

**TESTAMENTS**  
**Theological Explorations as Self-Portrait**  
**What It Has Meant To Find And Be Found By God**  
**By C. Wess Daniels**  
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When the First Friends Ministry and Counsel first brought up the idea of my being recorded by our meeting, I had both a deep sense of love and appreciation for their taking this on, and a number of thoughts and questions that arose for me. I initially started the recording process when Emily and I still lived in Canton, Ohio, and I was pastoring at an Evangelical Friends Church there from 2000-2003. Since then, I have had a desire to be recorded and to find myself within a community that would be able and willing to do so. I believe that moment has finally come.

**The topic of recording brings up these issues for me:**

1. My 20-year journey of finding a Quaker community able and willing to record me.
2. Having found my fullest sense of ministry and calling while serving Camas Friends Church in Camas, Washington (2009-2015), and yet not being able to be recorded in that time by that congregation leaves me wondering, "How can I honor that community and work while living and working 3,000 miles away?"
3. How can I use my recording to amplify the voices of others? I have had a personal struggle with wanting to be seen and recognized for my contributions, but the deeper desire of my heart has always been to lead a life that amplifies the voices of others and builds participatory communities.
4. How does my recording change my relationship to the Quaker community here and beyond Greensboro? My experience of living in Greensboro and working at Guilford has been difficult at times. I remain unsure if I am seen for my gifts, my role, or in comparison to others.
5. Who are those are most willing and able to speak to God's call in my life?
6. In all the ways that I have grown and changed, what remains truest for me?
7. How can I best be of service to my Quaker meeting and the the Quaker tradition, given my own gifts and limitations?
8. What does this recording mean for me in this stage and phase of life? What does this mean for my future ministry? Is God still with me, leading me into ministry? Am I still a minister given the roles I now I have? What is yet to come?



## **A Timed-Out Ocean**

I've never seen  
a timed-out ocean  
But I've dreamed  
of water being still  
I saw the world stop  
and just for a minute  
the surface turned to glass  
It was only a moment  
a breath  
a beat  
a sound that washes  
warmly in your ears

I've never seen  
A timed-out ocean  
But I know it's there  
Inside the heartbeat of the moment  
Inside the beat and breath of every moment

### **1. PIVOTAL MOMENTS**

There are a handful of pivotal moments through which I see my experience of God. Here are a few written in autobiographical sketches.

#### **Early Formation, Finding Faith**

I grew up in Canton, Ohio. It's a steel mill town, known for being the home of the Pro Football Hall of Fame and President William McKinley. It's also the birthplace and resting place of generations of members of my family members on both sides. Canton remains important because it is where I grew up, learned to ride a bike and drive a car, had my first job, went to college, met the woman I would fall in love with and marry, and where I became a Quaker and began developing my skills as a minister and theologian.

Split between divorced parents when I was only 1-year old, I am the oldest of eight half-siblings. Wherever I looked, I could not find a whole picture of who I was or where I came from. My mom's house was working class that turned poor when my step-dad had a career-ending car accident in 1992. That accident had a profound impact on that side of the family, a ripple that continues to be felt today.

My dad's family was working class striving towards middle-class, with college-educated roots. My dad went to technical school and worked faithfully over his life fixing business machines all over Northeastern Ohio. The influences on that side felt a world away from my mom's, where I spent all

but two years growing up. Expectations, half-sibling relationships, family culture, religious ideals, even the meals were vastly different from one household to the other. I quickly learned adaptability as a matter of blending in and sometimes survival. While I know I was loved and cared for, my childhood was often marked by an unsettled feeling that I never fully fit in someplace.

The church was a place where I learned to find my own space. My early faith drew my mother's support and my dad's disapproval. He associated all Christians with "fire and brimstone Old Testament Baptist preaching." This past August at my dad's memorial service, however, I learned he was the only family member family to support his younger sister, Patty, in her coming out in the late 1980s. When she told me this, I began to see some of the ways that he, an artist and musician, practiced his actions of acceptance and love outside the church and why conservative Christianity created such a strong reaction in him. On my mom's side, where I lived most of my childhood, we fluctuated between non-denominational churches and Catholicism. I was nominal on both until middle school, and then I got really into the Catholic Church.

I found a place of welcome when I started going to Mass on my own in the eighth grade. Whereas waters raged outside, Mass was like a timed-out ocean. Calmed waters with depths of tradition that offered a space of reflection, contemplation, and quieting of the soul. Finally, I found a place that mirrored the inward state I wanted to experience.

The Catholic church was my witness to the generosity of God. During my middle school years and after, my mom's family really struggled financially. Eventually the eight of us lived on my step-dad's social security income, which was not enough to go around. However, we were held together by the generosity of the churches, both Catholic and the charismatic non-denominational church my family joined later. I remember numerous times where Christmas presents, utility bills, and mortgage payments were provided for by these faith communities.

I found God in the receiving of support from the church. This was one of the first and most important movements of God in my life. I experienced what I still hold to be true: the church is meant to be a place of belonging (for all who wish to be there); a place of calm reflection, self-awareness, and friendship; and a place of generosity, caring for the poor in our midst.

### **An Initial Call**

In high school, I had two distinct spiritual experiences that impacted the direction of my life. The first was hearing an audible voice during a worship service at the charismatic church my family and I attended. It simply said, "I want you to become a pastor." Until then, this was the furthest thing from my mind. I wanted to become a film director. A cartoonist. A lawyer. An author. A professor. Even a robotics engineer. I wanted to be either a creative or someone who helped others, or some combination of the two.

Then that still, small voice.

My initial response was a screwed-up face, as if I'd just eaten an invisible lemon. I remember a kind of prayer-protest: "No way. Absolutely not. Not interested. No thank you!" I tried to focus on the worship

service. But it plagued me, until, eventually: "Okay. Fine. I'll make a deal with you, God. You have to make me want to do this, but if you do, I will do it." I absolutely was not interested in it. And I figured God didn't want a pastor serving against his own will. I felt like this was a good bargain, at least for me. How would God change the nature of my heart at age 16?

One day, a year or so later, I looked back and I realized my heart *had* changed. I was actually interested in becoming a pastor. I wanted to help people, be creative, and share ideas in a way that helped others find the kind of belonging I found. I saw that being a minister would pull on all three of the things I loved!

A second vision happened sometime around my acceptance of the first. In it, I was driving through an extremely poor neighborhood with my future wife. I remember feeling the urge to roll up windows, an impulse from realizing we were in a place that would typically be classified by people with more privilege as "unsafe." We pulled into a church parking lot, went in and prepared for worship. The next scene was a packed-out house, people from the neighborhood spilling over, hands raised in worship. There was, in the vision, a real sense of togetherness despite the challenges this community faced. A small voice whispered: "This is your church. These are your people." This second vision had the effect of pushing me towards what we used to call "inner city or urban ministry" in college. Once there, I took as many classes as I could on these topics. They turned out to be, without my knowing it, good groundwork for my interest in Liberation theology later.

### **Friends Found Me**

I became a Quaker as a college student while I was working as a youth pastor at Barberton Evangelical Friends Church in Ohio. I was attending Malone College, an Evangelical Friends school, in Canton. I had heard of Friends churches, but I knew almost nothing about Quakers before attending Malone. Only after a few years there did I start to make sense of what the Friends Church was all about. While I was working at Barberton Friends, I decided I should know more about this denomination I was working for. What happened next changed my life again.

I assumed denominations were a stand-in for rote and tired religion where people just went through the motions. The denomination did all the believing for you. But my time in college opened me up to the importance of traditions again. This started to rekindle the Catholic part of me that found something very calming in the depth of tradition and ancient practices which felt grounded and stable.

There was no ceremonious shift when I was first convinced to Quakerism. It happened both suddenly and slowly. It took time for my theology to expand and change while at Malone. I met a professor who spoke of Jesus as a pacifist, an attractive idea I'd never encountered. I met another whose wife was an ordained clergywoman. He was committed to supporting women in ministry and teaching us the hermeneutics necessary to do so. Yet another, who taught those Urban Ministry classes, took us to the poor parts of Canton and helped us connect in service, relationship, and theology to the realities people faced there. He helped me see my own experiences of poverty as a valuable frame of reference in ministry and helped me learn how to give voice to God's commitment to the poor.

Slowly, over time, my theology loosened and my view of the Bible became less rigid. I came to believe

in non-violence in the face of the hatred and retaliation caused by September 11th. I was convinced of the equality of genders both because of my changing hermeneutics, and because of my meeting female classmates who were clearly more than capable of holding their own and witnessing to the Spirit in their lives. These shifts meant that I was on the outside of what my charismatic church taught. I was still a Christian but found myself again on the edges without a firm place to belong. That was some of the slow part of becoming convinced.

More suddenly, after reading Friends history and theology, working in a Friends Church, and all those theological shifts taking place within, I realized one day that I always was a Quaker and just didn't know it. The Quaker tradition, its language, its practices, its commitment to those on the margins, named my experiences better than the language I'd been using. I felt seen and a sense of belonging to this old tradition and adopted into it. I felt found by a community and seen by God.

### **Looking For Belonging**

It is a strange sense of belonging to find yourself connecting with ancestors past, ideas written in language difficult to decipher and people you've never met in places you've never been. And yet there I was. A 20-year-old, newly-convinced Quaker in the midst of Evangelical Friends who for the most part had very little interest in being "Quaker." I found myself alone in the contemporary Friends world but in community with generations of Quaker ancestors.

It was around this time that I met a freshman named Emily Miller. She came in with a similarly conservative theology, and very quickly and without my influence found herself an equally convinced Friend. The strange miracle by which these two young Evangelicals turned Quaker in a sea of non-Quakers and fell in love is not lost on me.

To give you a sense of what I mean by Friends not wanting to be Quaker: while I was working there, I learned there was an American Flag standing in the sanctuary of Barberton Evangelical Friends Church alongside a Christian flag. Every Fourth of July the congregation had a big celebration, singing all the patriotic hymns. Even as a newly-convinced Quaker, this seemed to me very odd. I didn't know much about Quakers yet, but I understood they felt passionately about the separation of church and state, rejecting the religion of empire to its very core.

Therefore, this Fourth of July celebration during worship did not sit right with me. I talked to my boss, the pastor of the church, and told him I should not participate in the service. I did not feel good about inviting the youth to the service because I felt it didn't fit with Quaker teachings I was trying to instill. This was one of the first times I pushed against leadership out of a sense of leading, and would not be the last. He felt that I had no right to condemn the practice without first having participated in it. To his credit, a week later he approached me and said he had met with the worship planning committee and heard of what they were planning. He changed his mind and thought it best that if I felt strongly about it, I should not come.

I was welcome at Barberton and the pastor was a very good mentor to me in my fledgling ministry (I will never forget the time he stood up for me in the face of parents and elders who tried to fire me because my theology was different from theirs), but it was less a Quaker meeting than a nice church in

a poor part of town. Most of what I learned of the Quaker tradition while I was there was from books I read on my own. I grew as a minister and a young man. I made plenty of mistakes, but I also saw the fruit of my spiritual work.

It was in this context that I first went up for recording. The "Evangelical Friends Church – Eastern Region," as the yearly meeting was then known, had a rigorous and top-heavy approach to recording because they wanted to make sure that their (predominately male) pastors were on the same page theologically. I got through the first year of the process, already a little on edge. My freely identifying with the Quaker tradition in such an Evangelical context meant I stood out. I still considered myself very Evangelical and held to many conservative ideas. It's even more interesting that they saw something in me I didn't yet see. But by so openly calling myself a "Quaker" and drawing on Friends teachings, I was clearly, in their minds, headed in a different direction than they were.

This distance was further reinforced at my last meeting with one of the leaders of the Yearly Meeting. By this time, Emily and I were preparing to move to Pasadena, California, so I could attend Fuller Theological Seminary for grad school. My recording committee put my recording process on hold because, "We don't know if you will come back and if you do, we don't know what [theological] state you will come back in." At the close of that meeting, they asked me if I had any questions for them. I did: "What happened to the Evangelical Friends Church that it has become so unrecognizably Quaker, and what can be done about it?"

What I didn't foresee is that those two questions -- "What happened and what do we do about it" – have become two of my main questions about the Quaker tradition and have in many ways led me in my research, writing, and ministry since. It wasn't until we moved to Pasadena and I began connecting with Quaker bloggers that I began to find a "place" to belong among Quakers.



## 2. A THEORY OF CONVERSATION

So far I have shared a number of key events that shaped my spiritual life. Next, I want to offer some theory and praxis in the hopes developing a dynamic, relational theology I refer to as "convers(at)ions."

I've long been interested in the interplay between the more fixed and structured idea of **conversion** and the more open-ended and free-flowing possibility of what happens in genuine **conversation**. There's a natural push and pull between these actions; as my mind changes, new ideas, people, and communities open up to me as conversation partners. As I encounter them, I find myself undergoing various kinds of conversions (emphasis on its plurality), whether spiritual, ideological, political, emotional, etc. I now rarely use the word conversion in its singular form. Whether we want to or not, we go through many conversions in life, whether in the form of cultural and social experiences, new

ideas, or people in communities different from our own.

The original concept of convers(at)ions came about while I was pastoring in Camas. I was trying to understand how teaching and preaching came to affect individuals in their experience of the sermon. Convers(at)ions are connected to the belief that there is an ongoing series of “micro-conversions” people experience throughout their life that are often story-centered and experiential. For me, this typically comes through two or more people conversing around a subject. I realized the more a sermon could become like a conversation, the more it could open the possibility of deep change within the congregation.

Three characteristics became core to my understanding of this dialectic:

1. **Convers(at)ions are mutual** – A bystander wouldn’t necessarily know who the teacher was. There is a genuine curiosity and sense of discovery that takes place between individuals. The teacher stands in a genuine posture of discovery alongside those they are in dialogue with.
2. **Convers(at)ions are invitational and non-coercive** – To be invitational is to create a space of hospitality where an individual’s soul is welcome and safe enough to show as little or as much as they feel free to do. No one is forced into believing a certain thing, but invited to wonder and consider possibilities. In this way, these dialogues can often be very imaginative as well.
3. **Convers(at)ions point in the direction of love** – They begin and end from a place of love. They start from a place of affirmation, trusting that truth is within the community and the individual, and that we all only see in part. I believe it is in the discovery of truth together that we come to know more fully and are fully known. Thus, to [be pointed] in the direction of love is to be pointed in the direction of God. It knows that wholeness cannot be found apart from coming to know for oneself the unconditional love of God. This love may be in the form of a gentle or affirming word, or perhaps in the form of a prophetic word or a hard truth spoken in a way that is meant to leave the listener both exposed but held in the possibility of recovery.

When I pastored, I applied this not only in more intimate work of pastoral care, but also in my practice of preaching. It includes inviting the congregation to reflect throughout the week on the upcoming text with the use of queries; opening space for dialogue prior to the sermon; orienting the message around questions rather than answers; allowing interruptions and questions during message; time for “open” worship afterwards; and creating spaces for online engagement and “sideways” chatter, which is conversation on the perimeter where everyone has a contributing role. This theory of conversation carries on into my leadership and teaching style at Guilford and among Friends today.

### **A Theology of Scenius**

When I frame my self-portrait in terms of the short-hand convers(at)ions, I have a web of people and moments I look back on and see how my life has been shaped. A favorite way to illustrate this comes from author Austin Kleon. He writes about the idea of the artist as a lone genius who holes up in the dusty attic working on their masterpiece isolated and alone. This has not been my experience. In contrast to the myth and metaphor of the “lone genius,” Kleon shares a concept from musician Brian Eno: [Scenius](#). According to Eno, a scenius could be pictured like a web, or a family tree, of artists, influences, and people who have impacted the way you experience the world. That web of influences comprises your scenius.

Here's part of what Kleon says in his book, "Show Your Work":

"Under this model, great ideas are often birthed by a group of creative individuals ... who make up an "ecology of talent." If you look back closely at history, many of the people who we think of as lone geniuses were actually part of a whole scene of people who were supporting each other, looking at each other's work, copying from each other, stealing ideas, and contributing ideas.

"What I love about the idea of scenius is that it makes room in the story of creativity for the rest of us: the people who don't consider ourselves geniuses. Being a valuable part of a scenius is not necessarily about how smart or talented you are, but about what you have to contribute—the ideas you share, the quality of the connections you make, and the conversations you start. "

To put it even more simply: Genius is an egosystem, scenius is an ecosystem.

Scenius and convers(at)ion are often linked in my story. My spirituality, my ideas of God, and my sense of creativity have always been in dynamic relation with others. Here are a few names/events I think of when I start to sketch the scenius of my spiritual call:

- My mom, **Vicki Jo Welden (Gusky)**, always encouraged me to be myself no matter how strange I got in middle school and high school. She taught me to have a big heart and that it was okay to be sensitive and creative. She would not let me give up when it came to facing the challenges I did in college. Her influence is key in my scenius.
- Of course, meeting and marrying **Emily Daniels** changed my life for the better. Her friendship and partnership over the last 24 years is an unquantifiable gift and has deeply impacted how I see the world. Her sense of adventure and desire to learn and grow inspires me, and her support has helped me believe I can accomplish just about anything.
- From that relationship came my becoming a part of Emily's family. Her mom and dad have been influences and enormous supports for my development as a person and minister.
- My aunt **Patty Daniels** coming out in the mid-1990s. This forced me to begin thinking about the queer community, prompting me to start asking questions about what I believed about same-sex relationships while I was still at Malone.
- Choosing to move to Los Angeles and attend Fuller Seminary for my masters and Ph.D. because it was the most open and ecumenical of the seminaries I knew about. Even though I was still an Evangelical, I did not want to be boxed in.
- Being called to pastor Camas Friends Church in Washington. Those were some of the best years of my adult life.
- My scenius includes, at the very center, my children **Lily, Mae, and Clem**, because of the countless ways that have shaped my life.
- Too many others to all be named here but they include friends at Fuller; Convergent Friends



like Robin & Chris Mohr, Chad Stephenson, Ashley Wilcox, Martin Kelley, Peggy Senger Morrison, Alivia Biko, Zachary Moon; all of our people from the Pacific Northwest; and now my people and experiences while here in Greensboro from traveling in the old style of Ministry with Lloyd Lee, to my Guilford Colleagues, and more.

I am truly a part of a beautiful scenius.



### **3. TESTAMENTS**

#### **Witnessing God in Music, Theology, Remix, and Friends**

*In this section, I respond to two queries: (1) Where has God found you; (2) where have you found God?*

#### **Holding Tensions**

I have felt close to God since I was young. I don't remember a time when spirituality was not part of my life. The voice in my head guiding me was always clear. As a child, I knew lying was wrong and would rather just face the consequence of telling the truth than go along with a tall tale. I was also empathetic, and that sensitivity opened me up to others in a way that boys my age didn't always, or weren't allowed, to do.

My friends and I were the outcasts and nerds. I understood their experiences of not fitting in and looked through whatever labels others put on them/us. One of my best friends, Nick, turned out to be gay later in life. I had no inclination back then. He was just my friend and it didn't matter that he was different from my other friends.

It was important to try and be good, very clearly wanting to get approval from my parents and avoiding the negative attention of my step-dad. A part of it was my desire to "let my life preach," as I would later learn George Fox once said. That kind of "doing right, because it is right" ran deep.

I also loved the rebels (still do). Inspired by the likes of John Lennon and Bob Dylan when I was a teenager, I had a strong urge to stand out, push boundaries, ask big questions, and think for myself. It meant that I was overly eager, but also a jokester, didn't mind attention, and was serious about a lot of things, especially the church.

Somehow, among the rebels, the nerds, and the Holy rollers of the church, I found my people and I found God. Those three labels all define what I later found in the Quaker movement as well – the more subtle act of learning to be myself and finding all of the places where God is, inside and outside the binaries of sacred and secular. This more expansive and open view would serve me as I continued to move towards a more open-ended, inclusive, and universalist view of God.

## The creativity of theology

*“...the theologian is not merely an outsider, commenting about something having happened, but is **on the way to becoming part of the act of communication** from the inside. Is on the way to becoming a shock wave from the impact, which is part of the impact itself.” -James Alison, *Undergoing God*, page 1.*

Create, invent, innovate, and remix are recurring themes in my life. One of the things that drew me to theology was just how creative it can be: it is the linguistic building block of alternative worlds of the seen and unseen. A good theologian can, through language, metaphor, story, and creative use of well-placed arguments, reveal a world in which we and God co-create something different from what we have. The being, *“on the way to becoming part of the act of communication from the inside.”* Theology at its best is creative and generative; it shifts perspectives and changes language, allowing for visions of a new world to arise. I love that. Early Quakers understood the power of language and sought to shift how they spoke and the words they used in order to create new realities. I am constantly looking for ways to recover, re-imagine, and remix what is already there. I think this is a similar impulse, or repetition, of what early Friends were trying to do.

Quaker practice is too often talked about as dour, conservative, boring; but in fact its origins are very creative. Refusing to use certain words when speaking to noble people was a practice of resistance that sought to not only say “no” to the current class system they lived within, it was also a “yes” meant to create a different world where even the way they spoke about others was different from what was seen as acceptable.

Early Friends resisted their current world in order to try and create something new in its place. In my book, *A Convergent Model of Renewal (2015)*, I call this **authentic resistance**. It is the act of *tearing down, while building up something new in its place that is more authentic to the people living in that time and place*. When we follow old Quaker practices because “that’s the way we do things,” we’ve lost the tension held between the resistance and creative edge that animated the first Friends.

Other examples can be seen in the simple shift in language such as ordination to recording, church (building) to meeting house, church (worship) to meeting for worship, you/yours to thee/thou, the way they spoke about communion, baptism, and more. This shows me what is possible with a creative approach to theology.

In comparison to the constant Quaker histories being written, there is very little new Quaker theology being developed. I think this betrays a lack of ability or interest in thinking creatively about the direction of our tradition today. There is little effort made to rethink, reinterpret, and remix the Quaker tradition.

Our points of reference and resistance are being lost. Re-contextualizing them and helping us to know how to make sense of faith, community, love, and God in the ever-changing world is a major concern of the theologian. I have felt called to this work and have tried to be faithful in thinking theologically as a Quaker minister. I find God in theology -- reading it, discussing it with f/Friends, writing it, and

teaching it. I connect with God and I hope I help others connect with God. I want to see (Quaker) theology grow and change.

It's in the cracks between what was and what can be that I feel most alive. I find God in the vibrant connection between the past and present; between what Friends believed and experienced a long time ago and how that mirrors our own experiences. In the practice and process of this kind of writing, I find my faith deepening. I believe part of my call reflects the work I've described, chiseling away at language in order to build and rebuild our world with renewed vision.

## **GOD IS IN THE REMIX**

I find God in the remix. The connecting of two parts, one old and one new, one nailed down and protected with the other still emergent. I find God in the discovery of where these meet -- where the sparks fly with electricity flowing from one fingertip to the next. The combination of old and new where heads turn, faces crinkle, word clouds form above people's heads: "Are you allowed to do that?" or "Can those two ideas be formed into one?" or "This doesn't seem appropriate, or right, or orthodox."

Revelation gives me a lot to think about when it comes to remix. A few years ago I re-read the Book of Revelation with a fresh (at least to me) question: What does this book tell us about empire? What I walked away with was a new reading of an old book: Revelation has nothing to do with predicting the end of the world, and everything to do with how the early church resisted assimilation into empire. Writing that theology down; preaching those words within Quaker community interested in what that Biblical text has to say to *us* today; and then sharing that newly found conviction with friends and groups of faithful people brought me closer to God and to my own community. Revelation also has a way of bringing electricity into every room where it is mentioned. Ever want to stop a party in its tracks? Mention you wrote a book on the Book of Revelation. Re-reading Revelation showed me the energy behind remix as an interpretive strategy.

### **Love as Repetition**

*"The task is not to reproduce literally what Jesus said and did -- I have never ever seen an olive garden or a fig tree --- but to repeat the love with which he said and did them, on the bet that those are the practices in which he would recognize himself today." - John Caputo*

God is present in the re-reading that recovers an earlier repetition. The repetition is found in similar threads showing up in the present that were around in the past. Our response to these threads today requires a different, perhaps slanted, reading; adding imagination and expecting different practices and responses. For example, for as long as empires have existed -- which so far as I can tell is just about as long as humans have existed -- there have been communities who have resisted. Those communities of resistance, just like the empires they seek to subvert, changes over time but the fact remains that one's imagination and action is rooted in a **religion of creation** (love, abundance, egalitarianism, gift), and the other in a **religion of empire** (suspicion, scarcity, scapegoating, violence). These two concepts have become important to me for understanding the threads we continue to have in our world today.

Here is an example of what I mean: This distance between us and the first readers of Revelation means first and foremost that we are not the intended audience of the person who wrote the letter. It is not about our time, nor was it meant to be treated like the Christian version of Nostradamus. But here's the kicker, the remix or repetition, so to speak: as soon as we understand that it is not about us at all, then it can have everything to do with us! If that isn't a great jolt, I don't know what is. In other words, the through-lines are not its literal interpretation of our time but rather the patterns of empire and what it is to be called by God as communities of resistance to empire that persist. It is the **conversation** between these two realities and the ways in which they are very different and similar, can speak into our time. The result of this repetition, what we do with it, what we create out of it, is the theological version of remix.

### **The children of remix**

Quakers are the children of remix. Earlier Quakers were not an original movement; they remixed the best of what was around them. Their ideas were almost all borrowed from other dissenting religious groups of their time. They took their experiences of being made up largely of poor and working-class folks plus their experiences of being heavily persecuted by authorities espousing the "religion of empire," and blended together their readings of the Bible with ideas from the Radical Reformers like the Mennonites, General Baptists, Diggers, Seekers and more. They were people unhappy with the way the world was working and felt that the church should be offering alternatives to society. They called their experiment Primitive Christianity Revived. I call it Primitive Christianity Remixed because they were able to harness the wisdom of the old in new ways that spoke to those in their time.

The goal of Quakers today should not be, and realistically cannot be, to re-live George Fox's time and teaching as though nothing has changed. Rather, through repetition, Quakers can create new remixes for our time. We're closer to the Spirit which guided the early Quaker impulse when we live into the question "what does it look like to reignite primitive Christianity in our day" rather than focus our energy on "how can we be just like early Quakers?" or "are we Quaker enough?"

### **Convergent Friends**

The phrase "convergent Friends", created by Robin Mohr in 2005, is important to me. I have spent a lot of my writing and research reflecting on what it means to be a convergent friend. Convergent, in this context means a remixing of Conservative, Liberal, and Evangelical branches of Friends. Today, Convergent Friends are those who believe it is in the dynamic tension of the conservative impulse to embrace tradition and the emerging experiences of context and community at the heart of our faith tradition.

I find God in the convergence. The living parts of our faith and tradition that connect and inspire us. If Fox meant it when he said, "There is one Christ Jesus who can speak to thy condition," a lot of unnecessary culture and habits have built up around what Friends have thought that meant over the last almost 400 years.

I feel particularly close to God when these boundaries are challenged, pushed, and transgressed. One

of the most inspiring examples of Quakerism to me was Freedom Friends Church, a small church run by queer women who sought to be fully Christian, fully Quaker, and fully inclusive. Their pastor didn't preach and they succeeded in welcoming queer folks, poor folks, disabled folks, and folks who had been run off by the most imperial expressions of Christianity. They wrote their own Faith and Practice, which stands out to me as one of the most inspiring Quaker remixes of the 20th century. A few years ago, after 15 years of being a community together, they closed their doors because they felt called to "lay down" the church. They were courageous, experimental and broke so many of the "rules" of Quakerism in the name being Quakers today. I did what I could to support their work in my writing. I continue to do what I can to reinterpret and repeat what they were doing in my own ministry contexts. What I learned from Freedom Friends changed what I believe is possible among Friends.



#### 4. SOME FAITHFUL BETRAYALS

Many years ago, I read Peter Rollins' book "The Orthodox Heretic," which is made up of short parables meant to challenge status quo Christianity. A story titled "The Apprentice" has become a kind of narrative frame for me. It lifts the idea of the need for the apprentice to become something more than a replica of their teacher. In fact, the goal of the apprentice is to learn the tradition so much that they are able to iterate, improvise, and sometimes betray that tradition in order to carry it forward. The image in Rollins' story has been a centerpiece of my thinking around Quaker renewal: we need apprentices of the tradition who knowingly seek to carry the tradition forward in new and sometimes surprising and creative ways. Here is the story.

##### **"The Apprentice" - Peter Rollins**

"There was once an old wise master who was at the end of his life. He had one apprentice he was deeply fond of but was worried that this apprentice was still far from enlightenment. The apprentice was deeply devoted to the master, carefully following all of his teachings and never deviating from the path laid out. This was what troubled the master most of all. Calling his apprentice to eat with him privately, he began, "You have been a thoughtful and dedicated follower of my teachings for many years, and you may well one day become a great teacher. However, I sense that you are in danger of betraying me in your thoughts and actions."

This apprentice was crushed at the suggestion and responded, "... I never tire of engaging in the rituals and prayers that you have taught. I swear to you that I would never betray you, my great teacher." The master responded, "The fact that you have never betrayed my teachings, and the fact that you swear never to betray them: this is to betray them already."

I have found God in this parable of *the faithful betrayal*. It has guided me in how I think about

tradition and faithfulness. It encourages the willingness to change, experiment, and to see past the emotional barriers that keep us from imagining and experiencing a new world.

I see God in the breaks and fissures of the pristine: The overturned tables. The people who defy the categories. The jazz improvisationalists who know their musical traditions so well they are able to break the rules in ways that honor and extend their tradition. The rebels, punks, and rock 'n rollers who do the same. Those who push against binaries and dualisms. Those who act in unexpected ways to reveal a deeper love, a deeper wisdom, or make visible the kingdom within. These are the people who are faithful to love and a vision that is willing to challenge, change, and even betray in order to carry forward what they love.

This sentiment is core to what I love about the Quaker tradition. It is itself an example of a faithful betrayal in its origins, rejecting imperial Christianity that grew up in the time of Constantine and carried forward into their own time. In doing so they were seen as betrayers -- and in a sense they were -- but it was all in an effort to be faithful to the radical seeds of Jesus' teachings that resisted the religion of empire. That Friends were willing to rebuild from the ground up shows that they, too, internalized their own tradition enough that they could remix it in their time.

I believe that God can be found in -- and sometimes calls for -- this kind of faithful betrayal. Here are a few times when I believe I was led in that direction.

### **Wedding Bells**

In the spring of 2014, I said yes to officiating the first same-sex wedding in the Northwest Yearly Meeting, an Evangelical Yearly Meeting known for its anti-LGBTQ stance. That would come to represent, to Yearly Meeting leadership, a "shattering" in their eyes. I believed the "yes" I was led to speak to two women in our meeting was an act of faithfulness that betrayed a structure seeking to say "no" to their lives, their love, and their family. While my "yes" had everything to do with my being asked to perform a wedding for people in my congregation, it jeopardized my job and standing in the yearly meeting.

Fortunately, my "yes" was affirmed by the elders of our meeting, who were courageous and willing to stand on principle in a moment when fear could have won the day. They said: "We will celebrate their marriage the same way we celebrate any other milestone that happens to people in our meeting." Unknown to me, this "yes" was one of the seeds planted that would become a new yearly meeting, Sierra Cascades Yearly Meeting of Friends, rooted in love and acceptance.

### **Go First**

In March of 2020, I spoke up, saying "no" to the president of Guilford College during mass layoffs at the start of Covid. I felt God calling me to speak in the cabinet meeting where it was being decided to lay off more than 100 college staff. I did not believe we, as senior leaders of the college, could lay off so many people without first making our own financial sacrifices. It was a matter of truthfulness for us to go first, to lead the way and be an example. What I said led to my being furloughed for four months with the risk of not being brought back. In this instance, it was a "no" I was led to give, which took me into a very difficult and dark period of my life. I was eventually brought back and that "no" has forever

shaped and impacted my relationship to Guilford (in good as well as challenging ways). Later, during my last meeting with the then president, she told me that I betrayed her by what I'd done.

### **People Over Ideologies**

I keep being brought back to this commitment – people over ideologies -- not in some dogmatic way, but with a gentleness that softens the edges of any ideological commitments I have. I think that putting people over specific ideologies will almost always have the feel of a faithful betrayal, just as standing in solidarity with those on the margins. Even Jesus ran into this problem when he said, "The Sabbath was created for people, not people for the Sabbath." People and their needs should come before buildings, the institution or organization, or one's own theology. Yet this seems like such a difficult stance for us to hold to.

### **Standing in Solidarity**

I have found God when I am standing in solidarity with others whose own life experiences and identities are different from my own. I try to be connected to those in more marginalized communities and faithful at showing up when asked. This is what happened in 2014 with Jayce, an African-American Transgender student, who [was being discriminated against by George Fox University](#), a Quaker-founded college, because he requested housing that aligned with his gender. George Fox University tried to use a religious exemption in order to reject Jayce's request. A meeting with his lawyer eventually led to my being asked for help with Jayce's situation. I asked another Quaker pastor and friend of mine, Mike Huber, to help. We co-authored an open letter arguing that the school had no grounds to request a religious exemption from granting Jayce's housing request.

Our "Open Letter to George Fox" was published by Portland Queer Monthly (July 2014) and went viral. In the end, I believe that it helped Jayce's overall cause; unfortunately, it didn't get him the housing he needed on campus, which was the whole point. I think he ended up getting an exception to get an apartment off campus with some friends. Because of the letter, and subsequent noise that followed from it, I was let go from my adjunct teaching position at George Fox Seminary.

### **Intersections**

Later that summer in 2014, Mike Brown was shot and killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Mo. This happened some 300 miles to the west of Richmond, Indiana, where I was teaching a two-week intensive for the Earlham School of Religion called "Poverty, Empire, and the Bible." Students in the class immediately wanted to respond and organized a vigil on the courtyard of Earlham. We reached out to local Black churches and asked the pastor of the local AME church to share a few words during the vigil. When she stepped onto campus that afternoon, she was surprised to find out there was a Quaker seminary only a couple miles from where she lived. She knew nothing of it. That was a poignant reminder that it is one thing to say we are allies and quite another to be in relationship with the people who we say we are allied with.

The murder of Trayvon Martin in 2012 is what really woke me up from my white slumber. So when Mike Brown was shot and killed just two years later, I knew I needed to be more involved. I was glued to Twitter during those weeks of teaching, following clergy and activists on the ground in Ferguson,

sharing images, retweeting reports, reading eyewitness accounts, and adding my own voice and encouragement to those resisting the police in Ferguson. We talked about what was going on in class, and it was easy to apply the situation to the contents of the course.

When I got home after my class one day, I had a phone call from one of the women whose wedding I had just performed a few months earlier. Not only were she and her wife newlyweds and new(ish) to Quakerism, they were also police officers. They told me that what I was sharing on Twitter made them feel unwelcome in the meeting and they did not intend to come back. I was stunned and broken-hearted. I did my best to listen to her concerns while also holding a stance true to what I believe: individual police can sometimes be good, and I believed they were of that kind, the policing system, and many within it, are not. Police brutality against African Americans is an age-old sin in this country. I was ultimately not successful in convincing them to come back to the meeting, even though we have been connected through social media since.

In the spring and summer of 2014, I attempted to stand up for what I believed was right, where I felt God was leading me personally, and worked hard to stay grounded in the midst of a lot of confrontation, hard feelings, emotional responses, and anger from others. How could it be that in the same summer I married a couple in our meeting, we also lost them, while bringing the ire of the yearly meeting upon us in the process, and losing my job at the seminary all in one fell swoop?

Today, I wonder why it was that I found myself deep within these varying intersections in that moment. I did not seek it out, but instead it felt like God found me and whether I was ready or not, called me to be faithful. Looking back, I felt close to God in that series of experiences that continue to shape who I am and how I minister today.





## 5. TEACHING QUAKERISMS

There's a thread you follow. It goes among  
things that change. But it doesn't change.  
People wonder about what you are pursuing.  
You have to explain about the thread.  
But it is hard for others to see.  
While you hold it you can't get lost.  
Tragedies happen; people get hurt  
or die; and you suffer and get old.  
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.  
You don't ever let go of the thread.

*William Stafford, from The Way It Is, 1998*

### **As The Call Changes**

Today, I continue to feel called to ministry, but one that is very different since moving to Greensboro in the summer of 2015. The discernment to leave the Pacific Northwest and Camas Friends remains a huge turning point. While I continue to see the Pacific Northwest as a spiritual home, Greensboro has become a place of growth and change in its own ways.

The move to Guilford was a logical step for me. I had long dreamed of being a professor and, at least since college, felt a pull towards teaching theology. I have always felt a tug between the teaching and the pastoral sides of ministry. Both are woven into my spiritual DNA.

My ministry focus has shifted at Guilford. Where it was once primarily the one-on-one relational work of pastoring and the work of advocating for and the nurturing of a small faith community, it now looks outward more broadly. I love working with students and supporting them in their education and spiritual formation, but my ability to focus on that has not always been easy given the various roles and responsibilities Guilford expects of me.

Today, much of my job is institutional. I am very often teaching new staff, most of whom are not Quaker and whose initial ideas of Quakers do not represent the current reality. I've honed my skills at presenting the "basics of Quakerism" to faculty, staff, and students, and how that relates to my work. Usually, the most popular version of a common question comes in the form of, "Is Guilford even Quaker anymore?"

I confess that I have grown wary of that question. I began ministry because I believed that I was to be God's "hands and feet" in the world, joining God's co-laborers, sharing and living the message of Jesus' love and solidarity for the disinherited. Now, I have slide decks full of details about Quakers long gone, theological disagreements among Friends, and reasons why Friends are historically important. There are times when I feel I have lost my way, and others when I believe that I see the through-line with my work today. What remains constant is this: I am motivated to help Friends face our challenges only insofar as it means our communities can be mobilized to care for, and prioritize, those who are in the deepest needs around us. Everything else feels secondary to the question: "Are we being faithful to

who God has called us to be?"

Part of what this "are we really Quakers" question represents to me is a lacking of generative Spirit. It feels very much like a question of *ideology over people*. As Quaker leader Everett Cattell once wrote,

"Perhaps the call before us now is for a new seeking: to find where God's Spirit is actually at work in today's world and then give of ourselves to the work with Him, whether within or without the framework of Friends. The future of Friends may be like the grain of wheat, which must fall to the ground and die. Perhaps this would be the way to a new harvest."  
Everett Cattell

Therefore, I have been charting my own course since I arrived with questions about what is really alive here and less about how to reinforce fixed structures and identities. While not everyone has agreed with this path or helped me forge it, it is very much related to everything already in this theological reflection, and my sense of call as it pertains to renewal, inclusion, and building participatory spaces whether in a college or congregational setting.

### **Work-Life Balance**

First, I've tried to bring joy to what it means to be a Quaker at Guilford. I've never been one to strong-arm people. Exclusive Quakerism led to the diminishing of its tradition over time because people were turned off by it, afraid, or pushed away. I've noticed this tendency among Quakers more generally. The longer the religious identities have been around, the more fixed they can become, especially in a place where historically being Quaker was in very real contrast to other religious and political identities. Guilford's Quaker identity can be rigid in these ways.

Coming from a very different background and experience among Friends, first Evangelical and then West Coast, my frame of reference sometimes feels almost alien. Both are much more open in their understanding of identity, more happy to see people interested and connected than a certain fixed identity carried on. I've tried to bring to campus a relaxed perspective on these things. One where we work to create a friendly, relevant, humble, and joyful Quakerism. My focus has been about building community and genuine connection, showing that the best of the Quaker tradition on campus is creative, insightful, and participatory among any interested in picking up and helping to carry the tradition forward.

### **Ask New Questions**

Second, we ask new and different questions. When we get stuck on answering the same old way, it is time for a new question. The one I have been asking at Guilford is "what does it mean for me/us to be in conversation with the Quaker tradition of the college?" I talk about the Quaker tradition of Guilford as the *Wisdom tradition*. That is, a living well-spring of wisdom that we return to again and again as we have need or desire. It never forces itself on us, but it gives life as we seek life. This new question leads in a different direction. Trusting the voices and experiences of the students, staff, and faculty. Trusting that together we can re-imagine what the Quaker tradition means to us in this time.

## **Build a Scenius**

Third, I try to teach and lead in a way that builds the scenius. I envision a participatory culture where everyone has the opportunity to be curious about and takes ownership over what it means to be connected to the Quaker tradition today. This means moving from a lone Quaker expert model (like me) to a scenius model. Teaching in a way that empowers others to find their own way into the story in ways that best make sense to them. My approach is to bring in diverse voices and perspectives, focus on the ways in which Quakerism is a part of the radical and prophetic and universalist stream within Christianity. Throw the gates wide open and discover the open, iterative version of Quakerism that can flourish in our time. Participatory leadership creates the conditions where I am but one piece in the puzzle rather than what holds the puzzle together.



## **6. ON THE FUTURE**

This theological reflection has been months in the making, partly because I'm walking down a path in which my call feels very different than it once did. I can no longer avoid this question posed by Norma Silliman, member of Camas Friends and co-clerk of Sierra Cascades Yearly Meeting.

What does this mean for your future ministry?

The truthful answer is still unfolding, with only hints and whispers. I am writing this at the beginning of a six-month sabbatical where I hope to find more clarity. I know those realities are changing and what I will be like and what I want/need there will be different upon my return. I know I am committed to service and ministry within First Friends with the gifts I have to bring.

Serving with Ministry and Counsel, teaching and preaching, and supporting the community where I can be of service has been a joy. I also know I must continue to write and allow it to take me places I do not yet foresee. This is where I have the most energy currently. It is in the process of learning, synthesizing, creating, and the act of sharing that I feel closest to God and my call. It has often been in finding a way forward through a forest of words and sentences that I come to touch upon the tenderness of God.

More to the personal side of things: I feel less driven by "my career." By the need to be known. By the need to climb the ladder and achieve. If my life does not matter or make a difference in the lives of Emily, Lily, Mae, and Clem, then I am not interested. I don't want to do things so that I look busy or can feel good about "the difference I am making." I won't distance myself from my family because of work. I want to be able to see Mae in theater, have time to hear Lily's recent adventures, and help Clem draw or watch him play basketball at 4:15 on a Tuesday without guilt.

I am also acutely aware that the timing of my process to be recorded falls only months after the death of my father. I am discerning amidst grief, a melancholy minister trying to find breathing room in a world where the walls keep closing in. More than ever, I want to live day by day and see how they stack up. Annie Dillard says, "How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives."

Here is one story about my dad that is apropos of this reflection:

When I first went into ministry 25 years ago, I remember dad expressing to me his reservations. He was never a big fan of what he'd call "dogmatic Christianity", and he was concerned about me going in that direction. He used to tell me his religion was Love, like the Beatles, "All you need is love." Or maybe like the Eagles song, "Love Will Keep Us Alive," a regular in his setlist. That was what he believed down to his core. One of the things that was always really important to him was accepting others no matter what. I think he did that pretty darn well throughout his life--all of us here are a testimony to that. Due in large part to his influence, that is an important value of mine too. No matter who people are or what they do, you seek to see the Light in everyone, you accept people for who they are. You could see this in his life: he never knew a stranger. Fast forward to many years later. He and Mary visited us for a week when we were living out in the Pacific Northwest. One afternoon on a walk out to the car after seeing the Multnomah Waterfalls, he told me he loved me and was proud of who I'd become. I'll never forget that moment as long as I live. He accepted me too.

I want to be of service to Friends and see how my gifts can be used to help renew and revitalize local Quaker meetings. I want to see healthy and joyful faith communities where people find belonging, learn and grow, and find the support they need.

I feel called to build and rebuild systems that support the "mission of the church" -- to love God and be the beloved community in the world.

I feel called to help the church find ways to be "the freedom church of the poor" that Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. talked about.

I feel called to help apprentice more people, young and old, to the living Quaker tradition. I believe that which is most alive within our tradition still is relevant and wanted in our world today. I believe that at the heart of the Quaker tradition is an alternative vision of the world that stands counter to empire's vision.

I feel called to love, to make space for others, to help hold tensions, and cherish the watersheds I live within, and to allow for silence to center me.

And I believe in the day-to-day. The one-to-one. The seconds that make up this moment. The people in front of me. The people who make up our local communities, our Quaker meetings, our dining room tables. The classroom of students I spend my mornings with. The conversations over coffee with colleagues. The discernment big and small that a listening ear can serve.

I am working to understand what it means for me to be faithful today in Greensboro, post-Covid,

surrounded by the problems facing the world, my community, and my children. I am trying to understand what it means to live day to day, satisfied, happy, and in love. I want to live in a way that I can look my children and my wife in their eyes each day, and that I'm gentle with my dog even when I've had a bad day. I am trying to pay attention to what it means to be faithful within the container of Quakerism, to be a good steward of the relationships I have, the power and privilege I have, and how to use that for the hard task of being human. Somewhere within all of this lies a call, like a hidden trail through the woods that leads me from my home onward to the one I'm searching for.

My recording will be a recognition of the need for this ongoing and dynamic work of discernment and faithfulness, not just for myself, but for the communities I am a part of. It is also an invitation for the First Friends community to join me in this process. This is a reminder of the courage I have had and the courage I continue to need if I am going to "hold to the way." There is confidence in knowing that I get to be a co-laborer with God among Friends in this work of love, and I am grateful for each of you who are a part of my scenius.

## **APPENDIX A: Short Circuits**

*These are quotes and sayings I have found God within over the years. They speak to me like holy texts and reminders of who I am called to be. These words have changed my thinking and my faith. These are other people's testaments that I take as my own.*

### **Quotes used elsewhere in this text**

Austin Kleon - Scenius; John Caputo - Love as Repetition; Peter Rollins - The Apprentice; Everett Cattell - Friends as a Grain of Wheat

### **Jaroslav Pelikan on Tradition**

"Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. And, I suppose I should add, it is traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name."

### **John Caputo on Love and Remix**

Derrida would say that genuine tradition is not constituted by any position or positivity but by a deeper affirmation. The task is not to reproduce literally what Jesus said and did - I have never ever seen an olive garden or a fig tree - but to repeat the love with which he said and did them, on the bet that those are the practices in which he would recognize himself today.

### **Alasdair MacIntyre on being a bearer of a tradition**

"What I am, therefore, is in key part what I inherit, a specific past that is present to some degree in my present. I find myself part of a history and that is generally today...one of the bearers of tradition."

### **Margaret Fell - On First Hearing Fox's Message and the Importance of Convers(at)ions**

And [George Fox] said, "Then what had any to do with the Scriptures, but as they came to the Spirit that gave them forth. You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this; but what canst thou say? Art thou a child of Light and hast walked in the Light, and what thou speakest is it inwardly from God?" 4 This opened me so that it cut me to the heart; and then I saw clearly we were all wrong. So I sat me down in my pew again, and cried bitterly. And I cried in my spirit to the Lord, "We are all thieves, we are all thieves, we have taken the Scriptures in words and know nothing of them in ourselves." -Introduction to The Journal of George Fox, 1694

### **Alasdair MacIntyre on The Living Tradition (1984: 222)**

A living tradition then is a historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition. Within a tradition the pursuit of goods extends through generations, sometimes through many generations.

### **James Alison on the importance of boredom as a part of worship:**

When people tell me that they find Mass boring, I want to say to them: it's supposed to be boring, or at least seriously underwhelming. It's a long term education in becoming un-excited, since only that will enable us to dwell in a quiet bliss which doesn't abstract from our present or our surroundings or

our neighbour, but which increases our attention, our presence and our appreciation for what is around us. The build up to a sacrifice is exciting, the dwelling in gratitude that the sacrifice has already happened, and that we've been forgiven for and through it is, in terms of excitement, a long drawn-out let-down.

### **James Alison - Theology as an Act of Communication**

“Imagine two different groups of scientists. One group, armed with a set of encyclopedic guidebooks which are constantly being annotated, take turns to look at a distant star or galaxy through an extremely powerful telescope. The scientists offer comments from what they see, and in the light of what they see, or deduce, further annotations are made in the guidebooks, and their deliverances are passed on to anyone who is interested. The other group of scientists is standing round the rim of a huge concavity in the surface of the earth, or maybe they are in submarines, gazing at the rim of a huge concavity which has been detected as giving form to the sea bed. They are trying to work out what has happened, what force, what dimensions, what speed, produced this impact, and what the consequences have been, or are, or will be, for life on the planet as a result of whatever it was that produced this concavity.”

“Of the two groups of scientists, the one which offers the closer analogy to the discipline of theology is the second group. For the discipline of theology, a distinctively Christian discipline, presupposes a happening, an impact, an interruption, having already happened, and offering a shape which can be detected as the consequences of its having happened spread further. Furthermore, it presupposes that that happening, that impact, is not only a blind collision, of the sort produced by a meteor in the vicinity of the Yucatan peninsula, but is an act of communication. This means that the theologian is not merely an outsider, commenting about something having happened, but is on the way to becoming part of the act of communication from the inside. Is on the way to becoming a shock wave from the impact, which is part of the impact itself.”

### **Margaret Fell - On Quakers Getting Stuck on Purity**

We are now coming into that which Christ cried woe against, minding altogether outward things, neglecting the inward work of Almighty God in our hearts, if we can but frame according to outward prescriptions and orders, and deny eating and drinking with our neighbours, in so much that poor Friends is mangled in their minds, that they know not what to do, for one Friend says one way, and another another, but Christ Jesus saith, that we must take no thought what we shall eat, or what we shall drink, or what we shall put on, but bids us consider the lilies how they grow, in more royalty than Solomon.

But contrary to this, we must look at no colours, nor make anything that is changeable colours as the hills are, nor sell them, nor wear them: but we must be all in one dress and one colour: this is a silly poor Gospel. It is more fit for us, to be covered with God's Eternal Spirit, and clothed with his Eternal Light, which leads us and guides us into righteousness. Now I have set before you life and death, and desire you to choose life, and God and his truth. -Margaret Fox, 1700

### **Vincent Harding on Becoming A Quaker Community**

“You know something about building a Quaker community, you can see it. The vision that you have is not meant to be kept to yourself, it’s meant to be expressed, to trouble some people, to push some people, to embrace some people, but for you to keep saying, “I see a Quaker community that does not yet exist and I am absolutely committed to its coming into being.”

### **William Stafford, from *The Way It Is*, 1998**

- There’s a thread you follow. It goes among
- things that change. But it doesn’t change.
- People wonder about what you are pursuing.
- You have to explain about the thread.
- But it is hard for others to see.
- While you hold it you can’t get lost.
- Tragedies happen; people get hurt
- or die; and you suffer and get old.
- Nothing you do can stop time’s unfolding.
- You don’t ever let go of the thread.

### **The Eagle - Anthony De Mello**

A man found an eagle’s egg and put it in a nest of a barnyard hen. The eaglet hatched with the brood of chicks and grew up with them. All his life the eagle did what the barnyard chicks did, thinking he was a barnyard chicken. He scratched the earth for worms and insects. He clucked and cackled. And he would thrash his wings and fly a few feet into the air.

Years passed and the eagle grew very old. One day he saw a magnificent bird above him in the cloudless sky. It glided in graceful majesty among the powerful wind currents, with scarcely a beat on his strong golden wings. The old eagle looked up in awe. “Who’s that?” he asked. “That’s the eagle, the king of the birds,” said his neighbour. “He belongs to the sky. We belong to the earth – we’re chickens.” So the eagle lived and died a chicken, for that’s what he thought he was.

### **Truth as Blasphemy - Anthony de Mello (Awareness)**

The whole world is crazy...The only reason we’re not locked up in an institution is that there are so many of us. So we’re crazy. We’re living on crazy ideas about love, about relationships, about happiness, about joy, about everything. We’re crazy to the point, I’ve come to believe, that if everybody agrees on something, you can be sure it’s wrong. Every new idea, every great idea, when it first began was in a minority of one. That man called Jesus Christ — minority of one. Everybody was saying something different from what he was saying. The Buddha — minority of one. Everybody was saying something different from what he was saying. I think it was Bertrand Russell who said, “Every great idea starts out as blasphemy.” That’s well and accurately put.



### **Robin Mohr - Convergent Friends**

This is my favorite phrase (so far) to describe the coming together of several strands of Quakerism. It describes Friends who are seeking a deeper understanding of our Quaker heritage and a more authentic life in the kingdom of God on Earth, radically inclusive of all who seek to live this life. It includes, among others, Friends from the politically liberal end of the evangelical branch and from the Christian end of the unprogrammed branch.

Metaphorically, it suggests that Friends are moving closer together towards some common point on the horizon. Put otherwise, I would say that the winds of the Spirit are blowing across all the branches of Friends - blowing us in the same direction.

Linguistically, it alludes to an affinity for both Conservative Friends and the Emergent Church. Many of these Friends owe a great deal to the work of Lloyd Lee Wilson and especially his book, *Essays on the Quaker Vision of Gospel Order*.

### **When You And I Met - Anthony De Mello**

...You will no longer say to your friend, "How happy you have made me." For in so saying you flatter his ego and manipulate him into wanting to please you again. And you give yourself the illusion that your happiness depends on your friend. "Rather you will say, "When you and I met, happiness arose."  
Source: *Call to Love – Meditations* by Anthony de Mello SJ: Meditation 10 – Life is a symphony

### **On Blaming Religion - Abraham Heschel**

It is customary to blame secular science and anti-religious philosophy for the eclipse of religion in modern society. It would be more honest to blame religion for its own defeats. Religion declined not because it was refuted, but because it became irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid. When faith is completely replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit; when the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendor of the past; when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living fountain; when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion - its message becomes meaningless.

### **Parker Palmer On The Mission of the Church**

The mission of the church is not to enlarge its membership, not to bring outsiders to accept its terms, but simply to love the world in every possible way - to love the world as God did and does.

### **Wes Howard Brook - On Religion of Empire and Religion of Creation**

We can understand one of the bible's religions to be grounded in the experience of and ongoing relationship with the creator God, leading to a covenantal bond between that God and God's people for the blessing and abundance of all people and all creation.

The other, while sometimes claiming to be grounded in that same God, used to justify and legitimate attitudes and behaviors that provide blessing and abundance for some at the expense of others. - Wes Howard Brook - Come Out My People