on to state that Englewood Friends were not sure that they fit in IYM, and they asked for someone from IYM to come visit with them. The result of that letter was a visit by two IYM Friends, Rod Dennis and Ivan Flaugh, to Englewood. At this meeting, some Englewood Friends brought up the fact that their meeting is LGBT affirming. This news was not received well by the IYM visitors. According to Wheeler, Flaugh “went on a rant,” while waving his Bible. Among other things, he said that IYM couldn’t have those type of people teaching at church camp.
In this meeting, Dennis drew a matrix to illustrate his points. This matrix, or chart, has been used by IYM leaders in several contexts, with both nonconforming meetings such as Englewood and West Richmond and with individual pastors. As Wheeler remembers it, Dennis drew both a horizontal axis and a vertical axis on a whiteboard. In the upper left hand corner, he wrote “conservative-orthodox.” In the lower right hand corner, he wrote “liberal progressive.” Then he placed an “x” in the upper-left hand corner to represent IYM, and an “x” in the lower-right hand corner to represent Englewood. Dennis intended his matrix to demonstrate that IYM and Englewood “have irreconcilable differences.” Dennis and Flaugh also emphasized that Gulley’s universalist theology was outside the IYM mainstream, and thus it was quite proper, in their view, that the IYM leadership had not seen fit to communicate the Englewood event involving Gulley to other IYM meetings.

The only bit of practical advice that Dennis and Flaugh left behind was that Englewood should find another yearly meeting. Understandably, Englewood Friends took this advice very seriously. Englewood Friends decided not to pursue affiliation with other FUM yearly meetings, in part because of their concerns over the FUM personnel minute limiting volunteer and paid work to persons who are either celibate, or are married, with marriage defined as between one man and one woman.

Shortly after the visit of Flaugh and Dennis, they talked to a staff person at Friends General Conference in Philadelphia, who put them in touch with Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting. As Englewood Friends studied the matter of yearly meeting affiliation, there was a lot that they liked about Friends General Conference and Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting. They found out that FGC Meetings were much more likely to be friendly toward diverse theologies and LGBT affirming. They read through the Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting Faith & Practice, and compared it to that of Indiana Yearly Meeting. Where there were differences, they found that in every case they preferred the guidelines offered by OVYM over those offered by IYM.

In May 2011, Englewood sent a letter to OVYM requesting membership in that yearly meeting. The OVYM Faith & Practice states that decisions about admitting new member meetings are to be made by the Quarterly Meetings, and accordingly Englewood’s letter was referred to Miami Quarterly Meeting, which set up a clearness committee to meet with
Englewood Friends. (The present author was a member of this clearness committee.) The clearness committee met with Englewood Friends in August 2011, and recommended to Miami Quarter that Englewood Friends be admitted as a new meeting. Miami Quarterly Meeting accepted this recommendation, and Englewood Friends were welcomed as a new member meeting at the Miami Quarterly Meeting session of February 2012 and at OVYM sessions in July 2012.

Meanwhile, Bear Creek Meeting had made a proposal to Indiana Yearly Meeting that no monthly meeting could have contact with another yearly meeting, for the purpose of exploring a new affiliation, without the permission of Representative Council, Executive Committee, or yearly meeting in session. In the summer of 2011, IYM put this proposal on hold. It is almost certain that an IYM-B, should that come into existence, will incorporate such a provision into its Faith & Practice, but the meetings opposing reconfiguration objected, so its immediate progress was halted.

In August 2011, when Doug Shoemaker visited Englewood Friends, they informed him that they were working with Miami Quarter of Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting. As Wheeler recalls, “nothing major” came out of that meeting with Shoemaker. But in February 2012, Englewood sent a letter to IYM informing them that Englewood had been accepted into Miami Quarterly Meeting of OVYM, and was expecting to join OVYM in July. The IYM reply, signed by Hinshaw and Shoemaker and sent on March 27, stated that it was impossible for Englewood to maintain a dual affiliation with Indiana Yearly Meeting and another yearly meeting. The reply seems at least somewhat ironic, since it was the advice of IYM elders that sent Englewood Friends looking for another yearly meeting affiliation in the first place.

According to IYM Executive Committee minutes, Englewood’s response “answer[ed] some questions and shar[ed] their continuing concerns with IYM and clearness in considering affiliation with Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting.” According to Wheeler, the Englewood letter stated that nothing in IYM’s Faith & Practice says that a meeting cannot be dually affiliated. In fact, at least one monthly meeting that was part of IYM until recently was dually affiliated. (That was Clear Creek Meeting in Richmond, Indiana, which dropped its IYM membership in the 1990s.) Another letter from IYM stated that the Faith & Practice
of the two yearly meetings – IYM and OVYM – were too divergent to be compatible with one another. Englewood Friends do not dispute that IYM contention.

A committee of Shoemaker, Hinshaw, Wade Beatty, and Tom Hamm was charged with meeting with Englewood Friends, and this meeting took place toward the end of June (with Shoemaker, Hinshaw, and Beatty in attendance – Hamm was unable to make it). As Wheeler recalls, Hinshaw did most of the talking. He emphasized the authority of the yearly meeting, and the subordination of the monthly meetings. Referring to the Hinkle Creek decision of 1982, he stated that the Indiana case law was clear, and that if Englewood challenged IYM, they would lose in court. (See QT #20, pp. 16-19, for more detail on these points.) Hinshaw stated that there were meetings in IYM that would like us just to throw Englewood out of the yearly meeting. Wheeler said it was “not my idea of a great meeting,” because what Hinshaw was saying “sounded so much like a threat.” It was a “chastise Englewood meeting.”

But eventually this meeting did offer Englewood Friends a way forward, and that opening came during the question-and-answer section at the end. Someone asked, “The fact is, we will be dually affiliated in another month. Now what?”

Hinshaw stopped to think. When he finally spoke, he stated that, if they stayed through a reconfiguration and chose A, IYM would hold its concerns about Englewood’s dual affiliation in abeyance, and that Englewood Friends would have to deal with that question with their new yearly meeting after reconfiguration was complete. Meanwhile, they would be required to catch up with their back assessments. (Wheeler says that they owe $3000.)

On July 1, 2012, Englewood mailed a letter to the IYM office, choosing IYM-A.

But what if reconfiguration does not happen? Wheeler says, “That’s what concerns us most. Here’s what we’d like to have happen. Sign the meeting house over to us, we’ll pay our back assessments, and we’ll go our merry way.” There is some worry among Englewood Friends that IYM will try to take their meeting house, although most commonly YM leadership disclaims any such intentions with any meeting. Hinshaw told Englewood Friends that IYM had a lot invested in their building, but Wheeler’s rejoinder is that Englewood Friends have invested far more; in fact, “There is no comparison.” And Englewood
Friends need to make roof repairs urgently, so they will be investing more in their building imminently.

Wheeler concluded his interview with me as follows: “To me, it [the reconfiguration process] looks like a purge of meetings that look a lot like West Richmond.”

Meetings that have been unable to decide between IYM-A and IYM-B

To complete our survey of the more than 60 monthly meetings in Indiana Yearly Meeting, we must look at a fifth and final category, those monthly meetings which will be unable to make a decision on reconfiguration.

One such is Dublin Monthly Meeting. Nathan Ulerick posted the following message on August 24: “At this time, Dublin Monthly Meeting wishes to table our decision in what Yearly Meeting we would like to be part of, due to a Lack of Clearness as part of the Reconfiguration.” There will almost certainly be meetings other than Dublin that will be unable to come to clearness on reconfiguration. There is sure to be more contact between the Task Force and meetings like Dublin, after the September 1 deadline.

But both the meetings that oppose reconfiguration, and those that have been unable to decide on any response at all, underscore the often illusory character of the supposed clarity that the Task Force and the Yearly Meeting leadership have been attempting to achieve between a Yearly Meeting A and a Yearly Meeting B. For the many meetings that are home to members with diverse theologies, the breadth, even the ambiguity, of past and present IYM theological approaches serves them just fine.

Everybody loves Spiceland

At this point, it behooves us to recapitulate the data in a form that can fit on one page. (Otherwise the data can be quite confusing.) Unfortunately, there is no single agreed-upon way to interpret this data. Accordingly, I will present two tables that aggregate the data from meeting responses in two somewhat different ways. If one looks at which meetings have expressed a preference for YM-A and which for YM-B, the data shows that many more have expressed a preference for YM-B.
As one can see from this chart, of the responses received thus far by the Task Force, the overwhelming preference of IYM Meetings has been to indicate a preference, whether strong or slight, for YM-B. In fact, of the responses received thus far, there have been many more meetings have chosen B (37), than have chosen A (4), combined with those that have refused to choose (9). Looking at the moment at those that have indicated a preference for A, they constitute thus far only 6% of the meetings in IYM. There is also a significant non-response rate, and the fact that the meetings that have not yet responded have a low percentage of the overall yearly meeting membership demonstrates that many of the meetings that have not yet responded are quite small. In fact, all but one (9) of the meetings yet to respond have fewer than 20 members; the only other non-responding meeting, Mooreland, has 32 members. So the non-responding meetings are generally quite small. If one assumes that most meetings yet to decide will in the end side with YM-B, it would seem that YM-B will retain at least 75% of the current yearly meeting membership.

But there is quite another way to analyze the data. The Task Force did not solicit criticisms of the reconfiguration process, but it received many such critiques, and several Task Force members have promised to consider such critiques in the
report that they will present in advance of the September 29 Rep Council. If one tabulates the data in this manner, one can discern two blocs within IYM of more equal size:

![Table 2. Meeting Responses to the Reconfiguration Process Itself](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion on Reconfiguration</th>
<th>Mtg.</th>
<th>% of Numbers</th>
<th>% of MMs In IYM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oppose or critique reconfiguration</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>1065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No objection to reconfiguration</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>1843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawn or dually affiliated</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>05%</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still to decide</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here one can see that the number of meetings that have been moved to critique the reconfiguration process is closer to the number of meetings that have endorsed the process, than any delineation of A-type versus B-type meetings might make it appear. However, the meetings that support the reconfiguration process have several hundred more members than those that have opposed or critiqued reconfiguration.

Why the difference between the two tables? One reason is a grouping of five meetings (Back Creek, Charlottesville, Jericho, Shirley, Spiceland, and Walnut Ridge) within IYM that have both critiqued reconfiguration, sometimes in great detail, and who have also indicated (sometimes using the language “if . . . forced to choose”) a backup preference for IYM-B. Spiceland, with 203 members, is the largest of these meetings. Their associate minister, Cathy Harris, serves on the Task Force and has helped to draft the plan for YM-A. All factions would dearly want to have Spiceland in their yearly meeting, whatever configurations emerge from the upcoming IYM deliberations.
As these meetings have significant agreements with both the opponents of reconfiguration and the large faction of IYM Friends who unequivocally support the B option, they may constitute a center in the yearly meeting. If reconfiguration is approved along the lines that the Task Force presented it to the meetings last spring, they will form part of the large majority of IYM meetings opting for B. If, on the other hand, reconfiguration is not approved at the Sept. 29 Rep Council, they would happily remain in an IYM that would include West Richmond. One IYM Friend has summarized the situation as follows: “There is a tug of war to get to see who claims the center. I hope that there is a center that won’t be dragged one way or another.”

Harris summarizes the position of Spiceland as follows: “Spiceland’s letter does not call for disciplining West Richmond Friends. The question the meeting raises is, how did we go from trying to resolve the conflict between IYM and WRF to splitting the yearly meeting? [It] seems like a huge leap. Spiceland’s stance from the beginning of this whole mess is that the meeting is opposed to reconfiguration, even if we can’t support WRF’s minute. Spiceland wishes to still be in relationship and feels that we recognize that there are differences and problems in IYM, but we are committed to being in relationship with one another and work together on the issues.”

Sense of the Meeting, or Disguised Voting?

One irony is that, while IYM Superintendent Doug Shoemaker deplored the process of voting used by Penn Meeting in order to sever its connection with IYM, similar kinds of processes, without, of course, using the name of voting, have been deployed by IYM leadership during the controversy over West Richmond’s minute. Brian Lilly states, “Before the topic of reconfiguration had ever risen, a letter from the Superintendent and Clerk of IYM M&O was received by my monthly meeting asking for responses to West Richmond’s Welcoming and Affirming minute. While I may not have been incredibly happy with West Richmond’s minute, I was even more bothered by the fact we were basically being asked to choose a side. In my mind that is pretty much equivalent to taking a vote in Quaker meeting. Since that time, it seems that we have forgotten the
value of Quaker process. Quaker decision making doesn’t choose a side, it seeks the will of God.”

Yet Task Force member Tom Hamm comments, “I don’t understand how asking an individual monthly meeting to choose YM A or B is voting. Tabulating who chooses what and declaring a ‘winner’ would be, but that’s different.” Indeed, many yearly meetings gather information from all of their monthly meetings on crucial issues coming before the whole body. But Lilly’s point seems to be that the use made of the information gathered from the above-mentioned letter was polarizing, and meetings were in fact being asked to take sides. While the results may have not been systematically tabulated and presented as such to the yearly meeting, it still seemed to Lilly that a winner was being declared. And Lilly is not alone in that feeling.

Another critical take on how yearly meeting decision making processes on these issues have been conducted was offered by Winchester Friend Ron Ferguson in a discussion meeting: “It looks like we have thrown Quaker process out of the window. There have been some Rep Council Meetings where clearness has been decreed, even when several people have spoken out strongly in opposition to the course that the clerk has found to be the sense of the meeting. What we have in IYM is artificial, manufactured clearness. There is not clearness in the Yearly Meeting to proceed with reconfiguration, not now, not this way. For the same thing that happened at last October’s Rep Council meeting to happen again on September 29 would break my heart.” Along similar lines, Heidi Kratzer Hisrich has stated that, at the IYM sessions she attended, “My sense was not that we were in unity in what we discerned, but that some voices were silenced and/or disregarded. And I know that some of us who felt we weren’t heard throughout the process are struggling to come to terms with the Task Force plan.”

Tom Hamm notes that, while some IYM Friends have always opposed reconfiguration, “at both yearly meeting sessions in July 2011, and the October 1 Representative Council, Greg stated that unity had been reached on the proposal before the meeting. When a number of Friends asked to be recorded as standing aside, he reopened the discussions. At yearly meeting, after some revision of the minute, only one Friend stood aside. At Representative Council, no one did.” Perhaps Greg Hinshaw should get more credit for doing a good job as Clerk.
And yet some IYM Friends would insist that there is more to the story. One notes that the consideration of realignment at the 2011 yearly meeting sessions was chaotic before Tom Hamm himself, as recording clerk, stepped in to offer an alternative minute, which carried the day. (QT #19, 7-8) He drily notes that he was more impressed with Hamm’s clerking skills than with those of Hinshaw. Ron Ferguson is correct that there were many strong dissenting voices at the October 2011 Rep Council, and the wisdom offered by these Friends seemed not especially reflected in the Reconfiguration minute that Hinshaw offered. (See QT#19, 18-21) And there are other ways to affect the meeting results, besides testing the sense of the meeting. Certain IYM Friends have sometimes been strongly cautioned by the IYM leadership not to speak from the floor, and Ferguson perhaps knew of such instances. The gathered body would then be deprived of whatever wisdom the Holy Spirit might impart through the ministrations of these Friends.

Now some IYM Friends would like to ask: At this late date, can the IYM members and leaders set aside side-taking, in order to truly seek the will of God?

Next Steps, and Down the Road

The Rep Council will face strongly conflicting tendencies among IYM Friends whether to act or to delay on whatever proposal the Task Force puts forward. The IYM-B interest group at yearly meeting sessions in July, attended by about 80 people, fielded lots of questions as to whether the reconfiguration process was moving forward quickly enough. Task Force member Cathy Harris noted that a lot of meetings are pressing for a decision at the Sept. 29th Rep Council meeting. Dave Phillips noted that the Task Force and IYM “have struggled with this incredibly. We are working hard to speak truth and love in balance. But we can’t be afraid to make decisions. Sometimes we are forced to make decisions. Those of us who favor Group B do this with incredible sadness.”

After the deadline for meeting responses on September 1, the Task Force of ten yearly meeting Friends will have to unite on a recommendation to carry forward to the IYM Rep Council on September 29. The Task Force will make a recommendation – see below – but it is important to state at the
outset that the Task Force is divided on a central issue – its charge. Some Task Force members believe that, on the basis of the October 2011 minute, that the yearly meeting has already approved the implementation of reconfiguration, and the only matter now before IYM is the details of the plan that Friends will subsequently implement. How Friends coming from this viewpoint can possibly incorporate into their sense of a direction forward the significant input from monthly meetings opposing reconfiguration altogether is unclear, to say the least.

Other Task Force members believe that their charge was to enter into a year of discernment about reconfiguration, and that the September 29th Rep Council meeting should make the decision as to whether reconfiguration will be implemented. There is no indication that the Task Force members will be able to resolve their disagreement on this fundamental point.

The plan that the Task Force will recommend is as follows: It has apparently abandoned any distinction between YM-A and YM-B; there were too few meetings embracing YM-A for there to be a vital core for that group. Instead, the Task Force will recommend that the yearly meeting separate on the lines of affirming the authority of Yearly Meeting. If a Monthly Meeting affirms the authority of the Yearly Meeting, then it is welcome to remain within IYM. To remain within IYM, a monthly meeting would have to affirm the YM-B concept of yearly meeting authority: that is, that monthly meetings are subordinate to the yearly meeting, which is the “means… of common protection” for all of the monthly meetings. This interpretation would disallow the counter-balancing phrases, such as the “validity of the prophetic voices” of monthly meetings, to be used to mitigate the overriding importance of subordination of monthly meetings to the yearly meeting. Meetings that cannot affirm this concept of yearly meeting authority would have to leave. In effect, instead of choosing between YM-B and YM-A, monthly meetings are now being asked to choose between “B” and “not-B.”

This Task Force response, and in particular its decision to characterize those meetings questioning the reconfiguration process as “not-B,” strengthens many IYM Friends’ view that all that is going on is that certain IYM leaders want non-conforming meetings out – or, to use Russell Wheeler’s word we have quoted above, what is going on is a “purge” of non-conforming meetings. As far as names go, are we not further down the road
in the direction of Joshua Brown’s wry observation that the official Yearly Meeting process is oriented toward two putative yearly meetings, which could more honestly be designated as Indiana Yearly Meeting (Right) and Indiana Yearly Meeting (Wrong)?

This Task Force recommendation was communicated to IYM Meetings on September 11 by email and snail mail. Consequently, it seems highly uncertain that there will be enough time for Monthly Meeting Representatives to get adequately prepared for the September 29th meeting. Many of the complaints that were forthcoming at this August meeting concerned the lack of timely notice on reconfiguration matters at last October’s Rep Council. One IYM Friend complained that “there was so little notice given to Option 5 before last October’s Rep council that I felt railroaded. I don’t trust the process.” Lack of trust, especially in yearly meeting, is a huge issue, particularly for Friends opposed to reconfiguration. (See QT #19, p. 19)

It is likely that an alternative reconfiguration plan might be proposed from the floor of the Rep Council. One such yearly meeting possibility is currently dubbed “IYM-O.” One version of this is as follows: YM-O would agree to be set off from the Yearly Meeting; it would adopt the current governing documents of IYM, including the current Faith & Practice as its own, with the latter interpreted “relatively loosely”; it would agree to a 10-year effective moratorium on enforcement of the 1982 minute; during the moratorium, no other minute or change in Faith & Practice regarding a stance on homosexuality could be adopted by the yearly meeting without absolute and express unanimity from all monthly meetings; monthly meetings would have some de facto autonomy under this proposal, but their actions would in no way bind any other monthly meeting.

Of course, the September 29 Rep Council upcoming will provide another daunting test of the ability of the whole yearly meeting and its clerk to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit amidst some very strong disagreements. It is devoutly to be hoped that the yearly meeting will be able to avoid a disguised voting process on this occasion, too.

Task Force member Ray Ontko, when he contemplates the possibility of an impasse around such different perceptions of where the Spirit is now leading IYM Friends, shares these two questions for Friends’ consideration:
“First, was there wisdom in the historic splits, or not? If there was, then this may be the logical continuation of the process. Second, can one of these groups make the gift of departure to the other group, acknowledging that the work of all meetings may go forward better, if this barrier to individual and meeting consciences was removed?”

Some ask that more work of reconciliation be done between the various factions of IYM, in keeping with the Quaker reputation as peacemakers. Margaret Fraser writes that she first heard about the possibility of a separation at July 2011 yearly meeting sessions, and then the October Rep Council meeting two months later set the reconfiguration process in motion. “I’m not saying that it’s the wrong outcome, but I do understand those who still feel their heads spinning. And I do wonder how much real deep intentional reconciliation work has been done in the YM as a whole. Seems to me that there is a lot of impatience among some, which isn’t how Friends do their best discernment of God’s will. If it took some early Friends a couple of years to get clear to undertake a particular piece of travel in the ministry, it wouldn’t be surprising if a decision to fracture a faith community would take longer.”

Other Indiana Friends ask pointed questions about the usefulness of work on reconciliation. Amy Smith Dennis asks, “When meetings opposed to reconfiguration say that we need unity and reconciliation, what would that look like? How does unity in a Christian organization look when there are deep theological differences? What are we unified by? . . . How does diversity in basic beliefs make us stronger? Has it made us stronger in the decades that we have been arguing over these things?”

Another IYM Friend, contemplating the matters before the yearly meeting in September 2012, names “a failure of leadership” in IYM, as evidenced by a “widespread confusion about what is and has happened” and also a “lack of clarity or unity among the task force itself concerning its own charge.” Along similar lines, Jay Janney, a professor of management at the University of Dayton thinks that “Doug Shoemaker has failed at leading the yearly meeting. He might be a nice guy (I don’t really know him) but at the end of the day, you measure leaders by the outcomes of the organization.”

To fellow members of Richmond First Friends, Janney urged that they get their “lack of confidence in Doug S.’s
leadership... on the record. It’s not personal, just business. I’ll spare you the details, but I think that by how we academics define leadership that Doug S. failed. I think voicing that is important... The best thing for us to do is to act, not react. And to act with deliberate, visible action.” In fairness to Shoemaker, however, at every business session where reconfiguration has been discussed, there have been a number of Friends who affirm him and his leadership. He has strong support among IYM members who identify with option B.

Board members of organizations under the care of Indiana Yearly Meeting are aware of the impending division within Indiana Yearly Meeting and the extra burdens that will place on their organizations and their board’s management. One trustee of Friends Fellowship Community, a retirement community under the care of Indiana Yearly Meeting, recently reflected on the difficulty of decisions that his board will ultimately face, how and whether to admit unmarried couples, whether heterosexual or homosexual. Yearly meeting tensions, he thinks, will bring an added layer of difficulty to the decision making process. Janney wrote about his experiences at the Quaker Haven Camp this summer: “The reconfiguration hung over the counselors. Everyone knows the big split is coming. I didn’t hear anyone looking forward to it. I hear a lot of hurt in the voices of people, and people feel disengaged.”

Much, of course, depends on the outcome of the September 29 Rep Council, and no one knows exactly what that outcome would be. But the likelihood of sweeping changes in the near future is so great that IYM Friends have to look past September 29, and to conceive of what the future for themselves and their meetings will look like after that date.

One possibility is that the Rep Council will approve reconfiguration in some form. If that is the case, according to a timeline distributed at yearly meeting sessions, there will be a three month interim period, until December 31, when any groups of Friends who do not accept the authority of the yearly meeting as the Task Force has defined it, will begin organizing, all IYM appointed officers and committees will continue to function without change, and meetings who have yet to discern their choice of affiliation with any possible yearly meeting configuration will continue their discernment process.

As of January 1, 2013, meetings opting for a new yearly meeting grouping will be released from all assessment
obligations, and members of these meetings will cease their service as IYM officers or committee members. However, meetings not reporting a choice for any grouping will continue to be responsible for paying their assessment, but members of such meetings can no longer serve as IYM officers or committee members.

From January 1 until July 2013, any necessary arrangement to legally relinquish assets and property rights to meetings opting to be part of the new yearly meeting will be made. Departing meetings, if leaving in a group, under the proposed Task Force plan, would be given their proportion of liquid funds of the yearly meeting (the unrestricted funds total about $300,000; the departing settlement would be proportionate to membership, and that fund amount is roughly $100 per member). Legal costs for setting up a new yearly meeting grouping or grouping would be paid from IYM funds. Departing monthly meetings would receive clear title to their meetinghouses, and any legal costs relating to that title transfer would also be paid by the existing IYM. It appears that the existing IYM would retain, in their entirety, illiquid assets (the yearly meeting owns a strip mall in Muncie) and the restricted funds for missions use.

In yearly meeting sessions in July 2013, the meetings opting for new yearly meeting groupings will be formally released by action of IYM in session.

Indiana Yearly Meeting has agreed to host the Friends United Meeting triennial in 2014. At the April 2012 Rep Council, Chris Sitler, pastor of Dublin Meeting, asked Doug Shoemaker how the hosting of the triennial would fit into the reconfiguration process. Shoemaker replied that if two IYMs exist at that time and both are part of FUM (as both A and B Friends appear to want to do), the two IYMs will co-host this event bringing in Friends from all over the world. There has been a brief discussion of this matter at the Friends United Meeting Board level, and FUM General Secretary Colin Saxton confirms that, if there are two yearly meetings by 2014, that FUM would desire them to work together, peacefully and collaboratively, to co-host the triennial. The FUM Board will surely have more conversation about this matter as the date of the triennial draws closer.

If the IYM Rep Council does not approve of reconfiguration at its September 29 meeting, there will likely still
be repercussions of some sorts. Those Friends who favor B say that there will be some monthly meetings that will leave IYM. As mentioned earlier, there is already a great deal of impatience for a decisive outcome among some Friends favoring the B option. When Western Yearly Meeting discerned no unity on the matter of removing Phil Gulley’s recording, six meetings withdrew; those who favor the B option say that there may be more meetings that leave IYM over the West Richmond minute than left Western Yearly Meeting over Gulley’s recording, and based on the information that the Task Force has carefully collected over the past few months, there is no reason to think that they are wrong.

On the basis of the information gathered by the Task Force, it remains to be seen whether there are enough meetings who would opt for a YM-A (or a yearly meeting that is not YM-B) to form a vital core. What other options might then exist for these meetings? They might explore affiliation with other yearly meetings in the geographical vicinity – Western Yearly Meeting, Wilmington Yearly Meeting, both of which are affiliated with Friends United Meeting; or if, like Englewood or Penn, they wish to relinquish FUM ties, they could explore affiliation with Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting affiliated with Friends General Conference or with Evangelical Friends Church -Eastern Region. Since Westfield and Hinkle Creek Meetings made the move from Western to Indiana Yearly Meeting, and are poised to join IYM-B when and if that forms, there may be meetings from IYM which will want to make the reverse migration, to join an existing yearly meeting which seems more accepting of diverse theologies.

It is still to be hoped that IYM will come up with a plan that will strengthen Friends’ witness at both the monthly meeting and yearly meeting levels. Perhaps, even in the wake of past separations, and recent discord, it can yet model Friends’ testimonies on unity and reconciliation. Many Friends have been praying diligently that IYM find its way out of its impasse for years now. May their continuing prayers be fruitful. In this time of crisis, Friends will need to listen closely to God’s whispers to discern a loving and peaceful way forward for the good of all Indiana Friends.

Update: September 30, 2012
Indiana Yearly Meeting Representative Council met for almost eight hours on Saturday, September 29, at Farmland Friends Church in Farmland, Indiana. The Reconfiguration Task Force, composed of five members who favor an Indiana Yearly Meeting B and five who are more favorable to a not-B approach, presented a united recommendation on behalf of their reconfiguration proposal as outlined in our article in QT#21. However, when pressed on certain details, it was clear that there were some differences among the ten Friends making the presentation. There was some disagreement on the disposition of Indiana Yearly Meeting’s more than $7 million in assets, most of which are restricted by their donors. Not-B meetings that agreed to leave in a group prior to December 31, 2012, would receive a share of the unrestricted funds (about $300,000) proportional to their memberships, but there were no plans to share the restricted funds with not-B meetings. One Task Force member stated that a reason for not sharing the restricted funds was that some Friends associated with IYM B would not countenance these funds going to meetings that were in support of "sinful" behaviors (a reference to West Richmond’s Welcoming and Affirming Minute), but the question of who could shoulder the administrative responsibilities of handling these funds according to the wishes of the donors was another reason cited as to why those restricted funds should remain with IYM B.

Tom Hamm gave an introduction filled with historical detail, pointing out the decades-old roots of the current conflict, and stating that it would be incorrect to think that it simply began with West Richmond's Minute.

There then followed several hours of discussion, with representatives of most IYM meetings speaking to the issue of reconfiguration. There were few surprises. Most representatives’ messages closely dovetailed with the letters that their meetings had sent to the Task Force. The clerk of West Richmond, Rich Sinex, offered to return to his meeting and to advocate for their withdrawal from Indiana Yearly Meeting, especially if that would help to resolve the conflict within IYM. The discussion took place in a worshipful atmosphere. Many meetings have both members who favor IYM B and those who do not favor IYM B. The representatives of these meetings were very open about the difficulties that the reconfiguration proposal posed for their yearly meetings. When they sent back their responses favoring neither IYM B or IYM A, their responses were often
characterized as these meetings refusing to choose. The reps from these meetings, however, criticized such characterizations of their meetings’ responses. They emphasized that their meetings had chosen; what their meetings had chosen was to reject configuration.

Other issues were raised as well, including the disagreement over allocation of assets. The representatives of meetings who favored the IYM B approach spoke strongly and eloquently on behalf of reconfiguration and their choice of IYM B. This hours-long discussion took place in a worshipful atmosphere, with frequent periods of silence and also much reference to the Scriptures.

In mid-afternoon, clerk Greg Hinshaw asked for the sense of the meeting. Many voices were raised in approval of the reconfiguration proposal. He then asked if there were representatives who disapproved of the proposal. Fourteen representatives stood in disapproval, and their names were recorded. Hinshaw then determined that, on the basis of his reading of Faith & Practice, that the reconfiguration proposal would not be approved at this time. He listed some of his frustrations with the process as it had unfolded thus far, including unhelpful discussions on Facebook. One Task Force member, Rod Dennis, suggested a Facebook fast. Hinshaw also urged deeper listening, and reminded representatives that they needed to be listening to God, and not just reflecting the position that they brought to the Council with (a position that they brought from their meeting.)

Eventually four of the fourteen representatives who had stood in disapproval decided to stand aside on the Reconfiguration proposal. Hinshaw honored the objections of the ten others who both were standing in disapproval and refusing to stand aside, and he did this by stating that the Reconfiguration Proposal had neither been approved or disapproved, but would be reconsidered at the next Representative Council, scheduled for Saturday, November 10, 2012, at Friends’ Memorial Church in Muncie.

There was much disappointment among many representatives of the IYM yearly meetings that favored reconfiguration. The clerk had stated that 44 of the more than 60 meetings in IYM had favored the IYM B proposal, and these 44 churches represented about 75% of the total IYM membership. Many of the representatives from these meetings had been
hoping for approval of the reconfiguration proposal at the September 29 meeting, and that had not happened.

The noticeably weary Task Force understandably did not look thrilled that their work would need to continue, but that was an outcome of this meeting. Hinshaw and others on the Task Force asked what needed to be done to make this a better proposal. A representative from Upland suggested that attention be given as to how opportunities for continuing fellowship between all meetings now in IYM could be structured, after the reconfiguration plan had gone into effect. Others suggested that the plan to allocate assets be revisited, in order to make it fairer to the new yearly meeting being set off. It was emphasized that this was to be a loving, collaborative reconfiguration, and anything that could be done to emphasize the loving as well as collaborative nature of the process and its end result would be welcome.

The Representative Council Meeting finally adjourned about the hour of 4:30 PM.

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William Bartram: The Moral Philosophy of a Quaker Botanist

Sarah Werner

William Bartram (1739-1823) was one of the first scientists to explore the southern colonies of the United States in the 18th century. He is best known for his widely popular account of his journey, *Travels Through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida, the Cherokee Country, the Extensive Territories of the Muscogulges, or Creek Confederacy, and the Country of the Chactaws*. His experience of the natural landscape of these new lands was mediated through his Quaker worldview, just as his travels affected his religious notions about the place of humans in God’s creation.

Bartram’s encounter with the natural world led him to question the prevailing hierarchical notions of the universe as a Great Chain of Being. He saw humans as corruptions of nature rather than the pinnacle of creation, and his growing knowledge of the natural world led him to believe that nature presented humanity with a moral imperative to live in harmony with other animals. The philosophical reflections found in the letters and other works of William Bartram illustrate how his religious perspective was shaped by an encounter with the natural world and the emerging field of biological science.

William Bartram was born in 1739 to Ann Mendenhall and the renowned botanist John Bartram (Whitfield, 2008: 488). He grew up on a farm in Kingsessing, just outside of Philadelphia, and he accompanied his father from a young age on his various plant-collecting travels throughout the Northeast (Hallock and Hoffman, 2010: 3). As a young man he struggled to find his calling in the world, failing as a merchant in North Carolina and then as a rice planter in Florida. In 1773 he embarked on an expedition to the Carolinas, Georgia, Louisiana, and Florida under the patronage of London Quaker Dr. John Fothergill to collect plants and make drawings of the local flora and fauna (Whitfield, 2008: 489). Called “Flower Hunter” by local Native Americans, he travelled widely in the southern colonies, even
during the Revolutionary War, unimpeded (Whitfield, 2008: 488). There he marveled at the natural wonders of the landscape, and the peaceful societies of the Native Americans. After four years, he returned in January of 1778 to the family farm on the Schuylkill to live with his brother John, who had taken over the farm after their father’s death (Hallock and Hoffman, 2010: 4).

Bartram settled into life at the farm in Kingsessing and spent the next ten years compiling and editing his account of his journey in the southern colonies for Travels, which was finally published in 1791 (Hallock and Hoffman, 2010: 5). He spent the remainder of his life at the farm, corresponding with colleagues, working on manuscripts and plant drawings, and becoming a mentor to a variety of young naturalists (Hallock and Hoffman, 2010: 6-7). In his later years he became an influential figure in eighteenth-century American botany as well as a social commentator, and was active until his death in 1823 at the age of 84 (Hallock and Hoffman, 2010: 6).

Natural History in the Eighteenth Century

William Bartram practiced botany at a time when modern science was first developing into the discipline it is today. A hundred years before Darwin would publish his famous treatise on evolution, On the Origin of Species, scientists such as Linnaeus were first attempting to categorize living organisms in a systematic way. Botany was popular in eighteenth-century America as individuals explored the New World and catalogued its strange botanical wonders. It was still common well into the nineteenth century to attribute natural features to the work of a divine actor, and Historian Clarence Glacken refers to these kinds of natural histories as “physico-theologies” (1967: 502). Glacken explains in Traces on the Rhodian Shore that natural history emerged as a field the eighteenth century, and that it was “a prosperous time for physico-theologies, propitious for finding the traces of the Creator’s wisdom even in the study of stones and insects” (502). These natural historians went on voyages and returned to write and publish accounts of their travels and the flora and fauna they encountered in a variety of exotic locations (502). There is a strong emphasis on teleology in the writings of these early natural historians, and these physico-theologies are concerned with establishing proof’s for the existence of God and the orderliness of the natural world (504).
Another main feature of these physico-theologies was the idea of creation as a Great Chain of Being, an elaborate hierarchy that stretched all the way from God at the pinnacle down to the smallest microorganisms. Leibniz was an influential proponent of the idea of the Great Chain of Being, that there is an order to the created world that is based on reason and harmony, with humans lower than God, but higher than all other animals (Glacken, 1967: 508). He also argued that creation was progressing towards greater order, an order that was aided by the work of humans in improving creation (506). Great advances in technology, including the invention of both the microscope and telescope, allowed humans to see the magnificent design of creation with increasing intricacy, enhancing Leibniz’s argument even further (506). Despite the prevalence of the Great Chain of Being paradigm during the eighteenth century, Bartram was deeply troubled by the implications of such a worldview that placed humans in a superior position to animals despite their moral failings.

Though ecology as a formal scientific discipline did not emerge until the latter part of the nineteenth century, its roots stretch back to the eighteenth-century period when natural history was becoming prominent in early modern science (Worster, 1994: x). Environmental historian Donald Worster identifies two traditions in early ecology that emerged in the eighteenth-century “Age of Reason.” The first he calls an “arcadian” stance, which “advocated a simple, humble life for man with the aim of restoring him to a peaceful coexistence with other organisms,” and which is characterized by the nature writing of Gilbert White. The second he names the “imperial” tradition, which sought to “establish through the exercise of reason and by hard work, man’s dominion over nature,” and which is characterized by the work of Carl Linnaeus to categorize all plants (2).

Carl Linnaeus had a passion for finding order in nature, and he traveled extensively in his native Scandinavian region, cataloguing plants and forming his own comprehensive classification system, the Systema Naturae, which has become the foundation for modern taxonomy. Worster writes that Linnaeus “seemed to demonstrate in his work the reconciliation between religious belief and scientific rationalism,” and he found a strong following in John and William Bartram (1994: 33). In 1749 Linnaeus wrote an essay entitled “The Oeconomy
of Nature,” which detailed an ecological point of view in depicting nature, one of the earliest of its kind (33). The underlying purpose of the essay was to find evidence of God’s handiwork in the natural world (33).

Linnaeus uses a three category system, dividing the terrestrial ecosystem into mineral, vegetable, and animal. He describes how the economy of nature involves the cyclical processing of materials in each of the three categories (Worster, 1994: 34). Worster writes, “Circulating in the natural economy is a dazzling profusion of species, all made of perform together with symphonic precision” (34-35). God created this perfect system so that all creatures can coexist peacefully, each having its basic needs met by the rest of the organisms in the system (35). In this system, in the words of Linnaeus, all creatures “are so connected, so chained together, that they all aim at the same end, and to this end a cast number of intermediate ends are subservient” (38). Worster argues that this notion of the chain of being is more than a taxonomic category; it is also a “system of economic interdependence and mutual assistance” (46). Each creature has a specific place within the system and it contributes and receives exactly what nutrients it needs. Linnaeus’ model assumes a harmonious and perfectly ordered creation, each piece a cog in the brilliant machinery of the universe.

Art historian Michael Gaudio sheds light on another facet of natural history in the eighteenth century in his essay, “Surface and Depth: The Art of Early American Natural History,” by evaluating the visual works of these early natural historians. Gaudio argues that natural history is a visual science. Sir Francis Bacon believed that objective observation was the best method for gathering data, because the scientist could focus completely on what he was seeing. While scholars at the time believed their observations to be completely unbiased, Gaudio notes that natural historians always observe through the lens of their experience (55-56). He argues that nature itself is a “historically conditioned category” onto which Bartram and other natural historians projected their own desires and expectations (56).

Gaudio argues that the illustrations and other visual art of natural historians in the eighteenth and nineteenth century can be characterized as a dialogue between surface and depth (57). On the one hand, natural historians sought with their botanical illustrations to present particular organisms exactly as they appear. Gaudio notes that “Bartram’s interests were less in
showing how nature conforms to an underlying system than in presenting its surfaces as they appeared to the eye,” whether or not those observations fit completely into the Linnaean biological categories (61). At the same time, Gaudio also observes how Bartram depicts nature as a peaceable kingdom in his illustrations. He argues that Bartram “represents nature as a world of environmental interaction in which diverse plants and creatures exist together harmoniously” (67).

Gaudio argues further that Bartram’s *Travels* is helpful for interpreting his visual works because in it “nature is fundamentally a social world in which the flora and fauna of the southeastern United States play out a politics of visibility” (67-68). By this Gaudio means that Bartram finds in nature a particular politics, enacted by fish and other creatures, that reflects the politics of visibility that played out in the early republic of America (68). Gaudio argues that for both politicians and natural historians “the people, plants, and animals of the world could be Fully and Fairly represented when and only when one could read their essential natures transparently upon the surfaces they presented to the world” (69). In other words, organisms in nature are self-evident, just as certain truths are self-evident. This interplay of surface and depth informs Bartram’s visual work, but it also helps us understand how Bartram saw a moral imperative in nature, a topic that will be discussed in greater depth below.

Quakers and Ecology in Eighteenth Century America

In the period shortly after their founding, Quakers echoed similar sentiments about the dominion of humans over the created world that were common during that period. In the early eighteenth century, Quakers began to excel in business both in Britain and in the Pennsylvania colony, and became leaders in the Industrial Revolution as well as in science and medicine. In the latter part of the eighteenth century, some Quakers became disillusioned with the success and wealth that industry had brought them and began to withdraw from secular life to become quietist farmers.

In the time immediately after their founding and their early years in America, Quakers shared similar sentiments about the Great Chain of Being and the dominion of humans over the created world. George Fox (1624-1691) and Robert Barclay
both echoed common seventeenth-century sentiments about the relationship of humans to the natural world as one of lordship and dominion, just as God was the sovereign Lord over humanity. George Fox even stated, "all things were made subject to man, and man subject to God; all creatures were to fear and dread man and woman but men and women were to fear and dread God" (Kelley, 1985: 243).

Arthur Raistrick, in Quakers in Science and Industry, articulates an understanding of the work of Quakers in eighteenth-century England and America that is characterized by enormous contributions by business-minded Quakers to the world of science and industry. Raistrick argues, "In spite of all disabilities and persecutions they are to be found in the early part of the eighteenth century permeating the whole of basic industry, trade and finance, supplying outstanding members of the medical profession, and even appearing in the lists of the Fellows and Council of the Royal Society" (1968: 10). Raistrick also notes that though they became successful in these fields, many Quakers retained their disdain for luxury and their care for the poor and oppressed in society. Because of this, Raistrick argues that there is a distinctive Quaker influence on science and industry. They contributed in major ways to these fields, but they did it in a particular manner that respected individuals and was guarded against excess and luxury (335).

By the end of the eighteenth century Raistrick argues that there was a divergence among Quakers between those that retreated from the affairs of the world, the quietists, and those that continued to grow in industry, while retaining their commitment to the wellbeing of all people. These two groups remained united in worship, but lived in very different contexts (Raistrick, 1968: 345). Raistrick observes that the quietists "retreated from the major affairs of the world, and became a self-contained, good-living, somewhat closed religious community, in the world but not of it" (345). At the same time other Friends continued their leadership in industry, refraining from becoming involved in any work connected to war, but growing in wealth and influence, and "always connecting their business with a human problem" (345). This connection to the human problem was the concern of both of these groups within the Society, but they approached it in different ways. The industrialists were primarily concerned with "the reform of
conditions within the structure of the new industrial order of society,” rather than its radical transformation (346).

Frederick Tolles shares a similar view of Quaker culture in the context of Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania colony. He uses the image of the inner and outer plantation to describe the lives of the early Quaker colonists in America. When they first crossed the Atlantic, George Fox admonished the colonists to cultivate the inner plantations of their hearts even as they created outer plantations in the New World (Tolles, 1948: 3). Tolles explores the tension that arose as the cultivation of the inner and outer plantations came into conflict with one another. He argues, “If one phase of the Quaker ethic promoted economic individualism and the accumulation of wealth, there were strong countervailing tendencies in the direction of corporate responsibility and criticism of the acquisitive spirit” (63). This led to a conflict that was implicit in the Quaker ethic because Friends were called upon to be industrious, but warned against the dangers of accumulating wealth (82).

In 1756 as tensions came to a head regarding the military defense of the frontier, many Quakers stepped down from their positions of political power in Pennsylvania and retreated from political life (Tolles, 1948: 234). Tolles argues that this development led to a “new spirit” among Philadelphia Quakers that led them to emphasize their separation from the world, a move toward the “normal eighteenth-century Quaker patterns of quietism and inwardness” (230-231). He argues that this not only marked the end of an era in Pennsylvania’s political history; it also signaled the beginning of “a thoroughgoing reformation in the Society of Friends” (235). This reformation was characterized by a return to piety and a renewed emphasis on the Quakers as a community separated from the “world” (236).

Donald Brooks Kelley argues that it is possible to find in eighteenth-century Quakerism the roots of an ecological ethos. He argues that in the eighteenth century the attitudes of Quakers about the natural world noticeably shifted as Friends began to emphasize humility and resignation as fundamental virtues of a pious life, part of the quietist period of Quaker history. Donald Brooks Kelley writes, “Seventeenth-century Quaker attitudes regarding man’s dominion over nature, to all appearances quite similar to those of Puritanism and to those of traditional Christianity, nonetheless emerged in the eighteenth century with
Kelley links the quietist emphasis humility with an ecological ethos. The emphasis on mystical experience as the basis of the Quaker faith manifested itself in the eighteenth century in a way that focused on the virtue of humility (245). Quakers no longer had to worry about constant persecution and the attitude of Triumphalism morphed into a focus on human depravity and the fallen nature of humanity (245). This new focus led to both an empathy with those in society who were marginalized and suffering and to an admonition to care gently for the land rather than rule over it (246). Kelley argues that the emphasis on the fallen nature of humanity that was intensified during this period ultimately led Quakers to “the doctrine of custodianship in the gentle husbanding and conservation of the material world” (246).

Kelley notes two distinct influences on this new focus on husbanding and conserving the land: early encounters with Native Americans and the animal welfare movement. Kelley argues that by the middle of the eighteenth century, drawing upon the wisdom of Native Americans, “ecology-minded Friends had evolved an explicit ethic of environmental responsibility in the conservation of pasture and garden” (1986: 263). They took from the Native Americans the practice of subsistence farming, cultivating only the land one needed to sustain one’s family, as well as the idea that God is the ultimate owner of the land and humans are only stewards (264). The role of humans was to improve creation by tending the land with care, not to mine and consume its resources until they were completely depleted.

Concern for the suffering of animals was also important for Quakers during this time and they spoke out against the abuse of domestic animals. Kelley notes that Quakers “displayed notable compassion to those beasts with whom they shared the earth” during a time when animals were widely abused for both sport and labor (1986: 265). Reform-minded eighteenth-century Quaker John Woolman (1720-1772) was a vocal advocate for animal welfare. In his Journals he tells a story about killing a robin who was protecting her young chicks when he was a child and afterwards realizing the cruelty of his action. He writes, “after a few minutes [I] was seized with horror, as having in a sportive way, killed an innocent creature while she was careful for her Young” (Moulton, 1971: 24).
This early insight into animal suffering set the tone for his later advocacy of a variety of social injustices in eighteenth-century society. He writes elsewhere in his Journals “to say we love God as unseen and at the same time exercise cruelty toward the least creature moving by his life, or by life derived from him, was a contradiction in itself” (Moulton, 1971: 28). When Woolman learned that horses who were used to pull stage-coaches and deliver the mail were driven so far and hard that they were often killed or blinded, he refused to ride in them or have his mail delivered (183). He writes about these atrocities, “So great is the hurry in the spirit of this world, that in aiming to do business quick and to gain wealth the creation at the day doth loudly groan!” (183) This was an example of how human greed directly led to the abuse of God’s creatures.

Woolman’s advocacy for animals was shared by Quaker abolitionist Anthony Benezet (1713-1784). Maurice Jackson, in his biography of Benezet, describes how Benezet’s vegetarianism reflected his care for both humans and animals. Jackson notes that Benezet and his wife, Joyce Marriott Benezet became vegetarian because they did not want to eat anything associated with slave labor. They also “did not believe that any life, including that of an animal, should be taken in order to feed another living being” (Jackson, 2009: 19). This is important because for Benezet the wellbeing of humans and animals were intertwined. His care for human welfare extended out to the natural world to a care for animal creation.

Kelley contends that Quakers during this period formed a distinct “moral ecology” that encouraged benevolence towards human and animal creation rather than dominion, and which opposed war as destructive not only for human society, but for the natural world as well (1986: 267). Raistrick and Tolles temper Kelley’s position by bringing to light the achievements of Quakers in science and industry. Not all Quakers were the quietist farmers that Kelley depicts, but their focus on human welfare influenced eighteenth-century industry. Tolles also notes that in Philadelphia there was a positive connection between the religious ethos of the Quakers and the rise of modern science (Tolles, 1948: 205). He writes, “The most significant area of agreement between the Quaker-Puritan position and that of modern science as it emerged at the end of the seventeenth century lay in their combination of empiricism and rationalism” (206). Penn and others believed that reason was a natural
capacity given by God and that humans were called to use it to God’s glory and their own benefit (211). This led many Quakers into the emerging fields of science and medicine, including William Bartram. Bartram was influenced both by the Quaker leadership in the field of science as well as the emphasis of Friends like John Woolman on animal welfare. These influences together with Bartram’s own experiences with Native Americans and with the flora of the American southeast were synthesized into his unique vision of the created order or the world and the place of humans in it.

William Bartram’s Moral Philosophy

Bartram’s influences mirror those of his eighteenth-century Quaker counterparts’ encounters with Native Americans and insight into the intelligence and emotions of animals. In Florida Bartram made contact with Native Americans that were still largely unaffected by the European invasion of the New World. Bartram saw the Seminoles, Cherokees, and Creeks as living an upright life that was characterized by generosity and humility, and he thought there was much to emulate in their society. He also recognized an innate intelligence in animals, both wild and domestic, that his contemporaries failed to see. He believed that they live more honorably than most humans, and this led him to argue for a moral imperative in nature.

In addition to his well-known work, Travels, a large quantity of letters and essays written over his lifetime provide valuable insight into Bartram’s moral philosophy and religious convictions. William Bartram wrote an unsigned draft of an essay or letter probably in the mid-1790s referred to as “The Dignity of Human Nature,” that is a sustained treatment of his thoughts on the concept of the Great Chain of Being. Laurel Ode-Schneider, in her introduction to Bartram’s essay, writes that in this work he “wrestles with the traditional beliefs of his Quaker culture and the additional constructs of Greek philosophy and Linnaean taxonomy in order to answer questions about humanity’s moral nature and find synthesis among these systems of thought” (2010: 340). Bartram attempts in the essay to reconcile his belief in the presence of God in all of creation with the depravity of human violence and moral ineptitude (342). Given the fallen nature of humanity, he questions the placement of humans above other creatures in the Chain of Being.
Bartram begins by asserting the value of the Chain of Being by stating, “As we are Creatures of The supreme Being, We were made for a certain & indispensible purpose in this Vast System of Creation, as instruments, Members or Organical beings design’d & created to form a part in the Whole & Act & perform a certain part” (Hallock and Hoffman, 2010: 348). This statement summarizes and reaffirms the value of such a “System of Creation.” Every organism has a particular purpose and place within the larger whole, and this synthesis reflects the hand of the Divine in nature, a sentiment similar to that put forth by Linnaeus in the “Oeconomy of Nature.” It is God who has created this system and the Divine Virtues of truth, justice, mercy, love, benevolence, and the like are part of this natural system (Hallock and Hoffman, 2010: 349). Humans use and act upon these virtues, but they are not human creations, and Bartram later argues that such virtues are also found in animal morality.

One of the main concepts on which Bartram elaborates is dissimulation, or pretense, a value that is completely contrary to the Quaker emphasis on humility and honesty (Ode-Schneider, 2010: 343). Dissimulation in animals is known as instinct, when they protect their young, defend themselves, and procure food (Hallock and Hoffman, 2010: 349). Bartram argues that in humans dissimulation too easily becomes a vice, “One of the most formidably & dangerous passions in our Nature if not kept under strict Rule & Regulation” (350).

One of the main virtues that is present in creation is reason. Bartram writes, “Thus, it appears that Reason or That Divine Monitor Which has been supposed by the Antient Philosophers, an emanation from the Divine Intelligence” guides our actions and points to what is “right & true Virtue” (Hallock and Hoffman, 2010: 351). The problem arises when humans indulge too much in their passions and “seducing Language & feelings,” because such behavior dulls the voice of reason in an individual (351).

Reason, like the other virtues, does not only belong to humans. As an emanation of the Divine Intelligence, Bartram argues next that reason is part of the nature of animals also. Bartram uses the three categories of Linnaeus, mineral, vegetable, and animal to describe how humans are a part of the animal category rather than their own separate category (Hallock and Hoffman, 2010: 352). He begins by reaffirming the logic of
the Great Chain of Being, recounting how God has put humans at the pinnacle of animal creation, solely possessed of knowledge of the Divine and a spirit that communicates with an “emanation or particle of the Divine Intelligence,” the root of human knowledge (352).

He then turns to examine the “Ethical and Moral Nature” of animals (Hallock and Hoffman, 2010: 352). He writes, “If we<examine> & compare those Actions, & movements of Animals, which they have in common with us, we find little or no difference, why than have we not every reason to believe that those action & movements are executed & proceed from the same motives or cause” (352). Bartram seems to be arguing here that because some animals of higher intelligence act in similar ways to humans, these moral and ethical behaviors must come from the same cause. He previously stated that the cause of this behavior in humans is the emanation of Divine Intelligence, and so this same Divine Intelligence must also be extended to animals. Having established that animals have an ethical and moral nature, Bartram argues that in its most pure form, this intelligence manifests as instinct. He describes instinct as intuitive knowledge, which is the same in humans and other animals (352). Indeed this knowledge is “the most Usefull worthy, & divine part of our Nature,” because it is both innocent and divine (352). Instinct is not base desire or aggression; it is a divine capacity, and Bartram argues that it is the most useful because it is completely innocent.

Now that Bartram has illustrated how humans are similar to other animals in moral behavior, he begins to question the place of humans as the pinnacle of the created order. He does not deny that humans are the most intellectually powerful animal, but argues that this does not mean humans are the most divine animal (Hallock and Hoffman, 2010: 353). Supposedly it is humanity’s knowledge of the Divine that sets it apart from lower animals, but Bartram does not think that is the case. He argues rather, “I cannot be so impious as to desire or imagen, that Man who is guilty of more mischief & Wickedness than all the other Animal together in this World, should be exclusively endued with the knowledge of the Creator” (353).

Reason is key in acting morally, and Bartram links this capacity for reason to instinct. He argues that if the human alone is endowed with reason, “he acts as if he seldom consulted, or obeyed the dictates & advice of that Divine Monitor” reason
Passion, desire, and pretense all cloud the human ability to act out of reason, and because of this Bartram argues that animals are in fact more moral than humans because they operate completely on instinct. He postulates that “we act most Rationally & virtuously when our Actions seem to operate from simple instinct, or approach nearest to the manners of the Animal Creation” (Hallock and Hoffman, 2010: 353). In this sense nature contains a moral imperative, a point that will be further discussed below.

Based on his extensive travels in Indian territory in the southern colonies, Bartram argues that Native Americans are less deluded than European Americans by passion and desire, and because of this are closer to animal instinct and so more rational (Hallock and Hoffman, 2010: 353). Native Americans defend themselves from the elements and from threatening forces, but they are not overly aggressive or obsessed with their appearance (353). They take from the earth only what they need to survive and to care for the young and old of their group (354). They clothe themselves in the most practical way to protect against the cold or the sun (354). They give thanks to the Creator for all things, and because of these behaviors Bartram concludes that their simple life makes them much closer to the ideal found in animal creation of instinctual rationality (354).

Bartram next takes up the contention that humans alone possess the creative capacity for art and language and that these unique traits make them superior to the rest of creation. He argues that animals and plants possess arts and ingenuity that surpass any human art, such as “the combs Honey & Wax of Bees, the Webs & Nests of spiders, The Houses or Cells of the Innumerable Tribes & species of Mastriposes, Corals, Sea Spunge, et cetera” (Hallock and Hoffman, 2010: 354). Bartram argues that it is not a matter of which organism has the highest or most complex art, only that each organism produces art according to its own manner (355). Humans are also not alone in the ability to communicate through language. Each animal has its own type of language, whether in sound or action, that is understood by all members of its species, or “Tribe” (355). Additionally “All the Tribes & Families of Quadrupeds, & Without doubt Reptiles, Amphibiae Insects & Fish have a common or universal Language” by which they interact with one another (355).

Given that all animals and even plants have these capacities, humans are tyrants for thinking that they alone possess Divine
Intelligence. Bartram writes, “Man is cruel, Hypocritical, a Dissembler, his dissemmulation, exceeds that of any being we are acquainted with He call to his Aid the sacred Name of the Supreme being & attributes & all the Virtues, the more completely to cover his purpose” (Hallock and Hoffman, 355). Bartram seems to be saying here that what makes humans the worst of the animals is that they justify their actions as Divine right. They do not display any sense of humility before the created world and abuse their intellectual power to lord over all other beings. In fact, Bartram thought, animals show people how to be better humans. This upends the Great Chain of Being because in this supposition humans are revoking their place of dominance. Bartram felt that humans had fallen away from God’s will when they killed one another in war and enslaved one another to profit from their labor. By engaging in these behaviors humans had showed that they were no better than animals, that in fact the creatures of God’s creation were more noble than they.

Closely related to this sin of pride and pretense is greed. Bartram argues that “Love of Power, Riches, Magnificence & Fame Are the offspring of this passion, & seem to be the Source or parents of all Our moral Misery” (Hallock and Hoffman, 2010: 356). Not only do humans invoke the name of God to justify their abuse of creation; their greed for wealth and power is the source of all their other moral failings. He also attacks industry as the establishment that fosters this greed. He notes that it not only oppresses workers; it also leads to war and other forms of violence. He writes that industry “is the Bane of True Morality, as it incourages every Vice & immorality” as it leads to excess, encouraging “Avarice, contention, & in the end perhaps War, & even a species of suicide” (357). The antidote to such rampant greed and pride is a return to instinct and reason. When humans indulge in greed, their capacity for reason diminished and they become a slave to their passions (358). Bartram writes, “The Divine Monitor (Reason), the Mind, (or Soul,) and the Corporeal part or System of sensation have a mutual” dependence (358). Passion is not altogether evil, but it must always be tempered by reason, that Divine Monitor.

A second source of information about the moral philosophy of William Bartram comes from the wealth of letters he wrote to friends and colleagues while living at the family farm in Kingsessing.
Bartram’s sketch of Arethusa divaricata, The Spread-ing Cleistes, a kind of swamp orchid.
In a letter to close friend Benjamin Smith Barton, written December 29, 1792, Bartram expands his argument about the moral intelligence of animals. He begins the letter by answering Barton’s previous queries about the medical treatments of the Native Americans in Florida. He then goes into a reflection on the birds he has observed recently on his farm, and engages in a sustained commentary on the moral intelligence of such birds. When he is talking about how the movement of the wild pigeon and red headed woodpecker indicate a mild winter he writes that “they are ingenious little Philosophers, & my esteemed Associates” (Hallock and Hoffman, 2010: 168). Their knowledge of the weather might be instinct, but this does not mean they are mindless, unintelligent automatons. This instinct is the purest form of reason, as Bartram elaborates in this essay “On the Dignity of Being,” because it is unclouded by pretense and passion. Bartram follows this comment with a question: “Can any Man of sense & candour, who has the use of his Eyes, Rational faculty, doubt that Animals are rational creatures?” (168) This innate knowledge about the seasons, as well as the migratory instinct of birds in general leads Bartram to the conclusion that animals are possessed of superior reason. He then argues, “[I]f we compare the Moral System of the two
Orders, decide impartially, we must in many instances give preference to many Animals which we hold beneath us” (169).

Bartram uses war as an example of the downfall of the human moral system. He argues, “surely we cannot possibly assume any degree of divinity, or dignity in our present Nature, while we approve of it, or the shedding of human blood under any pretence whatsoever,” because it is the absolute opposite of reason (Hallock and Hoffman, 2010: 169). War is antithetical to the design and intention of Creation, a “most daring transgression of the command and Will of God” (169). Given this profound moral failing, he wonders why philosophers have such a difficult time acknowledging that animals have the capacity for reason. He asks, “What are they afraid of? That the Spirits of Animals will rise up in judgment against them for killing & eating them?” (169). In his conclusion he makes a reference to an account of an intelligent bird in Pennant’s Indian Zoology where its cunning is described not as reason, but as “heaven-instructed” (169). Bartram concludes the letter by asking, “For how can any one receive instruction from a preceptor, without consciousness, and an association of Ideas, which I suppose is entelligence & Reason?” (170) An animal cannot receive divine instruction without the capacity for reason, because it is this rational ability that makes such reception possible.

A third source of information about Bartram’s moral philosophy comes from his famous account of his four year journey through the southern colonies. While he travelled between 1773-1777, Travels was not published until 1791. In it he includes a wealth of anthropological information about the Native American groups he encountered in Florida, Georgia, and the Carolinas. He portrayed these groups in a very favorable light. He encountered societies that were stable and powerful, and which were characterized by generosity and morality. These Native American groups practiced subsistence farming, and did not abuse the land by cutting more trees than they could use or killing more game than they needed. Bartram writes about how the Muscogee people displayed a virtuous and moral character that was not forced, but seemed to be an instinct, natural and easy (Van Doren, 1928: 182). Bartram writes that the Seminole people “appear as blithe and free as the birds of the air,” and that “joy, contentment, love, and friendship, without guile of affection, seem inherent in them” (182-183). Here, as in his
essay “The Dignity of Human Nature,” he portrays the Native American peoples as the epitome of rationality. He argues that this is because they are the closest to animals, and so less swayed by passions and greed than European people. They live simply and in harmony with nature, an ideal to which Bartram hopes more humans would aspire.

*Travels* is also filled with beautifully descriptive prose about the extravagant flora and fauna of the southern colonies. In his introduction, Bartram writes, “This world, as a glorious apartment of the boundless palace of the sovereign Creator, is furnished with an infinite variety of animated scenes, inexpressibly beautiful and pleasing, equally free to the inspection and enjoyment of all his creatures” (Van Doren, 1928: 15). Elsewhere he writes about a beautiful morning in East Florida, “by the powerful influence of light, the pulse of nature becomes more active, and the universal vibration of life insensibly and irresistibly moves the wondrous machine. How cheerful and gay all nature appears!” (159) It is clear from these exclamations of praise that Bartram is in awe of creation, and that this awe has guided his moral philosophy.

Bartram also articulates a vision of how plants possess a certain mode of intelligence. When writing about the differences between the vegetable and animal worlds, he cites one of the main differences as the fact that animals can move from place to place whereas plants cannot. However, even though plants must remain where they are planted, they do “have the power of moving and exercising their members, and have the means of transplanting and colonising their tribes almost over the surface of the whole earth” (Van Doren, 1928: 20). Plants can move their leaves and branches so that they make use of the best spaces and gain the most sunlight. They also transport their seeds in the wind or the bellies or fur of animals (20). This is evidence of their own type of intelligence.

**Religion in Bartram’s Moral Philosophy**

Though Bartram is most well-known for his scientific contributions to the field of botany, his religious views were intertwined in his scientific ideas in a way that is unprecedented today. While the Bartram family remained affiliated with the Religious Society of Friends, William’s father John was disowned by the Darby Meeting for being a deist. Despite this,
John Bartram continued to attend the meeting for the rest of his life and was buried in the Meeting House cemetery. William Bartram is also sometimes referred to as a deist, though his religious views differed dramatically from those of his father.

The *Encyclopedia of Religion* defines deism as a term that signifies “the belief in a single God and in a religious practice founded solely on natural reason rather than on supernatural revelation” (Wood, 2005: 2251). Deism is a somewhat amorphous term, and can refer to a number of different religious positions. It was used both as a derisive insult and a self-proclaimed title. Deism can refer to belief in a divine first cause without any personal attributes, belief in a divine being that does not act in the world, denial of an afterlife, or belief in God without any other tenets of religious practice (Wood, 2005: 2251). In the eighteenth century deism primarily signified religious belief that was based on reason and theologically unorthodox (2251). There are problems with such a designation, the most noticeable being that there is no concrete line that divides believers strictly into the category of deism. Thomas Aquinas was a Christian theologian who based his theology on natural reason, but very few would consider him a deist (2251).

John Bartram was disowned by the Darby Meeting for being a deist because he refused to affirm the divinity of Christ, but this was not his only fault in the eyes of his Quaker brethren (Whitfield, 2008: 487). He scorned the formality of religious establishment, Quaker pacifism, and any attempts at making peace with Native Americans (487). In 1762 he wrote, “My head runs all upon the God in nature,” and that “It is through that telescope I see God in the sky” (487). Though he disdained the religious establishment, he was not an atheist. He appreciated the God he found manifested in the wonder of the natural world rather than in any ecclesiastic institution.

Raistrick argues that John Bartram “showed himself to have a clearer perception of truth than his disowners, as he continued to attend the Friends Meeting, to worship in their way, and to adhere to their peaceable way of life” (Raistrick, 1968: 258). In light of this, William was probably also brought up in the Meeting, and so his link with institutional Quakerism would have been strong despite the status of his father within the Meeting.

William Bartram seems to display some characteristic beliefs that are consistent with deism, but he diverges remarkably from
the convictions of his father. Though he certainly shared his father’s love of God in nature, he was also a social critic and a prophetic voice similar to John Woolman. His sharp criticism of industry and the pursuit of wealth and power, his ardent pacifism, and his positive view of Native Americans all aligned him strongly with the eighteenth-century Quaker worldview. He also took the unpopular position of being an advocate for animal intelligence, and even went a step further to argue that animals were more moral than humans because they were innocent of greed and passion. He instead advocated for humility in humans and felt that the antidote to greed and vice was a return to reason. All of these convictions went strongly against the grain of the dominant Enlightenment cultural ethos.

Bartram lived at a time when modern science was first rising to prominence. Natural history was still concerned with proving the existence of God and cataloguing the wonders of God’s creation. Bartram certainly did a fair amount of cataloguing, but he was also quite poetic and philosophical about his work. Science was also not something that was divorced from social issues. Bartram believed that nature presented humans with a moral imperative. Detailing the organization of the created world was not his only goal. He was also trying to use his knowledge to improve society. The nineteenth century would be even more revolutionary for modern science, with the inception of evolutionary theory in Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*. It would no longer be acceptable to reference a Divine Creator in scientific texts, but it would also divorce science with morality. The ideal for science is to be value free, completely objective. Bartram was certainly not objective, but he was also not complicit in the destruction of the human and natural world by the ever-improving technology that was reshaping the surface and organisms of the earth.

The Moral Imperative in Nature

By arguing for animals as rational and ethical beings, Bartram believed there existed a moral imperative in nature. He felt that animals provided an example of the correct way for humans, as fellow animals, to behave. Part of this idea arose from the common current of deist thought circulating in the post-Revolutionary war period in America that saw natural reason as the template for creation. The Divine Intelligence had
created a perfect order in the natural world, a view evident in the Systema Naturae of Linnaeus. Another part of this idea arose from Bartram’s intimate knowledge of animal behavior and the observations of their interactions with their environment and with one another. He observed birds and other animals on his farm, and he encountered many exotic creatures in his travels south.

Bartram, like Linnaeus and other early natural historians, painted an overly rosy portrait of animal life. Animals engage in aggressive behavior among their own species, they sometimes kill in excess, and they do not always behave as generously as Bartram believed. Further, natural systems are never perfectly harmonious. An ecosystem is dynamic and sometimes chaotic. Nutrients and water do not cycle as neatly as Linnaeus thought, and animal populations are not as perfectly controlled, but are characterized by periods of mass growth and mass extinction. Despite these failings, Bartram’s insight into animal morality is consistent with the growing body of research on animal empathy and the ethical systems of higher mammals such as primates, wolves, and elephants. His indictment of humans as the only animal blessed with morality and intellectual capacity has been substantiated by more modern studies of animal behavior.

It is impossible to argue for a moral imperative in nature from a scientific perspective, but it is not outside the realm of religion. Bartram saw the relative harmony of the natural world as a stark contrast to the violence and injustice that was rampant in human society. There were people with a great excess of wealth, while others starved. Men went to war against one another over the right to power and control over land. These are cultural phenomena that survive throughout the world today. Bartram felt that God had created a world that was in perfect order, in which all creatures were guided by reason. It was a world that humans had tampered with to the point of destruction. Having witnessed the wondrous beauty of unscathed lands, he could not refrain from attempting to restore human society to this beautiful harmony.

Keith Helmuth is a modern scholar who argues that Quakerism has an evolutionary potential that has been unfolding since its founding in the seventeenth century. He traces the evolution of the concept of human betterment from eighteenth-century Quaker businessman John Bellers to twentieth-century scholar Kenneth Boulding. John Bellers was a Quaker
businessman who in his later life became an advocate for human betterment, which manifested itself in his writings about “the significance of universal education, vocational training, public healthcare, social fairness, political economy, finance and investment, governance, and international peacemaking” (Helmuth, 2011: 36). Helmuth contrasts human betterment with the often-used notion of progress, which is the pursuit of wealth, convenience, entertainment, and security (37). He compares John Bellers to Kenneth Boulding’s more recent work on human betterment, and “the evolutionary potential of Quakerism” (38). Helmuth argues that Kenneth Boulding was “one of the first social scientists, and certainly the first leading economist, who understood that all progressive thinking and action with regard to human adaptation and human betterment must now start with the way Earth’s ecosystems actually work” (38).

This is important for the study of Quakers and their influence on science and ecology because Boulding connects the continual emphasis on human wellbeing and social justice with care for the earth, a concept that only became part of mainstream American culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This evolution of Quakerism includes William Bartram, John Woolman, and John Bellers as the eighteenth-century precursors to scholars like Kenneth Boulding. Helmuth notes that John Bellers “continued his study of social and economic conditions, matched them to the ethical demands of his faith, and renewed his call to Quakers, in particular, to act effectively on behalf of the poor” (Helmuth, 2011: 46). Bellers is famously quoted as saying, “The labours of the Poor are the Mines of the Rich,” to which Helmuth adds, “The dismantling of Earth’s ecosystems is the accumulation of human wealth” (47, 64). Helmuth captures the current awareness of Quakers on the environmental damage humans cause the earth within the context of human betterment that has characterized the Quaker ethos for centuries.

Helmuth argues that “the evolutionary potential of Quakerism must now combine social fairness, ecological integrity, and a sustainable economy into a single focus of wellbeing for human communities and Earth’s whole commonwealth life” (64). Eighteenth-century Quakers such as William Bartram had no concept of the kind of ecological damage humans perpetuate on a global scale in the modern world, but his insight into human nature remains relevant. Bartram questioned the place of humans as the pinnacle of the
created world, and argued for a chastened view of humans as one among many animals. Many of his insights into animal intelligence and his denial of humans as a special, separate creation have been vindicated by current research in evolutionary biology. Bartram remains an important part of Helmuth’s vision of Quaker history as an ongoing evolutionary process, one that continues to unfold before us.
A Letter from William Bartram, 1792

William Bartram to Benjamin Smith Barton

Responding to a missing letter from Barton, inquiring about medicines and remedies among Indian groups in the Carolinas down to Florida that Bartram had visited during his botanical explorations. With the letter Barton sent a book on Indian lore. Spelling is as in the original.

Kingsessring [Pennsylvania]
December 29, 1792
My engenius, worthy Friend

I received thy Letter this Week dated, 1st Decemb, together with the Book, which are exceedingly pleasing to me, I shall peruse this fine Volume, and be carefull, untill I return it to Thee

... St. Augustine in East Florida was call’d by the Spaniards the Montpelear of America [the French city of Montpellier was famed as a center of medical study and teaching] on account of Its healthiness. The Sick & Valitudonarean of Hispaniola & Cuba went there to recover their health & vigour, tho this city is situated very low; & close to the water; & on the land side surrounded by Marshes, Swamps, & wet Savanas. all their Wells yielded a brackish disagreeable Water.

But to remedy this distressing evil the proprietor of every Dwelling in the City who were able to go to the expence, constructed a Cistern of stone & Lime in the Center of his house, which open’d at top of the terrac’d Roof, which being there lowest, conducted the Rain water that fell on the roof, into the Cistern; having two or 3 large driping Stones plac’d one under the other in a cool Vault adjoining the Cistern, where this Water was constantly filtering for the Use of the Family. This Water was as transparent pleasant, & cool, in this hot Climate as that which springs from Rocks or a Fountain in Cooler Regions, & undoubtedly as healthy. The Spaniards of St. Augustine were remarkebiy temperate in the use of Wines & Ardent Sperits, this purified Rain Water, being their favorite drink’
25th this day vast Flights of Pglons are teding on Acorns in the Woods, they were observed 2 or 3 days past in great Flocks, coming from [south], their course NE[ast]. Red head Woodpecker . . . We see, & flocks of Ampelis, (Cedar Bird) every day, they visit us now to partake of Thy favourite Fruite diospyros [probably a kind of persimmon], as do Robins . . . .They & Rubicula americana [bluebirds], entertain us every morning with their greatful benevolent songs, as in the Spring Seasorn; regulus crestatus [gold-crested wren], & the Ruby crown, wren . . . & some other winged Guests from the North, appear in the Trees in the Garden every Day--

The wild Pigeon (Columba migratoria) returning from the So[uth], at this season.

and Red head woodpecker staying so long with us, seem to indicate a mild winter,

But why should the movements of these Creatures afford us any Admonition, or instruction; do they understand any thing of Metaphysicks, Astronomy or Philosophy? Why not, I say they are ingenious little Philosophers, & my esteemed Associates

Can any man of sense & candour, who has the use of his eyes, Rational faculty, doubt that Animals are rational creatures? Man undoubtedly excells all the inhabitants or creatures of this World. Not only in the Organisation & Figure of his Body or Person, but also in his intellectual System, particularly in variety, expansion, and powers, but if we compare the Moral System of the two Orders & decide impartially, we must in many instances give preference to Animals which we hold beneath US. Animals seldom err in their choice of food (& consequently are healthy &c), what ever concerns, the Senses & Appetites, & seldom transgress the rules of Moderation & decency, & they often set us examples worthy of our imitation with respect civil concerns &c.

For instance with regard to National Warr's, social sports, and divertoiments, Can —any action, affair or concern, strike our understanding with more decisive, & forceble Ideas of Madness, Brutality, Wretchedness, & depravity of Nature, than National Wars? surely we cannot possably assume any degree of divinity, or dignity in our present Nature, while we approve of it, or the shedding of human blood under any pretence whatsoever. Is it not in every respect contrary to every ones notion if Right Reason, in the blissful moments of Peace, charity, & cool frelection? Contrary to the designs & of Creation, but yet more
dreadful to remember or recollect! a most daring transgression of the command and Will of God, the Creator & Universal sovereign, to whom all creatures are accountable for their designs & Actions.

Is it not, my Friend remarkeble, very remarkeble, how cautious, even Great men and Philosophers are of allowing to Animals the power & use of Reason. They seem to put invention to the Rack in endeavouring to establish Terms, to exclude from them the possession of that divine faculty, diffused impartially throughout all Animal Nature. What are they afraid of? That the Spirits of Animals will rise up in judgment against them for killing and eating of them?

However I must acknowledge a Trait in the Character of your Worthy engeneous Correspondent Mr. Pennant, which you will not he surprised at, places him very high in my estimation. Where he gives a Beautifull History of Matacilla Sutoria [the Tailor bird of South India-Sri Lanka, so called because it sews leaves together to make its nest] Tho he does not expressly allow that admirable bird the faculty of Reason, as a guide & director in its ingenious performances. Yet he says he’s ‘Heaven instructed,’ which in my judgment is equal to Reason if not the same. Or perhaps inspiration.--

For how can any one receive instruction from a preceptor, without consciousness, and an association of Ideas, which I suppose is intelligence & Reason.

I can assure Thee I am thy
Sincere Freind
Wm. Bartram

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Beyond Liberalism:  
Rufus Jones and Thomas Kelly in the History of Liberal Religion  
Guy Aiken

It was Monday, December 19, 1938, a little over a month since the Day of Broken Glass, and three American Quakers were holding impromptu worship in Berlin. They were in the headquarters of the Gestapo, and two Gestapo officers had just left the room to discuss with their superior the Quakers’ proposal to help expedite the emigration of Germany’s Jews.

Left to wait, the three Quakers “bowed our heads and entered upon a time of deep quiet meditation and prayer – the only Quaker meeting ever held in the Gestapo,” the leader of the group, Rufus Jones, later wrote. “It proved to have been rightly ordered.” The two Gestapo soon walked back in and granted everything the Quaker delegation had asked for. Jones wanted the agreement in writing. The two officers declined. “What will be the evidence then?” “Every word that has been spoken in this room has been recorded by a mechanism and this decision will be in the record.”

Jones was now doubly glad for “the period of hush and quiet” he and his two friends had kept. The three Americans were told the Gestapo would telegraph that night to every police station in Germany “that the Quakers are given full permission to investigate the sufferings of Jews and to bring such relief as they see necessary.” Three days later the three Quakers left for America having effectively saved the lives of a few Jewish families who were able to leave Germany before the war began.(1)

The summer before this dramatic winter episode, another American Quaker had traveled to Germany, to visit with German Friends and make a report of their sufferings. Thomas Kelly went from house to house, living with Quaker families so he could get to know their hardships – in good Quaker fashion – firsthand. While he was in Germany, he gave the annual lecture
at the German Yearly Meeting, in which he said that the “true
ground of social endeavor” was the “experience of the Eternal
breaking into time, which transforms all life into a miracle of
faith and action.”(2) –

Rufus Jones and Thomas Kelly working to ease the suffering
in Germany on the cusp of World War II – here was “ethical
mysticism” in articulate action. As American religious historian
Leigh Eric Schmidt points out in his article on the “Making of
Modern ‘Mysticism’,” the Protestant mystics of the first half of
the twentieth century “were adamant about the inseparability of
mysticism and political activism.” Jones and Kelly were just as
adamant on this point as their Protestant counterparts. Yet
because they were Quakers who worshiped in expectant silence
and who were steeped in the writings of Quaker mystics like
George Fox, Isaac Penington, and John Woolman, they hewed to
a middle way between Protestant activism and Catholic
contemplation. And so, unlike Washington Gladden, Walter
Rauschenbusch, and other social-gospelers, they found their
thoughts turning almost entirely to mysticism and the interior life
when they took up the pen.

Contemporary scholars Gary Dorrien and Leigh Eric
Schmidt have written expansive surveys of liberal theology and
spirituality that, because they are so wide in scope,
understandably rely more on published sources than on deep
archival research. This necessary limitation, however, might
obscure the strong and often tortured link intense devotionalists
like Jones and Kelly forged between the inner life and the outer
world. To get at this nexus of ethics and mysticism, the historian
I think needs to read these two Quakers’ published work
alongside and in dialogue with their unpublished letters,
sermons, and other ephemera. Only then might “the current
desire to reconnect Christian spiritual practices and social
justice” find its historical ground and most eloquent source in the
lives and writings of these two dead, white, Quaker men.(3)

Dorrien and Schmidt have trained their historical sights on
Jones and Kelly only recently, in the past decade. In his second
installment of his three-volume survey, The Making of American
Liberal Theology (2003), Dorrien devotes a short section to
Rufus Jones’s Christology and mysticism. In Restless Souls
(2005), Schmidt spends a good chunk of his chapter on “seekers”
creditng Jones with popularizing the term and Kelly with
exemplifying it. Both of these scholars’ treatments, being parts
of much larger works, are necessarily limited in scope and so have holes and elisions that beg for filling and articulation. They thus open the doors of American religious historiography to these two remarkable Quakers, while also providing fodder for debate over Jones and Kelly’s significance.

Jones and Kelly, though anchored in religious liberalism, moved beyond liberalism each in his own way. American cultural historian Matthew Hedstrom has defined religious liberalism as, at its most basic, Protestants’ “theological accommodation of scientific and humanistic scholarship, and overarching focus on ethics tied to optimistic postmillennialism.”(4) (That is, their focus shifted to making a kingdom of God on earth, largely through human effort, especially social reform.) Insomuch as this agenda was negatively a rejection of anti-modernism, conservative evangelicalism, and premillennialism, Jones and Kelly were religious liberals (Jones more comfortably so than Kelly). Yet Jones’s radical pacifism put him outside the liberal mainstream, and Kelly’s own experience of self-abnegation led him to call on his audience to surrender their claim to natural rights. Before assessing Jones and Kelly’s radicalism, though, Dorrien’s and Schmidt’s analyses of their religious liberalism need a closer look.

Jones and Jesus

After graduating from college, where he had fallen in love with the writings of Emerson and Thomas Carlyle, Rufus Jones traveled to Europe and spent a year in Germany and France studying philosophy and mysticism. While walking in a French wood, Jones had a vision.

I saw stretch before me an unfolding of labor in the realm of mystical religion, almost as clearly as Francis heard himself called at St. Damien to “repair the Church.” I remember kneeling down alone in a beautiful forest glade and dedicating myself then and there in the quiet and silence, but in the presence of an invading Life, to the work of interpreting the deeper nature of the soul and its relation to God.(5)

This mystical calling to “mystical religion” fortified Jones in his stand against any sharp dualism between God and humanity,
any strict separation of sect or denomination, and any unbridgeable chasm between Christ and the individual Christian.

Jones’s conception of God was orthodox when compared with his understanding of Christ. (6) Gary Dorrien overstates the case: “[Jones] could be quoted either way on the question whether Quakerism should be Christian.” Jones did not subordinate historical Christianity to mystical Quakerism. Early in his publishing career, in 1904, he wrote that “faith” was “an actual appropriation of the Divine Life” and that it “produces a religion as first-hand as [mysticism].” Five years later he elaborated, “To insist on mystical experience as the only path to religion would invoke an ‘election’ no less inscrutable and pitiless than that of the Calvinistic system – an election settled for each person by the peculiar psychic structure of his inner self.” (7) Jones retained Christ as the paradigm of human being and cleaved to Christianity as the faith that embodied God’s historical revelation in Christ, as well as in Christians down through the centuries.

Yet Jones’s decidedly theocentric Christianity might very well have “opened the door to a religion of spirit that dispensed with [any] confession” about Christ, as Dorrien charges. And according to one of his most recent critics, Carole Spencer, his high anthropology took Christ out of the Light, the soul itself was the Light, and the soul became divine. Thus Jones created an “inner light mysticism” in which the soul was its own authority, an elevated humanism which severed the inward light from Christ. Consequently, liberal Quakerism developed a humanistic confidence in the soul as supreme.

While this judgment might rightly ascertain Jones’s fontal relationship to twentieth- and twenty-first-century liberal Quakerism, Spencer, unfairly to Jones, supports it with Jones’s enthusiastic quotation of the Upanishads at the end of one of his fifty-seven books: “When the sun is set, and the moon is set, and the fire is gone out, THE SOUL IS THE LIGHT OF MAN.” Jones himself never conceived of the human soul apart from God, though he proved willing and able to adjust his philosophical language to humanistic psychologies on occasion. For Jones, the soul could be the “light of man” only because “God as Spirit and man as spirit are inherently related and there
is something in man which is unsundered (sic) from God."(8) Jones at times might have attenuated this intrinsic bond between God and humanity, but he never “severed” it.

In fact, one could see Jones’s “pattern-type” theory of atonement and high anthropology as a liberal revision of “early Quaker holiness,” which, Spencer argues, “was closer to patristic concepts of deification than to Protestant Reformation soteriology.” Christ’s role in early Quaker perfection is often obscured by early Friends’ emphasis on the “light.” The “light,” George Fox’s associate James Nayler wrote, “which we witness in us, is sufficient to lead us out of darkness, bring into the fear of God, and to exercise a pure conscience before God and man in the power of Christ.” Jones, in an archaic mood, might have written this sentence himself, the phrase “power of Christ” being suggestively vague. The early Quakers’ Puritan and Baptist opponents never tired of charging the Quakers with blasphemously deifying all of fallen humanity by conflating the “light” in the conscience with the “natural” light of the conscience. “Every writer who entered into serious argument with the Quakers picked up this point,” notes the leading scholar of this early debate, Rosemary Moore.(9)

Though this critique of early Friends anticipates Spencer’s critique of Jones, the early Quaker riposte differs markedly from Jones’s anthropology. The early Quakers insisted that they clearly distinguished the conscience, which was “natural,” from “the light in the conscience,” which was “spiritual” and thus no part of human nature.(10) Natural and spiritual – human and divine – constituted a sharp dualism for early Friends. Jones, on the other hand, rejected this sharp dualism and elided the separation, and sometimes even the distinction, between human and divine. But perhaps where Jones meant elision some of his readers perceive elimination, and they cry out, not as the Puritans and Baptists once did (“blasphemy!”), but as Spencer does – “humanism”!

Jones’s optimism about human nature was not only theologically rigorous. It was also personally hard-won. Dorrien’s summary biography of Jones and his emphasis on Jones’s published work eclipse Jones’s personal tragedies like the loss of his first wife and son and his temporary bout of crippling depression, as well as his dogged pursuit of peace as head of the AFSC in a time of global conflagration.
This constricted look at Jones inadvertently lends credence to Reinhold Neibuhr’s opinion that Jones had nothing to teach modern Christians about the social meaning of their faith. \(\text{\textsuperscript{11}}\) Jones, though relatively privileged, sacrificed his health continually as he taught a full load at Haverford, chaired the AFSC, lectured and preached all over the country, and worked for numerous ecumenical efforts, including his own Wider Quaker Fellowship, which he started when he was well into his sixties.

Jones was in his fifties when he helped found the AFSC, and he was 71 when he began his second stint as its chairman. This was no weak-kneed liberal. Two years after the horrors of WWII and just months before his death at 85, Jones wrote in his final book, “Religious faith which springs out of the vision of transcendent reality and an ultimate divine purpose not only stabilizes one’s life; it beautifies and consecrates it. It infuses a marching power.” \(\text{\textsuperscript{12}}\) That a man of such vitality and devotion, and, at the same time, of such worldliness, could write with convinced optimism about humanity after a long life shot through with personal and global tragedy – such a man had (and has) something to teach modern Christians about the social meaning of their faith, as well as social activists about the possible religious meaning of their work.

“Seeking” with Jones and Kelly

Jones found the seed of Quakerism’s worldly mysticism in an unlikely place: among the Seekers of seventeenth-century England. Jones could work magic with his pen, and with one of his greatest sleights-of-hand he transformed the Seekers from a band of primitivists and separatists into a vanguard of wide-open spiritual adventurers. In Restless Souls Leigh Schmidt marvels at Jones’s literary legerdemain. Though “the Seekers would have made lousy seekers on Jones’s liberal religious terms,” the term “morphed in Jones’s hands into a general attitude, a searching and unsettled disposition that had relevance far beyond seventeenth-century England.” \(\text{\textsuperscript{13}}\) Today even some evangelical churches seek to be “seeker friendly,” while those on the other end of the theological spectrum, as well as some “spiritual but not religious” folk, also embrace the “seeker” label. Yet the first notable “seeker” on Jones’s model, in Schmidt’s estimation, was Jones’s own student, Thomas Kelly.
I can find no major scholar after Glenn Hinson in 1978 who paid any attention to Kelly, though *A Testament of Devotion* came back into print with Harper’s in the early 1990s. No major scholar had ever presumed to historicize Kelly’s devotional work. With *Restless Souls* Schmidt sought to correct these oversights. “Devotional books and their admirers are always prone to minimizing cultural context,” he explains. What especially irks him is the mystics’ talk of “capital-P Presence,” which he thinks is a “theological ploy (or affirmation) designed to lift devotional books – and spirituality generally – above the limits of culture and history.” Presumably no experience or insight is entirely “above the limits of culture and history.”

This seems to be the prevailing assumption of much of the academy, so much so that religious studies giant Robert Orsi can simply state that “‘reality’ itself is a construct.” Orsi and Schmidt are “constructivists,” yet Schmidt’s subjects are themselves “essentialists.” Mystics like Jones and Kelly firmly believed that it was possible to have a pure or unmediated experience. Though the constructivist position has come to dominate scholarly studies of mysticism, Hindu scholar Richard King has recently highlighted some dissenting voices. The “essentialist” school lives on, with increasing sophistication. It is not merely a relic of religious liberalism.(14)

Yet regardless of the philosophical tenability of, say, Kelly’s *Testament of Devotion*, the historian’s first loyalty should be to the worldview of his or her subject. In *Thank You, St. Jude* (1996), for instance, Robert Orsi spends almost 200 pages sympathetically describing and analyzing the devotional lives of his subjects, Catholic women in mid-century Chicago. Only in the last chapter does he lay out his own constructivist position. Schmidt, however, does not give Kelly a similarly sympathetic hearing. Though ostensibly he brings in Kelly as the embodiment of Jones’s “seekers,” it seems he has an ulterior motive, namely, to deconstruct the essentialist position that invokes “Presence” to escape both history and biography. In Schmidt’s estimate, Kelly was “all too clearly a frail and flailing man of his time,” and his devotional work was tinctured with his life. “Repeatedly there are passages that sound differently, more sharply edged, when Kelly’s own recently relinquished aspirations are kept in mind.”(15) What is at stake in challenging Schmidt, then, is not just the historical memory of a man, but the ability of that man’s
world-shaking experiences to endure the condescension of history.(16)

Kelly lost his father in 1897 when he was only four years old. While Schmidt makes nothing of this, Glenn Hinson does: “Thomas Kelly learned early the importance of responsibility and perhaps, like many others in similar circumstances, developed the drive which compelled him always to perform at the very highest level.”(17) Hinson here gives a plausible psychological explanation for Kelly’s “almost maniacal” ambition, to use Schmidt’s words, an explanation that tempers Schmidt’s portrayal of Kelly as irrationally and selfishly driven. Recalling the years after his father’s death, Kelly wrote to his future wife, Lael Macy, in 1917,

I don’t know whether you realize that I have had very little home life, as you have had. You know how we have always been in school, or away from home, and Mother was not at home in the daytime either [she worked to support the family]. We never did have that wonderful atmosphere you have been brought up in, because we just couldn’t. You can’t imagine what a magic word HOME is.(18)

Certainly Kelly’s lack of stable home life growing up, as much as his academic acquisitiveness, later combined with the possible economic privations of the Depression to goad him on toward an ever-receding horizon of security.

Kelly acknowledged the burdens his ambition laid on his wife. After his year at Haverford under Rufus Jones, he taught at a preparatory school in New Market, Ontario, for two years, and then served the YMCA in England near the end of WWI. From there he wrote Lael of “the desire to get into a college. But that will be many years yet, and will require a great deal of money and more sacrifice on your part than I want you to make for me.”(19) Though conscious of the cost of his dream, Kelly doggedly pursued it. After a B.D. from Hartford in 1918, he taught at his alma mater, Wilmington College in Ohio, for two years. He then returned to Hartford for his Ph.D., after which he and Lael worked for the AFSC in Germany for fifteen months. After Germany, Kelly taught at Earlham for five years, during which his daughter Lois was born, then he took two years’ leave of absence to study under Alfred North Whitehead and Clarence I. Lewis at Harvard. He returned to Earlham for three years,
taught a year in Hawai‘i, and then assumed a post at Haverford, where his son would be born and where Kelly would teach until he fell dead on his kitchen floor on January 17, 1941.

This constant movement could hardly have provided him or his family with stability. But as Kelly’s son and biographer, Richard, remembers, Kelly did not drag his wife with him; she followed him willingly. “Though she never fully shared his heights of intellectual ambition or religious vision, she faithfully supported and encouraged him throughout the years of struggle and sacrifice, and they shared a rich life of love and devotion.”

When they set sail from Hawaii for the mainland in 1936, “She would have liked nothing better than to settle down in one spot to build a home for her family. But she loved her husband too much to hold him back in his restless search for satisfaction.”

After Kelly’s renewal he traveled in the ministry to Germany over the summer of 1938. From there he wrote his wife “of being laid hold on by a gentle, loving, but awful Power”: “it takes away the old self-seeking, self-centered self, from which selfishness I have laid heavy burdens on you, dear one.”(20) Kelly owned his selfishness. He did not excuse or justify it.

Schmidt gives no hint of this, of Kelly’s self-awareness and self-judgment.

Schmidt also gives no hint of Kelly’s dedication to his family. His daughter Lois remembers, “Thomas Kelly cared deeply and primarily for his home. He endeavored to give to us all possible happiness, variety of experience and real friendship. If, in those last years, any shred of worldliness remained in him, it was in his ambition for us, his longing for us to have the ‘very best.’” Now, the historian has to read the fond remembrances of a loving wife and daughter (as recorded by a loving son) with skepticism. On the other hand, notwithstanding any evidence to the contrary, the historian has also to entertain the possibility that they might simply be telling the truth as they remember it.

Further research might one day settle the scale on one side or the other. Until then, the historian should allow that Kelly might have been magnanimous as well as selfish, and that his selfishness might have stemmed from an almost congenital insecurity caused by his father’s sudden death.

No reader should discount Kelly’s writings because of the man’s apparent vanity. His life until 1937 was a prelude anyone born into his circumstances might have played. But not just anyone would have learned from such a life “to live in another
key than he had previously lived.” Kelly did. The major devotional scores Thomas Kelly wrote in this new key were arranged after his death by Douglas Steere as *A Testament of Devotion*. Here are a few “bars”:

The basic response of the soul to the Light is internal adoration and joy, thanksgiving and worship, self-surrender and listening. The secret places of the heart cease to be our noisy workshop. They become a holy sanctuary of adoration and of self-oblation, where we are kept in perfect peace, if our minds be stayed on Him who has found us in the inward springs of our life. And in brief intervals of overpowering visitation we are able to carry the sanctuary frame of mind out into the world, into its turmoil and its fitfulness, and in a hyperaesthesia of the soul, we see all mankind tinged with deeper shadows, and touched with Galilean glories.\(^{(21)}\)

*Jesus and Jefferson*\(^{(22)}\)

No further research is needed to settle whether ecumenism was one of the major strains Rufus Jones played in later life. In addition to founding the AFSC for the express purpose of uniting Quakers of all persuasions with conscientious objectors of any religious stripe, Jones preached and spoke at every kind of Quaker meeting and every kind of church and served with leaders from each of the mainline denominations on John D. Rockefeller Jr.’s “Laymen’s Commission” in the early 1930s to study Asian missions firsthand. In Japan he meditated with the monks in a Zen Buddhist monastery. “No student of the deeper problems of life,” wrote Jones in a paper on missions that brought him to Rockefeller’s attention, “can fail to see that the greatest rival of Christianity in the world today is not Mohammedanism or Buddhism or Hinduism or Confucianism but a world-wide secular way of life and interpretation of the nature of things.” The irony, according to American historian David Hollinger, is that it was precisely engagement like Jones’s with the “diversity of the modern world” that “enabled [ecumenical Protestantism’s] community of faith to serve as a commodious halfway house to post-Protestant secularism.” Jones’s ecumenical work was therefore utterly self-defeating but only if “one approaches history as a Christian survivalist.”\(^{(23)}\)
One such religious survivalist, anyway, was Jones’s student Thomas Kelly.

In *A Testament of Devotion* Kelly rails against secular humanism. Glenn Hinson argues that “he employs always a positive psychology, founded upon the Quaker high estimate of human nature and potential.” (24) But a close reading of Kelly suggests otherwise. Twice Kelly calls human beings “unworthy.” “We are nothing,” he says plainly. Twice Kelly bemoans the self-reliance of “this humanistic age.” And twice he decries the vanity of human aspirations. This last dyad highlights Kelly’s anthropological pessimism.

But what trinkets we have sought after in life, the pursuit of what petty trifles has wasted our years as we have ministered to the enhancement of our own little selves! And what needless anguishes we have suffered because our little selves were defeated, were not flattered, were not cozened and petted!

Positions of prominence, eminences of social recognition which we once meant to attain how puny and trifling they become! Our old ambitions and heroic dreams – what years we have wasted in feeding our own insatiable self-pride, when only His will truly matters! Our wealth and property, security now and in old age – upon what broken reeds have we leaned, when He is “the rock of our heart, and our portion forever!” (25)

Finally, and most provocatively in the age of Hitler whose Germany Kelly himself had visited in 1938, Kelly expressly disowns America’s Jeffersonian legacy of natural rights. “Our right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is not absolute.” Stronger: “Totalitarian are the claims of Christ. No vestige or reservation of ‘our’ rights can remain.” Kelly’s mystical experiences had led him to repudiate the classically liberal value of autonomy. At its starkest, the contrast between Jones and Kelly is that between a “liberal who wants to set at liberty those who are bound” and a radical who, like the Apostle Paul, wants nothing more for himself or for others than to be enslaved by Christ. A close look at Kelly might go a long way toward reversing what Hollinger sees as American historiography’s neglect of “the intensity and range of the self-critique carried out by the intellectual leadership of mainstream liberal
Protestantism” in the middle decades of the twentieth century.(26)

As Quakers, Jones and Kelly had only one foot in the Protestant camp. The evangelical branch of Quakerism had by 1900 adopted a more traditional Protestant church structure, complete with a “hireling” ministry. Before 1900, evangelical Quakers had proved more ecumenical than their more culturally conservative coreligionists. But, as Hollinger points out, evangelicals in general were most comfortable working with other evangelicals in “particularistic” institutions that, for instance, absolutely affirmed the lordship of Christ and the authority of the Bible. Both Jones and Kelly, however, subscribed to a more liberal and mystical Quakerism that by the middle of the twentieth century welcomed theological and even religious “diversity.” Also, it held onto the Quaker distinctions of unprogrammed worship, nondescript meetinghouses, and no paid ministry. So there was no “church” for Jones and Kelly to lose. Yet their deep devotionalism resisted the incursions of secularism. Unlike the Protestant ecumenists, they were not “more devoted to creating and maintaining communities than to facilitating a close emotional relationship with the divine,” nor were they “more frankly concerned with social welfare than with the state of the individual soul.”(27) It was precisely the individual soul’s emotional relationship with the divine – and not ecumenical institutions – that Jones and Kelly sought to buttress as the last levee protecting the core of religion, mysticism, against the rising tides of secularism.

Perhaps Jones and Kelly are more aptly called ecumenists of the spirit, who thought they had “overcome the curse of Babel” with the universal language of mysticism. Their essentialism led them to believe that all religions met in the deeps of mystical experience. They would have had no truck with the “constructivist” position, that no experience ever entirely bursts the bonds of culture and history. Yet, ironically, Kelly could sound downright illiberal. Near the end of his life he reclaimed the evangelical language of his childhood, and in his devotional writings he avowedly often preaches like an “old-time evangelist.” Though both Jones and Kelly troubled the waters of religious liberalism, each assuming a distinct sort of radicalism that the majority of their fellow liberals would have disdained, Kelly gave his own more “hell” than Jones did.
When seen in the context of religious liberalism at large rather than that of “seeker” spirituality more narrowly, Kelly’s scathing critiques of humanism look more like cultural commentary than self-laceration. So it might not be too much to say that, while Jones was one of religious liberalism’s high priests, Kelly was one of its gadfly prophets – a voice crying in the wilderness, “the last vestige of earthly security is gone. For the plagues of Egypt are upon the world, entering hovel and palace, and there is no escape for you or for me.”(28) Kelly, maybe even more than Jones, just might have some wisdom to offer our apocalyptic age.

Notes


7 Gary Dorrien, The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, and Modernity, 1900-1950 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 370; Rufus Jones, Social Law in the Spiritual World: Studies in Human and Divine Inter-


20 In Richard Kelly, *Thomas Kelly*, 32, 89; 102, italics his.


27 Hollinger, “After Cloven Tongues of Fire”: 22.


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Most Quaker groups I know of worry about growing. Whether they call it “outreach” or evangelism, whether they preach about it endlessly or only whisper furtively in the hallways, the desire, the need for more members and attenders hangs over Friends like an ever-present specter.

This concern (obsession?) is as prevalent in large pastoral churches with many staff as it is in small silent meetings wondering how to pay the light bill. In response, barely a season goes by without a new outreach/evangelistic scheme popping up and seemingly catching fire, be it “friendship evangelism” for the pastorals or “Quaker Quest” among the unprogrammed liberals. Some are quite expensive, requiring training sessions, purchase of materials, consultants’ visits, and so forth.

And just as quickly, it seems, these programs fade, like last year’s must-have video game or a shark-jumping “reality” show. They recede, alas, because they don’t show results after the early flurry. And in the Quaker groups which are losing members most rapidly (you know who you are; your name is legion), an undertone of desperation can be detected in discussions about their future; if the tide can’t be turned, Friends, oblivion – denominational as well as congregational – lurks not far around the corner.

Where, the urgent query rises as eyes anxiously scan the clouded horizon, where can we find real help?

Right here, I’m pleased to report.

Mark Chaves has it all, in this slim, packed volume. A professor of sociology, religion and divinity at Duke University, his American Religion, Contemporary Trends, sums up more than 40 years of careful, wide-ranging, and impartial survey research on U.S. Protestantism. And in this body of work are all
the time-tested ingredients needed for solid, continuing church growth, which I'll pass on to you presently, no extra charge.

But first, a bit of background. The overall picture of American Protestant Christianity which emerges in Chaves's pages is not, at first blush, an optimistic one. For one thing, church attendance has been stagnant since at least the 1970s, and now there are signs of slow but gathering decline. (The trend seems clear, even though Americans obscure it by habitually lying to pollsters about their religiosity, claiming to attend church substantially more often than they actually do. (43-45)) But they haven’t fooled Chaves: “Any talk of increased religious participation in the United States in recent decades,” he declares flatly, “is baseless.” (47)

For another, the prospects for smaller congregations (which includes most Friends meetings) seem dim indeed: churchgoing Americans continue to flock to and swell the rolls of the so-called megachurches (65f), while the smaller ones dwindle: collection plates get emptier, and the main way their membership grows is older.

It used to be that this church shrinkage was primarily a liberal or “Mainline” problem, while evangelical bodies kept expanding, and took the differential as a sign of divine favor.

But that was then. In the past ten years, the Mainline virus has seeped across the Mason-Dixon line. (92, 131) Now even the once-mighty Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant association and one long under staunchly evangelical control, has been losing numbers and money bigtime. (Barna; Rankin; Stepp)

Meanwhile, the fastest-growing category on the religious landscape is the un-churched. (18f) Few of them are actually atheists (though non-theist numbers are on the rise as well), but they seem content to deal with God or Whoever on their own, thank you very much. Yet for the custodians of institutional religion, their indifference is just as great a calamity as if they were out-and-out unbelievers.

So, as Chaves repeats, anybody who tells you the U.S. is undergoing some kind of religious revival is either ignorant, or kidding: themselves, you or both.

Yet, amid the overall gloom, there are (non-mega) churches which are growing, some quite rapidly, and the reasons for their increase come down to a startlingly simple formula. Simple, but time-tested, and not limited to a particular doctrinal system.
What is it? Get out your tablets and prepare to pound the keys, Friends, because here it is:

The Guaranteed Formula For Church Growth

1. Have lots of kids. And;
2. Hang on to most of them.

That’s it. As Chaves says, “Differential fertility has produced approximately 80 percent of the shifting fortunes of liberal and conservative Protestant churches.” (88) Until the past generation, evangelicals had the growth drill down pat: their fertility was high, and busy youth ministries kept young people (and many parents) involved all the way through the high school years. (89)

The “retention difference,” Chaves explains, “probably exists because evangelical families place more emphasis on religion than mainline families do, and conservative churches involve young people in a denser social web of youth groups, church camps, and church-based socializing, all of which increase the chances that a young person will remain in the fold as an adult.” (90) After that much programming, even many young adults who wander off for a decade or so tend to drift back when they have kids of their own. Or at least, they did.

By the way, contrary to some reports, Chaves notes that only about 10 percent of youths who drop out of liberal churches then turn to the evangelicals. The rest then “drop in” to the “none-of-the-above-ites,” who don’t go to church at all. (87)

To repeat: if you want church growth, have lots of kids and keep most of them. That’s the law and the prophets. The once robust growth rate of evangelical churches, Chaves reiterates, came “because their families produced more children than did mainline families and because they retained the people they had better than liberal denominations did.” (91) Simple.

What? Is that reader resistance I’m already feeling? Did someone say it has to be more complicated than that?

Go ahead, cavil. Check it out for yourself (the book is short, barely 130 pages of widely-spaced, accessibly written text), and ponder the results. See if you find any way around it.

But what about all those nifty evangelism/outreach programs? Don’t they work?
Basically, no. Sure, some bring in newcomers, a few of whom will stay. But if you look only at the visitors coming in the front door, Friend, you will fail to notice the other attenders slipping out the side and back doors. Attrition is an ongoing fact. In the face of such erosion, outreach work is at best a wash, that maintains the status quo; except usually not quite.

By contrast, evidence for the efficacy of this “Guaranteed Formula” runs all through the research Chaves summarizes, and is widely confirmed from outside it too: the Amish and the Mormons are Exhibits A and B. Many Islamic groups are Exhibit I; Orthodox Jews are Exhibit J.

With the remedy in view, let’s look back at the American Society of Friends, to gauge the implications.

One word sums them up: dire.

Overall, U.S. Quakers flunk the formula test on both counts. Our fertility is very low, and our retention record ranges from tepid to dreadful.

On the one side, liberal Friends have for years been under the sway of an eco-orthodoxy that, stripped of softening verbiage, regards having children as a sin against earth. For instance, the leading Friends environmental group offers grants for Quaker men to have vasectomies, and urges fertile Friends to consider adoption rather than bearing children themselves. (Vasectomy; Adoption) Clearly, from their perspective, one of the many crises facing the world is that there are too many Quakers, and they are eager to help us eliminate ourselves. On the other side, our religious ed programs are, to put it kindly, mostly unpersuasive, and often mainly a flimsy faith in osmosis.

The record among most pastoral groups is, if possible, even worse, though perhaps for different reasons. The Clerk of a pastoral yearly meeting that was once one of the largest, but has shrunk to half the size in a generation, summed them up for me this way: “We’re too male, too pale, and too stale.”

They also fit the latest research, that Chaves only alludes to, which shows that most evangelical groups have definitely lost their mojo on the formula front: not only are birthrates down, but despite frenetic effort, they are hemorrhaging young adults, legions of whom are voting with their feet against the spirit of rightwing obscurantism and repression that largely reigns among their churches. (91, 99f; Barna).

For both wings of Quakerdom, fertility is being further suppressed by the ongoing economic drag of the current
economic depression: births in the U.S. have fallen for each of the past four years. (CBS; CDC) So for many younger Quakers today, starting a family is seen as too great a financial risk.

Well. In light of this bleak survey, what is to be done?

The great economist John Maynard Keynes liked to speak of “animal spirits” as a mysterious source of “positive decisions”, be they “moral or hedonistic or economic.” They involve trust, confidence, optimism, and a sense of adventurous courage, all of which can be affected by many environmental factors. (Keynes)

Clearly, American Friends could use a major boost in their “animal spirits.” Those in their fertile years could begin seeking one by rethinking (and rejecting) the propaganda that stigmatizes producing Quaker kids as treason against the planet. Older Quakers could encourage them in this overdue reappraisal, then focus on the retention side, supporting young parents, and helping create and staff the “denser social webs” that knit meeting communities together and keep youth (among others) engaged. For pastoralists, it would also help to cut out the “Christian” Right malarkey.

I’m well aware that these suggestions are easy to make, but hard to execute, for a myriad of reasons, both internal and external. The temptation to avoid dealing with them, and instead send a committee running after the latest outreach/evangelism nostrum is understandable. But to paraphrase the Catholic teachers of my youth, extra ecclesiam, nulla salus: outside the Guaranteed Formula, there is little hope in sight.

Chaves does not mince words: “The religious trends I have documented [of the past 40+ years] point to a straightforward general conclusion: no indicator of traditional religious belief or practice is going up . . . . If there is a trend, it is toward less religion.” (110)

Given the record amply documented in this compact, eye-opening survey, our respective status quos and their self-limiting orthodoxies are also a recipe for continued Quaker decline, or worse.

Keynes was no Quaker, but his words still resonate: “Most, probably, of our decisions to do something positive, the full consequences of which will be drawn out over many days to come, can only be taken as the result of animal spirits – a spontaneous urge to action rather than inaction, and not as the
outcome of a weighted average of quantitative benefits multiplied by quantitative probabilities.”

I’m not an economist, but I suspect that if Keynes had been a Quaker, his rendering of “animal spirits” for us today would be what they used to call, “Grace.”

Other Works Cited:


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Reviewed by Chuck Fager

In early August 2012, a large Chevron oil refinery in Richmond, California was hit by an explosion and fire, disrupting production of as much as 240,000 barrels a day.

About two weeks later, at the huge Amuay refinery in Venezuela, an explosion and fire killed more than forty people, and shut down the processing of over 600,000 barrels of oil a day.

Venezuelan officials claimed that the refinery was back in operation by early September, pumping out forty percent of the previous total, with more expected as repairs continue. In California, however, industry experts said it could be months before the Chevron refinery resumes full production. By early October, gasoline prices in California were breaking records, in many places topping $5 per gallon.

Supporters of Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez, then locked in a tight race for re-election, suggested that sabotage might be involved in the Amuay blast, and pointed at the U.S. Special Forces troops operating from neighboring Colombia as prime suspects.

Maybe. But I want to point at another candidate: the Oil Industry Destruction Team, not from the American Special forces, but from the Deep Green Resistance (DGR). To wit: “In this scenario, well-organized underground militants would make coordinated attacks on energy infrastructure around the world. These would take whatever tactical form militants could muster – actions against pipelines, power lines, tankers, and refineries . . . .” (439)

Actually, I made up the “Oil Industry Destruction Team.” But not the Deep Green Resistance – or their desire to blow up the oil industry’s key installations. Further, while the DGR saboteurs would consider five dollar gasoline a modest success, it would only be a small step on their path. That’s
because their larger objective, spelled out several times in these pages, is this: “We want, in no uncertain terms, to bring down civilization.” Or, as in the section on “Decisive Ecological Warfare strategy”: “Goal 1: To disrupt and dismantle industrial civilization; to thereby remove the ability of the powerful to exploit the marginalized and destroy the planet.”

In this “Decisive Ecological Warfare,” the energy infrastructure–oil, gas, coal– will provide a central set of targets. The plan is to mount enough attacks on enough critical points in the grid and associated networks that the whole network crumbles: “The overall thrust . . . would be to use selective attacks to accelerate collapse in a deliberate way, like shoving a rickety building.” (433)

But wait a second. What about all the people – scores of millions in the U.S. alone– who depend on this infrastructure for their very lives?

Good question. It is posed explicitly in the book: “If we dismantle civilization, won’t that kill millions of people in cities?” a reader asks, on page 422. “What about them?”

Ah, yes. Well, you see: they’re part of the problem. So they, and the farms that sustain them, have to go. In a target list of “All activities that destroy living communities must cease, forever,” coauthor Lierre Keith notes that: “It includes agriculture and it includes life in cities.” (194) Besides, it turns out all those urban dwellers are not actually innocent after all. Co-author Derrick Jensen pronounces the verdict: “No matter what you do, your hands will be blood red. If you participate in the global economy, your hands are blood red because the global economy is murdering humans and nonhumans the planet over.” (422)

Yet even though all urbanites are guilty, we shouldn’t think our authors are unmindful of the human cost of this sudden, forced collapse. We are assured that they agonize over the “wrenching ethical decisions” such attacks will raise: “If there are people between us and our targets, they are not soldiers. We can say [and they do say–CF] that civilization is a war against the living world, but that does not answer the moral dilemma of putting living beings at risk. I [co-author Lierre Keith] have no answer, only an emergency the size of land, sea and sky. . . . No one who does not feel the burden of the moral risks of serious action should be making these decisions. Extremism has its own addictive thrills; violence feeds
masculinity too easily, and the human heart is quite capable of justifying atrocity. And I know that decisions have to be made, life and death decisions, the decisions of the desperate.” (497, 499)

So, for instance, if the Amuas explosion were the result of DGR sabotage, the perpetrators would have figured that the 40-plus people it killed were an acceptable cost in terms of “collateral damage.” And in the full-on campaign of “Decisive Ecological Warfare” as envisaged by these authors (425ff), the casualty toll would amount to 40 with several zeroes added. Several.

Oops– did I forget to mention that I picked up *Deep Green Resistance* on the book table of a strongly green-oriented Yearly Meeting this past summer? The thesis and authors were entirely new to me. But once open, I couldn’t shut the book; bought it and read it from cover to cover.

As a writer, I’m something of a fanatic about freedom of the press and freedom to read. So I would not propose banning books. Nevertheless, standing at the book table, turning the pages in something like a state of shock, I wondered how a Quaker bookstore manager would feel about helping disseminate the ideas and plans that *Deep Green Resistance* laid out.

I wondered because, to be strictly accurate, I had encountered many of the ideas in it before – not in a Quaker setting, but in my day job, witnessing for peace near a large U.S. military base which hosts many of the most secretive and ruthless killer units of our war machine. These units excel in exactly the skills, such as clandestine sabotage, that these authors recommend and say they are working to attract and, pardon the expression, refine in the service of destroying industrial civilization.

Having browsed at many book tables at many Quaker gatherings, I can’t recall seeing such a manifesto and textbook on one of them before. It is jarring to find, across from Woolman’s *Journal*, Kelly’s *Testament of Devotion*, and tracts extolling pacifism, a book which favorably referenced the Special Forces Guerrilla Warfare handbook, the Sabotage Manual of the pre-CIA OSS. It hails the IRA terror campaigns, along with the French Resistance and the Algerian rebels, as models of action on their intensely felt “concern,” and
dispassionately analyzes the proper uses of assassination, and the necessity to “eliminate” (i.e., murder) informants, infiltrators, or those who leave the underground groups with critical identifying information.

In military terms, especially in the U.S. clandestine units, none of this is unusual; DGR’s authors have done this part of their homework well. For Quakers – well, not so much. (I hope.)

Yet if you look past the surface of Quaker history, there are analogues. Who else has read of Abraham Lincoln writing to Eliza Gurney in 1864, as the Civil War raged:

“Your people – the Friends – have had, and are having, a very great trial. On principle, and faith, opposed to both war and oppression, they can only practically oppose oppression by war. In this hard dilemma, some have chosen one horn and some the other.”

And it was so: many young male Friends chose the “horn” of joining the Union army, where they saw and took part in unspeakable violence.

Or what of the Quaker magistrates who ruled Rhode island in 1675, when an Indian terror war engulfed the colony, and most of eastern New England? How were they to uphold their peace testimony while discharging their official duties to protect the citizenry at large? In that case, they did two things: they passed the first Conscientious Objection law for their brethren of “tender conscience” as to bearing arms; then they went to war, joining the campaign which won the war and destroyed much of what was left of Indian culture in their region.

In both these cases (as later in World Wars One and Two), many Friends came to believe that an imminent emergency on their very doorstep required a response which included violence – not just the force of self-defense, but the organized violence of warfare.

So let me not retreat into naivete: dealing with actual wars up close has often been difficult for otherwise dedicated Friends. Thus the question becomes: are we in such an emergency situation now, with regard to the environment? And if so, is guerrilla war aimed at destroying civilization the proper and faithful response?
In DGR, the authors’ answers, of course, are Yes, and Hell, Yes! They make their case forcefully, in detail, and with a seemingly well-organized, coherent argument. I have to hand it to them: they take the tenor and content of much doomsday ecological rhetoric, and follow the logic out to the end, or at least, one end.

At points they almost had me nodding in agreement that it might indeed be better if nine-tenths of the world’s humans would hurry up and perish in the wake of these guerrilla/saviors’ intended infrastructure destruction, so the survivors could flourish quietly in the scattered, feminist-oriented, elder-governed hunter-gatherer villages that they foresee in their place. (26) There they’ll follow the new religion that Lierre Keith says we must invent to replace the irredeemably sexist traditional faiths, especially the hopelessly misogynist Abrahamic religions. (160)

Almost nodding? Forgive me; that was an exaggeration for stylistic effect. Once I read through the entirely of their plans and saw where they were headed, my reaction was similar to others mentioned dismissively in passing: they were talking a “Pol Pot-styled genocide,” but on a much larger scale; which they acknowledged that “the authors of this book are often accused of suggesting.” (225)

The accusation has merit. If they could, these self-appointed world saviors are prepared to kill off 95 percent of humanity to impose their vision of how the remnant ought to live; they insist that “we face a decision, individually and as a resistance movement. Because a small number of people could directly target that [industrial] infrastructure; a few more, willing to persist, could potentially bring it down.” (110)

Co-author Aric McBay puts it this way: “A drop in the human population is inevitable, and fewer people will die if collapse happens sooner. . . . Therefore, those of us who care about the future of the planet have to dismantle the industrial energy infrastructure as rapidly as possible. We’ll all have to deal with the social consequences as best we can. Besides, rapid collapse is ultimately good for humans – even if there’s a partial die-off – because at least some people survive.” (439) And Lierre Keith gets coy: “The authors of this book have been accused of suggesting genocide: meanwhile, the genocide is happening now.” (502)
Does this make sense? Consider: life is a terminal condition; over time, the fatality rate is always one hundred percent. But if we’re all going to die eventually, does that make it okay for somebody to intentionally kill you, or me, or our children, now, to achieve some anticipated future benefit?

Such early, induced deaths do happen, of course; normally, we call them murders. When they happen on an industrial scale, it’s genocide. And urging the elimination of ninety to ninety-five percent of human life by intentional action qualifies as genocide squared in my book.

But, they promise, their genocide will be better than “ours,” that is, the planetary damage inflicted by the current system. And besides, remember that they promise to feel bad over the “wrenching ethical decisions” involved in carrying out their program. Indeed.

I had to get past the mind-boggling scale of this scheme, which wasn’t easy, before I could respond to the underlying chain of reasoning. Once I did, however, many features of it became familiar. So familiar, in fact, they were almost hackneyed. I’ve lived through similar arguments, and their calamitous consequences, at least twice in my adult life.

First of all, a key premise of their program is that nothing less will or can be “effective;” all else is mere talk or escapism. And to give them their due, they present often incisive critiques of many other approaches to the environmental damage of our present course. Yet the record of their violence-based approach is not subjected to the same scrutiny.

But it needs to be: Guerrilla insurgencies often fail, with great and pointless loss of life. And where others have initially succeeded (as, for instance, in Zimbabwe, Algeria or, dare I say it, Pol Pot’s Cambodia), they have often produced new regimes as destructive and repressive as (or worse than) anything that went before.

The authors’ response is that, no matter how flawed their plan might be, the present course is unimaginably worse, and its future bound to be even more destructive.

But here another question comes into view: in saying that, they are claiming to know the future, at least of the current trajectory. But do they?

In this case, one can be definite: no, they don’t. Nobody does, after all. And the limits of the authors’ prescience are shown by the fact that when they venture into actual prediction,
they run smack into the Harold Camping problem. (Camping, one will recall, was the radio preacher who put up billboards nationwide announcing Judgment Day and the End of Time in May or October of 2011.) In DGR, they cite a confident prediction that by “2012” there will be “an epidemic of permanent blackouts [that] spreads worldwide . . . .”(42)

Well, 2012 is more than three-quarters over as this is written, and while it has seen its share of natural disasters, Judgment Day has yet to arrive, and the lights are still going on in most places that have electricity. More unsettling, this year the U.S. appears to be on its way to producing more energy rather than less. So like preacher Camping, the DGR Endtimes scenario deserves to be taken with a grain of salt. Or maybe a shaker full. Further, not knowing the future undercuts their forecast in another way: in many areas of the world, population is dropping even without genocidal attacks; so there may be hope for a softer landing than they envision. Similarly, technology is advancing in many areas related to energy use. Is it really impossible, unthinkable that technology, which largely got us into our current environmental fix, might be able to help us figure out how to, at least, muddle through it? Sometimes I feel pessimistic too; but not always, and who can be sure?

Next, there is the problem of the vanguard. People, the authors declare, cannot be counted on to do the right thing, either in society generally, and certainly not regarding the planet. “The vast majority of the population will do nothing,” declares Keith, “unless they are led, cajoled, or forced.” (26) Only the latter option will now serve, they insist, and thus they are ready to shoulder the unwelcome burden of coercion. Not that the authors plan to blow up the refineries and power grid themselves, you understand; but they expect to inspire and attract those cadres who will actually “shove the rickety building” of industrial civilization, and the billions of us living in it, over the cliff.

Moreover, they are confident that, despite the inevitable and regrettable “collateral damage,” their violence will be different, and better than that of the status quo. Keith, a determined feminist, is particularly confident of this, insisting that “violence is a broad category of action; it can be wielded destructively or wisely. . . .We can build a resistance movement and a supporting culture in which atrocities are always unacceptable; in which penalties for committing them are swift and severe; in which violence is not glorified as a concept but
instead understood as a specific set of actions that we may have to take up, but that we will also set down to return to our communities . . . . We need our combatants to be of impeccable character for our public image, for the efficacy of our underground cells, and for the new society we’re trying to build. . . . Only people with a distaste for violence should be allowed to use it.” (83)

Well, good luck with that. After my decade of watching U.S. combat forces returning from the current wars, I’ve seen too many once-idealistic youths of good character reduced to a state in which suicides outnumber combat deaths, rapes and domestic violence are rampant, along with drug abuse and alcoholism. Reports from other war-torn countries reinforce these observations. (The technical phrase for this, if I recall correctly, is, “War is Hell.”) So count me as deeply skeptical about developing a new, civilized variety of deep green violence.

And when it comes to their scenario for “Decisive Ecological Warfare,” the forecasts, while well-informed at one level, follow a path that is all-too familiar, and disastrous.

Consider the recent case of Iraq: we were confidently told that Saddam Hussein was as bad as Hitler or worse; that he certainly had WMDs and was ready to use them against us; that all nonviolent responses to his regime were hopeless or naive; that dissenters from the plan to remove him were uninformed, foolish, and/or terrorist sympathizers; that while there would be some unavoidable civilian casualties, these would be strictly minimized and the airstrikes surgical; that our troops would be greeted with cheers as liberators; and the good we would accomplish would far outweigh any harm done. Meanwhile, the war would be cheap, and quickly pay for itself.

How did it turn out? US officials and combat commanders didn’t know as much about Hussein or Iraq as they thought; they completely misjudged the internal balance of forces in the country, and unleashed terrible waves of internecine bloodletting (which continue, almost ten years later); the war produced millions of refugees; the planners grossly underestimated the war’s cost, both in blood and treasure; and grossly over-estimated the US forces’ ability to direct events. They lost control of the violence, and saw their idealistic pronouncements descend into the moral sewers of Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, and black site torture prisons. And after them all have come the killer drones.
The U.S. lost the Iraq war. Thirty-five years earlier, after a decade of fighting similar in many respects, it had likewise lost the Vietnam war. It will soon lose the Afghanistan war as well.

All of which brings a new and decidedly colder light to the bedrock issue of “effectiveness.” The authors insist that nothing less than an eco-war, spread across an area vastly larger than Iraq can “effectively” end human damage to the environment. They will end the damage with a new kind of feminist-informed, genteel violence, that will bring down civilization while somehow minimizing harm to the innocent. The short-term human cost, they inconsistently admit (but shrug off) will be huge; but the few survivors will thank these revolutionaries in the end.

How feasible is this plan to smash civilization with guerrilla strikes on infrastructure? Frankly, it looks to me like a steep mountain to climb. The world is a big place; there’s an awful lot of infrastructure, and it’s not all linked together. Much of it is also very resilient: large pieces have come back from major shocks.

The 9-11 attacks are a prime example here: yes, they do fit the small-scale covert model: a handful of fanatics did bring down the twin towers, killed more than 2000, and traumatized the nation. No question, that attack was a very big deal.

But look also at what it did NOT accomplish: 9-11 didn’t crash the U.S. economy (it took our own feral financiers to do that, several years later, and not with underwear bombs, but with paper and glowing computer screens, from plush corner offices). Nor did 9-11 crush the US military, or paralyze the government; even major league baseball was only interrupted for a week.

So: 9-11 was a historic terrorist trauma, yes; but it came nowhere near shoving the US over the edge of any abyss. It suggests that bringing down civilization, even just America’s flawed version of it, is a much bigger undertaking. A much bigger war. Is this really almost within the reach of “a small number of people,” and needing only “a few more, willing to persist” to “bring it down.” (110) Again, I doubt it.

Which raises one final query: what do the authors know of war, real war, beyond what they have read? There is no indication of direct experience among any of the three.

So let me be plain: DGR’s plan is fantasy. Dangerous fantasy. And folly. But a potentially seductive folly, particularly
in certain credulous corners of our society. The authors appear to be aiming their thick volume squarely at younger readers, particularly those clustered around hippie enclaves and liberal college towns. In their recounting of how the “decisive” warfare will go down, they list as centers of resistance Asheville, North Carolina; Austin, Texas; Burlington, Vermont; Eugene, Oregon; Madison, Wisconsin; Berkeley; Lawrence, Kansas; Northampton, Massachusetts; and Ithaca, New York: hip college towns all, with only one in the Ivy League. In midsummer of 2012, a DGR recruiting roadshow traveled north from Florida to Washington DC, stopping at several college towns and activist collectives, where they shared a summary of the book. The tour team was five young people, who faithfully called for the development of underground groups to bring down civilization, for our own good.

Can anything be salvaged from this DGR false gospel? Perhaps. To the extent that it contributes to the growth of what it calls “a culture of resistance” to environmental degradation, there could be some positive potential. Such “cultures of resistance” need not be part of mass death cults such as DGR envisions. Quakerism has, in time of persecution and war, sometimes performed similar functions. This history has not escaped our authors’ notice: they mention Quakers several times as examples of such a resistance culture.

The attention is flattering, but caution is called for. Environmental concern is widespread among Friends today; but I urge us to clearly distinguish this concern from the genocidal pretensions and rhetoric of the DGR approach. There are practical as well as religious reasons for this. DGR’s dreams of “shoving the rickety building” of industrial civilization into collapse by sabotage and violence are not only unhinged, they are also a recipe for legal trouble, both for participants and their fellow travelers. Co-author Keith refers to the “Green Scare” (170), a series of federal indictments and trials of environmental underground activists in the western states for arson and other crimes involving animal farms, horticultural facilities, housing developments, cell phone towers and other targets. The authors expect more government crackdowns, and I believe they’re quite right to do so. But if Quakers are going to face persecution, let it not be for such a crackpot scheme.

Nevertheless, I predict this book will have a long shelf life, and a spreading influence. Parts of it could make a valuable...
study guide even for many who can see through and set aside the grandiose illusions of their planned eco-armageddon. This would include the preponderance of liberal Friends, who subscribe to one or another of the ecological transformation schemes described and challenged in its pages. The work of understanding this “deep green” version, sifting out what’s valuable in its critiques, and understanding its limits, already glimmering in the flames of the Chevron and Amuay refineries, will be a useful and enlightening exercise.

Maybe that’s why the book was on the yearly meeting’s book table.

Maybe.
About the Contributors

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