



NON-THEISM, PANENTHEISM, AND THE QUAKER WAY

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NOVEMBER 28, 2016

SCOPE OF INQUIRY

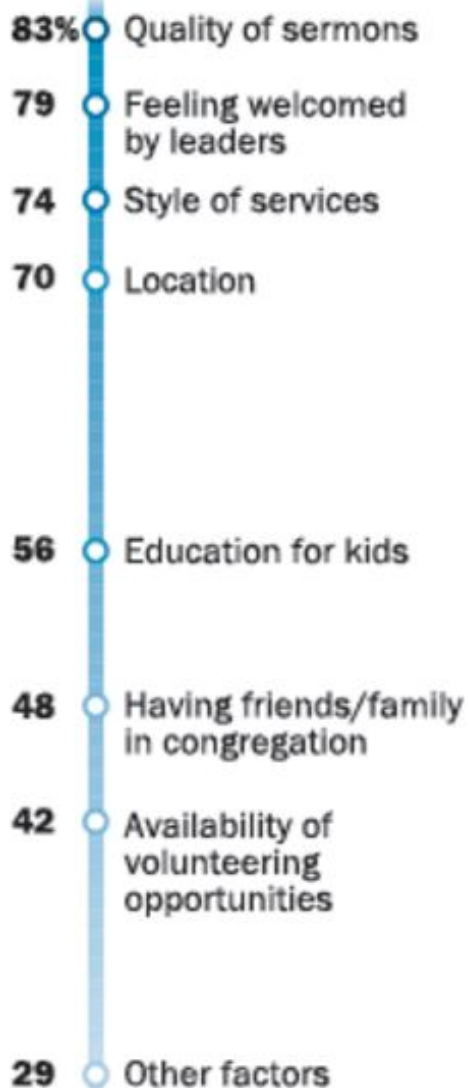
- Non-theism among liberal Quakers
- Panentheism in the context of the New Story
- The future of liberal Quakerism

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Before the election
 - My experience at Friends General Conference (FGC) this summer
- After the election
 - My experience at Meeting for Worship on November 13, 2016
- Understanding the New Story

When searching for a new congregation, Americans value quality of sermons and feeling welcomed

Among U.S. adults who have looked for a new congregation or house of worship, % who say each factor played an important role in their choice

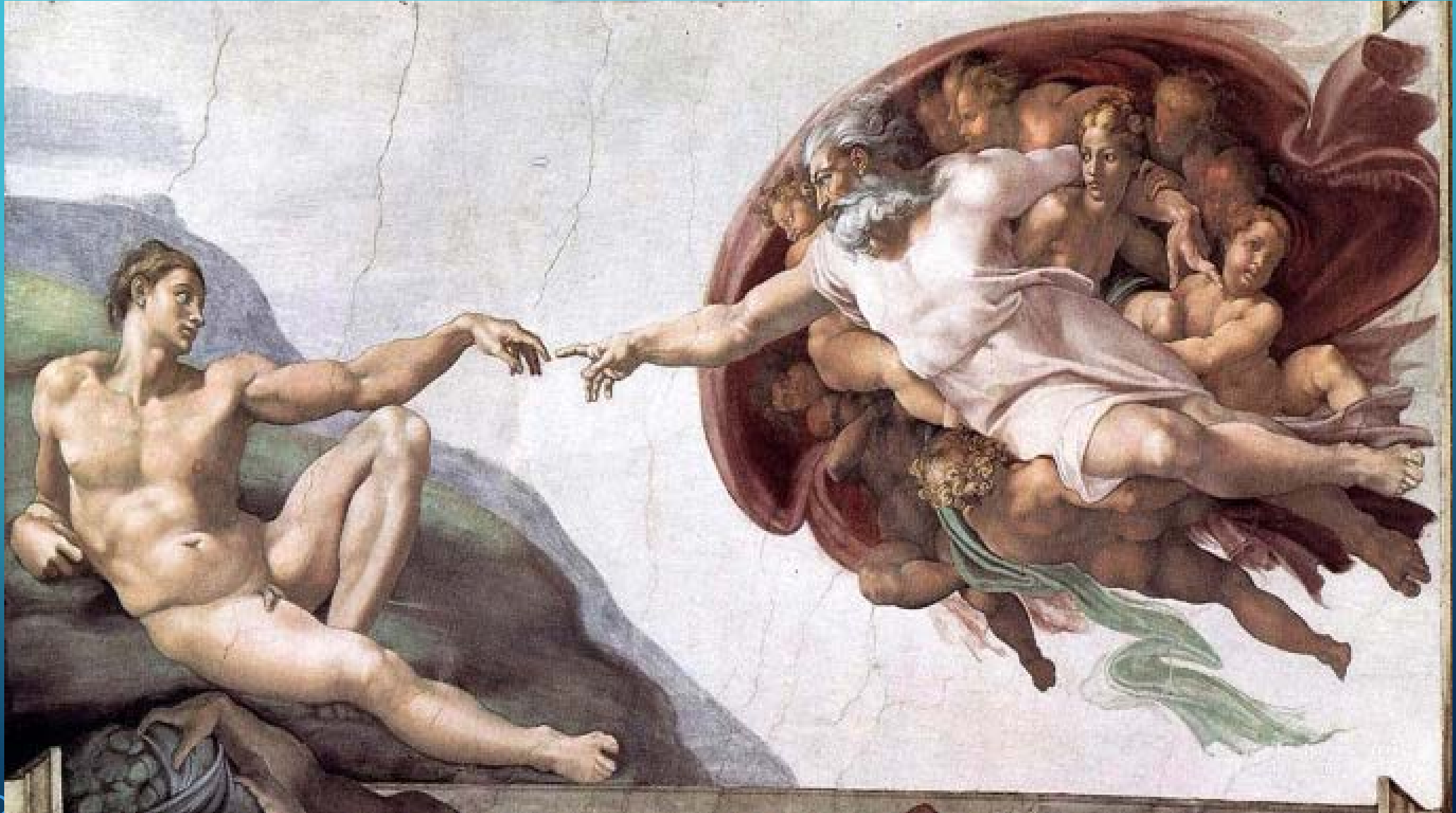


Note: Based on those who



THEISM

THE OLD STORY



WALTER WINK – ANCIENT WORLDVIEW

4

ENGAGING THE POWERS

1. The Ancient Worldview. This is the worldview reflected in the Bible (see fig. 1). In this conception, everything earthly has its heavenly counterpart, and everything heavenly has its earthly counterpart. Every event is thus a simultaneity of both dimensions of reality. If war begins on earth, then there must be, at the same time, war in heaven between the angels of the nations involved on earth. Likewise, events initiated in heaven would be mirrored on earth. There is nothing uniquely biblical about this imagery. It was shared not

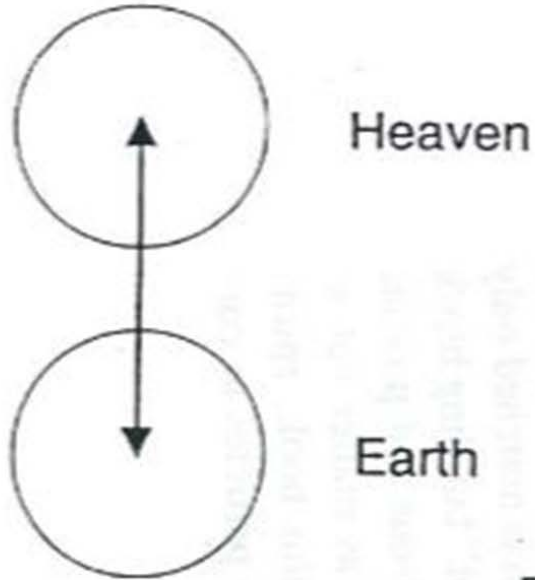
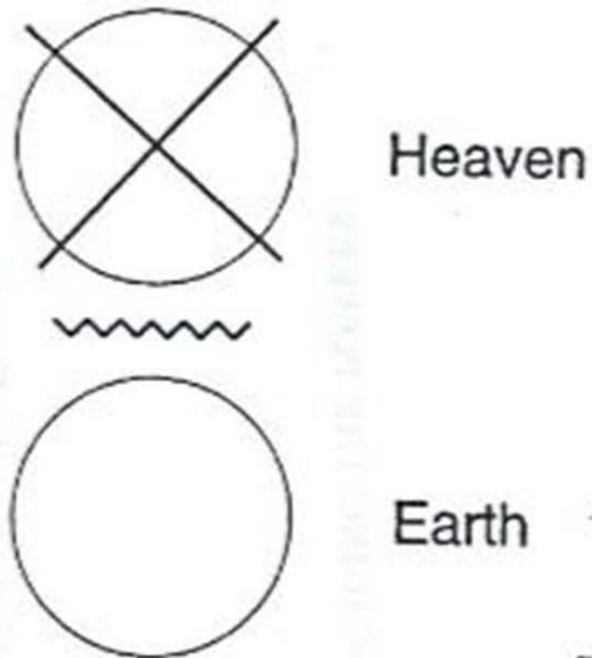


Fig. 1

only by the writers of the Bible, but also by Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Sumerians—indeed, by everyone in the ancient world—and it is still held by large numbers of people in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It is a profoundly true picture of reality.³

WALTER WINK – MATERIALIST WORLD VIEW

3. *The Materialistic Worldview.*

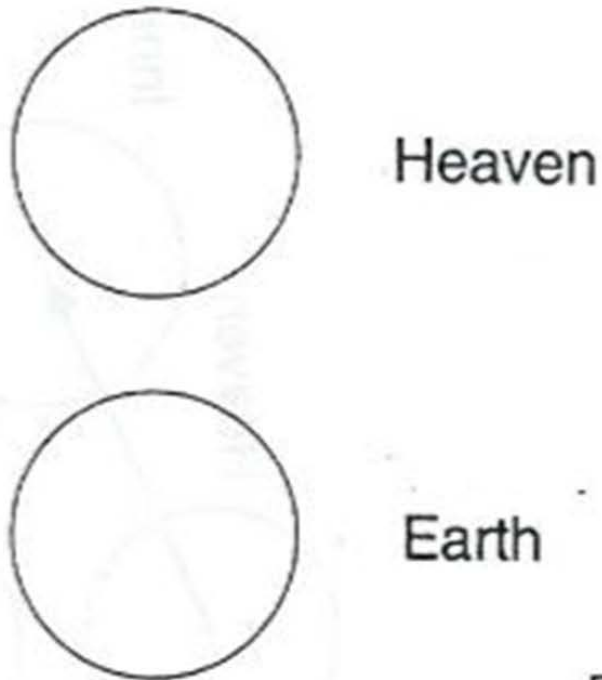


This view (see fig. 3) became prominent in the Enlightenment, but is as old as Democritus (ca. 460–ca. 370 B.C.E.), and is in many ways the antithesis of the world-rejection of spiritualism. In this view, there is no heaven, no spiritual world, no God, no soul—nothing but material existence and what can be known through the five senses and reason. The spiritual world is an illusion. There is no higher self; we are mere complexities of matter, and when we die we cease to exist except as the chemicals

and atoms that once constituted us. This materialistic worldview has penetrated deeply even into many Christians, causing them to ignore the spiritual dimensions of systems or the spiritual resources of faith.

WALTER WINK- THEOLOGICAL WORLDVIEW

4. The "Theological" Worldview.



In reaction to materialism, Christian theologians invented the supernatural realm (see fig. 4). Acknowledging that this supersensible realm could not be known by the senses, they conceded earthly reality to modern science and preserved a privileged "spiritual" realm immune to confirmation or refutation—at the cost of an integral view of reality and the simultaneity of heavenly and earthly aspects of existence. This view of the religious realm as hermetically sealed and immune to challenge from

Fig. 4

the sciences has been held not only by the Christian center and right, but by most of theological liberalism and neoorthodoxy.

DUALISM

- **Dualism 3a** : a doctrine that the universe is under the dominion of two opposing principles one of which is good and the other evil **3b** : a view of human beings as constituted of two irreducible elements (as matter and spirit) (Webster)
- Integral to the Old Story

CONSEQUENCES OF DUALISM

- For materialists it is the exploitation of the material world
- For spiritualists the purpose of life is to transcend the material world

A decorative graphic on the left side of the slide, consisting of a network of white lines and circles on a blue background, resembling a circuit board or a tree structure. The lines are vertical and horizontal, with small circles at various points, creating a complex, branching pattern.

NON-THEISM

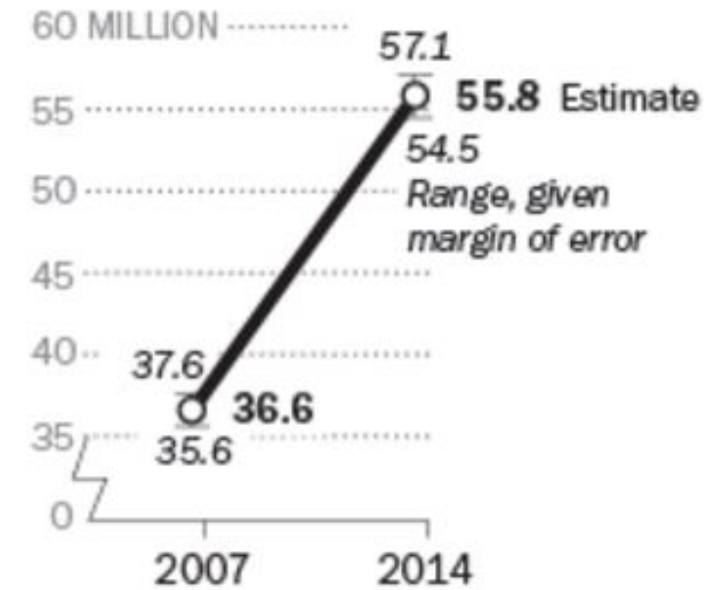
QUAKER MATERIALISM

WHAT IS NON-THEISM?

- Non-theism - is a range of both religious and nonreligious attitudes characterized by the absence of espoused belief in a God or gods. **Nontheism** has generally been used to describe apathy or silence towards the subject of God and differentiates from an antithetical, explicit atheism. (Wikipedia, not in Webster)
- 31% of the religious 'nones' are non-theists or atheists.¹

Meanwhile, the number of religiously unaffiliated adults has increased by roughly 19 million since 2007. There are now approximately 56 million religiously unaffiliated adults in the U.S., and this group – sometimes called religious “nones” – is more numerous than either Catholics or mainline Protestants, according to the new survey. Indeed, the unaffiliated are now second in size only to evangelical Protestants among major religious groups in the U.S.

Rapid Growth of Religiously Unaffiliated



Source: 2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

WHAT ARE QUAKER NON-THEISTS?

- United in rejecting a theist God
- Religious non-theists caught without a theology
- Widely differing personal theologies
- See *Godless for God's Sake: Nontheism in Contemporary Quakerism* by 27 Quaker Nontheists (2006)
- Also some contemporary position papers gathered at FGC

NON-THEIST QUAKER QUOTES

- ON MYSTICISM:

- “We should give up the idea the mysticism involves some sort of wordless way of experiencing the things of another and higher world.¹

- ON KNOWING EXPERIMENTALLY:

- I don’t know how you can say truthfully “I know God exists,” since in order to know God experimentally you would have to be God.²

- ON BELIEF IN CHRIST:

- It is wrong to assert that this essence [of Quakerism] is a belief in the supernatural Christ Jesus.³

MORE NON-THEIST QUOTES

- ARE QUAKERS CHRISTIAN?

- The Society should ‘give up its claim to be a specifically Christian organization,’ since ‘no faith can claim to be a unique revelation or to have a monopoly of the truth.’⁴

- ON MEETING FOR WORSHIP:

- The nontheist Friend in meeting for worship does not assume that the creator of the universe is a literal presence, either in body or spirit.⁴

- ON BECOMING A MEMBER:

- In the months after that experience [of being cared for by the meeting], though I still didn’t understand how a person like me could be a Quaker, it dawned on me that, whatever the conflicts and contradictions between us, these are my people.⁵

STILL MORE QUOTES

- ON LEADINGS:

- ...I was raised among Friends—and thus I turned to the language and explanation that came most naturally to me: I told myself that I was experiencing a *leading*.⁶

- ON SPEAKING IN MEETING FOR WORSHIP:

- I was aware that I didn't believe I was divinely inspired when I got up to speak in Meeting—although I would not speak unless I did indeed feel considerable passion or inspiration to do so.⁷

- WHAT DO YOU DO IN MEETING FOR WORSHIP?

- I do not think of God while sitting in Meeting. For me, it is enough to sit with Friends.⁷



PANENTHEISM

THE NEW STORY

AN ALTERNATIVE TO QUAKER NON-THEISM

WHAT IS IT?

- **Panentheism** (meaning "all-in-God"), is the belief that the divine interpenetrates every part of the universe and also extends beyond time and space. (not in Webster's abridged dictionary)

WALTER WINK-THE INTEGRAL WORLDVIEW

5. An Integral Worldview. This new worldview (see fig. 5) is emerging from a confluence of sources: the reflections of Carl Jung, Teilhard de Chardin, Morton Kelsey, Thomas Berry, Matthew Fox, process philosophy, and the new physics. It sees everything as having an outer and an inner aspect. It attempts to take seriously the spiritual insights of the ancient or biblical worldview by affirming a withinness or interiority in all things, but sees this inner spiritual reality as inextricably related to an outer concretion or physical manifestation. It is no more intrinsically "Christian" than the ancient worldview, but I believe it makes the biblical data more intelligible for people today than any other available worldview, including the ancient.

WALTER WINK- INTEGRAL DIAGRAM

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ENGAGING THE POWERS

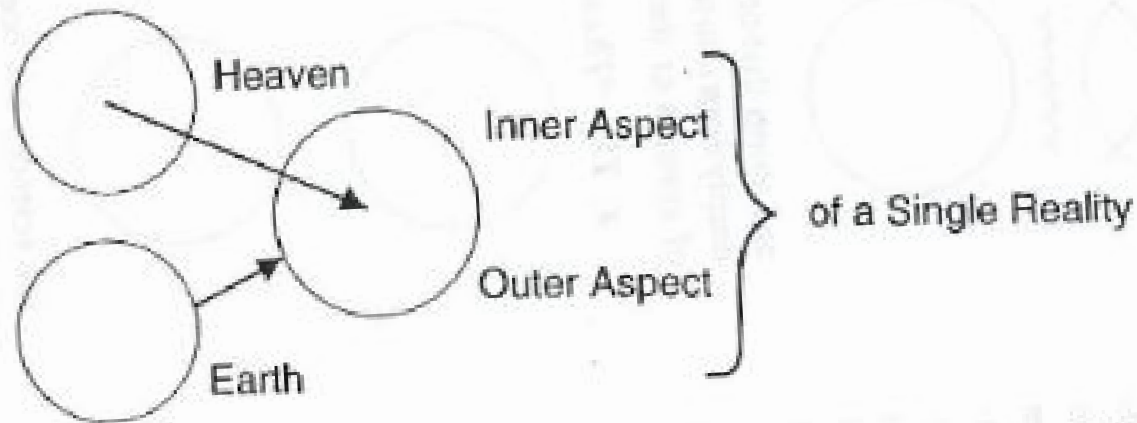


Fig. 5

The integral worldview that is emerging in our time takes seriously all the aspects of the ancient worldview, but combines them in a different way. Both images are spatial. The idea of heaven as "up" is a natural, almost unavoidable way of indicating transcendence. But in the West, which has been irremediably touched by modern science, few of us can any longer actually think that God, the angels, and departed spirits are somewhere in the sky, as most ancients literally did. (And some people today who disbelieve still do—including atheists. Remember the glee of the Soviet cosmonauts in announcing to the world that they had encountered no supernatural beings in space?)

The image of the spiritual as "withinness" is not, however, a





*

Earth seen from a satellite



Earth seen from Apollo



Earth seen from Saturn

WHAT IS PANENTHEISM IN THE CONTEXT OF THE NEW STORY?

- Panentheism is non-theist, but religious
- Panentheism is non-dualistic
 - spirit and matter are one
- Panentheism integrates science and religion.
- Panentheism assumes the interiority of matter
 - Explored by *Mary Coelho* last month

My insight

- Quaker religious non-theists are limited because they have a dualistic worldview.
- How do you put the divine in a materialist world?

A NON-DUAL NON-THEIST GOD:

- Is a Quaker God, called variously the Seed, the Light within, the Inner Teacher, the Christ within, Spirit.
- Is found in everyone
 - Quakers believe that there is that of God in everyone.
- Is found in everything
 - All nature is divine

WHY DID NO ONE TELL ME?

- To call an experience merely “human” is to miss the divinity of the person.
- To call an experience of nature, animals, and plants non-religious is to miss the divine within all.

A WISDOM TREE



LET'S CLEAR UP THE QUESTION OF THE CHRIST WITHIN

The early Quakers believed the Bible true, but in need of interpretation by the Spirit. They conflated the historical Jesus with the risen Christ, with the light within, and believed the Light to be the primary authority, the Bible Secondary.

- Patricia A. Williams in *QUAKERISM: a Theology for Our Time* (Infinity Publishing.com, West Conshohocken PA, 2008) explains three separate concepts for Christ that early Friends confounded.

THREE CONCEPTS FOR CHRIST

1. **HISTORICAL JESUS**—The man, Jesus, who was born in Nazareth and died in Jerusalem.
2. **THE ETERNAL CHRIST**—The Spirit who became incarnate in Jesus and still shines in people today. (Quakers' Christ, Holy Spirit, Light within, the transforming power of God, as well as Buddha nature, Krishna, Atman, the Great Spirit, and the Tao.)
3. **DOCTRINAL CHRIST**—died for sins, rose bodily from the grave, ascended into heaven, to return some day in the future.

QUAKERS SPLIT OVER THESE CONCEPTS

- Altogether Quakers are less than 0.3% of the total population in the United States.¹
- Liberal (unprogrammed) Quakers emphasize the second concept—the experiential Light within—and abandon doctrine.
 - “Christ Centered” Quakers in the Liberal tradition are usually talking about the experiential Light within.
 - Non-theist Quakers in the Liberal tradition often do not experience the Light within.
- “Christ Centered” (pastoral) Quakers of the fundamentalist variety emphasize the third, doctrinal concept, and the authority of the scriptures over the Inner Light.
- New Story Quakers are liberal, non-doctrinal, and bring the first concept, the historical Jesus, back into the mix.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS IN THE EVOLUTIONARY STORY OF 13.8 BILLION YEARS?



My insight

- The historical Jesus is, among other wisdom figures, an archetype for our evolutionary future.
- The human species will evolve toward the universal Christ spirit.

WHAT IS TRANSCENDENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF NON-DUALITY?

- Did you forget that panentheism claims that God is both immanent and transcendent?
- To the definition panentheism we added that
 - God is non-theist,
 - And our worldview is non-dualistic

My insight

- Nondual transcendence is about relationships.
- It's called love.
- Here's an example from the insect world.



COLLECTIVE GENIUS

BY PETER HESS (NEW SCIENTIST, 10 SEPTEMBER 2016, PP 29-31)

Master builders: ants possess remarkable construction abilities. How do they do it? Coordination is not by sight or smell but by detecting *forces* produced by other ants. A colony's intelligence is distributed among its component parts. That makes it a "superorganism" capable of unique behavior and adaptations that individual ants cannot achieve.

Such activities are classic examples of "emergent" behavior—group-level action that is more sophisticated than the sum of its parts. Such emergent behavior occurs in complex human systems including stock markets, democracies and even our brains. The same principles that organize ant colonies organize human behavior.

MODELS FOR ORGANIZING EMERGENT BEHAVIOR

- Quaker Meeting for Worship
- Quaker Meeting for Business in Worship
- Otto Scharmer's U-Theory
- New Story Pod

CONCLUSIONS

- The social, economic, political, racial crises that we face today are all aspects of an underlying spiritual crisis.
- We need to heal the differences within and between our faith traditions.
- We need to seek the power of collective genius to guide us to truth.

The background is a dark blue gradient. In the corners, there are white and light blue decorative elements resembling circuit traces or neural network connections, with lines ending in small circles.

EPILOGUE

THE ELECTION: OF HATE, GRIEF, AND A NEW STORY

CHARLES EISENSTEIN

NOVEMBER 10, 2016

[HTTP://CHARLESEISENSTEIN.NET/HATEGRIEFANDNEWSTORY/](http://charleseisenstein.net/hategriefandnewstory/)