Quaker Higher Education QHE

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This issue of QHE showcases a broad range of articles illustrating the types of messages that you might likely encounter at an FAHE Annual Conference. They reflect the scriptural and the secular, the philosophical and the technical. Leading off**,** Carole Spencer, drawing on scripture and Quaker authors, reprises her plenary presentation from the 2009 FAHE conference, movingly describing how we might follow the mystic's contemplative path to the *abundant life.*

In our second article, Steve Smith describes the course, *"Theories of the Good Life,"* that transformed his own life, as well as the lives of so many of his students. Steve's course is one that I'm sure many of us wish that we had taken somewhere in our academic careers.

Donald Smith follows by introducing an affirmative approach for addressing one of the thorniest of instructional problems, ensuring that students complete their reading assignments prior to class. *Just in Time Teaching* demands substantial effort from already busy faculty, but it is an effort that you just might want to make.

Jeff Dudiak explores the opportunity that a postmodern perspective provides for fruitful dialogue among Quaker factions. Celebrating Quakerism's expansive brand of Christianity, continually *over-flowing its own traditional and current articulations;* Jeff makes no attempt to chart the course such dialogue must follow. Rather, he invites our participation.

QHE will periodically publish non-fiction articles which, although not focusing specifically on higher education, address issues of concern to Quaker educators. The final article in this issue, illustrating the genre, is a first person account of my 1970's encounter with Civil Rights icon, Ralph Abernathy. Following the article, is a link to Reverend Abernathy's 1968, Solidarity Day speech on the Poor People's Campaign. Delivered forty-two years ago, it remains eerily relevant today, a transcendent call for sustained action for social justice.

Submissions: *QHE* is published twice a year, in the spring and the fall. Articles submitted for possible publication should be sent as Word documents to: weinholtz@hartford.edu . Since *QHE* is not wed to any particular referencing format, you may use the professional style of your choice. If you would like to discuss an idea that you have for an article, my telephone number is: 860-768-4186. In case you want to send a hardcopy, my address is: Donn Weinholtz, Department of Educational Leadership, University of Hartford, 223 Auerbach Hall, 200 Bloomfield Ave., West Hartford, CT 06117.

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Please scroll to page 13 to register for this June's FAHE Conference.

"Love yourself, then forget it, then love the world": Holiness and the Abundant Life

Carole Spencer
George Fox University

From Mary Oliver's poem "To begin with, the sweet grass" from Evidence, her latest book of poetry:

And I have become the child of the clouds, and of hope.
I have become the friend of the enemy, whoever that is.
I have become older and, cherishing what I have learned,
I have become younger.

And what do I risk to tell you this, which is all I know?
Love yourself. Then forget it. Then, love the world.

I must confess that I struggled to know what to tell you, Quaker scholars and teachers, about education for the abundant life until I read this poem by Mary Oliver, who spoke my thoughts for me. Poets can say in just a few words what theologians need four volumes to say. And here it is—the answer to the big questions: what are we here for, what is the meaning and purpose of life, and even, I dare to suggest, what Jesus meant when he said, I give you life, life abundant.

Poets have the uncanny ability to do what Malcolm Gladwell in *Blink* calls "thin slicing"—filtering through all the bits and pieces of life and zeroing in on what really matters. Oliver's thin slice is exquisitely simple: "Love yourself, then forget it, then love the world." It encapsulates the Gospel, and what Christian mystics, and Quakers at their best, have always taught. All I have to say is really just commentary on this perennial wisdom.

First, let me provide some autobiographical context. I occupy a narrow niche in Quakerdom. I am a seminary professor, a church historian, and a Quaker theologian. I imagine that George Fox would chastise me on all three of these roles, asking why we would have need for any of them. (My Lutheran colleague once said to me, only half-kidding: "Quakers have no theologians.")

On the other hand Evagruis Ponticus, a 6th century Syrian monk famously said, "The theologian is the one who prays truly, and the one who prays truly is a theologian". Which makes us all, no matter what our academic disciplines or church affiliations, theologians, if we pray truly. What does Evagruis mean by "praying truly?" Early Quakers called praying truly, "inward prayer" – whenever you are consciously in loving union with God that is inward prayer. And inward prayer is another term for contemplative prayer—a different kind of awareness, a unitive awareness, which is the touchstone of the abundant life.

I would like to suggest the abundant life is a description of holiness—a relationship that you may not have ever

considered, but our Quaker forbears experienced, and they called it "perfection" –the holy birth in all its fullness (that's Robert Barclay's phrase) or we might say: grace upon grace, or fullness upon fullness.

So, let us go back to a source for understanding holiness as abundance, as grace upon grace, the holy birth in its fullness. Let us go back first of all to the Gospel of John, the Quaker gospel, and chapter 1, the Quaker chapter, and vs. 9 the Quaker verse: "The true light which enlightens everyone was coming into the world…."a verse many Quakers know by heart. And then skip down a few verses to 14: "The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace & truth." And then skip down to verse 16, and here's the linchpin: "From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace." (I emphasize the all meaning everyone, every person, no exclusions.)

Let us turn then to the letters of Paul, (also favored by early Quakers) and Col. 1:19, my personal favorite Pauline letter, because of how poetically& powerfully he describes the cosmic Christ, the Christ who is the unifying power of the universe. Early Quakers called the Cosmic Christ, the universal Light. (I am a true Barclayan Quaker in that I believe one can know the mystery (the cosmic Christ) without knowing the history (the historical Jesus).

In Col. 1:19 Paul writes:
"For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace through the blood of his cross." (Note again the all things—no exceptions—he even says on earth or heaven—the entire cosmos.)

A side note here: Hannah Whitall Smith, a 19th century Quaker holiness evangelist, was author of one of the most popular American devotional books ever written, Christians secret of a Happy Life (which she might well have called Christians secret of the Abundant life (which I think would have been an even better title). HWS accepted Col. 1:19 for what it literally stated--the reconciliation of all things--and adopted a view called "the restitution of all things" which for her meant God would somehow, someway, reconcile everyone. I mention this so you know there was a popular Quaker author, an Evangelical, writing that "if grace is true, God would save everyone," long before Phillip Gulley and Jim Mulholand's book of that title.

To return to our text: A few verses later in Col. 1:26 Paul writes of what he calls, "the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and has now been revealed." He then proclaims just what that mystery is: "Christ in you, the hope of glory". And honestly, until I immersed myself in Quaker writings, I had never really noticed this verse of scripture and its significance. This was the favored Quaker description of holiness from the early period on into the 19th century. Now whenever I read it, I can't help but be dazzled by it's implication: Christ in you, the hope of Glory.

This, indeed, is what we might call the "audacity of hope"—the Cosmic Christ, the unifying Light is within us all. In us, the finite and the infinite co-exist!

And now, one final scripture verse to connect all the dots. In another letter traditionally attributed to Paul, or one of Paul's disciples, we find a statement that if you weren't dazzled by the audacity of hope of Col. 1:26 , you might be dazzled by this prayer found in Eph. 3:18-19:
"I pray that you may have the power to comprehend with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, *so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."*

From his fullness we have <u>all</u> received grace upon grace. Jesus came to earth bringing spiritual reality, the fullness of God, directly into the material world. The ancient Christian theologians proclaimed that "God became man that man might become God"—this is pure Christian Orthodoxy, strange as it sounds to most Western ears, but it is really quite biblical once you see it. Quakers rediscovered this mystery and they called it perfection—to be filled with the fullness of God.

It was a whole new way of looking at the world, a transformed awareness that literally turned the world into a different place for them.

The mystics have always called this transformation "union with God"—we might call it unitive awareness today. It is not that we become "gods" or equal to God, or absorbed into God. It is not that kind of Oneness. But it is a mutual indwelling. It's taught most explicitly in the Gospel of John. "We flow into God and God into us. It is the nature of love to flow, just as love flows between the Father, Son, and Spirit in the relationship of the Trinity. The ancient theologians called this flowing of love--perichoresis—using a word taken from Greek theater--literally, a dancing around, the dance of the Trinity, and we participate in that dance.

Yet most Christians, probably 95% of them, would say about these passages of scripture: beautiful poetry, powerful rhetoric, but have no clue as to what they might mean. Unless you have had an inner experience of God, it is only words, and it does not compute. Jesus realized as much when he said: "seeing they will not see, hearing they will not hear." It has to be opened to you somehow.

For me it happened while I was praying—at home, by myself, in my bedroom. Nothing dramatic from the outside, no visions, no rapture, but I was changed, I saw the world differently afterward. To try to put it to words is impossible, because words can't contain it, can't convey it. The closest I can come is to say with George Fox that , "I was taken up into the love of God."

It is the experience of holiness as participation— it's not the reaching or attainment of any state, in fact it is only the beginning of the journey. It's the baptism, the entry point. It even happened to Jesus—when he was baptized by John---He heard a voice saying "thou art my beloved in whom I am well pleased." I believe we must all experience something like that. The entry point, is to actually believe we are loveable.

Robert Barclay had the experience while he was in a Quaker silent meeting, he describes it as, "the evil in me

weakening and the good raised up" and a feeling of being 'perfectly redeemed' came over him.

I think for all of us there is a defining moment when the veil is lifted. Often it happens in childhood, but sometimes it also lies buried there, and may not resurface until great love or great suffering reawaken us later in life.

John Woolman, like so many 18th century Quakers, had his defining moment, his entry point, as a six-year old child, alone, reading the book of Revelation as he tells us in his journal, when suddenly the imagery drew his mind into a transcendent space. He writes, "Before I was 6 years old I began to be acquainted with the operations of divine love." Many years later, in mid-life, he remembers the moment as if it had just happened. "The place where I sat and the sweetness that attended my mind remains fresh in my memory." It is the experience of what mystics call pure love (or unconditional love)—a deep sense of unity with God.

It brings with it a kind of certainty, not that you've figured everything out, in fact, it's quite the opposite, like you've been taken into the mystery, opened to it, and can accept it as mystery. And knowing and being are one. Love and knowledge are one.

And the world looks different. George Fox, after one of his "openings," said that everything even smelled differently! Fox said another time that he saw the "hidden unity of creation." The cosmic Christ incarnate in creation.
Huston Smith provides what I believe is one of the best contemporary definitions of holiness, one which I find beautifully resonates with Fox's great openings: "When the fit feels perfect, the energies of the cosmos pour into the believer and empower her to a startling degree. She knows that she belongs. The Ultimate supports her, and the knowledge that it does that, produces a wholeness [holiness] that is solid for fitting as a piece of a jigsaw puzzle into the wholeness [holiness] of the All."

Fox's most common expression in his journal, more common even than the inward light, was "in the power." And "the power of the Lord is over all." I'd call this a vision of non-duality--the wholeness of the All, a vision of the hidden unity of creation. The limitless ocean of the love of God, which he expressed so poetically in my favorite passage in the journal:

"I saw, also, that there was an ocean of darkness and death; but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness."

There is the flowing of love, the perichoresis—the dance of the Trinity.

To see an Ocean of light and love flowing over the ocean of darkness—that is "radical optimism". What is holiness, if not radical optimism"! Early Quakers were constantly being persecuted, thrown into filthy, stinking prisons, and their goods confiscated—how could they be so optimistic in such troubled times, enduring such suffering? Because they had a vision of an ocean of love and light flowing over the ocean of darkness.

Their optimism was rooted in their reality of God—and their union with God. This gave them a transcendent

perspective, a different way of looking at the world, which Fox described as being "over the world"--not in a hierarchical sense, but as a unitive or wholistic vision.

A term that is beginning to be explored today, though somewhat cautiously, that I will suggest is a descriptor of holiness is non-dual. Common to the East, it is a new word in the Western Christian tradition-- but not a new concept—holiness, incarnational holiness, is non-dual. Although the terminology is new, the concept is ancient. In Western Christianity, in fact, it goes back to Jesus. Recently I heard Richard Rohr, a popular Franciscan speaker and writer, with a huge Catholic following, as well as a substantial evangelical one, make a claim with strong supporting evidence, that Jesus was a non-dual thinker. As an example he notes that Jesus is asked 128 questions either directly or indirectly. But Jesus, as a non-dual teacher answers only three of them. He was not one to provide simple, either/or answers.

Rohr said, (and I quote): "It's amazing that we took the wisdom-oriented style of teaching that Jesus used, which is to pull people into the horns of a dilemma, to pull them into something that they cannot resolve with the dualistic mind, and we turned Christianity largely into giving people answers."

Non-dual thinking is comfortable with paradox and mystery. It is not either/or but both/and. Rohr continued by saying that if anyone should have been ready to embrace non-dual thinking, it should have been Christians. Christianity is built on paradox. God is transcendent, God is immanent. Jesus was fully divine, yet fully human, God is one, God is three. In order to live, we must die. But Christianity tries to believe these paradoxes by dogma, we don't know how to integrate them into our lives.

Quakers, on the other hand, could authentically say "I don't believe the doctrines, I know them". Quakers realized that knowing God by participation is far different than knowing *about* God by belief systems. Early Quakers brilliantly realized that if we don't have inner experience, or inner authority, we must rely on external forms. Then we must have an infallible Bible as an authority, or an infallible Pope, or unchangeable tradition, and protection of that authority would become paramount.

Owen Barfield, a great friend of C. S. Lewis whom he called "the wisest and best of my unofficial teachers," wrote in a highly original way about the evolution of consciousness, which he divides into three stages: Original participation, loss of participation, and final participation. He contends that the ancients initially knew God by what he termed "original participation"-- perceiving the spiritual world directly through nature, dance, ritual. But gradually over many millennia, this original participation was lost, and in fact accelerated over the last 3 centuries. Connecting with the spiritual world became more and more difficult and rare. However, mystics in every age have experienced God by participation. (*Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry*, 1957)

Quakers, in the 17thcentury, experienced God by final participation. They called the previous three centuries the desert of non-participation, "the apostasy of the church."

Like Barfield, original Quakers recognized that Jesus as God incarnate came to promise *final participation*. Mystics are those who have glimpses of this further stage, *final participation*, in which the spiritual aspect of nature is rediscovered, but now experienced as "within" us, rather than, as it was for original participation, "without."

Final participation is what is meant by that ubiquitous phrase “in Christ” that Paul in his letters used 164 times. “In Christ” means much more than “in the church” or accepting Christ as your personal savior. It is a mystical relationship, a new form of consciousness, a participation in the mystical body of Christ in the world, the cosmic, universal Christ.

A passage in II Pet. 1:3-4, that the Eastern Orthodox church loves to cite for their doctrine of theosis or deification, and early Quakers as the promise of perfection, can be cited as the key biblical source for final participation:

“His divine power has given us everything needed for life and holiness that through his promises… we may become participants of the divine nature. In the KJV this is translated “partakers of the divine nature.”

Richard Farnworth, a notable early Quaker leader, loved this phrase so much, he made a ditty out of it: “Written by one whom the world called a Quaker, but is of the divine nature a partaker.”(Barclay also quotes this key text--2 Pet. 1:4 several times in his *Apology*)

Early Quakers not only claimed to be partakers of the divine nature, but they also claimed to “have the mind of Christ!” Sounding even more arrogant than “partakers of the divine nature,” this phrase also comes from scripture. In what may be the most daring claim that Paul makes in his letters, in 2 Cor. 2:16 he writes "But we have the mind of Christ." The only way to comprehend such a phrase without sounding like a megalomaniac is to realize it means a new consciousness, a new awareness, an alternative consciousness which has absolutely nothing to do with power or dominance. Another word that could be used here is *metanoia*, which is translated “repentance” and means a reversal of the direction of the mind.

“The mind of Christ” is a spiritual path, which gradually unchains the dualistic mind by a shift in consciousness. The usual sense of separation disappears, between God, humans and others dissolve—so that loving your neighbor as yourself really becomes possible. How else can one see Christ in “the least of these,” or where we least expect to see Christ--in our enemies. This is only possible with a non-dual mind. This is the core teaching of Jesus. The mind of Christ is the contemplative mind.

Nondual is not a term that you would expect to hear from an Evangelical Quaker. And in my circles one could easily be dismissed as “new age” or pantheistic or Buddhist, by using such a term. The concept first emerged for me as I researched Quaker holiness for my dissertation, and became aware that the metaphysical aspect of unity was in fact the key element of Quaker holiness or perfection. Non-dual is a way of

experiencing the spirit — it is participatory, not objective.

Incarnational holiness dissolves the dualistic separation between the spirit and the material, between body and spirit, between secular and sacred. The symbol of this in scripture is the veil of the temple being rent, *we* are now the temple, all of us. Paul reminds us of that as well, “Your body is the temple of God,” he writes.

Final participation knows something by being one with it from the inside out. It is the incarnation of Christ within us. Participation has been the classical Christian way to express it. It is not the same as Eastern non-dualism because it is based on an historical, event -- the incarnation of Christ, and is expressed now as the cosmic Christ or universal light. Many proponents of this type of non-dualistic consciousness, or incarnational holiness, can be found among the Christian mystics, notably Meister Eckhart and John Ruysbrock, and in more recent times, George Macdonald and Teillard de Chardin.

Owen Barfield contends that we can understand the relation between final and original participation only when "we admit that, in the course of the earth's history, something like a Divine Word has been gradually clothing itself with the humanity it first gradually created—so that what was first spoken by God may eventually be respoken by man [humanity]." (*Saving the Appearances; Worlds Apart)*

Barfield also claims that even if he knew nothing of the Bible, his study of philology (language) supports this evolution of consciousness and would compel him to invent "something like" the incarnation. He writes, "It is perfectly possible to accept as true ... the evolution of consciousness without relating it specifically to the ... Christian gospels. On the other hand, once it *has* been accepted, one may come to feel that such a special relation is self-evident" [*Saving the Appearances,* and “Philology and the Incarnation,” presentation at Wheaton college, 1976].

Holiness and Contemplation

Early Quakers from their inception were contemplatives--practicing the prayer of silence, waiting in the stillness & emptiness-- withdrawing attention from outward temporal concerns and refocusing on inward, eternal realities. While contemplation has a long history in the Christian tradition, after the reformation it became essentially lost to Protestantism, abandoned with the dissolution of the monasteries. Quakers in the 17th century rediscovered contemplation and practiced it communally.

It’s curious that few, if any, Quaker writers, felt the need to write treatises on contemplation, or as they called it “inward prayer.” Perhaps they felt they didn’t need to because they discovered it had already been done quite well by others outside the Society of Friends, one a French Catholic mystic, Madame Guyon (an exact contemporary of Robert Barclay and William Penn.)

Guyon was imprisoned in the Bastille by the Catholic Church in France, for daring to teach contemplative prayer to lay people. Although her writings were condemned by the Catholic Church, she developed a large following among

Protestants in Holland, Scotland, and England (including John Wesley). But she may have had her greatest impact on Quakers. Her writings were first translated into English by a Quaker in 1727, but her influence on Friends has yet to be fully explored or evaluated. By 1813, a collection of writings by three mystics, Guyon, Fenelon and Molinos (though primarily Guyon's work) was edited and published by two Quakers as *A Guide to True Prayer: or the Excellency of Inward and Spiritual Prayer*. According to Howard Brinton, this guide to contemplative prayer would soon be found in almost every Quaker library. Margaret Hope Bacon, however, in her revised edition of Brinton's work, *Friends for 350 Years*, disputes this, claiming only a few friends ever read this work, but I would challenge this assertion, since the Guide was reprinted by Friends twelve times over a 60 year period, more than a few Friends had to be reading it!

Rendel Harris, one of the most learned and scholarly Quakers in the beginning of the 20th century, and the first director of Woodbrooke College in Birmingham stated emphatically in his Founders Lecture at Bryn Mawr College in 1900: "There is no Society that has been so influenced by Guyon as the Quakers have been." He may be overstating the case but his thesis has never been really examined. Harris also added his personal tribute to Guyon, crediting her with being "the teacher from whom I have received more help and guidance in the things of God than from any other person." (Founders Lecture, Bryn Mawr, 1900)

The perception of the Catholic hierarchy that Guyon was a dangerous mystic, must have appealed to 18th century Quakers. Like early Quakers, she was denounced, demeaned, persecuted and imprisoned. She challenged the intolerance and totalitarianism of the Catholic hierarchy. The difference between Guyon and the Quakers, and most other reformers in the history of religious protest, is that she did not feel the need to either leave the church or create a new order or movement within it. Her spirituality was so internalized she could practice it within any church body. Her later non-Catholic disciples, considered her a "Protestant in disguise." Like Quakers in England, she led the way into the modern world in her respect for individual conscience, religious tolerance, and gender equality. Her non-dual vision was the fruit of her inner transformation through contemplative prayer. She called this new way of seeing, pure love, or perfection.

Louis Dupré, a Catholic theologian and a leading contemporary philosopher of religion, in reassessing Catholic Quietism (which continues to be associated with heresy in the Roman Catholic Church) writes: "No other spiritual movement …has suffered more from misrepresentation and unfair polemics than what we have come to comprehend under the general, derogatory term "Quietism." I would concur with his conclusions, as I believe Quaker Quietism has suffered from misunderstanding and misrepresentation from historians as well.

The other treatise on prayer that became a part of the Quaker canon, was *Spirit of Prayer* by the 18th century Anglican mystic William Law. Law's book was reprinted by Quaker Anthony Benezet in 1780, bound together with his own

writings on Quaker topics (including a revolutionary anti-slavery tract.) Most Quakers probably presumed *Spirit of Prayer* was written by Benezet. (*Spirit of Prayer* was reprinted numerous times by Quakers throughout the 19th century, and many of its expressions became part of Quaker vocabulary.)

Although Quietist Quakers of the 18th century are typically presented as sectarian and separatist, reinforcing religious conformity by a protective Quaker "hedge," Benezet a true contemplative, does not fit that image. Benezet's trademark closing in his many letters (to non-Quakers) neatly sums up his non-dualistic, world-embracing spirit: "I shall be glad to hear of thy welfare; and in that great circle which is not limited by party or country, but with cordiality of affection embraces the whole creation."

These 18th century Quietists Quakers whose spirituality was most deeply interior, inclusive, and non-dual, the true contemplatives of this era, were not at all passive and unconcerned about the real world and social oppression. They were, in fact the most radical Quakers of their time, figures we consider among our greatest social reformers, and change agents — John Woolman, Anthony Benezet, and later in the century, the ultimate missionary, Stephen Grellet. They were contemplatives in action. True contemplatives are not cut off from the world, they are sensitized to the suffering of the world. They have learned to "love themselves, then forget it, then love the world," and devote their lives to seeking a way to relieve the pain and suffering of the world.

You can't sit in silence for extended periods of time with the dualistic mind. Recent scientific studies of the brain have actually confirmed this, brain scans have shown that people from Carmelite nuns to Buddhist monks who regularly practice meditation or contemplation actually resculpt their brains. Especially intriguing is the discovery that the part of the brain connected to the sensory world, our place in the world and our sense of self goes dark on the scans of those who meditate for extended periods.*

We usually think of mystics as otherworldly—they flee the world, even hate the world, and desire to transcend it, but that stereotype is far from the truth. True mystics are lovers of the world as divinely created – the material world, which is also the spiritual world—for they see them as one, and not separate.

Even an Evangelical like Hannah Whitall Smith, famed Holiness Evangelist of the 19th century, who was also a suffragette who marched for women's rights, illustrates the transformation that results from contemplative practice. HWS was raised as an Orthodox Philadelphia Quaker, was drawn into the interdenominational Holiness movement, and finally came full circle back to her Quaker roots, along the way she came to embrace a non-dual world-view, which she called Restitution, as I mentioned earlier.

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*NPR's All Things Considered: series on Science and Spirituality: Prayer may reshape your brain…and your reality. http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=104310443

In her later years she described her spiritual journey in this way:

> …the true inner meaning of Quakerism dawned upon me more and more fully day by day. It was the "way of holiness" in which they were seeking to walk. They preached a deliverance from sin, a victory over the cares and worries of life, a peace that passeth all understanding, a continual being made "more than conquerors" through Christ. They were in short "Higher Life" people, and at last I understood them; and the old preaching, which once had been so confusing, became marrow and fatness to my soul. The preaching had not changed, but I had changed. I had discovered the missing link, and had reached that stage in my soul's experience to which such preaching ministered. (Unselfishness of God, 1903, 280-1)

When she describes her experience of holiness in her later years, she echoes George Fox:

> I feel myself to have gotten out into *a limitless ocean of the love of God that overflows all things*... 'God is love,' comprises my whole system of ethics. I find that every soul that has traveled on this highway of holiness for any length of time, has invariably cut loose from its old moorings.

Are Quakers still contemplatives today? Can one be a contemplative in Higher Ed?

In the modern world, the world shaped by enlightenment thought, by the rational, analytical, calculating mind, contemplation became marginalized and almost lost. Even in monasteries where the tradition was thought to be preserved, it was in decline. Thomas Merton, is often credited for reintroducing contemplative prayer, not only into ordinary life, but even back into monasteries.

There's a story told about him, that he was actually not very popular in his own Trappist monastery of Gethsemane, where contemplation was supposed to be the focus of daily life. He was not popular because he told the monks that they were <u>not contemplatives</u>, they were <u>just introverts</u>! Sometimes I fear that the same could be said of Quakers!

It's not easy to be a contemplative in Higher Ed, not even in seminaries! Contemplation circumvents Greek logic. In holding onto logical systems, the ego stays in control. In contemplation the ego must be displaced. Quietist Quakers called this annihilation—a disturbing word, that repels us moderns. But it means simply, surrender. In contemplation we must give up control. Give up the dualistic mind. And in doing so you experience a whole new way of seeing, and being, joy and abundance. I would propose that "education for abundance" means following a contemplative path. This should be the primary gift of Quakers to Higher Ed. It was the Quaker gift in the turbulent 17th century-- a century which had lost most of its mystics, and thus the practitioners of contemplation. No doubt we can all agree that contemplation has been marginalized by most educational establishments. But we also can see that

a movement is growing today that connects contemplative spirituality with education; Parker Palmer being one of the primary pioneers in this arena. So much is being recovered today of the mystical tradition of contemplative spiritually, a wisdom tradition that preceded the scholastic tradition (which developed analytical knowledge and technique), to one that developed the inner person--an inward, intuitive knowing, without the need to divide for the sake of being right.

I recently learned an interesting fact about the root of the word "school" which is *schola* in Latin and *scholë* in Greek. The Greek word *scholë* means leisure. Contemplation is holy leisure. Beatrice Bruteau, in her book Radical Optimism writes: "Before you can teach, you must learn, and in order to learn, you must stop your busyness and hold still for awhile. You must give yourself leisure to learn." Meister Eckhart said: "What we have gathered in contemplation we give out in love." Abundance is not what we store up but what we give away—it is love poured out.

I've often wondered where our Quaker forbears found the inner resources to go on hundreds of arduous journeys, traveling by foot or horse or boat — traversing the world in the service of Truth. It seems that such a lifestyle could only emerge from contemplative mindsets — Quaker communities that were schools of contemplation.

After the stillness, comes the learning — school in the sense we are most familiar, and after the learning comes the doing. Meister Eckhart also said, "Wisdom (i.e. holiness) consists in doing the next thing you have to do, doing it with your whole heart, and finding delight in doing it."

The path of holiness is not one of renunciation, but one of abundance: Everything can be embraced — everything belongs — but the catch is we must cling to nothing. We must learn to let go and to let it be.

I'll conclude with two quotes from two great teachers of holiness. First Madam Guyon filtered through her Quaker editors in A Guide to True Peace: She writes that holiness or what she calls:

> Christian perfection….consists in the union of the soul with Infinite Purity, a union that includes in it all spiritual good; producing in us a freedom of spirit; which raises us above all the events and changes of this life, and which frees us from the tyranny of human fear; it gives an extraordinary power for the well performing of all actions, and acquitting ourselves well in our employments; a prudence truly Christian in all our undertakings; a peace and perfect tranquility in all conditions; and, in short, a continual victory over self love and our passions.

This is holiness as abundance, and Christian perfection as contemplation in action.

Lastly, I want to introduce you to a theologian, if you have not yet met her, who understands the core of Quaker spirituality, as well as any Quaker I have ever read—the German liberation theologian, Dorothee Soelle. Soelle reminds us we can't be contemplatives in action as solitary individualists. We

need the strength of our spiritual communities to sustain us. She also reminds us that at the heart of the mystic vision are the issues of power and right relationships. Mystical language is a language of unity and not of dominance. It is a language of non-duality. The goal of the mystic, she declares, is to live with "Sacred Power." (another word for holiness). Soelle writes,

> If there really is love, it has to meet two conditions. It has to bring about a kind of mutuality in which the unknowability of the known is preserved, the otherness of the other. Only in this way can love impart Participation in sacred power, in the shared power of the holy. This power is called "holy" because its nature is not to rule over others or to exercise domination that is sustained by dominion. It is "holy" because it is in essence a sharing of power, and empowerment in which everyone has a share in the power of life.

This is a non-dual vision, the contemplative way, the way of abundance for everyone.

Like the poet Mary Oliver, Soelle too, invites us to experience the Holy as loving ourselves, then forgetting it, then loving the world, through the shared power of the holy. Perhaps this is what Jesus is trying to tell us when he says "I have come that you may have life in abundance."

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Living Well: A Course on the Good Life

Steve Smith
Claremont McKenna College

The Catalyst

In 1974 I was awarded tenure at a fine liberal arts college — and my life fell apart.

Most persons who knew me at that time would have said that I was doing well. In 1970 I had married a beautiful and talented woman; two years later, we celebrated the birth of our son. I enjoyed generous support and respect from faculty colleagues in my home department of Philosophy and Religious Studies. Students flocked to my classes and gave favorable reviews of my teaching. My Ph.D. dissertation was published by a reputable university press. I was in overall good health.

But my private life was a disaster. I was rapidly disintegrating under the onslaught of hidden furies from childhood. The chief symptom: my abuse of alcohol. Realizing that I needed help, I spoke to my doctor. He told bluntly that I must stop drinking. I quit, got myself into psychotherapy, and began a long and difficult journey of personal rehabilitation.

Creating a New Course

Within the field of academic philosophy, my field of specialization was ethics. The first course that I taught in ethical theory had seemed successful; students engaged in lively class discussions, wrote fine papers and said positive things about the course. But after class one day, a particularly bright and engaged student approached me and said words to this effect: "This course is very interesting, and I enjoy our discussions. But what we read and talk about does not help me to know how to live my life."

These words lingered disquietingly on my conscience. Should not the study of ethics be helpful in the actual conduct of life? Indeed, should not philosophy today help us (as it did the ancients) to live rightly and well? In the throes of my own personal crisis, these questions became intensely personal for me. I could no longer set them aside in favor of academic "business as usual," nor had I the heart to do so.

At times of great difficulty in my life, I have found that Grace has opened a healing path—if I allow myself to see it. Providence intervened for me that summer: having received tenure, I was granted my first sabbatical leave. The ensuing fallow period of several months became a crucible for creative reinvention of myself and of my career. Spurred by the twin incentives of student interest and my own urgent needs, I created a new course, "*Theories of the Good Life*," that focused not upon the specialized topics of professional philosophers, but rather upon broad views of human happiness and well-being. I included in the reading list many familiar figures from Western philosophy (Plato, Epicurus, Nietzsche, Russell, Dewey, Camus and others), as well as scripture, fiction (including

works by Tolstoy, Kafka, Kazanzakis, Hesse, Lawrence) and psychology (Freud, Rogers, Maslow). For the first time, I reached out to include readings from the great Asian religious and philosophical traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism.

Asian thought was a revelation. Here were systems of thought that were every bit as sophisticated and comprehensive as any Western metaphysics, yet whose overriding agenda was to ease human suffering and to awaken to a life of liberation, compassion and peace. While some strands of Asian thought were ascetic and otherworldly, others called me back to the immediate, lived experience of my body, revealing paths for a healing of the painful split that I had created between my body and my mind.

In Spring 1975 I taught *Theories of the Good Life* for the first time. I offered the course each year for the next 33 years. Teaching the course never failed to bring me new discoveries and renewed insights for my own life; yet I found even greater joy in the intimate privilege of sharing in the life journeys of my students. Student demand for the class forced me to find some way to control enrollment — so I made the class an elective, open only to seniors. As they thought searchingly about the futures that awaited them upon graduation, my students' labors in the course became a launching pad for their own examined life. Teaching *Theories of the Good Life* became the most satisfying and rewarding activity of my entire professional career.

I structured the course topically around salient motifs of a rewarding, meaning-ful life:

- *Encountering Emptiness*: before surveying positive views of the good life, we read and discussed compelling statements of futility and nihilism.

- *Pleasure*: the first and most obvious answer to the problem of an empty life is to fill it with prudent and healthy enjoyment of honest pleasures.

- *Detachment*: life brings not only pleasure, however—but also pain and anxiety. Psychic detachment is an appealing means to relief and serenity.

- *Becoming Human*: if detachment from desires seems incomplete, perhaps a more natural course is the full development of persons as growing, self-actualizing beings.

- *Nature*: a broadened view of human growth is continuous with growth throughout the natural world. The good life entails affinity with nature.

- *God*: From identification with nature to identification with God: yet a more exalted object of human aspirations.

- *Authentic Existence*: The death of God introduces atheistic existentialism. The good life is courageous self-creation and revolt against a meaningless universe.

- *Awakening*: Not revolt, but loving acceptance of the present moment is the key to happiness. Dynamic emptiness (Zen, Taoism) is not the problem—but the solution.

Because no satisfactory text existed for the class, I created my own (*Ways of Wisdom: Readings on the Good Life,* UPA 1983), supplemented by selected paperbacks and various handouts.

Friendly Pedagogy

Lacking a template or standard model, in creating the class I followed my own instincts. Eventually I realized that those instincts were drawn from lessons I had learned as a Quaker:

- Rejecting the role of "the sage on the stage," I taught as an experienced fellow seeker. Instead of offering solutions to my students' dilemmas, I invited them to cultivate their own discernment and draw upon an inner guide whose voice was unique to them.

- Rather than structuring classroom debate around competing abstract theories, I urged students to speak concretely and personally—and I modeled that advice as best I could.

- Emphasizing kindness and honesty in the classroom, I sought to create a safe space in which students might become trusting and self-disclosing without fear of humiliation.

- To encourage students to be open with each other, I was open about my own life, sharing personal struggles and failures. I urged students to bring *all* of themselves into the classroom, thus integrating academic and personal concerns.

- I made liberal use of small group discussions, guided by queries that invited students to share from their own personal experience, rather than stake out and defend a position.

- I functioned not merely as a purveyor of information but also as an academic "clerk" and "elder" (mentor), supporting students as they discerned their own authentic paths. Commenting upon students' papers, I sought to discern and name students' strengths, encouraging them to live into their unique gifts.

Taking Stock

My prolonged investment in *Theories of the Good Life* has repaid me a thousand-fold. My own life has been immensely enriched; each decade has been better than the previous decade — richer, deeper, more spiritually sustaining. Because I am less caught in my own private agendas, I have more to give to others. Now fully retired, I still hear from students who took my class years ago, and am privileged to support their continuing growth into mid-life and beyond. Indeed, nearly everything that is now most precious in my life, I owe to facing that dark and devastating descent into darkness some 35 years ago.

Steve Smith is open to conversations with others about any matters stimulated by this account. He is happy to share electronic copies of his course syllabus; contact him at ssmith@cmc.edu

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A Way to Get them to Do the Reading: Just In Time Teaching

Donald Smith
Guilford College

Just in Time Teaching (JiTT) is a technique developed in the mid-1990s by four Physics professors at widely different institutions as a way to use the then-new technology of the World Wide Web to enhance active learning in the physics classroom. They describe the technique in their book, *Just in Time Teaching*, by Gregor Novak, Evelyn Patterson, Andrew Gavrin, and Wolfgang Christian (Prentice Hall, 1999). I embraced their ideas when I encountered them in 2003, and I have used them in a variety of courses (Physics and otherwise) at Guilford College and at the University of Michigan. In 2009, I organized a workshop around the technique at the June gathering of the Friends Association of Higher Education (FAHE). The FAHE workshop led to this article to share the ideas of JiTT to a wider audience than just Physics educators, in the hopes that you will find them useful. I cannot take credit for the invention of the technique, but I have expanded the application into the interdisciplinary courses I teach, where I have found it to work just as well.

The core idea of JiTT is to use the world-wide web to pose reading quizzes that are to be answered by the day before the class sessions that are scheduled to deal with the corresponding material. The professor can then read the answers the morning of the class. Evelyn Patterson, of the US Air Force Academy,

calls them “pre-flights”, by analogy with the checking you need to do before a plane can leave the ground. This choice of terminology alone will convey the importance of the exercise: you don’t want the plane to crash! Even if there were no other benefits, this would free up class time that would otherwise be used in administering quizzes. However, this extra time is the least of what you gain.

First of all, with the carrot of credit and the stick of assessment, students are much more likely to actually do the reading ahead of time. I imagine (although I have been assured otherwise) that humanities professors have an easier time getting them to read ahead of time than we physical science types. After all, if your class is discussing *Beowulf*, it might make sense to have read the book before class (you humanities types are probably laughing at my naiveté). In Physics, there is a pernicious perception that you should encounter the ideas for the first time in the classroom, and then go to the book later to try to make sense of them. Offering credit for answering the questions provides a much clearer incentive for them to do the reading first. 10% seems about right. Much less, and it won’t seem worth their while to participate. It is important that the credit be based purely on participation: the pressure of needing to get the right answer (and for many of the most interesting questions, there isn’t one single right answer) leads to stress and motivates cheating. I have never (that I know of) had anyone cheat on these pre-flights.

With the pre-flight checks, the students gain exposure to the ideas, so they are more prepared in class to engage where they know they are confused or need attention. In fact, I have found that you need to reassure them repeatedly that you don't expect them to be able to answer all the questions all the time; if they knew all the answers, they wouldn't need to take the class! I find students often apologize for not getting it the first time, or they blame the textbook for their frustration. They need to hear affirmation that this is just the first step, not the last. The pre-flights also provide a space for them to share a connection they've made or an interpretation they've realized. Ideally, it's a tool of affirmation.

For the instructor, there is an even more important benefit: you receive, when you wake up that morning, an assessment of what your students do and don't understand about the material you plan to teach. If you are willing to adjust your lesson plan that morning (hence the name of the technique), you can tailor your attention right to where they most need it. In Physics classes, I have used this to decide to skip certain topics, or make sure to spend more time on a subject I thought I would be able to skip! The first time I tried it, I was teaching a class on cosmology for non-majors. I thought I wouldn't need to waste class time on how exponential numbers worked (10^2 is ten times smaller than 10^3, and so forth), but the pre-flights showed me that they really didn't understand exponents, so I made sure we spent time on that in class. In discussion classes, their answers will not only prime the pump of the students' critical thinking about the issues you want to tackle, you can see what aspects grab their attention, and you can leave room in the pre-flight for them to ask the questions they find most engaging.

To be most effective, the way in which the students' answers to the JiTT quizzes have shaped the class time needs to be transparent. If you use Powerpoint, incorporate their answers into your slides. If you are discussing, turn to someone and say "Patrick, you asked a fascinating question in your preflight answers. Could you explain further how you felt Eddington was begging the question?" When discussion lags, you have concrete contributions from each student that you can use to draw them in and get the conversation moving again. When they see how seriously you take their answers, and that their answers have a direct and important impact on the class time, they become more invested in the quizzes and take more ownership of the class time. This, in turn, makes it more likely they will do the reading.

Based on the recommendations of Novak et al., I use two short-answer and one multiple-choice question for each pre-flight quiz. For physics classes, I make one of the questions conceptual and another based on a simple calculation. The web-based nature of the exercise makes it easy to embed photographs, movies, or even Java applet simulations into the quiz page, so the quiz can be more interactive than just reading comprehension. For discussion-based classes, I try to use a mix of questions that simply assess whether they did the reading (e.g. "Which of these concepts is not one of Aristotle's four causes?"), whether a difficult concept was conveyed clearly (e.g. "What is the anthropic principle?"), or to

prompt them to think about the topics I want to discuss (e.g. "Would you characterize Ibn Tufayl's work more as science or more as religion?").

It's also very important to have a fourth question that's a simple, open-ended, i.e. What did you find challenging and/or interesting about this reading?" This is where they ask *me* questions, and this is usually the most productive place to find ideas that affect my lesson plans. This is where they express the ideas that are important to them, and if I can incorporate these ideas into the class time, I know they will be invested in the topic. Sometimes they simply state their reactions to the text (e.g. "Galileo was tough to read."), but often they will go on at some length about an idea they encountered that sparked their thinking. One student wrote, "the reading of McGrath made me want to delve further into the writings of Thomas Aquinus." Another student reacted to Ian Barbour with passion: "Barbour talks about the idea of design leading to a sense of gratitude for the gift of life and the idea of chance leading to a feeling of futility and alienation. I feel *EXTREMELY* grateful about the idea of chance though. The idea that *SO MANY THINGS* had to fall perfectly into place for *ME* to experience existing and that this was never a given blows my *MIND*! I don't know what the guy who says otherwise is even talking about!" These questions are a wonderful way to gain insight into our students' mindsets and backgrounds.

I find JiTT particularly intriguing from a Quaker perspective, because it has two priorities that I find align beautifully with Quaker ideals. First of all, it's not hidebound. You have to be willing to go out on a limb to a certain degree and improvise. You might be completely smitten with a particular topic, or plan, but if the students' answers show they're not ready for it, or aren't connected to it, you have to be willing to adjust your plans. This reminds me quite a bit of how we, as Quakers, have to be willing to let go of our own agendas to hear the sense of the meeting. Secondly, JiTT affirms the value of letting all the voices of the class be heard. Even the shy kid in the back who never says anything has to write something in the pre-flights. Sometimes that kid will amaze you, and sometimes you can figure out which ones are quiet because they're shy, which ones are struggling, and which ones just don't care. This enables me to be a better teacher because I can address the needs of each of those students separately, which makes for a stronger classroom because all voices are heard and valued.

There are a few downsides to JiTT. It's a pedagogical technique, not a piece of software, so implementation may not be easy. I wrote my own CGI/Perl/HTML code to handle the quizzes, tabulate answers into an easy-to-read table, and track participation. Even so, it takes about a day of work at the beginning of each semester to set up the files for new classes, give students login passwords, initialize the databases, and so on. I have to change those files as students add and drop courses. I'm not aware of any easy, plug-and-play software version. Some educational software, such as Moodle or Blackboard, offers similar features, but at least with Moodle, I have found their version insufficient. Moodle only allows me to view one student's answer to one question at a time, and for a large class, that's just not practical. However, it's

also quite possible that the fact that I write my own code has kept me from exploring what commercial software might be available for those who can't or don't want to do it themselves.

In conclusion, I have found that if you're willing to rework your lesson plans on the fly in the morning, and if you're willing to manage the software, the benefits are enormous. It doesn't get every single student to read every single page, but in my experience the participation rate has been close to 99%. The increase in students' attention and ownership of class time is palpable. Although the technique was developed by physicists for physics instruction, I have found that the approach works just as well in my discussion based courses such as "Magic Science and Religion", or "Science through Science Fiction". If you're interested, I encourage you to visit the JiTT web site www.jitt.org. It does actually get them to do the reading!

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Postmodernism and the Quaker Opportunity

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While there have always been tensions within Quakerism, and long been divisions, the principle fault line along which 20th Century Quakers have been divided and continue to be into this century, is, I want to suggest, a theological one. The depth of the divide is illustrated by the fact that, on one side of the divide, the term theology itself is suspect, and the purported rejection of theology is among its chief qualifying gestures. When the very terms in which our differences could be articulated are themselves caught up in the differences, and thus contribute to the division, the divide is deep indeed. In this paper, I want to attempt to trace this fault line (or at least one articulation of it) back to what I take to be a modernist trajectory in thought, whose tenets have (contrary to first perceptions) been accepted by those on both sides, both of whom have deep investments in the modernist framings of what each holds dear, which is what makes recourse to another, and perhaps more fruitful, way forth so difficult to envision. But as the modernist omnibus continues to falter under its own weight[1] (despite frantic attempts to prop it up, and denials of the demise in the form of appeals to the benefit of life under its auspices), as the framework in which that which has divided us has been framed loses some of its inevitability and intuitive givenness, as the terms in which our differences have been formulated loom less imposingly (i.e., no longer appear simply intuitively correct), might there

[1] The unbearable weight of foundationalism, of providing its own justification.

be, here and now, the possibility - a postmodern possibility, or promise, the postmodern *as* possibility or promise - of a renewed Quaker spirit of co-operation? Put otherwise: might our postmodernity open the possibility for a pan-Quaker discourse less encumbered by the modernist terms around which the divisions in 20th Century Quakerism have been constructed?[2] This essay - without the pretension of offering an alternative program, but straining to catch a glimpse of a way forth, will be an optimistic exploration of this question, one that I will attempt to frame as an admittedly provocative call for a renewed Quaker theologizing - albeit not as dogmatics, but as project.

I only add here, by means of autobiographical context, that this question is a live, existential one for me, despite the fact that most of Quakerdom has - and perhaps prudently - become inured to our lack of unity. Born and raised an Evangelical Friend, I have spent my adult life worshipping with non-programmed Quakers, and I feel equally at home (and sometimes equally alienated) in both communities. So I am interested in how to live my life, in how I live out this duality, and in how yet to work this out in the work, and the living, that is left to me. I am not sure, then, whether this material is a genuine attempt at making a gesture toward a re-newed, pan-Quaker dialogue, or whether it is a more idiosyncratic cry for help. I proceed here, in any case, by way of five indications of a thought experiment still very much underway.

[2] As Quakers have self-consciously undertaken the task of bringing their faith into a deeper and living discourse with the exigencies of the age before (a move that can be justified both or either on "modernizing" and/or on "incarnational" lines), is the "postmodern age" another such challenge, and another such opportunity? Or, more conservatively, is our task to bend the age to our Quakerism? Or, more quietistically, is our challenge to preserve our faith despite the vagaries of the age?

The Postmodern

"Postmodernism" is a term that has become so hackneyed in its ubiquity and shrouded in equivocity (better than Paul, postmodernism has succeeded in becoming all things to all people: saviour, whipping boy, a style, a period, a mood - whatever you need it to be) that attempts to dismiss it as a fad or to move prematurely beyond it, if motivated by nothing other than getting the silly word out of our ears, are perfectly understandable. And yet, something important, I think, is thereby missed, for all of this hullabaloo around the "postmodern" - though much of it *is* admittedly nonsense - does signify something. Or, perhaps, signifies rather a certain "nothing," a lack, but of a very specific kind. To understand the postmodern, I suggest we begin by refusing the lens offered by a hyperactive sociological imagination bent on making the postmodern into some describable and positive "something," and rather hear in the "post" a mere distancing gesture over against the "modern," without any positivity of its own at all. The "modern" is retained in the term post-*modern* itself, remains the larger part of it, as the only positivity it has. So while the modern is in some manner negated and chronologically superseded by the qualifier "post," the relation here is still one of active distancing rather than one of having moved on. Lyotard's 1960 analysis of the postmodern condition as "an incredulity toward metanarratives" (not to be confused with "master

narratives"), addressing modernity's Munchausian illusion of a self-supporting and self-justified rationality, sets - across the descriptor "incredulity" - this "distanciating" agenda, one that has not yet "progressed" beyond the "no" and the "no longer" of the "post" with respect to the modern and its holy trinity of science, education, and sure progress - values that not only haunt but continue to drive us in our postmodern age, despite the fact that we are no longer sure that we quite believe in them. The "post" of postmodernism, I suggest, signifies this disbelief. Postmodernism is perhaps best qualified, then, as a modernism that has now turned the critical energies it so confidently (and often pompously) directed at everything that came before it, upon itself, as a modernism that has overcome its naivete about itself, a modernism that has lost faith in itself,[3] that is no longer comfortable in its own skin. So we are not postmoderns because we share anything by way of common tenets or programs or promises (in fact, we are more likely postmoderns because we do not), but because our confidence in the promise of modernism has been shaken, because *we* - faced with a world in which our solutions are also our problems (e.g., technological fixes; globalized markets; bureaucracies) - have been shaken, and are so because we do not know, any longer, who "we" are, shaken by the seeming inevitability of a modernism that we cannot, dare not, and desire not, live without, but whose own promise of ever enhanced life now appears at the very least impossibly ambivalent.

[3] This loss of confidence in itself might, in Nietzsche's terms, be an indication of its sickness.

Modernism

Modernism, a complex set of coincident ideas and events, I characterize as a *Zeitgeist* rather than as a specific set of doctrines, a near ubiquitous *spirit* of Enlightenment that opened the door to - as it was shaped by - methodological, empirical science. In modernism, then, the truth is thought at the level of facts, objectively and/or rationally demonstrable, emancipated from the hoary authorities of myth, revelation, and tradition - which is how it was able to combine the perhaps irreconcilable motifs of a nature unfolding according to inexorable law with that of freedom. The epistemological problem of the relationship between knowing subjects and known objects was therefore central to the age, and in many ways remains so. What I would like to suggest (as a very limited but not completely arbitrary way of characterizing "the modern"[4]) is that the modern Enlightenment is, across all of the attempts (largely failed) at reconciliation between the two, the ultimate rule or governance of the objective over the subjective (testified to as much by the vehement reactions - influential but finally failed - against it by a Rousseau, a Kierkegaard, a Nietzsche, as by its predominance in the thought and life not only of the educated classes, but - and maybe even more importantly - in the general consciousness). Whatever the epistemological prospects given this framework,[5] the modern age is a

[4] And, admittedly, to some extent caricature, for here only one facet of a complex series of interconnected events is proposed, and this for a particular purpose.

[5] That philosophically the modern age was primarily oriented to epistemological questions, rather than to ontological, or ethical, ones, and that the conundrums produced across it continue

decidedly realist one: the truth qua objective is "out there," and as rational subjects our privilege and task is to grasp it, and allow it to govern our lives (since we too, paradoxically, including the very interiority of our conscious minds, are a part of what is, ultimately, "out there").

In religion modernism thus provides for a great divide: for on which side of the subject-object split do matters religious belong? God absent from the realm of empirical objects, and, after Kant, no longer credibly thought of as deducible from the ideas of reason, liberal theology (i.e., modern theology, having been liberated from the realm of myth and tradition to stand on its own two feet: a religion within the bounds of reason) does not hesitate, often dismissively, to relegate God (at least insofar as God is something thought) to the subjective side, the product of human willing and imagining and projecting. Orthodox theology (and I use this term here as an historically descriptive rather than an evaluative one), on the other hand, anxious to affirm the objective existence of God - that is, to put God on the more important side of the equation[6] - had then to conceive of revelation - special or general - as the deliverance of God as an objective fact. Thus: a revival of "the proofs" (now no longer produced out of a context of piety, but as purely rational demonstrations), apologetics, Biblical literalism, and related non-sense at the apogee of which sits (on my view anyway) the project of creation science. And, on the other, the equal but opposite phenomena of the radical (atheistic) Enlightenment, a reductionistic materialism, and - matching fundamentalism for fundamentalism - Richard Dawkins. Now, even if the hard-line positions staked out by these trajectories purified of nuance are perhaps exceptions with respect to the positions that most "living" thinkers and believers actually hold (*pace* the impression left by our "hell-bent" media), the vectors of meaning traced out by these divergent (because opposite) trajectories remain in force, and set the agenda for the basic theological debates of the age, including those among Quakers.

One popular and viable compromise with deep resonances in theology, but generally applicable across the sciences, product of a chastened if not yet nervous modernism, is "critical realism" - the claim that while every subjective and parochial actualization of God is simply that, some "objective" reality a propos God nevertheless subsists as the *telos* and measure of all of our structurally limited (because finite) attempts to name it. This compromise seems at first helpful, as the critical realist can admit both with the liberals that every version of God is a projection, an interpretation, while simultaneously being able to acknowledge with the orthodox that God is, after all, objectively what God is (or is not, if *that* is the truth of the matter) - be that the Personified God of Biblical language, the *deus sive natura* of a Spinoza, Hegelian *Geist*, a wish fulfillment, or what have you. But it is a compromise that retains, even while it softens, the subject-object division around which the split in religious sensibilities is structured, the division being re-inscribed across differences in the *degree* to which the subjective formulations of the ever-elusive

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to occupy and confound philosophers, often as remote from lived concern as east from west, is perhaps a telling indictment, despite the pride the discipline often takes in its "scientific" status.

[6] And this in a heightened way over against previous ages, I would argue.

religious object are conceived of as reflecting the objective state of affairs: issuing in the prohibition against any *objectively* meaningful claims about God on the one end (as in mysticism, although the subjective importance of these claims is permitted to retain its force), and, at the other end, as a reminder to be humble about not being *too sure* of one's ability to understand *too exactly* what has been disclosed by and of a *revealed yet still transcendent* God.

Our "Shared" Tradition?

Given the fundamental divergencies on the most foundational of matters among contemporary Quakers and the very real tensions and problems this creates, there is a great temptation to seek a commonality in the history of the tradition we all claim. And while there is every reason to be grateful to our historians for their assistance in allowing us to more deeply understand our heritage, for mining our tradition for its gems of inspiration, and for writing histories in which we can find ourselves as inheritors and agents, the implication of these histories - if not explicit intent - as I at least sometimes read them, is to identify the core of "genuine" Quakerism, entailing the tacit charge that we too - if we are to be true Quakers - will live out of this core as the heart of our faith and practice. And so the different trajectories of Quakerism construct different histories, each identifying the core of the tradition with an aspect that yet resonates with some current faith and practice, and relegating to the realm of the incidental and accidental those aspects that are less resonate, or considered relics of an often quaint but now surpassed yesteryear. The result: out of a "shared" tradition, divergent, even competing, traditions.[7]

Now, without belittling the crucial efforts of our historians - on the contrary, it is the task of the historians to write histories simultaneously reflective of archival evidence and relevant to the exigencies of the times, and we cannot do without them - I am suggesting (and this is already a "postmodern" move) that the historians qua historians cannot solve the problem of the identification of our essential core, but are rather vital participants in what is yet to come (and is always to come because always emerging in a community that is a living one): the ongoing "constitution" of this core. A unified Quakerism is not best thought as a fractured Eden to be regained, but as the promise of a future that already imposes itself upon us as a call we have always to answer and answer again in each new generation and circumstance: to be Friends. However variant our responses, it is this calling that we share.

The illumination of a way forth, a lamp onto my feet and a light unto my path in the idiom of the Psalms, in other words, "revelation," rather than the "deliverance" of some propositional content, is a beckoning or a call to us as individuals and as a community to transcend ourselves (and our protectionist stance toward our own beloved but limited form of Quakerism,

[7] Indeed, in which period of Quakerism, and across which themes, does the tradition take on its paradigmatic form? The first decade? The second generation of institutionalization? In quietism? In nineteenth Century evangelicalism, or early twentieth Century mysticism, or contemporary liberalism? In whose voice does authentic Quakerism resound: Fox, Penn, Hicks, Gurney, Jones, Trueblood?

whatever that might be) toward some as yet unrealized promise - even as that promise always already takes shape among us. As members of the religious society of Friends (even across our radical differences) we participate in a tradition of response to a call upon our hearts (a synecdoche for the whole of who we are). But already a tension: for if we share a sense of being called, and perhaps further share a sense of the manner of being called, we are far from united on our *conceptions* of the call, on who or what it is that calls us, and to what, more precisely, we are called. And - and this is crucial for what I am suggesting here - what we take the call to be affects, and even effects, that to which we take ourselves to be called, the very manner of response, and, thus, the manner of responsibility it entails. How we conceive of the call, and of the caller (whoever or whatever that is), even if that is across a principled refusal to pin it down, is constitutive of the call that we hear, even if it is true that we also articulate our calling in response to our having already been called.

Articulating Our Calling

If the more orthodox among us are convinced, in continuity with the earliest Children of Light, and with the vast majority of Friends until quite recently, that the source of this call is none other than the God testified to in the Bible, the same God who witnesses directly to the heart of every man that cometh into the world, the more liberal among us are wary of, and sometimes weary of, this straightforward identification, seeing in the Biblical story but a particular, and parochial, expression of a far broader call - one inappropriately identified with *any* given response to it. (But this too, remember, is a way of conceiving of the call - albeit negatively, one that allows for a legitimate though non-universalizable because subjective response - rather than a complete absence of conception.)

There is, I think, considerable plausibility in the case that would trace out an unbroken trajectory from early Friends to contemporary liberal Friends across a doctrine of continuing, inner revelation, one not tied to the experience of those who have gone before (God transcending the authority of every "apostolic" age - as much that of Fox, Fell, and Pennington as that of Matthew, Mark, and Luke). Indeed, one of my own preferred ways of understanding Quakerism is as an expansive Christianity, perhaps its most expansive form, overflowing perpetually even its own traditional *and current* articulations, transcending, transgressing, itself, which - if allowed full rein, would have to permit of the surpassing of the "parochial" doctrine of continuing, inner revelation itself - to the point where Quakers should perhaps have an ear, if not a heart, inclined toward the recent discourses of Gianni Vattimo and Jean-Luc Nancy, each of whom, in their own way, argue that the autochthonous, logical, and historical outcome of a Christianity true to itself - across its autodeconstruction - is secularism.

What is less often recognized, by either the orthodox or the liberals, is that this charge of limitation or parochialism with respect to any image of God is thoroughly Biblical. The Bible has as perhaps its quantitatively predominant theme the prohibition against idolatry: i.e., the equation of an image of God with God. *Any* image. On this head, if I mistake the God of the Bible with God - an image of God that would govern,

restrict and discipline, alternative images of how God might be revealed - I am, on the terms of the Bible itself, committing idolatry. Contemporary liberal Friends - though phrasing this as a concern over dogmatism rather than with idolatry - might well resonate with this conclusion, even if they might not so much resonate with this quasi-orthodox derivation of it.

But of course the Bible, despite this auto-prohibition, and thus perhaps paradoxically, does little else but present (across a history of communal attempts to do so responsibly) images of God, as both an activity that has its end in itself (called worship), and in the service of service (called ministry). Indeed, I take the claim in Genesis[8] that we are made in the image of God not as the attribution of some ontological status to humanity that is shared by God (a notion likely foreign to ancient Hebrew conceptions in any case), but as a charge: it is among our human callings to image God, that is, to imagine God. We are called to imagine God! Or, put otherwise, to do theology, where the "*theos*," in the broadest terms, is at once the call upon us, and a first articulation, or "*logos*," of that call - and where these two are ultimately indistinguishable, for God is only ever revealed to us across our understandings of the call.

My argument is that as a *religious society* ("religious" in the sense that we are centered in our recognition that we are bound to that which exceeds us and leads us beyond ourselves, and a "society" in that we do so together rather than as discreet individuals), with or without acknowledging the Biblical precedent as authoritative, it is incumbent upon us to be active participants in giving formulation, and formation, to the call, not only to respond to the call, but - as constitutive of responsible response - to give articulation to (the source of) this call (on the premise, remember, that our sense of the source of the call effects the nature of the call we hear) - individually and corporately. This is not, despite the theistic language I am employing (for one must use some language, even for that which is "beyond words"[9]) intended to bias the call toward orthodoxy, for "God" here simply means the call upon us to be Friends, or the call we join ourselves with Friends in order to responsibly answer - for we can "theologize," in this broad sense, with or without the word God itself (*that* would have to be determined; we would have to see how we might "imagine" that), but neither is to prejudice the discussion against orthodoxy across the pretended neutrality of anti-theological terms.

But for this we need a dialogue that is genuinely open, while being a genuine dialogue, that is, where openness is not an alibi for dismissive indifference.[10] It

[8] Although in doing so I engage in what is admittedly a bit of improvisational bravado, and so ask the Biblical scholars to plug their ears and hold their noses, at least for a moment.

[9] To borrow a phrase from Rex Ambler.

[10] Granted, orthodox Friends and liberal Friends take up this task in different ways, each for very good reasons. Liberal Friends, fearing (with some justification) the violence to persons that too often accompanies (and many would claim structurally so) the inclusionary/exclusionary doctrines of the Church, tend to relegate theological work to the realm of the personal, the center of gravity of meeting having been displaced into an elsewhere. How my neighbor in meeting conceives of the source of the call upon us, if it is known at all (and there are some implicit but powerful mechanisms to all but ensure that it is not), is his business, and has no claim upon me if I do not want it to, even though

is my premise here that it is the categories entrenched across modernism - expressed here as the opposition between truth as objectivity and its poor subjective cousin - that constitute the primary impediment to this dialogue. The liberals are unwilling to engage in this dialogue because they see it as divisive, where "theologizing" (if we need it at all) is better relegated to the personal, the "subjective," or the inessential side of the subject/object dichotomy. The orthodox are unwilling to engage genuinely in this dialogue because, in its broad outlines at least, the issue of how we should be imaging God, and objectively so, is settled, set by an authoritative Scriptural testimony. The liberals, through their experience, and a certain "theological" thoughtfulness (that is aligned with a broader liberal theology), have arrived at the idea that we best keep unity by avoiding the question of theology, but in doing so have, ironically, fallen out of unity with those for whom this question remains central to faith (and whose theological allegiances tend toward something other than the modern, the liberal). If liberals maintain unity by relegating theologizing to the whims of subjective individuals, the orthodox impose it by insisting upon the authority (and relative objectivity) of certain articulations over others. On the one side, it is prohibited (at least as a public discourse, except in the most general, inoffensive, and vapid terms), on the other, it is largely settled - but on neither model is an openness or gesture toward unity with the other side of Quakerism made possible or encouraged. It is beyond this impasse, side-effect of a modernist framework presupposed on both sides, that the postmodern negativity may yet open a way.

Not a Conclusion

At this point I should be bold and begin the process of a theological conceptualizing liberated from the fetters of a modernist categorization, but you have indulged me long enough already. I have already begun this thinking *for myself* as an attempt at rethinking "truth" in a sense that is richer than the one which the modern subject-object split permits us to entertain with sufficient seriousness, and some of this work I have presented at previous FAHE conferences. My task here has been to

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it might minister to me, and should probably challenge me. Here the corporate responsibility for imagining God is trumped by the need to make space for one's personal responsibility for imagining God. Conversely, the orthodox tend in the direction of taking corporate responsibility for the images of God, but at the expense of the necessity for me to undertake for myself responsibility for the images of God that inspire me.

My sense is that the liberals among us are very good at focusing on that *to which* we are called, seeing a discussion of the call itself as unnecessary, as a distraction. And no doubt it *can* be - there has indeed been too much argument over the nature of the call to feed the hungry at the expense of getting around to feeding the hungry - and these concerns are well heeded. Indeed, I have considerable sympathy for leaving the designation of the call as empty as possible - but this too is a "theology," and one (however idiosyncratically constituted by Friends) that is not at all uncommon, but participates in a larger, liberal theological program. The orthodox are, conversely, committed to giving concrete articulation to the source of the call, the Caller, personifying the call (thus making it personal!), and taking an understanding of the call as a prerequisite to an understanding of that to which we are called. There is much to this too, as I have suggested. For example, articulating our sense of moral calling as derivative of the exploits of selfish genes cannot but affect the manner, if not the seriousness, in which we undertake it.

provide some of the "back story" to such work, but more importantly, perhaps, to propose that the postmodern situation provides us with an opportunity to rethink our old prejudices across the development of new prejudices - ones more responsible to the demands of the age, and the constitution of our Society's identity in it. But as this proposal is a call to an enhanced, that is, more open and creative, dialogue among Quakers, the form it takes will itself have to be dialogically formulated, the by-product of a communal engagement I am trying in my own small way to encourage. And so it is perhaps necessary that this essay is "to be continued," and not by me alone.

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Remembering Ralph Abernathy

Donn Weinholtz
University of Hartford

Gary and I sat in our Atlanta hotel room killing time before the next regional sales session. It was mid-afternoon, early in September 1974. Assigned as room-mates only the night before, we quickly discovered that we had several things in common. A couple of misplaced school teachers who had recently stumbled into selling college texts for Harper and Row Publishers, our politics were substantially to the left of the other sales reps. And neither of us particularly liked canvassing campuses and hawking books to professors. We saw our jobs as stopgap measures, keeping us afloat until something better turned up. In the meantime, we'd satisfy ourselves by driving our company cars, collecting our small commissions, exploiting our flexible schedules, and reading the best of the free copies from Harper and Row's ample book list.

We had our differences too. Gary was in his early thirties and had just recently broken away from the classroom. For over ten years he had floated around his native South Carolina teaching high school English; usually wearing out his welcome after being labeled as the maverick liberal in schools run by right-wing principals. His most recent teaching job had been in Charleston, a

city he loved due to its coastal location, ante-bellum architecture, sense of history and funky art scene - his second wife was a painter. But when the hassles with the school's principal again got to be too much, Gary jumped to Harper & Row, staying based in Charleston and traveling throughout South Carolina and eastern Georgia.

I was twenty-four, recently married and holding down my first full-time job since completing a master's degree in social studies education. The baby boom driven teacher glut had prevented me from landing a teaching job at home in Pennsylvania; or, for that matter, anywhere else in the northeast. And my wife, Diane, even with her teaching certificate in biology and great recommendations, suffered the same humiliating fate. So, after substitute teaching for a year and then being turned down by the Peace Corps, which had room for a science teacher like Diane, but not a history teacher like me, I signed on as Harper and Row's man in North Carolina. After all, I rationalized, I was still working in education and a company car looks pretty damned good when your ten-year-old Volvo is falling apart.

We settled in Chapel Hill - well actually Carrboro, the lower rent town just to the west- because it was centrally located in North Carolina's piedmont and we liked the idea of living in one of the South's best university towns. From the moment we arrived, we heard how it was nearly impossible to land a teaching job at Chapel Hill High School, but Diane put in an application anyway, just in case. Then she wangled herself a research technician job at nearby Duke Medical School, where she quickly discovered that she hated injecting mice with tumor cells and shocking half of them to see if the stress reduced their cancer rate. But the doctors she worked for were friendly and interested in recruiting her for medical school; so, we began to suspect that she was headed down the med school path when, out of the blue, a biology teacher took a mid-year leave of absence from Chapel Hill High School. Diane interviewed, clicked with the department chair and principal and got the job; which became permanent when the teacher that she replaced decided not to return. As we went into the fall of 1974, Diane was living out her teaching dream and I was pouting over having to keep traveling around the state hustling books.

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While Gary and I chatted, I mentioned that I had recently attended a lecture at UNC by Julian Bond, who led a predominantly black delegation to the 1968 Democratic National Convention, and successfully challenged the seating of the notoriously racist Governor Lester Maddox's hand picked delegation. Bond also helped to found the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Southern Poverty Law Center. He was an accomplished leader within the civil rights movement and his speech at UNC was witty, insightful and dead-on about the social costs of racism. So, I was disappointed when Gary didn't, in my opinion, respond with sufficient enthusiasm.

"Yeah, Bond's good; but if you ever get the chance, go hear Abernathy."

He was talking about Reverend Ralph David Abernathy, president of the

Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the long-time friend of and successor to Martin Luther King. I was puzzled by the comment because, having seen Abernathy on television many times, I had pigeon-holed him as a well-meaning, but uninspiring, disciple, incapable of filling King's great shoes.

"You're kidding," I shot back. "He's always seemed pretty dull to me."

"Where'd you see him?"

"On TV, plenty of times!"

"That explains it. You see he's a black, Baptist preacher; a Southern, Black Baptist preacher. It takes him almost ten minutes just to begin to warm up. The man's not made for TV sound bites. Believe me, I've heard a lot of them, and I've never seen anyone rock the house like Abernathy!"

Though skeptical, I mentally filed away Gary's recommendation, figuring that nothing much would ever come from it. But life is bizarre sometimes. At that moment, I had no idea that within a week I would quit my job at Harper and Row; and that the following week the Chapel Hill High School social studies teacher I was substituting for would decide that I was just the person to job-share with her. Suddenly, I became a new, half-time teacher frantically developing three course preparations - American Studies, Comparative Religion, and Sociology – for my 75 students. And somehow, I soon found myself up to my neck in the students' racial politics.

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Until the mid-1960's, Chapel Hill supported two separate school systems, one black and one white. With the onset of integration, black students began attending the previously all white schools, which were expanded and renovated as needed. Symbolically and figuratively the black system was erased, even though the black community held many fond memories of their former schools, especially the old Lincoln High School - located in Carrboro - which became the unified school district's central administration building. By the time Diane and I arrived, black students who began attending predominantly white schools in second and third grades had become juniors and seniors at Chapel Hill High School.

In my heavily integrated American Studies and Sociology classes I picked up on the substantial tension between the black and white students, mostly manifesting itself as wisecracks by parties on both sides who knew how to push matters to the brink of serious confrontation without going beyond. To me, a new teacher, this racial edginess was a particularly troubling. Drowning in my three course preparations, I was discovering that I couldn't rely on lectures and my youthful enthusiasm to make daily classes fun for everyone. In order to make my courses even reasonably good, I needed to design provocative discussions and small group activities. But I worried that these approaches were too risky if too many of my students were regularly giving each other lip. However, *fools rush in*, and after a few weeks of classes I decided to cut to the heart of the problem. One day, as some typical insults were being thrown around, I confronted my American Studies class.

"What's this black and white thing going on here? I'm getting tired of the way you guys are treating each other."

My white students clammed up, unwilling to move into a taboo area. But the black students jumped at the opportunity to vent. All kinds of stuff came pouring out. Sue Sue, a natural leader among the black students, led the attack.

"They don't like us cause we're black. I mean they don't like they way we talk. They don't like the way we dress. They don't understand us, and they don't want to understand us either."

"Do you give them a chance?"

"They've had every chance in the world. They've had chances for years."

Trying to draw the white students in, I addressed them.

"Is that true. Do you dislike black students?"

After an awkward silence, Ricky, another black student and the quarterback on the football team, chimed in.

"You see. They can't even talk about it cause it's so true. They can't hide it."

Then, John, the white son of a UNC coach and a boy with a reputation for smoking his fair share of dope, spoke up.

"Well, I mean that's crazy. I don't hate *all* black kids. But some loudmouths are a real pain. They go struttin' around like the world owes them everything. And I get sick of it."

"Oh, God," I thought to myself. "What have I gotten us into?"

The atmosphere was becoming increasingly tense, and I wasn't sure how to defuse it. I tried to be the cool moderator guiding the discussion toward cathartic resolution, but I was in way over my head. There was a moment of awkward silence, and then Amy raised her hand.

The daughter of a University of Vermont professor visiting UNC on a year-long sabbatical, Amy, blonde and delicate - with a shy smile, had been a solid student during my first few weeks at the school. She regularly offered insightful responses to tough questions, showing that she had done her reading and thought hard about it. The positions she staked out were generally liberal and politely presented. She was never overbearing. In her quiet way she had earned the respect of her classmates, black and white.

Desperate for a lifeline, I called on Amy; hoping that she would pull us to safety. Instead, she dropped the bomb. Almost in tears, she blurted:

"In Vermont, I used to think that black people were unfairly discriminated against. But now I realize that back there I really didn't know any black people. There weren't any black people in Burlington. I was just believing what my parents told me. Since I've been down here, I've found out that black people are loud and rude and they discriminate against white people. I hate it here. I can't wait to go home."

There was stunned silence. Then, Sue Sue recovered her voice.

"Girl, you're racist! You're hopeless! I'll be glad to see you go. Why don't you get up and go right now!"

With Amy on the verge of tears, Sue Sue knew that she had her on the ropes; but instead of moving in for the kill, she backed off.

"But maybe you shouldn't go, cause you really don't know black people yet. Maybe you need to get to know us. Maybe that's the problem. We know you, but **you** don't know us."

Picking up on Sue Sue's comment, heart pounding, I jumped in.

"Sue Sue, how can white people get to know black people better? How can I get to know you better?"

"I don't know," she answered. Then after pausing for a few moments, she laughed and clearly joking said , "Maybe listen to some Richard Pryor albums. **He** knows the differences between black folks and white folks."

At this suggestion, many of the other black students, who made up almost half of the class, hooted out loud and chimed in their agreement.

"Yeah Richard Pryor! That'd be cool."

"That'd give us something to talk about."

"But we can't bring that to school."

"Too much cursin' "

"Hell! We'd all get suspended."

"You won't get suspended if I tell you to bring it in." I stated, naively rising to the challenge. "If you think that we'd all benefit from listening to Richard Pryor, we'll listen to Richard Pryor. I'll bring the record player, you bring in the album."

Black students and white students alike stared at me in disbelief, dumbfounded, but grinning at the prospect.

Willis, one of the black students, spoke up.

"Are you sure? You're goin' to get in big trouble. There's serious cursin'. When Mr. Strickland" (the school's principal) "hears about it, you'll be outa here!"

"Well, I guess that's my problem, and not yours. Maybe we'll just have to keep this confidential, and not let it leave this room. But let me worry about that. The point is this. All of us need to get along better, and that's not going to happen unless we start doing some things differently, including taking some risks. So, Sue Sue, you bring in Richard Prior. We'll listen to him, and see if we have anything to learn. Okay?"

"Okay! That's cool. It's your funeral, but that's still cool. Are you sure about this?"

"I'm sure."

The bell rang and the students got up to leave class. The change in the atmosphere was palpable. Instead of the bitter confrontation that had filled the room just a few minutes before, everyone was smiling at the prospect of the stupid new teacher playing a Richard

Pryor album. As the class was filing out, a few of the black students stopped at my desk to double-check with me about my decision, and I reaffirmed to them that I was committed to following through. I was so relieved at having avoided a serious fight, that I wasn't concerned about the next day.

But when we played that album, I thought, "Oh,shit! What have I done?"

I had seen the sanitized version of Rich Pryor on TV many times, but had never listened to one of his raw uncensored performances. It was all that Sue Sue had promised and more, and I had no idea how to guide a meaningful class discussion around Pryor's raucous, profanity-filled, diatribes. As his searing monologues, came flying out of the speakers, I stopped the record every now and then, asking for comments from the students, who were laughing hysterically. They were having a great time; but I wasn't sure anything of real educational value was coming from it, and I was seriously worried that I might be hanging myself out to dry with the school administration. So, before dismissing class, I reminded everyone:

"We shouldn't let this leave this room. Right?"

"Don't worry, Mr.Weinholtz", someone assured. "It's just between us."

I breathed a sigh of relief. But my peace of mind didn't last long. As the class moved into the hallway, I heard one loudly shout, "Guess what we just did!"

A few weeks went by and I didn't hear a thing from the administration about the Richard Pryor incident. Feeling lucky to have dodged a bullet, I canned the idea of playing controversial albums in favor of designing my own unit on inter-racial communication. Drawing heavily on a few texts from my old Harper and Row sales list, I tried my best to mix a set of lectures on cultural differences and crossed communications with readings and exercises intended to increase empathy, improve listening skills and refine verbal precision. But still new to teaching, insecure about race-related issues, and frantically developing separate preparations for my other two classes; I new that I was falling far short. I grew tired, frustrated and concerned that I was only making things worse.

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A few weeks later, after supper, I was reading the *Chapel Hill News*, and my eyes locked onto a notice that Reverend Ralph Abernathy would be speaking **that night** at 8:00 PM in Memorial Hall on the UNC campus. Gary's words came rushing back to me.

"…if you ever get the chance, go hear Abernathy!"

Although we both had class preparations to develop, I immediately asked Diane if she wanted to go to the lecture. She didn't see how she could pry herself free from the two Biology units that she was working on. But hoping that I might learn something valuable about inter-racial communication, I talkedmyself into going.

"I gotta here this guy, Honey" I exclaimed to Diane. "I might never get another chance."

Memorial Hall is an old auditorium, narrowly constructed with a steep balcony overlooking its stage. By the time I arrived, the lower level was filled, and I had to make my way to the balcony, which still had a number of vacant seats. I settled into one in the first row, and surveyed the crowd below and around me; about an equal mixture of blacks and whites; what you might expect in a liberal, university community with a substantial African American population. Soon, Reverend Abernathy was introduced by a UNC administrator who acknowledged Abernathy's long-time role as pastor of Atlanta's West Hunter Street Baptist Church. Then, invoking the name of Martin Luther King Jr., he mentioned Abernathy's unwavering commitment to non-violence and chronicled his roles in planning the Montgomery Bus Boycott, founding the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, leading the Poor People's March in Washington D.C. and organizing and resolving the Charles S.C. hospital workers' strike. The litany of accomplishments was impressive. It was apparent we were in the presence of a great figure of the civil rights movement.

But when Abernathy began to speak, the letdown, following the buildup of the introduction, was painful. It wasn't so much what he said, but how he said it. After thanking his host for the compliments, he quietly and haltingly said that he was merely a preacher from a modest background in rural Alabama, someone who had the good fortune to be in the right places at the right times. Briefly flashing some emotion while mentioning being blessed by working with "The Dreamer"; he quickly retreated, murmuring the he was only one of thousands who had contributed to a great social movement. Following several minutes of rambling comments about all that had been accomplished and all that still needed to be done, I began to feel embarrassed for him. Even though I recalled Gary's claim that Abernathy needed time to warm up, the leap to being a great speaker seemed too tall an order for the man standing in front of me.

But then, there was a subtle shift. With a slightly condescending tone, Reverend Abernathy scolded the current generation of young African Americans for becoming too comfortable and resting on the accomplishments of the generation now in their forties and fifties. With gradually increasing volume, he chronicled the sacrifices made by so many over the previous decades; Rosa Parks, the innocent children taken in church bombings, the civil rights workers shot on lonely country roads and his own best friend – Martin Luther King- murdered in his prime. Soon, fully transformed, he acknowledged that great victories had been won, that there were night-and-day differences between the United States of the 1950's and that of the 1970's; but pleaded that it was not yet time to rest. He asked, "How can we be complacent when so much remains to be done?"

He launched passionately into the plight of America's poor of all colors. Sanitation personnel, hospital employees, migrant workers, the impoverished elderly, hungry children; he pleaded for them all. And he did so with power and eloquence. Never mind that he offered no clear plan as to how to proceed. Never mind that the problem of poverty in America is far more

intractable than that of ensuring civil rights; by twenty minutes into his speech, he held us spellbound. The audience sensed that we were being preached to, not just by a crafty Baptist preacher, but by a moral warrior who, fueled by God's righteous indignation, had engaged in and won many battles. He was mesmerizing. We cheered as he exhorted us to rise to the challenge of bringing true equality to our nation. He continued with example after example of the gargantuan disparities between the lives of the wealthy and the poor in the United States; and we rose to our feet as he once again recalled the memory of Martin Luther King, who gave his life while helping the poor seek economic justice. We clapped our hands as he intoned that we will not truly "overcome" until each of our brothers and sisters has a decent working wage with accompanying job benefits.

Then, he was finished. Standing proud and erect at the podium, he thanked us for coming out to hear his message, and he asked for God's blessing of us all. As we applauded, the administrator who had introduced Reverend Abernathy thanked him and thanked us for coming. He announced that a reception for Reverend Abernathy at the nearby Carolina Inn , to which we were all invited, would begin in a half an hour.

Euphoric at the possibility of meeting Reverend Abernathy, I called Diane as soon as I was out of the auditorium to let her know that I would be getting home a lot later than I had expected. Then, I made my way to the Carolina Inn, found the reception room, and hung out in the crowd, sipping wine and munching on cheese and crackers. After about forty-five minutes, most of the people departed, but about ten of us remained, sitting around Reverend Abernathy, who was seated on a small sofa. As he fielded questions from the group, he looked tired and older than he had appeared on stage. Though only 48, it was apparent, up close, that he had weathered much in his lifetime. And after about 20 more minutes, he begged our pardon, saying that he was fighting "some kind of bug" and needed of a good night's sleep before flying back to Georgia the next day. Sensitive to his request, we all stood and waited to shake his hand. I was last in line.

During the earlier discussion, I had mentioned to him the tension between the black and white students at Chapel Hill High. I had focused particularly on black students feeling betrayed by white's who, now at dating age, distanced themselves from the blacks who had been their friends in elementary and junior high school. Upon hearing that I didn't see my in-class efforts improving things, Reverend Abernathy encouraged me to keep fighting the good fight, as it was important for these matters to be confronted. Pondering this as I approached to shake his hand farewell, a I blurted out a request.

"Reverend Abernathy, you've got to come out to our high school. Our kids have to hear your message. In one hour you could do more to promote racial harmony than I can ever do in my lifetime."

Taken aback, but looking a bit amused, he responded.

"I appreciate the compliment, Young Man; but I'm afraid that it's just not

possible. I have to catch a plane early tomorrow. I have to be in Atlanta for a late afternoon meeting. And I'm feeling poorly. I need some sleep."

I didn't doubt either his tight schedule or his diminished health. But, caught up in the urgency of the moment, I pressed on.

"What time is your flight?"

"Twelve-thirty."

"That's perfect. If I get you scheduled to speak at 10:00 AM, you can be finished by 11:00, and get to the airport by 11:45."

Wearily shaking his head and laughing, he quickly followed up.

"You may be right, but you don't have me scheduled yet; we're already pushin' 11: 00 PM; and I'm feelin' worse by the minute."

He looked terribly weary, and I knew that it was a long shot that things would work out; but I persisted.

"I know that I can make it happen. Look, Sir, my wife and I live from paycheck to paycheck and we only have fifty dollars to our names, but I'll donate that fifty dollars to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference if you come to speak. How about it?"

Reverend Abernathy lifted his eyebrows, paused for a moment, then spoke.

"Fifty dollars, huh. Your last fifty dollars?"

"Yeah."

He shook his head again, and with a look of resignation committed himself.

"Well, if you're willing to put out your last fifty dollars; I guess that I'm willing to inconvenience myself a bit. Never let it be said that Ralph Abernathy turned his back when there was a need. But are you sure that you can arrange this?"

"Absolutely, I'll go home and take care of it right away. My principal is a great guy. I'm sure that he'll cancel classes for this. I'll call you at your room to confirm as soon as I've got it set up. Where should I pick you up in the morning?"

"There's no need for you to do that. The university has a car and a driver for me. We can swing by on our way out of town."

"So, for sure you'll do it?"

"Yes, I'll do it."

"Oh, thank you. Thanks so much! Listen, I've got to take off and get in touch with my principal. Are you staying here at the Inn?"

"Yes."

"OK. I'll call you in about forty-five minutes. This is going to mean so much to everyone."

I shook his hand and raced out of the room, simultaneously pumped up by an incredible adrenaline rush and conflicted by the fact that I had no idea if I could pull off what I had promised. But having crossed the Rubicon, there was no turning back. I ran to my car and drove home much too fast. When I got

there, Diane was already in bed. Without waking her, I went to the kitchen phone to call Bill Strickland.

My hunch was that Bill would go along with the plan because he was pretty liberal, but I couldn't be sure. An ordained minister, he was also former college football star, who had a tryout as a lineman with the Los Angeles Rams. He had given up his youth ministry job with a large Chapel Hill church when he felt called to take the principal's position at the racially unsettled high school. Respected within both the local black and white communities, Bill tried his best to promote racial harmony and would go to great lengths to do so. Still, given the unbelievable last minute nature of this situation, I didn't know if I could count on him to rise to the occasion, on demand.

It was almost 11:15, and I figured that Bill might already be in bed. My heart was racing as his phone rang, and I prayed that someone would pick it up. Fortunately, Bill did, yawning as he said, "Hello."

I apologized then rushed into my sales pitch.

"Bill, hi, this is Donn Weinholtz. I'm really sorry to bother you this late at night. I hope that I didn't wake you up."

"That's OK, Donn. I was just watching Monday Night Football, and I guess I fell asleep in the chair. What's on your mind?"

"Something incredible has come up. I've arranged for Ralph Abernathy to come to the high school tomorrow to address the students. I need you to unschedule classes and arrange for the gym to be available."

I held my breath as I waited for Bill's answer. He didn't disappoint me.

"Ralph Abernathy, **the** Ralph Abernathy. That's fantastic. How'd you manage this? What time is he coming?"

"Well, to make a long story short, I went to hear him speak at UNC. He was great. I cornered him at a reception and I offered him my last fifty bucks as a donation to the SCLC. He can be there by Ten o'clock, but he has to leave immediately afterwards to catch a plane."

"No problem. It will have to be optional, but I'm sure that we can arrange for the gym and I'm sure that most teachers and students will want to come. How'd it happen again?"

Quickly, I again described the evening's events, emphasizing Abernathy's powerful delivery and his willingness to visit the high school in spite of his illness and the personal inconvenience. Bill was thrilled. I thanked him, hung up, called Reverend Abernathy to confirm and went to bed.

Diane has never particularly liked being awakened after falling asleep on a work night. But this was too much for me too keep to myself. As I crawled under the sheets, I leaned over, kissed her and whispered to her.

"You don't have to teach third period tomorrow. Your class is going to be unscheduled for an assembly."

"What? What are you talking about? Why are you waking me up? What about third period?"

"I said, 'You don't have to teach third period tomorrow.' We're going to have an assembly. Classes are going to be unscheduled."

"How do you know? Nobody said anything about it at school today."

"Well, nobody knew today. But I know now."

"How?"

"I know because I spent every bit of your savings making it happen."

"You what!"

Having gotten Diane's attention, I explained the situation, concluding with, "And how cool is that?"

"That is cool. That 's really cool. Now let me go back to sleep. I want to be rested enough to enjoy it."

* * * * *

At 8:10 AM, Bill announced over the school PA system that we were fortunate to be having Reverend Ralph Abernathy coming to address the student body. After making the connection to Martin Luther King and citing some of Abernathy's personal accomplishments, Bill acknowledged my role in arranging the talk. I floated through my homeroom period and first two classes, as my students expressed their awe and gratitude. I enjoyed the spotlight, no matter how small.

Second period ended at 9:55 AM. As my students filed out the door and headed to the gymnasium, I bolted to the front of the school in order to greet Reverend Abernathy. I had to go by the school office on my way to the front door, and I bumped into Bill in the hallway.

"Any sign of him?" I asked.

"Nope. Not yet."

"Well, I'm going to wait out front."

"OK," Bill responded. "I'll go to the gym to keep a lid on things. Bring him over when he arrives."

It was a bright, warm Carolina day; a wonderful time to be outside taking in the sun. But my watch soon read ten o'clock, and there was no sign of Reverend Abernathy and his driver. I was worried. Chapel Hill High School sat in an isolated area several miles outside of town. What if they had gotten lost? Worse yet, what if something happened and he couldn't make it! Here I was a new teacher with my reputation on the line. How would I ever recover if this thing fell through?

At 10:05, with no car in sight anywhere, I sprinted across campus to see how things were going in the gym. The bleachers on one full side were packed with students and teachers, about one thousand people in all. It was noisy, very noisy. Bill was standing on the basketball court in front of them next to a podium that had been set up for Reverend Abernathy. A few faculty were standing next to him. Upon seeing me enter the gym, Bill smiled and called out to me.

"Is he here?"

"Not yet." I shot back. "Should be any minute now. I'll bring him here as soon as he arrives."

"Not-to-worry. He'll show." Bill said, as though reading my mind; but perhaps reassuring himself as much as me.

By the time that I reached the front of the school, it was approximately 10:12, and still no car. Now my heart was really pounding. We were already guaranteed an embarrassingly late start, and I was becoming certain that Ralph Abernathy was gong to be a "no-show."

Then, in the distance, a white limousine turned the corner and headed toward the high school. "God, I hope that this is him," I whispered to myself. And it was.

When the limo pulled up in front of the school, Reverend Abernathy quickly exited the back seat, shook my hand, and apologized for the delay.

"I'm sorry I'm a little late. In order to make sure that I could get back to Atlanta, I changed my flight. It took me a little longer than I expected, but I'm all yours. Point me in the right direction."

"That's ok. I was getting a little worried," I grossly understated. "But you made it. Let's go."

It was almost 10: 20 when Reverend Abernathy and I strolled into the gym. The students cheered; and Bill, looking relieved, shook hands with us both. To my surprise, he alerted me that he was going to let me make the formal introduction. As Reverend Abernathy and I took our seats behind the podium, Bill stepped up to the microphone, greeted everyone, and welcomed Reverend Abernathy to our school. Then, emphasizing that I had only recently joined the faculty, he expressed his thanks to me for arranging this very special event for the entire school. The next thing I knew, I was standing in front of the microphone gamely trying to produce an introduction worthy of the moment. I mentioned my thrill at hearing Reverend Abernathy speak the previous evening. Stressing his unique friendship and collaboration with Martin Luther King, I noted a few of his accomplishments; then closed on a personal note.

"Although he has accomplished so much in his lifetime, at the last minute request of a total stranger, he was willing to alter his plans to come here to speak to you. To me, that shouts volumes about the type of man that he is. It's my great pleasure to present to you Reverend Ralph David Abernathy."

The students applauded enthusiastically. I turned and headed to my seat, and Reverend Abernathy shook my hand as he approached the podium. The students quieted down, and he began to speak.

"Thank you, Mr. Weinholtz, for your kind introduction, and thank you for your invitation to speak to this fine looking student body. It's so nice to gaze out and see happy, smiling faces; both white faces and black faces together in this beautiful school."

"Nice start," I thought to myself. "He picked right up on my concerns from last night." But then he shocked me by poking some fun at Bill.

"I'd also like to thank your principal for making this time available to me on such short notice. You know, Mr. **Strict**-land is a pretty large fellow, "he commented intentionally emphasizing the first syllable of Bill's name and touching his own belly in clearly joking about Bill's slightly expanding middle. "He's also starting to show some signs of getting up there in age," he said while rolling his eyes and patting the back of his own head in obvious reference to Bill's emerging bald spot.

"Oh my God," I thought. "Bill's done nothing to deserve this. Where in the hell is he going?" But the students loved it. They got a huge kick out of seeing their principal taking a ribbing. Reverend Abernathy was working the crowd, at the expense of the local authority figure. Fortunately, Bill, though a guy with a substantial ego, took it all in stride; blushing a bit, feigning a look of insult, but smiling throughout. By doing so, he passed the Abernathy test.

"You know, people in positions of power sometimes make the mistake of thinking that they are 'big deals.' They can get pretty **full** of themselves." Then glancing over at Bill he added, "But your Mr. Strickland took that pretty well. I can tell that you are in good hands here."

The students cheered. Bill smiled broadly. I breathed a sigh of relief. Reverend Abernathy continued.

"I also want to thank all of you for greeting me so warmly, even though I didn't arrive quite on time. I had to make some changes in my travel plans and it took me a bit longer than expected to get here. But in all honesty, I tend not to worry too much about getting places exactly on time. You see, I learned long ago that I would rather be Ralph Abernathy and be little late, than be *the late* Ralph Abernathy."

He got another good laugh for this line; and I was struck by how strongly he was starting, as compared to the previous evening. All was good, but then he abruptly changed stride, once again adopting the hesitant demeanor of a poor rural pastor. After several minutes of this persona, the students became restless; and I began to squirm, wondering if he could repeat the performance from the night before. But within minutes, he pulled off the same metamorphosis that had thrilled us at Memorial Hall. Delivering essentially the same talk, gradually shifting cadence, seizing the moral high ground, invoking Martin's name, and scolding the complacent; he challenged the students to struggle not only against racism, but also against the economic inequality that so starkly defines America.

He concluded shouting, "In the words of the old spiritual, 'We shall overcome. We shall overcome. We shall overcome some day!' "

And the students, who had been stomping and applauding wildly, came streaming out of the bleachers , mobbing him, hoping simply to touch him. Then, blacks and whites together marched out of the gym holding hands and loudly singing, "We shall overcome some day."

It was a stunning moment, by far surpassing my wildest expectations. I wanted it to last for hours. But within fifteen minutes, I was standing alone with ReverendAbernathy at the front of the school as he prepared to enter his

limousine. Before shaking his hand, I reached into my wallet, and pulled out the check that I had promised him.

"By the way, here's your fifty dollars. Thanks for giving me my money's worth."

He laughed and took the check.

"You know, I thought about not taking this, but it's good for you. Sacrifice is good for the soul. I'll make sure that it gets to the SCLC treasurer, who'll probably get back in touch and give you the opportunity to sacrifice a little every year."

I laughed and reached for his hand.

"Seriously, thank you very much. This was exactly what we needed."

"Well, you'll need quite a bit more. It's an ongoing struggle, but things have a way of getting better. Keep on pushing and things will get better."

We finished shaking hands. He ducked into the limo, and then he was gone.

* * * * *

Of course, he was right. His appearance was a momentary shot in the arm, an evangelical event; raising hope, but not erasing fundamental problems. There were plenty of tense, racially-charged moments over the next few years. But, over time, race relations did improve somewhat at the school. Although I moved on to graduate school at UNC after two years, Diane stayed at the high school for a total six years; and racial tension diminished noticeably by her last year; by no means gone, but surely better. This positive shift was soon reflected in the school system's hiring of Gerry House, a talented woman, as its first African American superintendent.

Reverend Abernathy and I never met, nor spoke to each other, again. I was disappointed when I heard that, after resigning the presidency of the SCLC in 1977, he lost his bid for one of Georgia's congressional seats. Later, I winced when I heard that he endorsed Ronald Reagan's1980 presidential bid; a step he took out of frustration with the Democrats' failure to deliver meaningful economic reform, and an action that he later admitted regretting, as he felt that he had let himself be used. Finally, in 1989 I was distressed to hear the criticisms heaped upon him following the release of his autobiography, *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down*. The torrent was unleashed because in a few paragraphs his book served up some minor details about Martin Luther King's long-rumored sexual encounters.

I vividly recall catching a glimpse of Reverend Abernathy on TV at the time, looking exasperated and slowly speaking into a bank of microphones. He said that it was important for people to remember that his dearest friend, Martin, was a great human being, not a saint; and as a human being, he was subject to human frailty.

I thought, as usual, the sound bite ended far too quickly for his power to shine through. But I also noticed how tired and puffy he looked. As he stumbled through his remarks, it was apparent that this was not just unfortunate staging. His health had badly deteriorated. I was subsequently saddened, but not shocked,

when, within a few months, I read that he had died.

Recently, I got around to buying his out-of-print, 620-page autobiography, chuckling at the irony when I saw that it had been published by Harper and Row. The book is a fascinating account of a remarkable life. And while reading it, I naively hoped for just the slightest mention of our time together in Chapel Hill. I had no such luck. Even late in life, after suffering two strokes, Ralph Abernathy flew all over the nation averaging a speech a week. For him the morning at Chapel Hill High School was just one of thousands of minor episodes spread among the great events that defined his life. By the time he wrote his memoir, he may not have remembered anything about that single day.

But for me, and I suspect for many others who were there, that morning remains unforgettable.

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Note: Click on the following link, to access Ralph Abernathy's June 19, 1968 Solidarity Day, Washington DC speech on the Poor Peoples Campaign. Predictably, he starts out slowly before delivering a rousing, and still timely, call to action.

http://www.archive.org/details/ReverendRalphAbernathySpeechOnThePoorPeoplesCampaign