Quakers, enslavement and reparation





A report on the history and theology of Quaker involvement in enslavement, abolition and reparation

Prepared by Woodbrooke for the Reparations Working Group of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain.

QUAKERS

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Statement on Terminology

Words have power. The terms and references we use to convey past events, figures, processes and phenomena have a profound effect not only on how we relate to and interpret the past but also how we honour and recognise the lived experiences of human beings.

We feel it is important to explicitly identify some of the phrases and terms traditionally used in Quaker historiography that we believe perpetuate harmful narratives and instead signpost alternative phrasings which centre the human and better reflect the reality of the violence intrinsic to enslavement.

- 'Slaves' → people enslaved, enslaved people, people held in bondage
- 'Slave traders', 'masters', 'owners of slaves' → enslavers
- 'Transported', 'sold', 'shipped' → trafficked
- 'Transatlantic slave trade' → transatlantic chattel enslavement

This list is not exhaustive but intended to reiterate the importance of using our words sensitively and accurately.

A Note on the Cover Imagery

The book's visual identity rests on a deliberate pairing: the roots of a tree and a collage. We set out our reasoning here to make those choices explicit.

The Reparation Working Group's task sits alongside that of the Book of Discipline Revision Committee. When speaking to Friends, the content of the new book, *Our Quaker Way*, is represented as a tree. Our work is to untangle an early period of Quaker history and bring it into the light, showing how, in part, it contributed to the foundation on which that tree rests. Profits accruing from the economy of enslaving provided a firm financial basis for the Quaker movement to grow and become known in Britain. That wealth built some of our meeting houses and enabled the Quakers who held it to establish banks, participate in the industrialisation of Britain, and provide welfare projects for their British workers. It is part of the roots of our Quaker church.

We are conscious that images of tree roots and family trees have a difficult history. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, European taxonomy and genealogy used branching diagrams – a single trunk giving rise to subordinate lines – to naturalise racial hierarchy and assert order over human descent. Roots, too, were bound up with land: with settlement, ownership, and the claim of belonging. Set against a history shaped by the economy of trafficking and enslaving Africans – a history of forced removal, displacement, and severed lineage – that imagery cannot be used without care.

Yet we do not accept that the natural world itself carries this history. What was colonial was never the tree, but the diagram: the act of flattening a living, non-hierarchical system into a chart of rank and ownership. This is what makes the tree, for us, a theological image rather than a decorative one: unearthing roots becomes an act akin to testimony – the necessary, uncomfortable work of bringing tangled and mangled histories into the light so that they can be spoken of openly. In choosing roots as our primary visual anchor, we reclaim the tree from colonial flattening and allow it to hold a truth of interconnection, unearthing, and continuity.

Alongside the roots sits the collage. Where the roots anchor the work, the collage acts as a meditative piece, confronting the “gap” – the profound sense of absence and broken history that an image of unbroken continuity alone risks smoothing over. Assembled from historical Quaker texts, maps, and plants native to Barbados with traditional healing properties – aloe, cerasee, and Pride of Barbados – the collage offers a visual language for histories that were broken and reassembled rather than continuous. By centering Black and Brown figures alongside motifs such as the raven and Sarah Mapps Douglass’s black butterfly, it reflects a commitment to repair, small acts of love, and a sense of time that moves in more than one direction – backward into unearthed history, forward into repair.

Neither image, alone, tells the whole story. Together, they hold both truths: unearthing the tangled roots of the past while assembling a language for restoration, without asking one to stand in for the other.

Marghuerita Remi-Judah & Ann Morgan

BYM RWG Clerks

Introduction and Project Remit

Britain Yearly Meeting Reparations Working Group

Project Background

In 2022, the Minutes of Britain Yearly Meeting (of the Religious Society of Friends) recorded that:

> Love and justice require us to tell the truth, as best we can, about historical and contemporary injustices…
>
> We have heard that love and justice also require us to consider deeply how the Society of Friends in Britain might make financial and other reparation for our part in the wrongs of the transatlantic slave trade. (Minute 27)

And:

> We have heard ministry about the importance of true listening which pushes us to action. We have also heard encouragement to move forward with acknowledgment and apology for how our wealth has been linked to the enslavement of people… We do not need to begin this work afresh, but can build upon the foundations laid by others and work with partners including other churches and faith groups… We ask Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees, Meeting for Sufferings and area meetings to examine the resources which they hold on trust, and to consider how they, and we, could move forward with this work [of reparations]. (Minute 33)

Following this commitment from Britain Yearly Meeting, BYM Trustees established a Reparations Working Group (RWG). The task and finish group was established for 4 years with a remit to:

- research our past

- consult with those today experiencing the legacies of British Quaker involvement in enslaving and trafficking Africans across the Atlantic, in Quaker colonialism and economic exploitation and

- make recommendations to the BYM Trustees on reparation for the harms caused on which ultimately Friends attending a Yearly Meeting will discern the way forward.

As a faith community the members of the RWG were clear that one of the four workstreams we established needed to develop an understanding of the theological arguments used to justify enslavement. There is a growing awareness that Quakers in Britain have an incomplete understanding of their own part in the trafficking of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic. Our historical view has usually focused on British Quaker involvement in the abolitionist movement, with little or no consideration given to ways in which our theology may have justified, normalised or ignored the grave injustices of widespread enslavement.

Supported by the Commissioning Group of the Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations, project aims and a commissioning brief were developed for a one-off project for postdoctoral research to investigate (i) the ways in which the Religious Society of Friends has theologically justified, prolonged, or obscured the injustice of enslavement and oppression; (ii) the ways in which the Religious Society of Friends has theologically addressed, resisted or repented for the injustice of enslavement and oppression.

RWG members were delighted to appoint Woodbrooke to undertake this work for us.

Project Remit

The aim of the proposed research is to help modern British Quakers understand the ways in which Quakers have theologically justified oppression and enslavement.

The research should include consideration of:

- **Theology used to justify and support systems of enslavement and oppression, including**:

- The ways in which wider Christian theologies have been used to justify the enslavement and trafficking of non-Christians, and whether and how such theologies have been used specifically within Quaker writings and ministry

- Whether and how distinctive Quaker theologies have been used to justify, prolong or obscure enslavement and trafficking

- Whether theology for opposing enslavement was there, but other theological concerns were seen to trump the need to take action

- Whether and how theology was used practically as a method of day-to-day control of enslaved people within the Quaker community

- **Theology of abolition**

  - This strand would seek to build historical evidence of the theology used to justify and support the case for abolition. Although primarily seeking to understand how Quakers developed and used this theology, this would likely involve considerable overlap with abolition theology in other Christian denominations.

- **Theology of reparation and liberation**

  - This strand would seek to understand whether there was, and continues to be, a Quaker theology of emancipation and reparation which may draw on, or be drawn on, by wider Christian theologies. Some research in this strand may be historical, as we seek to understand whether Quakers in previous centuries argued for reparations to formerly enslaved people in theological terms, however we expect that at least some research in this strand will be contemporary.

Summary of Key Findings

Key Historical Conclusions

Lily Chadwick

The history strands of this report may be summarised as follows:

Strand I [1650s to 1727]:

The history of the Religious Society of Friends in relation to colonialism and enslavement is more complex than has typically been acknowledged in traditional Quaker historiography. Quaker communities have been intertwined, invested and complicit in chattel enslavement from very early in the faith's history. Historians have largely traced the 'origins' of Quaker engagement in transatlantic chattel enslavement to Barbados, where Quaker missionaries from 1655 succeeded in converting a significant proportion of European colonisers on the island – nearly 1200 Quakers lived on Barbados by 1680, of which eighty per cent held at least one person in bondage. Of those Europeans converted or 'convinced' to Quakerism on Barbados, many already held people in bondage, while other convinced Friends enslaved and continued to enslave people after their conversion to Quakerism. Despite repeated claims that Friends were 'in the world but not of it', Quakers were shaped by and deeply embedded within a dominant sociopolitical European culture in which African people and people of African descent were kidnapped, trafficked, enslaved and forced to perform labour to further European imperial aims. From the faith's conception, Quakers had been highly mobile and present in colonial contexts, and historians have traced how Friends' close-knit familial, business and social connections facilitated the spread of chattel enslavement between Quaker communities in the Caribbean and North America. Early Quaker leaders like George Fox did not condemn enslavement but rather developed a particular theological ideology called 'Gospel family-order' which sought to characterise enslavement as a kind of 'Christianising' or 'benevolent' enterprise in order to 'justify' the practice within their communities. Historians know very little about the people enslaved by Quakers. Quaker archives have been constructed by and for Friends' purposes throughout history; the identities and lived experiences

of people held in bondage by Quakers are largely unrecorded. This strand endeavours to highlight explicit 'archival silences' to bring attention to one example of the violent legacies of enslavement that persists today. This strand ends with an acknowledgement that it is not universally agreed in the historiography why, how or when Quaker attitudes shifted en masse against enslavement. Early expressions from within Quakerism against enslavement such as the Germantown Petition of 1688 ultimately had little immediate effect on the collective Quaker community, although a series of inquiries to London Yearly Meeting from various Yearly Meetings in North American colonies suggest a growing discourse around enslavement within Quaker communities from the late seventeenth century. In 1713, London Yearly Meeting wrote an epistle to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting stating that enslavement was 'not commendable nor allowed'. While not unquestionably prohibiting enslavement from Quaker communities, this statement marks British Friends' first known expression of antislavery sentiment. This statement was reiterated to a more general Quaker audience in 1727.

Strand II [1728-1787]:

This strand begins with a central acknowledgement that, despite popular associations of Quakerism with early abolitionist movements, Quakers were not the first to express antislavery or abolitionist sentiment. Abolitionism and resistance to enslavement has always come first and foremost from the people forcibly held in bondage themselves. The earliest antislavery and abolitionist voices from among the Quakers were disowned, ignored or otherwise relegated to the margins of Friends' communities. A collective Quaker rejection of enslavement only came gradually:

- 1730s: Philadelphia Yearly Meeting establishes a committee to investigate Friends' complicity in enslavement

- 1758: Philadelphia Yearly Meeting becomes the first Yearly Meeting to explicitly forbid 'slave trading and slave holding' and to require all members to manumit people Quakers held in bondage

    - Various Yearly Meetings across North America gradually follow suit between 1758 and 1784

- 1758: London Yearly Meeting issues a statement that Quakers should 'do no less than to impress it upon Friends everywhere, that they endeavour to keep their hands clear' of trafficking enslaved people

- 1761: London Yearly Meeting makes enslavement a disownable offence

- 1784: London Yearly Meeting orders an enquiry into the status of the Society's complicity in transatlantic chattel enslavement

- 1787: London Yearly Meeting, in partnership with Anglican collaborators, establishes the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade

This strand concludes by making the necessary distinction between 'antislavery' and 'abolitionist' definitions, arguing that the stance adopted by eighteenth-century Friends constituted antislavery but not an abolitionist sentiment. This argument is explored through a case study of a report commissioned by British Friends to present before Parliament to petition the abolition of transatlantic chattel enslavement.

Strand III [1788-Present]:

The third strand of the history report argues that although Quakers were highly visible and active within the antislavery movements within the British empire and United States, the foundations for true abolitionism were not established. This incomplete realisation of abolitionism is evidenced by the many publications released by Friends detailing experiences of marginalisation, inequality and racialised oppression within their Meetings and Quaker communities. This strand ends with reflections on reparative justice for Friends to consider.

Key Theological Findings

Benjamin Wood

The theology section of this report calls on Quakers in Britain to re-examine our colonial past as a means of developing a consistent practice of reparative justice in the present. Readers are invited across three sections to reflect on a personal and collective level regarding the ongoing impact of colonialism and racism on their lives, the lives of their meetings, and the character of wider society. Friends are encouraged to consider how they might nurture just conditions from the ground up by practising repeated small acts of love and compassion as a means of modelling a better future. Friends are also asked to consider how their resources (at a national and meeting level) could

be used to support greater racial justice, social equity, and reconciliation. To ground this discussion, Strand 1 identifies the ways early Quakers used their theological reflection to directly justify the institution of chattel enslavement in the Transatlantic world. It identifies the pivotal role of the writings of George Fox in prolonging Friends' engagement with the colonial slave economy. Fox's theology justified slavery in several key respects:

1) *Evangelisation*: Fox shows very little concern with the conditions of enslaved people. Fox's primary focus is on evangelisation, and incorporating enslaved people into Quaker households. Fox did not believe that enslavement should be abolished, only that enslavers should moderate their methods of control.

2) *Biblical interpretation*: Fox regarded enslavement as morally and theologically acceptable. Fox used Scripture to justify a form of indentured servitude. He emphasised the importance of enslaved people submitting to their enslaver, alongside the enslaver's role in Christianising the enslaved.

3) *Quaker Suffering*: Fox actively prioritised the spiritual and physical suffering of early Quaker communities in ways which make the lives of enslaved people invisible.

4) *Spiritual Inwardness*: The early Quaker emphasis on spiritual inwardness often caused Friends to minimise the importance of external social and economic conditions, and instead focus on an inward experience of salvation.

These theological assumptions had a significant afterlife in the pro-slavery theology of William Penn. In an effort to build on this account, Strand II seeks to show the paucity of Quaker antislavery theology from the late seventeenth to the middle of the eighteenth century. While British and American Friends would develop a coherent theology of antislavery by the 1780s, there was a long period in which Fox's theological justifications of mass enslavement continued at local meeting and Yearly Meeting level. While we can find isolated Quaker protests both before and after the death of George Fox, none of these make any significant impact on institutional Quakerism, either in Britain or in the American colonies. In an extended response to this history of complicity and inaction, Strand III considers the theological resources British Quakers have to contest the ongoing impacts of enslavement, colonialism and racism in their meetings and within wider British society. The discussion is structured around three core questions:

1) Does the Quaker Way have a theology of liberation which can sustain and resource contemporary reparative practice?

2) How can Quaker theological tradition help us define the nature of harm?

3) Can our Quaker words about God, world and community help us reflect fruitfully on the nature of ongoing moral responsibility?

A significant focus of Strand III involves the identification of biblical symbols and narratives which can help Friends reflect upon and enact forms of reparative justice. The book of Jonah is used to examine the nature of wronged and wrongdoer, and how woundedness cannot be healed by violence or marginalisation. Covenant is used as a means of recovering a radical mode of Quaker prophetic witness in the modern world. In the course of this exploration Friends are introduced to a number of important subthemes, including:

- The meaning of reparative practices
- Quaker understandings of sin, responsibility and community
- The nature of radical hospitality

A key thread running through these subthemes is the claim that by facing the Quaker past, we can develop a renewed theology of liberation in the world. In this vein, Friends are encouraged to understand the colonial past as something which continues to impact the lives of those descended from enslaved people, the structures of our society, and the organisation of our global economy. By engaging with these often painful realities, we can discover new ways of living and worshipping. Friends are asked to nurture and resource prophetic voices in their own Meetings and beyond. This report ends with a series of queries to help us consider what love requires of us in a world scarred by the ongoing realities of colonial violence.

Researching Historical Quaker Complicity in Enslavement

Lily Chadwick

Introduction

Project Overview

This study examines the role the Religious Society of Friends has historically played in the trafficking and enslavement of people from Africa and people of African descent. This work was commissioned by the Reparations Working Group established by Britain Yearly Meeting with the purpose of identifying the theology that informed Quaker complicity in systems of enslavement and oppression, but also theologies of abolitionism and, more recently, theologies of reparation and liberation. This project has been designed to unfold across three strands which are mapped onto three corresponding chronological periods; the first strand being an analysis of the theology used by Quakers to 'justify' and 'support' systems of enslavement and oppression, which we identify as occurring roughly between 1650 and 1727; the second strand being an examination of Quaker theologies of 'abolition' between 1727 and 1787; and the third and final strand being an investigation of Quaker theologies of 'reparation and liberation' from 1788 unto the present day. The work comes with a central recognition that Quakers cannot hope to live justly and peacefully in the present without a critical engagement with their past.

Scope, Methodology and Materials[1]

The transatlantic trafficking and enslavement of people from Africa and of African descent was a central component of European imperialist and colonial enterprises from the fifteenth century onwards, with which the Society of Friends was intertwined from the mid-seventeenth century. While Quakers

1 I am deeply grateful to Robert Beckford for his comments on this section in particular.

were not the only religious community complicit in systems of oppression and subjugation linked to European imperialism, the complicity of Quakers in transatlantic chattel enslavement in particular remains underexamined in traditional historiography.

The author of the history strands, while not a Quaker themselves, is a social and cultural historian of religious belief and empire, and is carrying out this work as the part-time programme coordinator in Quaker history at Woodbrooke Quaker Learning & Research. The author's personal position outside of the faith is intended to bring a degree of analytical distance to the project, to help avoid framing this report as only an internal act of Quaker self-correction and to prevent the production of a reductionist report that reflects a narrative of Quaker redemption rather than an evidenced-based account of the harms historically committed within and by the Quaker community.

As such, it is important to acknowledge the limitations and tensions in the project's methodological design in order to establish a more nuanced reading of the remit. First, by commissioning this work to be completed from within Quakerism, the study may risk centring the narrative around Quaker perspectives rather than those directly harmed and enslaved by Quakers. The three-part narrative arc of this report, for example, examining theologies of complicity, abolition and finally reparation/liberation, risks producing a story of Quaker moral progress that is not necessarily reflective of reality. Reparative work should elevate the voices, lived experiences, needs and desires of the communities against which harm was/is committed. This report has received the invaluable guidance of a steering group composed of academic theologians, journalists and social justice activists, but future work in this vein should also include a reparative inquiry accountable to the African-descended communities who continue to experience the legacies of Quaker colonialism today.

Moreover, if the analysis is confined only to Quaker institutions, materials and archives, the history that is reproduced will only document what Quakers have written, evidenced and recorded about the faith's historical complicity in transatlantic chattel enslavement – which is to say, very little. Archives are not unbiased repositories of historical memory. They are, along with museums and other institutions intended to preserve the past, always curated with particular goals, communities and narratives in mind. Quaker manuscripts, ledgers and minutes were not created or assembled by the people enslaved by Quakers; their contents reflect the systems of power produced by enslavers for purposes of governance, estate and business management and social control. If we neglect to interrogate 'archival silences' – or the absence of certain voices, perspectives and lived experiences in the

written record – then we risk perpetuating incomplete, incorrect or harmful historical narratives.[2] In order to prevent this, the historical analysis of this report explicitly flags archival silences (blocks of text bolded and in italics), particularly in the analysis of primary material which constitutes a significant part of the analysis in the second strand.

It is in part because of these limitations that the historiographical analysis of this report is predicated on an imperfect balance between primary and secondary material. Strand I contains an overview of the few published works from early Quakers on the subject of enslavement, analysed in conversation with the major findings from critical secondary work outlining Quaker history of complicity in transatlantic chattel enslavement. Strand II distinguishes between the meanings of antislavery and abolitionism to argue that, despite an overwhelming emphasis in the scholarship on Quaker abolitionist movements, the Religious Society of Friends never fully achieved abolitionism in practice. This argument is articulated through the analysis of a report submitted to Britain Yearly Meeting in 1787, titled 'Some testimonials of the moral conduct and industry of sundry Black Persons who have been in slavery and restored to their just right of freedom'.[3] These testimonials, although containing narratives purportedly from individuals emancipated from enslavement, are mediated through white Quaker voices and recount a particular agenda of paternalism and racialised hierarchy. Finally, Strand III provides a brief overview of Quaker history from the formal prohibition of enslavement within the faith to the more modern era, underscoring that formal prohibition did not result in the immediate cessation of enslavement nor of total abolitionism within the Religious Society of Friends. The strand ends with the reflections and writings of modern Quakers who have publicly expressed their experiences of marginalisation and racism within the faith, as well as their reflections on reparative justice.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that this study does not address all forms of colonialism or oppression engaged in by Quakers or indeed by Europeans more broadly; acts of violence, coercion and subjugation have also been committed by Quakers against other communities that are equally worthy of renewed analysis and research. But this project in particular is in response to a minute from Britain Yearly Meeting in 2022, the remit for which reads in part as follows:

2 Saidiya Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1–14; Marisa Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

3 MS Box E1.8, 'Some testimonials of the moral conduct and industry of sundry Black Persons who have been in slavery and restored to their just right of freedom […]', 1787, Library of the Society of Friends [henceforth LSF].

> There is a growing awareness that Quakers in Britain have an incomplete understanding of their own part in the transatlantic slave trade; our historical view is usually focused on Quaker involvement in the abolitionist movement, with little or no consideration given to ways in which our theology may have justified, normalised, or ignored the grave injustices of widespread chattel slavery.

As indicated, the knowledge that Quakers were involved in the trafficking and enslavement of people is not new; it is not something that has been recently uncovered but rather has been carried through multiple generations and manifestations of Quakerism into the present day. It is therefore worth reflecting on the factors that may have contributed to this history receiving sustained attention from Quakers in Britain at this particular moment.

This minute also references an awareness of British Quakers' 'incomplete understanding' of Quakerism in the 'transatlantic slave trade'. Indeed, much of what has been written about Friends in relation to the subject of slavery has emphasised Friends' notable labours as antislavery advocates, abolitionists and campaigners for human rights and justices. And certainly, many individual Friends have also, since the very conception of Quakerism, advocated steadfastly for the total equality of humanity. There is tension, however, in elevating some elements of the past without also recognising the others, to promote one facet of a collective history without acknowledging its totality, especially as it relates to power and privileges as manifested in the present.

The legacy of this complicity has affected the lived experiences of Friends in different ways, with some benefiting from the economic wealth extracted from the exploitation of enslaved people and with others continuing to experience the oppression and inequalities stemming from the actions and decisions of people in the past, among them Quakers. This report is intended to make a productive contribution to the dialogue surrounding the ongoing legacies of colonialism and oppression; to draw attention to Quakers' part in these injustices and to underscore the connection between past harms and the perpetuation of their legacies in the present.

Nevertheless, this report is imperfect and incomplete. The analysis reflects the research we were able to conduct within the timeline and resources allocated to us. The conclusion outlines critical avenues of exploration that this report did not have the resources to carry out but which should be taken up as this work continues.[4] Future projects building from this report should seek in the first instance to address the methodological limitations and

4 I am once again thankful to our steering committee for their invaluable comments here.

tensions as outlined above and in the conclusion. It is hoped that this brief report may serve as a starting point, a launchpad for further investigation and discussion for Britain Yearly Meeting to create a more equitable and just future for all.

[Strand I:1650s–1727] Quakers and Enslavement as a 'Christianising' Enterprise

1.1 Quakers and Enslavement

The emergence of the early Quaker movement in early seventeenth-century Britain coincided with a period of accelerated imperialism, when many European nations colonised land, enslaved people to perform forced labour and exploited resources in Africa, the Caribbean and North America.[5] These Europeans claimed various denominational identities; among them were those known as Quakers. Within the first decade of the faith's existence, British Quakers were present in many European colonies, primarily in the Caribbean and North America, often travelling in the ministry but also in pursuit of permanent settlement. It was in colonial contexts that the Quaker faith came into sustained contact with and investment in plantation economies and chattel enslavement.

Quakerism first developed in England in the 1640s as a radical sectarian faith which taught that the spirit of Christ was accessible to all of humanity regardless of race, class or gender. For this reason, Quakers theoretically rejected social and political hierarchies. Almost immediately following the faith's conception, Quaker ministers travelled throughout the Atlantic with the intention of proselytising their message to nonbelievers abroad. It is thought that the first recorded encounter of Quakerism with transatlantic chattel enslavement occurred when two of these missionaries, Ann Austin and Mary Fisher, reached the island of Barbados in 1655, when the Quaker faith itself was only around a decade old.[6] Barbados had been an English

5 Elizabeth Cazden, 'Within the Bounds of Their Circumstances: The Testimony of Inequality Among Eighteenth–Century New England Friends,' in *Quakerism in the Atlantic World, 1690–1830*, ed. Robynne Rogers Healey (Penn State University Press, 2021), 57–58; see also Sylvester A. Johnson and Stephen W. Angell, 'Quakers and Empire,' in *The Creation of Modern Quaker Diversity, 1830–1937*, eds. Stephen W. Angell, Pink Dandelion, and David Harrington Watt (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2023), 21–22.

6 J. William Frost, 'From Dissidence to Sense of the Meeting,' *Quaker History* 101, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 13.

colony since 1627; by the time Quaker ministers arrived on the island, European colonisers had already established several sugar plantations on which enslaved African and Indigenous American people were forced to perform intensive labour. It was into this plantation system of chattel enslavement that the missionaries Fisher and Austin found a number of new converts to Quakerism, exclusively among the Europeans on Barbados who were already established, as historian Katharine Gerbner has written, "slave-owning planters, merchants, indentured servants and craftsmen."[7]

Through the efforts of ministers like Austin and Fisher, a sizable proportion of Barbados eventually converted to Quakerism, many of whom held men, women, and children in bondage at the time of their 'convincement'. Researcher Mary Watkins estimates that by 1680, nearly 1200 Quakers lived on Barbados, about six per cent of the island's European population.[8] Of these nearly 1200 Quakers, Gerbner projects that at least eighty per cent held at least one person in bondage.[9] Current scholarship suggests that the Society of Friends' particular entanglement in chattel enslavement began in Barbados, from whence Quakers later facilitated the establishment of enslavement in Friends' communities in other colonies like Pennsylvania and Maryland, among others.[10]

By the time Quakers first arrived in North America and the Caribbean, many European colonisers were already deeply entrenched in transatlantic chattel enslavement.[11] However, the transatlantic network of Quakerism had, from the faith's conception, depended heavily on a series of closely integrated and overlapping communal ties to sustain a rapidly expanding faith body.[12] It was through these famously close-knit networks of familial, business and social connections that Quakers facilitated the spread of chattel slavery to other Quaker communities throughout the colonial British Atlantic.[13] Gary

7 Katharine Gerbner, *Christian Slavery: Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic World* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 51.

8 Mary Watkins, *Hypocrisy, Racism, and Self–Interest on the Path to Reparations: Quaker Complicity with Slavery (1657–1776) and White Supremacy*, (Pendle Hill Pamphlet 489, 2024), 4.

9 Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 52.

10 Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 58; Katherine Freedman, 'Sustaining Faith: Quakers and Slavery in the Early Anglo–Atlantic, 1655–1679,' *Journal of Global Slavery* 3, no. 3 (2018): 225.

11 Jean R. Soderlund, 'Black Women in Colonial Pennsylvania,' *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 107, no. 1 (1983): 50.

12 Frederick B. Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House: The Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia, 1682–1763* (W. W. Norton, 1948), 121; Jordan Landes, *London Quakers in the Trans–Atlantic World: The Creation of an Early Modern Community* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 55, 88.

13 Gerbner argues specifically that Quakers facilitated the spread of 'Christian slavery' to other communities in the Atlantic, 'Christian slavery' being Gerbner's term for the specific ideology justifying Quaker complicity in enslavement. See: Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 69.

Nash has written, for instance, of 150 enslaved African people trafficked to Philadelphia in 1684 who were "eagerly purchased by Quaker settlers" to be "engaged in the difficult work of clearing trees and brush and erecting crude houses in the budding provincial capital."[14]

> ***Here it is critical to draw attention to the explicit silences of the archive. Citing papers from the Board of Trade as well as correspondence between individual Quaker leaders, Nash evidences an instance in which 150 enslaved African people were trafficked to Philadelphia in the earliest days of the colony's establishment, where Friends, as Esther Sahle describes, 'unquestionably planned to use forced African labour to build their "holy experiment."'[15] Information about these 150 enslaved individuals—their identities, experiences, thoughts, feelings and actions—were not recorded in the materials intended to document their enslavement and are largely absent from the archives. The existence of these individuals in historical memory is thus either erased or otherwise confined in the written record to the context of their enslavement, both forms of violence that persist long after the individuals themselves have passed away.***

It was also through Quaker familial and professional networks that Friends also spread a particular ideology about and approach toward enslavement.[16] The role Quakers played in the enslavement and trafficking of Indigenous American people, people from Africa and of African descent, was publicly known. The acknowledged founder of the Quaker movement, George Fox, was aware that Friends throughout the colonies held people in bondage and even witnessed enslavement himself when visiting Friends' Meetings.[17] Quakers in Britain wrote very little about enslavement in the faith's first few decades of existence, but when they did, it was to implore enslavers within the Religious Society of Friends to treat the people they enslaved with a sense of Christian 'benevolence'.[18] George Fox first addressed the subject in his 1657 epistle 'To Friends beyond the Sea, that have Blacks and Indian Slaves'. In this tract, Fox never explicitly condemns enslavement. Instead, he

14 Gary B. Nash, 'Slaves and Slaveowners in Colonial Philadelphia,' *The William and Mary Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (April 1973): 225.

15 For information included in this section, see: Esther Sahle, *Quakers in the British Atlantic World, c. 1660–1800* (The Boydell Press, 2021), 40. Saidiya Hartman has famously written on wrestling with the violence of these archival silences and the 'task of writing the impossible', see: Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts.'

16 See also Caitlin McGeever, 'Friends of Slavery: Barbadian Quakers and the Spiritual Plantation Family, 1655–1719,' PhD dissertation, George Mason University, 2024.

17 Freedman, 'Sustaining Faith: Quakers and Slavery in the Early Anglo–Atlantic, 1655–1679,' 227–228.

18 Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 54.

reminds Friends "in all those Plantations" or colonies, of the common origins of humanity and to affirm the spiritual equality of all people: "And [God] hath made all Nations of one Blood to dwell upon the Face of the Earth, and his Eyes are over all the Works of his Hands, and seeth every thing."[19] In this short tract, Fox reaffirms the contemporary Quaker teaching of all people as creations of an all-knowing God while tacitly implying the existence of a ubiquitous moral law determining right from wrong. However, nowhere in this short tract does Fox adopt an explicit stance on the practice of holding humans in bondage. Instead, Fox's primary concern, as far as may be told from his writings, was with the nature of Quaker behaviour towards the people they enslaved, encouraging them to "have the Mind of Christ, and to be Merciful, as your Heavenly Father is Merciful."[20] No contradiction is made by Fox between Friends' belief in the universal spiritual equality of humanity and Quakers holding people in bondage.[21]

Another tract, published in 1660 by Quaker missionary Robert Pinder, echoed Fox's emphasis on the 'morality' of the enslaver and exhorted the "Masters, and Owners of the severall Plantations" in particular to "become good examples to all under you, in patience, in moderation, and sobriety."[22] Pinder, like Fox, did not express concern with the morality of enslavement as an institution, but rather with the comportment of Quakers as 'Masters and Owners' of the people they enslaved. Moreover, Pinder insists Quaker enslavers adopt a 'benevolent' approach towards the people they held in bondage, but his emphasis on benevolence is offered primarily for the potential benefit it brought the enslaver:

> For you being good examples both in word and behaviour, this will answer the witness of God in all you are over: and this will reach more deeply into their hearts, and constrain more obedience then all your cruell usage (in whipping them). For consider, if you whip them for drunkenness, and such like things, and you your selves be guilty of

19 Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 53; George Fox, 'To Friends beyond Sea, that have Blacks and Indian Slaves,' in *A collection of many select and Christian epistles, letters and testimonies written on sundry occasions, by that ancient, eminent, faithful friend and minister of Christ Jesus, George Fox; the second volume* (London: T. Sowle, 1698), University of Michigan Library Digital Collections.

20 Fox, 'To Friends beyond Sea, that have Blacks and Indian Slaves.'

21 Freedman, 'Sustaining Faith,' 215; Herbert Aptheker, 'The Quakers and Negro Slavery,' *The Journal of Negro History* 25, no. 3 (July 1940), pp. 332–333.

22 Robert Pinder, 'A loving invitation (to repentance, and amendment of life) unto all the inhabitants of the island Barbados: Before the Lords sore judgements come upon them, which is seen to be nigh, and which they cannot escape, except fruits meet for repentance, and amendment of life be brought forth. With somthing more particularly to the heads, and owners, of the several plantations. By a friend to the whole creation, called Richard Pinder,' (London: for Robert Wilson, in Martins Le Grand, near Aldersgate, 1660), 7, 9, University of Michigan Library Digital Collections.

> the same, this greatly hardens their hearts against you, and provokes them to curse you behind your backs. And thus you cause the Name of God to be blasphemed, through your disorderly walking; and being bad examples unto them, whom in the Wisdom of God you should rule over, and keep subject unto you; as I said, being bad examples your selves, this looses your Authority, which otherwise you might have, if you were kept in the Fear and Wisdom of God your selves.[23]

Like Fox, Pinder does not condemn slavery, rather he appeals to an interpretation of Christian morality to fabricate a paternalistic stance towards the people Quakers held in bondage.[24] Beyond an appeal to a specific interpretation of 'benevolence', Pinder's statement is intended to be of 'practical' use to the enslaver, to strengthen the enslavers' authority over people held in bondage in a way Pinder deemed more compatible with purportedly Christian sentiments. Pinder's tract echoes Fox's calls for benevolence while simultaneously reasserting a perceived need for a hierarchy that prioritised a certain view of social order over egalitarian humanity, with enslaver over enslaved. This language of morality and benevolence was used by leading Quaker voices to make conceptual space for chattel enslavement within the discourse and ideology of an increasingly transatlantic Quaker community.

1.2 ' Justifying' or Reconciling Enslavement with Quaker Belief and Practice

The works of Quakers like Pinder and Fox gave Friends the language to define the presence and practice of enslavement within their communities. From these foundations members of the broader Society of Friends constructed their own 'justifications' for the place of chattel slavery in Quakerism. The writings and records of seventeenth-century Friends reveal an effort to reconcile chattel slavery, the oppression and violence inherent in its practices, with a professed belief in the universal spiritual equality of all humanity. The word 'reconcile' is deliberately used in this context to mean the process by which a particular group attempts to make one 'account' or practice consistent with another.[25] In this case, it is the efforts of a transatlantic Quaker community to reconcile a professed belief in universal

23 Pinder, 'A loving invitation (to repentance, and amendment of life) unto all the inhabitants of the island Barbados,' 9.

24 Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 54.

25 The term 'reconcile' is also used by Katharine Gerbner in her groundbreaking work, *Christian Slavery: Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic World*, to describe Fox's attempts to render slavery compatible with Quaker practice and belief. For more, see: Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 50.

spiritual equality of all people with the practice of holding women, children and men in bondage. Only gradually does the incongruence between the two appear in Quaker writings and only at first among disparate individuals.[26] Some of the 'loudest' Quaker voices into the eighteenth century nevertheless endeavoured in writing to characterise enslavement as a practice compatible with Friends' beliefs.

And yet, it is not universally agreed upon by historians why some Friends chose to 'reconcile' enslavement with their practices and beliefs at all. One strand of thought within the historiography suggests that British Friends incorporated enslavement into their communities for the relative economic, social and political security it afforded the Society of Friends within a rapidly expanding British empire. Since the faith's conception in the 1640s, Quakerism had largely existed as a faith on the margins of 'acceptable' European society.[27] The earliest Quaker theology developed in the turbulent, apocalyptic environment of the English Civil War and Commonwealth period. Early Quakers were just one of the numerous radical Protestant sects of the period that interpreted the chaos of the period as a sign of the impending eschaton.[28] But with the fall of the Republic and restoration of the monarchy in 1660, many sects like the Quakers lost their millenarian impetus.

This perceived loss of a raison d'être prompted Quakers to reassess the fundamental structures of their faith. Internal strife among Friends towards the late seventeenth century and the implementation of legislation intended to reign in the excesses of fringe religious groups like the Quakers further prompted a period of internal reflection among Friends.[29] It became apparent to Quaker leadership that the contemporary model of the faith was unsustainable, that continual preparation for an eschaton that may come later rather than sooner was not viable to the long-term survival of

26 Frost writes, for instance, of Ralph Sandiford, who in 1729 published a testimony having tried unsuccessfully to convince his Meeting of the immorality of enslavement; Frost, 'From Dissidence to Sense of the Meeting,' 18–21.

27 Richard T. Vann, *The Social Development of English Quakerism, 1655–1755* (Harvard University Press, 2013); Barry Reay, 'Popular Hostility towards Quakers in Mid–Seventeenth–Century England,' *Social History* 5, no. 3 (1980): 387–407.

28 Keith V. Thomas, 'Women and the Civil War Sects,' *Past & Present*, no. 13 (1958): 42–62; Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (Maurice Temple Smith, 1972).

29 For a succinct overview of some of these schisms, including the Wilkinson–Story, Perrot, and Keithian controversies, see: Clare J.L. Martin, 'Tradition Versus Innovation: The Hat, Wilkinson–Story, and Keithian Controversies,' *Quaker Studies* 8, no. 1 (2003): 5–22; see also Robynne Rogers Healey, 'From Apocalyptic Prophecy to Tolerable Faithfulness: George Whitehead and a Theology for the Eschaton Deferred,' in *Early Quakers and Their Theological Thought: 1647–1723*, eds. Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 278–280. For information on restrictive legislation against Quakers, particularly the Clarendon Codes, see: William C. Braithwaite, *The Second Period of Quakerism*, 2nd ed., ed. Henry J. Cadbury. (York: William Sessions Limited, 1979), 3–9.

the religious community. Friends thus came to recognise a need to adapt to living within the very world from which they had spent the previous decades attempting to extricate themselves and thus began to seriously consider measures to preserve their faith for future generations.[30]

A central component of this task required Friends to prove to the powers that were that the faith could coexist peacefully alongside mainstream society.[31] The Quaker community could not survive under the consistent pressure and persecution it had experienced from national and provincial governments and needed, as historian Kristen Block has compellingly argued, "to show that they could conform to social order, at least in the secular realm."[32] To secure their survival, Quakers would need to prove they were not a threat to existing hierarchies of authority; that Friends could, within specific parameters, play by society's rules.

Integration with 'worldly' economies was one way, some historians have posited, that Friends sought to obtain this conformity.[33] The Quaker practice of eschewing oath swearing consequently excluded Friends from attending universities and thus from entering into professions requiring a university education.[34] Many Quakers consequently found employment in the trades through which many Quaker families became incredibly wealthy.[35] It has been argued that the accumulation of wealth and material capital were especially desirable to Friends for the relative degree of protection they offered; the ability to pay fines and recover from distraint of goods or property, not to mention the relative social and political power that typically accompanies wealth, all enabled Quakers to guard themselves from persecution and "provided the economic stability necessary […] to endure for future generations."[36]

30 Healey, 'From Apocalyptic Prophecy to Tolerable Faithfulness: George Whitehead and a Theology for the Eschaton Deferred,' 284; Pink Dandelion, 'Guarded Domesticity and Engagement with 'the World': The Separate Spheres of Quaker Quietism,' *Common Knowledge* 16, no. 1 (2010): 97, 102, 108; Vann, *The Social Development of English Quakerism, 1655–1755*, 200–201; Braithwaite, *The Second Period of Quakerism*, 248, 250–253, 254.

31 Freedman, 'Sustaining Faith: Quakers and Slavery in the Early Anglo–Atlantic, 1655–1679,' 212; Healey, 'From Apocalyptic Prophecy to Tolerable Faithfulness: George Whitehead and a Theology for the Eschaton Deferred,' 284; Braithwaite, *The Second Period of Quakerism*, 250.

32 Kristen Block, 'Cultivating Inner and Outer Plantations: Property, Industry, and Slavery in Early Quaker Migration to the New World,' *Early American Studies* 8, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 520, 524.

33 Block, 'Cultivating Inner and Outer Plantations: Property, Industry, and Slavery in Early Quaker Migration to the New World,' pp. 515–548; Freedman, 'Sustaining Faith: Quakers and Slavery in the Early Anglo–Atlantic, 1655–1679,' 211–233.

34 Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House*, 50.

35 Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House.*

36 Block, 'Cultivating Inner and Outer Plantations: Property, Industry, and Slavery in Early Quaker Migration to the New World,' 520.

However, as Quakers in Britain became increasingly integrated into emerging capitalist economies, they also became deeply intertwined in oppressive and exploitative systems. The economic systems in which British Friends operated were expressly dependent upon trade and production occurring within British colonies abroad, a system of trade and production that was largely performed by people held in bondage.[37] Scholars like Block and Katherine Freedman have argued that Quakers in the seventeenth-century Atlantic integrated enslavement into their communities in part for the wealth the 'Atlantic slave system' generated and the degree of protection this wealth gave Quakers "from persecution by the British state and other religious groups."[38]

And yet, Friends' acceptance of slavery within their communities cannot be reduced solely to economic motivations; contemporary Quakers were also deeply cognisant of the social and political implications their position toward enslavement could hold within a rapidly expanding British Empire. By the time Quaker missionaries reached Barbados in 1655, for example, a large proportion of the island's European population already held people in bondage.[39] Freedman has proposed that for Quakers to push back against the burgeoning plantocracy would not only have cost them necessary converts to the faith, but it would also have served to further isolate Quakers socially and politically from 'mainstream' European society.[40] Of particular concern was the potential to incur the disapproval of particularly powerful figures who could make life easier or harder for Quakers in the British colonies.[41] While on a tour of Friends' communities in the Caribbean and North America the early 1670s, Fox likely encountered "thousands of people", but, as Freedman astutely notes, he only recorded the 'convincement' or conversion of high-status individuals; "of magistrates, justices of the peace, politicians, officers" and so on.[42] This may suggest Fox felt a particular concerned with garnering the approval of influential figures, likely with the intent of further cementing Friends' stability and continuity in different regions of the British

37 Recent work investigating connections between Quaker trades and merchants to transatlantic chattel enslavement include: 'Uncovering the Past: Four London Quakers and Their Ties to Slavery,' Quaker Strongrooms, 10 January, 2025; Samuel Barber, 'Following the Money: Quakers of East London and their ties to slavery in the Caribbean,' Quaker Strongrooms, 14 April 2025; Ann Morgan, *The 18th Century Enslaving Industry: Lancaster Quakers Involvement*, 2025.

38 Freedman, 'Sustaining Faith: Quakers and Slavery in the Early Anglo–Atlantic, 1655–1679,' 231; Block, 'Cultivating Inner and Outer Plantations: Property, Industry, and Slavery in Early Quaker Migration to the New World,' 517–520.

39 Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 4.

40 Freedman, 'Sustaining Faith: Quakers and Slavery in the Early Anglo–Atlantic, 1655–1679,' 216.

41 Ibid., 227.

42 Ibid.

Atlantic. "Fox's tacit approval of slaveholding" in the 1657 epistle might thus be read as part of a broader impetus of currying favour from an elite stratum of Europeans, many of whom obtained vast fortunes from plantations and trades established through the trafficking and enslavement of African and Indigenous American people.[43] A perceived need for social inclusion and subsequent freedom from persecution may have inspired leading Quakers like Fox to make accommodations for a practice that contradicted a central tenet of Friends' beliefs.

Nevertheless, it would be unrealistic to conclude that Friends relied on one 'justification' over another to self-legitimate the presence of enslavement within their communities. It is more likely that Friends' complicity in chattel enslavement was the result of a system of overlapping contexts and priorities. Certainly, it cannot be assumed that all Quakers recognised this tension between spiritual equality and slavery, or that all Friends automatically felt uneasy about the concept of 'slaveholding'. Although it is, as historian Brycchan Carey has written, "difficult now to imagine a time when slavery was not considered either illegal or immoral", slavery has existed "in one form or another [as] a fact of life for many" throughout most of human history.[44] Many people who converted to Quakerism held people in bondage at their time of convincement. Many others were born into the faith and became complicit later as practicing Friends. Some Quakers conveyed an uneasiness with the practice, while others never questioned the morality of enslavement at all. But as the wider transatlantic Quaker community as a whole became more deeply entrenched in the violence and oppression of chattel enslavement, the more Friends attempted to 'rationalise' enslavement and its presence within Quaker communities.

1.3 'Gospel Family-order'

By the 1670s, Friends had adopted a discourse surrounding enslavement that endeavoured to "reconcile slavery with Christian practice."[45] The development of this framework coincided with a moment of profound change within the Religious Society of Friends known as the 'Second Period of Quakerism', when Quakers moved away from the eschatological impetus behind many of their actions and redirected their attention toward securing the longevity of the faith.[46] In addition to integrating closely with the practices

43 Ibid., 212, 216.

44 Brycchan Carey, 'The Pennsylvanian Origins of British Abolitionism,' *Historian* no. 93 (Spring, 2007): 6.

45 Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 50.

46 Healey, 'From Apocalyptic Prophecy to Tolerable Faithfulness: George Whitehead and a

and economies of the world, Friends endeavoured to reconceptualise the community in terms of a hierarchical Meeting structure. This system, consisting of tiers of Meetings for business and worship, erected broadly at the monthly, quarterly and yearly levels, was meant to instil structure and discipline to a faith body that had previously existed relatively amorphously.[47] The establishment of the Meeting system codified for the first time what it meant to be a member of a Quaker community and gave scope to define the bounds of acceptable practice within the faith.[48]

For this reason, the implementation of a Meeting system and apparatus of institutional practices was controversial; some Friends felt that the stipulations on where, when and how to worship or deliberate matters of faith infringed on the basic tenet of following the immediate, internal guidance of the Inward Light.[49] And in some ways, it did. For the first time, Friends were encouraged to erect boundaries around spiritual practices that had previously been relatively spontaneous and fluid.[50] One perhaps unanticipated consequence of the Second Period was the impetus it placed on Friends to truly consider what 'spiritual equality' meant in organisational practice, i.e., who fit where within the institutional apparatus of Quakerism? The establishment of gendered business Meetings for men and women, for instance, both implicitly and explicitly defined the disparate roles and responsibilities men and women played within the wider Quaker community through the medium of the Meeting.[51] But as Quakerism expanded further into North America and the Caribbean through the missionary work and colonialist enterprises alike of early Friends, the spiritual boundaries and hierarchies of order that Quakers endeavoured to implement were continually brought into tension with their practices in the world.[52] The development of the Quaker Meeting system in the Second Period inadvertently constrained

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Theology for the Eschaton Deferred,' 279–281, 284; Dandelion, 'Guarded Domesticity and Engagement with 'the World': The Separate Spheres of Quaker Quietism,' 97; Vann, *The Social Development of English Quakerism, 1655–1755*, 200–201; Braithwaite, *The Second Period of Quakerism*, 248, 250–253, 254.

47 Naomi Pullin, *Female Friends and the Making of Transatlantic Quakerism, 1650–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 7, 96.

48 Freedman, 'Sustaining Faith: Quakers and Slavery in the Early Anglo–Atlantic, 1655–1679,' 224.

49 Martin, 'Tradition Versus Innovation: The Hat, Wilkinson-Story, and Keithian Controversies,' 5–22.

50 Ibid.

51 Pullin, *Female Friends and the Making of Transatlantic Quakerism, 1650–1750*, 10, 32, 98–102; Lily Chadwick, Transatlantic Friends: Gender, Authority, and Regionalism in the Early Modern British Atlantic, PhD diss., Durham University, 2024.

52 Block argues that "Just as universal love served as an ideal more than a reality, nonviolence would always be in tension with the dictates of slave societies"; see: Block, 'Cultivating Inner and Outer Plantations: Property, Industry, and Slavery in Early Quaker Migration to the New World,' 530.

Friends to define what 'spiritual equality' meant in practice, especially in relation to cultural constructs like gender and race.

In 1671, Fox embarked on a multi-year tour of the British colonies to assist in the establishment of Meeting systems throughout Friends' communities. Fox hoped his efforts would strengthen the faith by bringing a rapidly evolving Atlantic Quaker community into greater uniformity of practice and discipline.[53] It was during this tour that Fox first visited Barbados in 1671, where he stayed at the plantation of Thomas Rous, a wealthy sugar planter and the father of Fox's stepson-in-law, John Rous.[54] Both Thomas and John Rous had converted to Quakerism in Barbados in the mid-1650s and were deeply invested in chattel enslavement at the time of their 'convincement'. The Rouses continued to hold people in bondage after their conversion and by 1680 the family enslaved over 300 people across three Barbadian plantations.[55]

> ***As above, it is essential to flag archival silences in this report. While materials originating from and about the Rous family are present in the archive—their letters, estate information, and presence within Meeting documents—very little is documented in the written record about the more than 300 people held in bondage by the Rous family. This is again reflective of the power dynamics that shape how archives are constructed, what materials are preserved and what historical narratives are created and told.***

Despite the familial connection to the Rouses, Fox's stay on Barbados was in all likelihood his first in-person, sustained encounter with chattel enslavement, an experience which is thought to have prompted his second epistle on the subject of slavery titled, *Gospel family-order: being a short discourse concerning the ordering of families, both of whites, blacks, and Indians*'.[56] Commonly shortened in scholarship to 'Gospel family-order', Fox's

53 Freedman, 'Sustaining Faith: Quakers and Slavery in the Early Anglo–Atlantic, 1655–1679,' 224–225.

54 I. Gadd and Steven C. Harper, 'Rous, John (d. 1695), Quaker missionary,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (23 Sep. 2004).

55 I. Gadd and Steven C. Harper, 'Rous, John (d. 1695), Quaker missionary.' John Rous married Margaret Fell's eldest daughter, Margaret, at Swarthmoor Hall in 1662. The couple would continue to travel between their homes in England and Barbados over the course of their marriage. Researchers have uncovered evidence of goods harvested from coerced labour like sugar and oranges having been shipped from the Rous plantations in Barbados to Swarthmoor Hall in Ulverston. Upon John's death in 1695, his plantations in Barbados were left to Margaret and their son, Nathaniel. For more, see: 'Uncovering the Past: Four London Quakers and Their Ties to Slavery,' Quaker Strongrooms.

56 Freedman, 'Sustaining Faith: Quakers and Slavery in the Early Anglo–Atlantic, 1655–1679,' 225.

epistle was first delivered as a sermon to European Friends in Barbados in which he outlined a theological framework for the place and practice of enslavement in Quaker communities. In 'Gospel family-order', Fox builds on his 1657 interpretation of 'benevolence' to outline a hierarchical order of racialised paternalism.[57] Fox's sermon was later published in London in 1676, three years after his return to England and circulated among Friends in the wider British Atlantic.[58] Again, very few Quakers prior to the 1670s wrote about slavery at all, including those itinerant Friends who undoubtedly witnessed enslavement while ministering in the colonies.[59] Unlike previous tracts from Fox in 1657 and Pinder in 1660, 'Gospel family-order' was the first attempt from any Quaker to 'reconcile' enslavement expressly within Quaker theology and to outline a particular practice of enslavement 'suitable' to Quaker beliefs.[60] 'Gospel family-order' might therefore be read as the foundational text on which dominant Quaker approaches towards enslavement were consequently built.

As the title suggests, Fox's sermon emphasised the importance in Quaker communities of both 'family' and 'order', two seemingly straightforward concepts that nevertheless require further contextualisation to fully grasp their meaning in a seventeenth-century Quaker parlance. The concept of 'family' in the seventeenth century encompassed a much broader range of individuals, for instance, than we might ascribe to it in our modern day.[61] The 'family' in Fox's time would have included the biological familial unit – mothers, fathers, children and perhaps extended family like cousins or grandparents – but it also would have extended to everyone else who lived within the same household and under the authority of the householder.[62] These families encompassed not only servants and apprentices within the household but also those who were enslaved by the householder. The term 'family' in Fox's 'Gospel family-order' describes less a network of relationships characterised by kinship and affection but rather more a system of hierarchical authority and control.[63]

57 Ibid.

58 H. Larry Ingle, 'Fox, George (1624–1691), a founder of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers),' Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 23 Sep. 2004; Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 61, 69.

59 Kenneth L. Carroll, 'George Fox and Slavery,' *Quaker History* 86, no. 2 (1997): 16; Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 54.

60 Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 50.

61 Naomi Tadmor, 'The Concept of the Household–Family,' in *Family and Friends in Eighteenth–Century England: Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 19–20.

62 Tadmor, 'The Concept of the Household–Family,' 22.

63 Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 49, 56–57.

This conceptualisation is especially important, as it is also how Fox endeavoured to characterise the newly implemented hierarchical Meeting system. Indeed, Fox famously sought to reimagine the Quaker community as a sort of 'spiritual family', wherein Meetings at every level (weekly, monthly, quarterly and yearly) were brought under the purview of a universal, godly household.[64] But the language of 'family-order' also became the vehicle through which a particular narrative of discipline and authority was conveyed to Quaker enslavers.[65] J. William Frost has drawn parallels between the familial unit in Fox's 'Gospel family-order' to traditional depictions of ideal household structures, wherein the 'father took responsibility for the religious training not only of his immediate offspring but the servants' as well. [66] In the seventeenth-century household, the householder – typically the patriarch of a familial unit – was ultimately responsible for the spiritual welfare and moral character of all members of the family.[67] The patriarch was expected not only to instruct but correct the behaviour of his subordinates, to maintain order by instilling within them the character and principles of good Christians in a commanding yet benevolent manner. Fox's framing of 'Gospel family-order' in this way consequently embedded 'servants' within the 'spiritual household' of Quakerism and defined their place of subordination within a broader community structure.[68]

Of greatest significance, however, is what Fox's tract meant for the people held in bondage in Quaker households. Throughout 'Gospel family-order', Fox scarcely uses the term 'slave' to refer to enslaved people, opting instead to primarily characterise those held in bondage as 'strangers', 'servants', or 'heathens'.[69] In so doing, Fox renders enslavement as a kind of 'paternalistic' enterprise, situating enslavement firmly within the broader context of the Quaker 'spiritual family'.[70] Fox uses this language of familial structure in his sermon to emphasise his particular concern that the 'families' he had observed while in Barbados "were not brought into Order."[71] In other words, Fox was concerned more with the nature of authority underpinning 'order'

64 Ibid., 56.

65 Ibid., 56–57, 69. See also: Cazden, 'Within the Bounds of Their Circumstances: The Testimony of Inequality Among Eighteenth–Century New England Friends,' 58–59.

66 Frost, 'From Dissidence to Sense of the Meeting,' 14–15.

67 Tadmor, 'The Concept of the Household–Family,' 25. See also Anthony Fletcher, 'Household Order', in *Gender, Sex & Subordination in England, 1500–1800* (Yale University Press, 1995): 204–222.

68 Freedman, 'Sustaining Faith: Quakers and Slavery in the Early Anglo–Atlantic, 1655–1679,' 225.

69 Ibid., 225–226.

70 Freedman, 'Sustaining Faith: Quakers and Slavery in the Early Anglo–Atlantic, 1655–1679,' 225; Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 56.

71 Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 56.

within the enslaving households of Quakers than with Quaker participation in transatlantic chattel enslavement.[72] Fox addresses the enslaver directly in his sermon:

> And therefore mind and consider this in your Families, and gather them altogether, and teach them the Way of the Lord, and the New Covenant; yea, your Families and Children, and those you bought with Moneys, and the Strangers, and such as are born of them in your House[73]

'Gospel family-order' is an explicit exhortation to Quaker enslavers to bring all members of the household, including "those [they] bought with Moneys", into the Christian fold. Fox echoed contemporary prescriptions that all 'Elders and Masters of Families' were ultimately responsible for the moral and spiritual health of their households; where he deviated from his contemporaries was in instructing Quaker enslavers to extend this responsibility to those they held in bondage as well.[74] Fox's 'Gospel family-order' may thus be read as an attempt to soften or naturalise chattel enslavement by redefining it within the purportedly benevolent authoritarianism of the Christian and patriarchal.[75]

Indeed, part of fabricating enslavement as a sort of 'benevolent' enterprise meant fashioning the practice as simultaneously beneficial to both the enslaver and the people enslaved. Freedman argues, for instance, that Fox's usage of the word 'servant' over 'slave' in his sermon is especially significant because it signals a possibility of change; whereas chattel enslavement necessarily meant the person (and all of their descendants) held in bondage would be enslaved for the duration of their lives, one characterised as a 'servant' could, in theory, end their state of subordination.[76] The emphasis on the term 'servant' over 'slave' encouraged Quakers, Freedman asserts, to "view all the people they brought in to their households as potential converts, who could be spiritually freed 'from under oppression'."[77] The theoretical possibility of conversion thus offered rhetorical possibilities: if the inherent

72 Ibid., 49–50, 54, 56.

73 George Fox, 'Gospel family–order being a short discourse concerning the ordering of families, both of whites, blacks, and Indians / by G.F,' 5, in the digital collection Early English Books Online, University of Michigan Library Digital Collections.

74 Block, 'Cultivating Inner and Outer Plantations: Property, Industry, and Slavery in Early Quaker Migration to the New World,' 524.

75 Block, 'Cultivating Inner and Outer Plantations: Property, Industry, and Slavery in Early Quaker Migration to the New World,' 524; Freedman, 'Sustaining Faith: Quakers and Slavery in the Early Anglo–Atlantic, 1655–1679,' 226; Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 56–57, 61.

76 Freedman, 'Sustaining Faith: Quakers and Slavery in the Early Anglo–Atlantic, 1655–1679,' 226.

77 Ibid., 226.

violence and brutality of enslavement could be repackaged as somehow salvific, then enslavement could be reinterpreted as a moral or 'Christianising' enterprise.[78] On the other hand, the language of conversion and 'salvation' implied the possibility of manumission – of one being emancipated from slavery. It was widely acknowledged among contemporary Europeans that the enslavement of other Christians was immoral and it was partly for this reason that many colonies prohibited the conversion of enslaved people to Christianity.[79] Fox's 'Gospel family-order' is unique in this respect, as it makes a very brief allusion to the possibility that people held in bondage could eventually be manumitted:

> And to close up all, let me tell you, it will doubtless be very acceptable to the Lord, if so be that Masters of Families here would deal so with their Servants, the Negroes and Blacks, whom they have bought with their Money, to let them go free after a considerable Term of Years, if they have served them faithfully.[80]

This statement is, however, not followed with concrete provisions for manumission, nor an explicit prohibition of chattel enslavement among Friends. Fox only broaches the possibility of manumission theoretically, not practically and the subject is left inconclusively vague.[81] Indeed, a review of extant Quaker estate records indicate that, prior to the late eighteenth century, very few manumissions occurred within the Society of Friends at all.[82]

Instead, some Quaker enslavers endeavoured to 'instruct […] in Christianity' the people they held in bondage through the creation of Meetings expressly for 'Blacks':

> Dear Friends, keep your Meetings, and your Mens and Womens, and your Fortnights Meetings among your Blacks, and train them up in the Fear of the Lord, and spread the Truth abroad, and instruct your Families, as Abraham did, that they may know the New Covenant, & the Lord to write his Law in their Hearts, and put it in their Minds.[83]

78 Block, 'Cultivating Inner and Outer Plantations: Property, Industry, and Slavery in Early Quaker Migration to the New World,' 542; Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 50, 56–57, 61.

79 This point is heavily summarised here for brevity. Katharine Gerbner thoroughly explores European debates surrounding Christian conversion of enslaved people in her work, *Christian Slavery*. See, for example: Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 13–14.

80 George Fox, 'Gospel family–order being a short discourse concerning the ordering of families, both of whites, blacks, and Indians / by G.F,' 16.

81 Frost, 'From Dissidence to Sense of the Meeting,' 14; Freedman, 'Sustaining Faith: Quakers and Slavery in the Early Anglo–Atlantic, 1655–1679,' 225.

82 Nash, 'Slaves and Slaveowners in Colonial Philadelphia,' 236, 238.

83 George Fox, 'Gospel family–order being a short discourse concerning the ordering of families, both of whites, blacks, and Indians / by G.F,' 21–22.

In his sermon to Friends in Barbados, Fox further exhorted Quaker enslavers everywhere to establish separate Meetings for worship for those held in bondage in Quaker households. These Meetings are sometimes referred to in the primary material as 'family meetings' in line with Fox's 'Gospel family-order'. As far as is known, no records were kept of these Meetings of enslaved people, nor are the experiences of Black and Brown made to attend these Meetings known. What is known has been gleaned from the extant fragments written about these Meetings by European Quakers. One of the earliest accounts comes from the writings of Quaker minister Joan Vokins, who partook in these meetings while in Bridgetown, Barbados in the early 1680s:

> And most Days I had two or three Meetings of a Day, both among the Blacks and also among the White People: and the Power of the Lord Jesus was mightily manifested, so that my Soul was often melted therewith, even in the Meetings of the Negro's or Blacks, as well as among Friends.[84]

Vokins' account of her time at Meetings in Barbados and the specific language she used to characterise these Meetings, indicates that not only were Meetings racially segregated – that enslaved people from Africa and of African descent attended Meetings separate from those of white Quaker colonisers – but that attendance at Meeting did not translate to inclusion as equal members within the 'spiritual household' of Quakerism. Rather, as Kristen Block has articulated elsewhere, Quaker Meetings for enslaved people solidified their "place in the holy household", a place characterised by subordination and marginalisation.[85] The creation of these Meetings for people enslaved in Quaker households is a stark indicator that the 'Christianising' impetus behind 'Gospel family-order' did not, in practice, make provision for the emancipation of people held in bondage nor their inclusion on an equal basis as members of a wider Quaker community.

1.4 'Benevolence' as Moral Exceptionalism

Despite its implicit acceptance of enslavement and racialised hierarchies of power, Fox's 'Gospel family-order' also brought Friends into further contention

84 Joan Vokins, *God's Mighty Power Magnified: As Manifested and Revealed in His Faithful Handmaid Joan Vokins, Who Departed this Life the 22nd of the 5th Month, 1690, Having finished her Course and kept the Faith. Also some Account of her Exercises, Works of Faith, Labour of Love, and great Travels in the Work of the Ministry, for the good of Souls* (London: Thomas Northcott, 1691), pg. 43, Early English Books Online.

85 Block, 'Cultivating Inner and Outer Plantations: Property, Industry, and Slavery in Early Quaker Migration to the New World,' 524.

with other European communities. Critically, Fox delivered his sermon in a period characterised by ongoing debates between European colonisers about Christianity and slavery, namely the conversion of enslaved people to Christianity.[86] Fox's particular interpretation of a 'Christian' or 'benevolent' slavery was heavily criticised by other European colonisers; Anglican leadership in the British Atlantic especially feared Fox's 'Christianising' enterprise would encourage a rhetoric of spiritual liberation and incite rebellion among people enslaved throughout the colonies.[87] In an attempt to quell these accusations, Fox and other Quaker leaders argued instead that Christianity would 'teach' enslaved people to be peaceful and that "knowledge of the gospel would prevent rebellious behavior, not incite it."[88]

But scholars have also proposed that Fox's attempts to fashion enslavement as a 'benevolent' enterprise had an additional purpose, namely, that it was also intended to bolster Friends' "sense of godly authority and to distinguish themselves from their neighbors."[89] Quakers during the first generation of the faith famously considered themselves to be God's chosen people; that they who adhered to the ministration of the Inward Light would achieve salvation in the coming eschaton. Early Friends had constructed an identity for themselves as a people 'in the world but not of it', who rose above the sin and degradation of mortal existence.[90] And yet, the second generation of Quakerism and subsequent reorientation of the faith toward long-term survival on Earth meant Quakers required a new justification for what might be referred to as 'Quaker exceptionalism', or the self-perceived superiority of Quakerism to other faiths.[91] Fox's 'Gospel family-order' offered a way for Quakers to make claims to moral exceptionalism while also "asserting their dominance over" the people they held in bondage.[92] This sense of moral exceptionalism depended on the creation of difference through which Friends could position themselves as superior, both racially and religiously. Moreover, the fabrication of this difference enabled Quakers to paint the subordination and oppression of enslavement in the language of benevolence, through which to achieve overlapping social, economic

86 Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 49.

87 Ibid., 65–67.

88 Ibid., 67.

89 Block, 'Cultivating Inner and Outer Plantations: Property, Industry, and Slavery in Early Quaker Migration to the New World,' 526.

90 Dandelion, 'Guarded Domesticity and Engagement with 'the World'', 101, 107.

91 Dandelion, 'Guarded Domesticity and Engagement with 'the World'', 97–101; Judith Jennings, 'Mid–Eighteenth Century British Quakerism and the Response to the Problem of Slavery,' *Quaker History* 66, no. 1 (Spring 1977): 40; Block, 'Cultivating Inner and Outer Plantations: Property, Industry, and Slavery in Early Quaker Migration to the New World,' 526.

92 Block, 'Cultivating Inner and Outer Plantations: Property, Industry, and Slavery in Early Quaker Migration to the New World,' 519, 530–531, 544.

and spiritual goals.[93] This stance adopted in early Quaker writings toward enslavement emphasises the maintenance of order and control over an increasingly racialised 'other', over people designated as non-white and non-Quaker and held forcibly in bondage within their communities.

1.5 Quakers and Enslavement Discourse [1688–1727]

Fox's 'Gospel family-order' was first published in 1676 and circulated around Quaker communities in the British Atlantic, whereafter it continued to spark wider debates as to the "relationship between Protestantism and slavery."[94] It is in the final quarter of the seventeenth century that debates and conversations regarding enslavement within Quaker communities began to occur outside of the Caribbean; the presence of Friends in Barbados in particular diminishes from the 1680s onwards as Quakers migrated to other colonies such as Pennsylvania in the British Atlantic.[95] It is possible that some discernment on the place of enslavement among Friends occurred in individual Quaker communities throughout the wider Atlantic prior to the publication of Fox's sermon, but it is only after 'Gospel family-order' that these narratives begin to appear more consistently in Quaker writings.[96] The most famous early Quaker writing on enslavement, for example, was a petition produced in 1688 by Friends in Germantown, Pennsylvania. Written by a group of Mennonites associated with Friends, the 'Germantown Petition' has commonly been lauded as the first formal antislavery petition produced by Europeans in colonial British America.[97] In some respects, the Germantown Petition is similar to Fox's 'Gospel family-order'. For instance, an emphasis is maintained throughout on benevolence, in particular on the 'Golden Rule', that one should only do unto others what one would want done unto them:

> There is a saying, that we shall doe to all men alike as we will be done ourselves; making no difference of what generation, descent or colour they are. And those who steal or robb men, and those who buy or purchase them, are they not alike? […] But to bring men hither, or to rob and sell them against their will, we stand against.[98]

93 Ibid., 530–531.

94 Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 61, 69.

95 The Quarterly Meeting in Barbados reported that by 1706 only a few Friends remained at all; see: Gerbner, *Christian Slavery,* 69. See also Larry Gragg, *The Quaker Community on Barbados: Challenging the Culture of the Planter Class* (University of Missouri Press, 2009).

96 Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 69.

97 Carey, 'The Pennsylvanian Origins of British Abolitionism,' 7.

98 Society Of Friends, Germantown, Pa., *Germantown Friends' protest against slavery*, Library of Congress.

As evidenced by this passage, however, the Friends in Germantown took a more direct stance against enslavement and trafficking than Fox in 'Gospel family-order', protesting explicitly against the "rob[bing] and sell[ing]' of people 'against their will." This petition from Germantown Friends is the first known public protest from colonial Europeans against transatlantic chattel enslavement of African people and people of African descent.

Indeed, the Germantown petition is unusual for its explicit objections to "the traffick of men-body", nearly a century before abolition movements among Europeans and people of European descent gained any momentum. Nevertheless, the Germantown Petition did not have much, if any, of an immediate effect on transatlantic Quaker discourse surrounding enslavement. The Petition was initially presented to the Dublin Monthly Meeting in Pennsylvania whereafter it was passed on to the Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting, which decided it was "a thing of too great weight for them to determine" and forwarded it finally to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.[99] However, Friends in Philadelphia rejected the Petition, citing that it "was adjudged not to be so proper for this Meeting to Give a Positive judgment in the case, it having so General a Relation to many Other P[a]rts."[100] The Petition was thereafter laid aside and largely forgotten, not to be rediscovered until 1844.[101] The first European voices among Quakers to protest enslavement were effectively dismissed to the margins of the community.[102]

1.6 Quaker Meetings of Enslaved People

Instead, the primary evidence suggests that the control and paternalism toward enslaved people as articulated within 'Gospel family-order' continued within Quaker Meetings. Recall the Meetings of enslaved people established by Quakers in Barbados. These Meetings were not exclusive to a Caribbean context and were in fact held by Quaker communities throughout the Atlantic into the nineteenth century.[103] At a Monthly Meeting in Philadelphia in 1697,

99 Monthly Meeting of Friends of Philadelphia, 'Minutes, 1682–1714,' *Philadelphia Congregations Early Records* [henceforth *PCER*] minutes for 4 4mo 1688. Note that although designated as Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, the Yearly Meeting at which this petition as presented was held in Burlington (now New Jersey);

100 Quoted in Brycchan Carey, *From Peace to Freedom: Quaker Rhetoric and the Birth of American Antislavery, 1657–1761* (Yale University Press, 2012), 76.

101 Carey, 'The Pennsylvanian Origins of British Abolitionism,' 7.

102 For a more thorough examination, see: Donna McDaniel and Vanessa Julye, *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship: Quakers, African–Americans, and the Myth of Racial Justice* (Quaker Press of FGC, 2009), 14–22.

103 See for example: Henry J. Cadbury, 'Negro Membership in the Society of Friends,' *The Journal of Negro History*, XXI (April, 1936), 152–154, 156.

for example, a minute from the Yearly Meeting was read out "concerning family meetings And negroes" which recommended "putting the same in practice" at all Monthly and Quarterly Meetings.[104] Subsequent entries in the Philadelphia minutes reveal an increasing impetus of control and surveillance behind these Meetings. In 1698, Philadelphian Friends further reminded their members to "endeavour to bring their Negroes to publick meetings of worship on first days", but emphasised that "those that do not come to meetings may be restrained or prevent from meeting together in companies."[105] In other words, Philadelphian Quakers were advised to 'bring' the people enslaved in their households to Meetings for Worship, but also to take measures to restrict the people they enslaved who did not attend from gathering or meeting with other enslaved people in the absence of their enslavers. This directive is consistent with those expressed by other European enslavers, who became increasingly concerned across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with suppressing opportunities for rebellion among the people they enslaved. Quakers were similarly concerned with control; at the Monthly Meeting prior to this edict, Philadelphian Friends wrote to their Barbadian counterparts, imploring them to "forbear sending any negroes to this place because they are too numerous here."[106] Further minutes likewise articulate directions that people enslaved by Quakers should not only be in attendance at "weekly meetings […] at least" but that "all masters & mistresses […] neglect not coming with their negroes."[107] For some people enslaved in the households of Quakers, then, attendance at Meeting was obligatory, where people held in bondage met only under the surveillance of their enslavers. It has therefore been argued in the scholarship that Quakers' Meetings of people held in bondage became, where erected, vehicles of control and "discipline more than real outreach to the enslaved."[108]

Again, this report encounters archival silences: the only written evidence these 'family Meetings' or Meetings of enslaved people occurred at all may be found in the writings of European Quaker ministers and the directives ordering their establishment in Quarterly and Yearly Meeting minutes. As far as is known, no minutes exist from these Meetings established explicitly 'for' people held in bondage. It is not known what occurred within these Meetings, nor what the people enslaved in Quaker households thought, felt, or experienced in them.

104 'Minutes, 1682–1714,' *PCER*, minutes for 26 1mo 1697. See also: Cadbury, 'Negro Membership in the Society of Friends,' 152.

105 Monthly Meeting of Friends of Philadelphia, 'Minutes, 1682–1714,' *PCER*, minutes for 28 8mo 1698.

106 'Minutes, 1682–1714,' *PCER*, minutes for 30 7mo 1698.

107 'Minutes, 1682–1714,' *PCER*, minutes for 30 6mo 1700.

108 Block, 'Cultivating Inner and Outer Plantations: Property, Industry, and Slavery in Early Quaker Migration to the New World,' 520–521, 525.

1.7 London Meeting and Gospel Family-order

Many of the narratives of control and paternalism in 'Gospel family-order' are also present in the epistles, advices and letters written by Friends and circulated throughout the British Atlantic, suggesting Quakers remained overwhelmingly concerned with the maintenance of 'order'. And yet, London Yearly Meeting remained largely silent on the subject until the early eighteenth century. Between 1683 and 1703, the epistles sent by London Yearly Meeting to the various Meetings in the colonies do not make overt references to enslavement.[109] Rather, the overwhelming advice given to Friends outside of Britain concerned matters like ensuring the good behaviour of youth, preventing further persecution of Friends from those of "the world" for things like refusal of oaths or tithes and concern with stemming the influence of sectarians among Friends like the minister, George Keith. Where references are made to enslavement among Quakers, they are tangential until the early eighteenth century. Initially, these references appear primarily in 'advices' issued to colonial meetings about maintaining good Quaker discipline while continuing to hold people in bondage. In 1709, for example, London Yearly Meeting wrote an epistle to Friends in Antigua, who purportedly refused to participate in defensive labour of the colony, which included drilling with the militia, trench digging and the bearing of arms. In response, British Friends chastised their Antiguan counterparts, citing Quakers in Barbados as an example:

> As for friends appearing at Training Places without arms or weopans[sic] of warr, friends in Barbados have acknowledged it a favour and moderation soe to be admitted on Pattroles to prevent Negroes Insurrections and Tumultious meetings and at other Times of alarmes, but tho they have soe appear'd and offered to serve in that Capacity they have been denyed and often suffered ye great spoyle of their Goods[110]

In this excerpt, British Quakers reflect that Friends in Barbados esteemed it "a favour and moderation" to be included in colonial military exercises like the "Pattroles to prevent Negroes Insurrections." That Quakers could partake in such patrols on Barbados was evidently esteemed as a sign of acceptance within the wider colonial community; even if Friends were sometimes denied or even punished by "ye great spoyle of their Goods" for their refusal to bear arms, London Yearly Meeting evidently praised Friends on Barbados for offering themselves to 'serve' in these capacities. The existence of

109 This finding is based on a review of the following volume at the Library of the Society of Friends, London: YM.EPPS.1, London YM Epistles Sent 1683–1703.

110 YM.EPPS.2. London YM Epistles Sent 1704–1738. 1709 epistle to Antigua, LSF.

and engagement with transatlantic chattel enslavement is not of concern in this passage; of primary significance is the acceptance of Quakers into colonial society and the maintenance of relations with colonial leadership. Other correspondence with London Yearly Meeting from elsewhere in the colonial British Atlantic further illustrates the tangential nature of Quaker discourse surrounding enslavement at this time. In 1714, Quakers in Virginia similarly enquired of British Friends whether or not it was acceptable for Friends "yt have servants and slaves or negroes yt goe to hear ye Priest" to pay tithes to those priests on their behalf "and at the sametime keep ye Testimony of Truth clear."[111] In other words, Quakers in Virginia desired to know whether they could pay tithes on behalf of those individuals in their households, including the individuals they enslaved and who attended non-Quaker worship elsewhere and still remain in good standing with their Quaker Meeting. London Yearly Meeting responded in the negative:

> For those friends wch have this Testimony of Truth in them selves i.e. That no Tyths or any thing in Leiw of Tythes ought to be Required or paid by them unto any such Preachers yt Preach for Hire in this gospel day or by any faith full followers of ye Lord Jesus Christ, who hath said to his freely ye have Received freely give, Those friends cannot Pay such Preachers yt keep not Christs command, and keep their Hands clean, and be true to their Testimony and […] command[112]

This passage suggests that the concern among Friends was not that Virginian Quakers held people in bondage, but rather that Friends in Virginia did all they could to 'keep their Hands clean' of paying tithes.

It is in the 1710s that London Yearly Meeting receives inquiries from Meetings abroad desiring to "know the mind" of leadings Friends "about Importing Negroe Slaves and detaining them and their Posterity, without any Limitation of time &c […]"[113] This particular appeal, from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1712, was initially deferred by London Yearly Meeting "untill such time as it is more generally Represented" or until more Meetings also raised similar concerns.[114] Twenty-four years after tabling the Germantown Petition, Philadelphia Friends in 1712 appealed to Friends in London for direction regarding the continued practice of enslavement within their communities; the exact causes of this reverse in course is not entirely clear. Like their Philadelphian counterparts, London Yearly Meeting had hitherto declined to take a firm stance against enslavement in Quaker communities other than

111 YM.EPPS.2, London YM Epistles Sent 1704–1738, 1714 epistle to Virginia, LSF.

112 YM.EPPS.2, London YM Epistles Sent 1704–1738, 1714 epistle to Virginia, LSF.

113 YM.EPPS.2, London YM Epistles Sent 1704–1738, 1712 epistle to Pennsylvania, LSF.

114 YM.EPPS.2, London YM Epistles Sent 1704–1738, 1712 epistle to Pennsylvania, LSF.

to advise that trafficking of people from Africa was "not a commendable nor allowed Practice", expressing hope that "friends have been carefull to avoid ye same Remembring [*sic*] ye Command of our Blessed Lord whatsoever ye would that men should do to you do ye Even so to them."[115] This remark, sent in 1713, that transatlantic chattel enslavement was not "commendable" is the first known censure of slavery from a Yearly Meeting and signals a shift in global Quaker rhetoric against the practice. London Friends preface this censure by noting Pennsylvanian Friends' desire to also consult with other colonial Meetings, responding that they would "say ye Less, untill such time as it is more generally Represented."[116] Nevertheless, the epistle from London Yearly Meeting proceeds to qualify its previous censure of enslavement with an appeal to the "benevolence" of 'Gospel family-order':

> Besides ye Multiplying of Negroe slaves among you may be of dangerous Consequence considering ye Peaceable Principles we profess and you are not unsensible of some Instances that may be given of their Barbarity when opportunity has seemed to present unto them, and we desire you to consider whether your Children and white servants may not be Injured by keeping such slaves, learning them a Dominering spirit, and useing them as their vassals, extending cruelty to them at their Pleasure wch to be sure ought to be avoided for they are humane kind and as ye Lord hath been and is mercifull to us he expects we should extend compassion to our fellow creatuers[117]

As in the above examples, the primary focus of this excerpt is on the consequences of enslavement for the wider Quaker community; the concerns expressed around a growing population of enslaved people in the province centres not around the perpetuation of human oppression, but rather on a perceived increased risk of violence and a supposed propensity for 'barbarism' among the people held in bondage. Although the passage includes an exhortation to compassion, the overarching concern remains around the effect these perceived threats were imagined to potentially have on Quaker children and servants. The advice here is perhaps intentionally ambiguous, condemning cruelty while simultaneously maintaining a sentiment of racialised paternalism and hierarchy. Seeking further clarity, Friends in Philadelphia would again write to London Yearly Meeting in 1715, requesting further advice regarding the continued practice of enslavement within their communities, to which London Friends responded that "to be any ways Concerned in bringing [African people and people of African descent] from their native country and their selling them for slaves, is a Trade not

115 YM.EPPS.2, London YM Epistles Sent 1704–1738, 1713 epistle to Pennsylvania, LSF.

116 YM.EPPS.2, London YM Epistles Sent 1704–1738, 1713 epistle to Pennsylvania, LSF

117 YM.EPPS.2, London YM Epistles Sent 1704–1738, 1713 epistle to Pennsylvania, LSF.

fit for one Professing Truth to be concerned."[118] London Friends moreover expressed desire that "Friends [would] be Cautious of being concerned therein", once again articulating a disapproval of enslavement while stopping short of prohibiting Quaker involvement in chattel enslavement entirely.[119]

1.8 Conclusion

The dialogue between Quakers in London and Yearly Meetings elsewhere in British colonies signal the extent to which British Friends were aware of and engaged in shaping practices of enslavement within Quaker communities.[120] The gradual increase in requests for direction regarding the subject of enslavement from colonial Yearly Meetings indicates a growing discourse in the early eighteenth century surrounding Quaker entanglements with chattel enslavement. The inclusion in the 1713 epistle that London Friends would say "ye Less, until such time as it is more generally Represented," suggests a reluctance on behalf of British Quakers to take a definitive stance on enslavement until a faith-wide consensus had been reached. Perhaps it is for this reason that a more explicit statement from London Yearly Meeting censuring the "importation of negroes from their native country and relations by Friends" came fourteen years later, in 1727.[121] Future researchers may wish to interrogate the correspondence between LYM and colonial Yearly Meetings further for more evidence of this dialogue's development.

118 YM.EPPS.2, London YM Epistles Sent 1704–1738, 1715 epistle to Pennsylvania, LSF.

119 YM.EPPS.2, London YM Epistles Sent 1704–1738, 1715 epistle to Pennsylvania, LSF.

120 McDaniel and Julye, *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship*, 17.

121 Morgan, *The 18th Century Enslaving Industry: Lancaster Quakers Involvement*, 11.

[Strand II: 1728–1787] Quakers and Abolition

The second strand of this research, the 'theology of abolition' in Quaker history, may loosely be ascribed to the period between 1728 and 1787, during which time British Friends deliberated the place of chattel enslavement within Quaker communities. As shown in strand one, Friends largely debated the morality of enslavement between the 1650s and 1727, making different arguments which fabricated a sense of morality to 'justify' the subjugation of African and Indigenous American people among Quakers. It was in the first quarter of the eighteenth century that London Yearly Meeting determined enslavement was "not commendable nor allowed" among Quakers. As far as is known, this is the most London Friends would say on the matter until the 1750s. No directives were given regarding manumissions, nor were provisions made for disciplining Quakers who continued to traffic and enslave. The global Quaker community became gradually divided over the matter.[122] The 1727 epistle nevertheless signified for the first time a collective shift in British Quaker disposition towards enslavement; that it was not an institution or practice to be welcomed into Friends' communities. Although sentiment against slavery had existed among Quakers before, it was only after 1727 that British Quakerism adopted an official antislavery stance. As will be shown below, however, the Religious Society of Friends was slow to formally implement a faith-wide antislavery ethos and Quaker communities across the colonial British Atlantic remained largely entangled in transatlantic chattel enslavement throughout the eighteenth and into the nineteenth centuries.

2.1 Antislavery Origins on the Margins of Quakerism

It must be stressed that Quakers were not the first to express antislavery sentiment; resistance to enslavement has always come first from the people themselves held in bondage. Jim Fussell reminds readers in a recent article that Friends' adoption of the antislavery cause occurred largely in response to the words and acts of resistance from the people Quakers held in bondage.[123]

122 Watkins, *Hypocrisy, Racism, and Self–Interest on the Path to Reparations*, 20.

123 Jim Fussell, 'Black Resistance to Quaker Enslavement,' *Friends Journal*, 1 August 2025.

One such individual includes a young child named James, who at the age of fourteen challenged his enslaver's son, Warner, asking why James and his future children must be enslaved while Warner and his progeny would be free.[124] Many other individuals, including men like Dolphin, Jack and Peter, risked their lives to emancipate themselves from the households of their Quaker enslavers by fleeing, often in the dead of night.[125] Women such as Grace and Jane resisted their enslavement by setting fire to their enslaver's tobacco crop, an act for which they were subsequently hanged.[126] As Fussell poignantly remarks:

> Enslaved Black people did not wait for white consciences to awaken. They confronted, escaped, sabotaged and some paid with their lives for acts of defiance that made it harder and costlier for Quakers to continue enslaving others.[127]

These and other innumerable, and often unrecorded, acts of resistance from people enslaved by Quakers forced Friends to reckon with their practices and principles, to confront the immorality of slavery and its contradictions with Quaker beliefs.[128] Acts of resistance from people enslaved by Quakers compelled Friends to gradually question the morality of their actions at both personal and institutional levels, a process that occurred in stages and over decades.[129] Without resistance from the Black and Indigenous American people enslaved by Quakers, it is unclear when a corporate adoption of antislavery sentiment by Friends' Yearly Meetings would have occurred.

Nevertheless, much historical scholarship on the Religious Society of Friends has centred around the works of some of its membership in nascent abolitionist movements of the early eighteenth century, particularly individuals like Benjamin Lay, Anthony Benezet and John Woolman. Lay, Benezet and Woolman, among other Friends, are especially remembered for their radical principles and often unconventional methods of antislavery action. Benezet wrote antislavery pamphlets that were circulated widely in the press and offered tuition to students from communities without access to traditional schools, including women and people of colour.[130] Woolman travelled extensively on foot to deliver his antislavery ministry and refused

124 Ibid.

125 Ibid.

126 Ibid.

127 Ibid.

128 Ibid.

129 Ibid.

130 Carla Gerona, 'Benezet, Anthony [formerly Antoine] (1713–1784), educational reformer and abolitionist,' Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 23 Sep. 2004.

to consume goods produced by enslaved labour, famously wearing all-white clothing in protest of dyes grown on plantations.[131] Lay, perhaps the most controversial figure of the early Quaker antislavery voices, once entered a Meeting house in Burlington, New Jersey, where he produced a Bible containing a small bladder of red dye. After delivering his ministry protesting the evils of slavery, Lay skewered the Bible with a sword before the assembled Friends, puncturing the bladder to spurt like blood and crying out his message that "holding a slave was no better than stabbing a man to death."[132] Lay was disowned from Quakerism on a few different occasions for his actions which Friends perceived to be disruptive. The earliest antislavery Friends varied considerably in their methods, but their voices certainly brought attention to their cause, both within the Society of Friends and without.

Despite the efforts of some early Friends, the adoption of antislavery sentiment was not immediate nor uniform among Quakers. As Harold D. Weaver Jr, reminds us: "What has traditionally been a straightforward narrative of Friends' unilateral support of abolition is, in fact, much more nuanced and complicated."[133] Brycchan Carey has reflected that while some Friends immediately questioned the morality of slavery, "their voices were not the loudest, nor were their concerns taken very seriously by those in power."[134] Mary Watkins has also remarked on the treatment of the earliest abolitionists among Friends, noting that many of the antislavery Quakers lauded by Friends today were initially "pushed out of the Quaker community."[135] Citing the example of Benjamin Lay (1682–1759) in particular, Watkins argued that the earliest antislavery protests among Friends came from "those on the peripheries of power" and that some Friends "who were most loyal and adherent to the Quaker testimonies of equality and peace were the ones shoved outside the community" for their testimonies against enslavement.[136] Although commonly lauded as being among the first European Protestants to adopt an official antislavery stance, Quaker protests against enslavement began on the margins of the Society and were only gradually accepted by Friends across time and space.

131 David Sox, 'Woolman, John (1720–1772), Quaker minister and anti-slavery campaigner,' Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 23 Sep. 2004.

132 J. R. Oldfield, 'Lay, Benjamin (1681–1759), opponent of slavery,' Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 23 Sep. 2004.

133 Harold D. Weaver Jr., *Race, Systemic Violence, and Retrospective Justice: An African American Quaker Scholar–Activist Challenges Conventional Narratives* (Pendle Hill Pamphlet 465, 2020), 13.

134 Carey, 'The Pennsylvanian Origins of British Abolitionism,' 6.

135 Watkins, *Hypocrisy, Racism, and Self–Interest on the Path to Reparations,* 16–17.

136 Watkins, *Hypocrisy, Racism, and Self–Interest on the Path to Reparations*, 16–17.

2.2 Development of Transatlantic Antislavery Movement

Watkins and many other authors writing on the subject of Quakers and slavery have focused predominantly on the North American context, of the abolitionists and enslavers alike among Friends who attended Meetings in colonial settings. Indeed, it is impossible to write about British antislavery without referencing its parallel developments in North America and the Caribbean.[137] Just as the history of enslavement among British Quakers cannot be extricated from history of the Americas and Caribbean, so too is the history of antislavery in Britain intimately intertwined with its development in British colonies. In particular, scholars have argued that the original impetus among Friends for antislavery thought originated in the colony of Pennsylvania.[138] As shown at length in the first strand of this report, the earliest known expression of antislavery sentiment among Quakers "in any meaningful or corporate sense" came in 1688 from Germantown Friends in colonial Pennsylvania.[139] This first 'corporate' expression, however, had little immediate impact and any implementation of tangible actions against enslavement proceeded only gradually over the next 70 years. Again in Strand I, it was noted that Philadelphia Yearly Meeting issued advice in 1696. It explicitly advised that the traffic of enslaved people into the colony be stemmed, although this directive was largely motivated not out of concern for the wellbeing of people held in bondage but fear of potential revolt and a desire for self-preservation of European society. In 1711, Philadelphian Friends, this time in the Pennsylvanian Assembly, endeavoured to limit the number of enslaved people in the colony by imposing a tax on enslavers for each enslaved person trafficked. This tax was ultimately unpopular among European colonists and later repealed.[140] In 1712, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting requested guidance from London Yearly Meeting "touching the importing and having negro slaves and detaining them and their posterity as such."[141] As shown in the previous strand, London Yearly Meeting responded that the matter would be better discerned among the Quaker Meetings of different British colonies, condemning enslavement for the first known time but effectively deferring official action until a consensus could be reached among Friends. In 1715, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting resorted to repeating the 1696 advice against the trafficking of enslaved people and, as far as is known, largely laid the subject aside for several

137 Jennings, 'Mid–Eighteenth Century British Quakerism and the Response to the Problem of Slavery,' 24, 37–38.

138 Carey, 'The Pennsylvanian Origins of British Abolitionism,' 7.

139 Ibid., 7.

140 Ibid., 8.

141 Quotation cited in McDaniel and Julye, *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship: Quakers, African–Americans, and the Myth of Racial Justice*, 18.

years thereafter.[142] In 1730, potentially in response to the 1727 epistle from London Yearly Meeting, Pennsylvanian Quakers as a corporate entity revisited the concern and established a committee intended to investigate those Friends still complicit in enslaving and trafficking. Those members of the Meeting found guilty were to be "admonish'd and caution'd" but little provision was made for further censure. Indeed, it was not until 1758 that the Yearly Meeting in Philadelphia explicitly forbade Friends from both "slave trading and slave holding" and required its membership to manumit all people they held in bondage.[143] Over a period of several decades, Quakers in colonial Pennsylvania became "the first social or religious grouping in the European world to assert a commitment to antislavery as part of its corporate identity."[144] Between 1758 and 1784, various other Yearly Meetings across North America would follow suit and make Quaker complicity in enslavement a disownable offence.[145]

2.3 Antislavery in Britain

By 1758, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting had become the first Quaker Meeting to forbid Friends from trafficking and holding people in bondage, with other North American Meetings gradually following suit. Along similar veins used to propagate 'Gospel family-order', Friends further facilitated the spread of antislavery sentiment to other Quaker Meetings through Friends' well-established networks of itinerant ministers.[146] Throughout the 1760s and 1770s, ministers and leaders like Anthony Benezet petitioned Quaker Meetings around the Atlantic and Caribbean to similarly forbid enslavement within their communities.[147] It is likely in part through these efforts that London Yearly Meeting, by the mid-eighteenth century, had moved closer to adopting an antislavery stance. In 1757, for the first time, London Yearly Meeting admonished Quakers who profited from enslavement.[148] A directive was simultaneously given to the Meeting for Sufferings to uncover all "past Yearly Meeting Minutes and Advices relating to the slave trade to every local Quaker meeting in Britain and the Colonies" to inform new directives as deemed necessary.[149] Judith Jennings's 1977 study found that no

142 Carey, 'The Pennsylvanian Origins of British Abolitionism,' 8.

143 Ibid., 8.

144 Ibid.

145 Fussell, 'Black Resistance to Quaker Enslavement.'

146 Carey, 'The Pennsylvanian Origins of British Abolitionism,' 9.

147 Ibid; McDaniel and Julye, *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship*, 35–36.

148 Morgan, *The 18th Century Enslaving Industry: Lancaster Quakers Involvement*, 12.

149 This minute is quoted in Judith Jennings' article; see: Jennings, 'Mid–Eighteenth Century British Quakerism and the Response to the Problem of Slavery,' 23.

additional advices aside from the 1727 epistle had been issued from London Friends.[150] In 1758, Friends in London determined that Quakers should "do no less than […] impress it upon Friends everywhere, that they endeavour to keep their hands clear" of trafficking enslaved people.[151] This was not a formal condemnation of enslavement, but rather further advice that Quaker involvement in enslavement was undesirable. However, this narrative changed dramatically only three years later. In 1761, London Yearly Meeting made provisions for local Meetings to disown Quakers who continued to traffic and enslave.[152] This evidence would suggest that the antislavery dialogue adopted by London Yearly Meeting was developed in tandem with, or perhaps in response to, Quaker Meetings in North American and Caribbean colonies.

2.4 Theories of Change

It is nevertheless unclear why Friends chose the 1750s to adopt a more principled stance against enslavement.[153] Some researchers have argued that the advent of the Seven Years' War (1756–1763) in the Quaker colony of Pennsylvania forced Friends globally to reconsider their standing in the world, resigning from positions of political prominence and reassessing the sources of many Quakers' vast wealth and embracing a more staunchly humanitarian impetus.[154] This line of inquiry posits that Quakers of the mid-eighteenth century underwent a profound crisis of identity, a crisis in which Friends sought to reassert themselves as "in the world but not of it." By the mid-eighteenth century, Friends in North America and in Britain had achieved a degree of toleration within their wider communities; in most places where Quakers lived, Friends were allowed to worship openly, conduct business freely and even hold public offices in certain capacities. At the same time, Friends began reporting a general decline in attendance at Meetings, while accounts of lavish dress, excessive materialism and patronage of alehouses and taverns.[155] Such reports prompted Meeting leadership to fear that Friends were losing conviction in an age of "more ease and tranquillity."[156] Jennings suggested that this period of perceived degeneracy was "especially

150 Jennings, 'Mid–Eighteenth Century British Quakerism and the Response to the Problem of Slavery,' 23.

151 Ibid., 23.

152 Ibid., 25.

153 Ibid.

154 Ibid., 39–40.

155 Ibid., 32–34.

156 London Yearly Meeting quoted in Jennings, 'Mid–Eighteenth Century British Quakerism and the Response to the Problem of Slavery,' 32–34.

distressing" for Quakers "because it contradicted the long-standing Quaker self-image as a chosen and therefore a peculiar, people."[157] Jennings writes that, in an endeavour reverse these worrying trends, Quakers turned their attentions to humanitarian efforts to re-establish themselves as moral exemplars, set-apart from others:

> By their good works Friends would become shining examples to the world and would convince others of the values of Quakerism, and the Society would become as the Biblical City set on a Hill, a beacon light of truth in an evil world.[158]

It has therefore been theorised that this impetus to serve as a "beacon light of truth in an evil world", to exist as exemplars of Christian behaviour, motivated Friends to adopt a more explicitly antislavery position from the mid-eighteenth century. Others have similarly written of a Quaker emphasis on maintaining the 'purity' of the faith, that Friends gradually came to see enslavement as a kind of stain on the moral fabric of Quakerism, which "compromised the self-proclaimed purity of Friends."[159] Some scholars have argued that Friends abolished enslavement to maintain a perceived sense of moral exceptionalism "to preserve the purity of the Religious Society of Friends, not to restore freedom for Africans and African Americans."[160] Still others maintain that Quakers gradually adopted antislavery sentiment because of changes in the colonial labour market, that the "appeals of antislavery ideologues went largely unheeded" until other forms of bound labour like indentured servitude of European labourers "became available in sufficient number" in the 1760s.[161] This vein of research would suggest that Quakers finally adopted an antislavery stance not purely from a humanitarian impetus, but because it became economically viable to do so.[162] Indeed, secondary evidence indicates that even after Quaker Yearly Meetings began to denounce slavery, Friends did not move en masse to manumit the people they held in bondage; Gary Nash's study of Philadelphian enslavers shows, for instance, only eighteen manumissions occurred between 1766 and 1775, fourteen of which occurred in households 'not in Membership with

157 Jennings, 'Mid–Eighteenth Century British Quakerism and the Response to the Problem of Slavery,' 33.

158 Ibid., 34.

159 Frost, 'From Dissidence to Sense of the Meeting,' 29.

160 McDaniel and Julye, *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship*, 14, 24.

161 Nash, 'Slaves and Slaveowners in Colonial Philadelphia,' 254, 256.

162 See also: Jean R. Soderlund, *Quakers & Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (Princeton University Press, 1985). Jennings argues that Quakers rejected egalitarianism for humanitarianism, the latter of which allowed for the maintenance of implicit hierarchies; Jennings, 'Mid–Eighteenth Century British Quakerism and the Response to the Problem of Slavery,' 30–31.

Friends'.[163] What is clear is that the adoption of an antislavery position and action supporting this position, occurred gradually and discontinuously across a broader transatlantic Quaker community.

2.5 Antislavery, not Abolitionism

Finally, although this strand is labelled as the history of Quakers and 'abolitionism', this section has intentionally relied on usage of the word 'antislavery' throughout. This analysis relies on an important distinction between the two terms: antislavery is opposition to slavery, but this might mean eradication of slavery only gradually or within limits. Abolitionism, in contrast, means the total, immediate abolishment of slavery and the recognition of racial equality.[164] Indeed, the research informing this report suggests that for Friends the eighteenth century was not a period of 'abolitionism' but rather a time of antislavery activity with subtle movement towards abolitionist sentiment by the turn of the nineteenth century.[165] As we have seen, Quakers across the British Atlantic did not uniformly nor immediately accept the call to end Quaker involvement in enslavement; the process of adopting a faith-wide stance on antislavery was not immediate nor linear. Meetings expressed varying degrees of acceptance, reluctance, or even outright denial toward the subject.[166] For these reasons, this period of Quaker history is better characterised as the development of antislavery sentiment rather than abolitionism among British Friends; it is only at the end of this period that institutional sentiments approaching abolitionism begin to appear. While the global Quaker position changed gradually over the eighteenth century to ultimately condemn enslavement, the Society of Friends continued to grapple with racism and prejudice which precluded a full realisation of a definitive abolitionist stance in this period.

2.6 Primary Evidence Case Study [MS Box E1.8]

This distinction among Friends between antislavery and abolitionist sentiment is best elucidated through analysis of a report currently held in

163 Nash, 'Slaves and Slaveowners in Colonial Philadelphia,' 236, 238.

164 For a fuller discussion of debate surrounding the usage of these two terms, see: David Brion Davis, 'Antislavery or Abolition?' review of *Abolitionism: A New Perspective* by Gerald Sorin, *Reviews in American History* 1, no. 1 (1973): pp. 95–99.

165 Caitlin McGeever, 'Friends of Slavery: Barbadian Quakers and the Spiritual Plantation Family, 1655–1719' (PhD dissertation, George Mason University, 2024), 14.

166 Carey, 'The Pennsylvanian Origins of British Abolitionism,' 8. Some additional examples of this may be found: Jennings, 'Mid–Eighteenth Century British Quakerism and the Response to the Problem of Slavery,' 24.

the archives at Friends House Library. This report, titled "Some Testimonials of the moral conduct and Industry of Sundry Black persons who have been in slavery', is the product of British Quakers' political engagement with antislavery activism in the late eighteenth century. In 1783, a contingent of Friends presented a petition before Parliament in Britain publicly calling for the abolishment of transatlantic chattel enslavement. Shortly thereafter in 1784, London Yearly Meeting ordered an enquiry into the status of the Society's membership's continued complicity in enslavement. It is likely in relation to this enquiry that the London Meeting for Sufferings wrote an epistle in 1785 directed to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting requesting "all such well authenticated Accounts of the good effects of Manumission (either to the Individuals who have adopted the Practice or to the communities where they reside)."[167] London Yearly Meeting intended to present the accounts from Philadelphian Friends to the British Parliament to argue for the eradication of the 'slave trade'. Two years later in 1787, London Friends received a twenty-eight-page report attached to the Philadelphia yearly epistle, the above named 'Some Testimonials…', containing accounts purportedly in the voices of both Quakers who had enslaved and some of the individuals who had been enslaved by Quakers. As this document was commissioned by Friends to "assist in [their] approaches to Parliament", it is possible the narratives contained within were selectively chosen to promote a view of emancipation that Friends believed would be agreeable to their intended audience – i.e., the British ruling elite. Further contextualising evidence, e.g. internal correspondence or Meeting minutes, is needed to confirm the process behind the document's ultimate production. Moreover, it is critical to note that the accounts sent by Philadelphian Friends, especially those purportedly from manumitted individuals, were almost certainly mediated by the transcriber; the handwriting across narratives is consistent enough to suggest an individual or select group of scribes took down accounts and that they were not written by the individuals themselves. As such, their content should be read with a degree of caution, as another form of archival silencing.

With these considerations and historiographical limitations in mind, this document is nevertheless significant to this report for the persistent sense of racial 'othering' it reveals. This means that a clear distinction was drawn in the text between European people/people of European descent and African people/people of African descent. As Vanessa Julye has observed, "Some Quakers believed in freedom for the enslaved. However, for the most part, Friends believed that Africans and people of African descent were not equal

167 MS Box E1.8, 'Some testimonials of the moral conduct and industry of sundry Black Persons who have been in slavery and restored to their just right of freedom […]' (1787), LSF. This information is included in a contextualising letter detailing the contents of the collection, dated August 1958.

to people of European descent."[168] In certain Yearly Meetings, "Africans and people of African descent were not allowed to become members of the Religious Society of Friends until 1784."[169] The narratives within this document reflect the lack of a consistent position among late-eighteenth-century Quakers regarding antislavery sentiment; the myriad motivations and concerns eighteenth-century Friends held about the manumission of enslaved people. Among them are expressions from former enslavers among the Quakers suggesting they had manumitted the people they held in bondage out of a sense of morality. Levin Bell of Accomack County, Virginia, for example, reported that he made provisions for the manumission of the people he held in bondage out of a sense that freedom was the "natural right of all mankind":

> From a conviction that freedom is the natural right of all mankind, without distinction of nation or colour, and being prossess'd[*sic*] of sixteen Black people of different ages and sex, it became my concern to attend to the Golden Rule, to do unto others as I would […] they should do unto me unto me. I could no longer reconcile to myself, holding them in a state of Slavery […][170]

Bell's report suggests he felt an internal tension concerning the morality of holding people in bondage, reflecting especially on the Golden Rule of treating others as he would wish to be treated. But Bell's account also stresses additional motivations, particularly emphasising the benefits of manumission to himself as a former enslaver:

> I am a considerable gainer, & freed from the […] incumbrance of Masters of Slaves, & they seem happy and cheerful, & do more than twice the labour, than when they were in a state of Bondage, & make to themselves a comfortable livelihood, […] PS I am persuaded a blessing has attended the concern, & my Ground yields greater increase.[171]

For Bell, a central benefit of manumission was a perceived increase in production and profit yield on his estate. He felt compelled to include that not only was emancipation just, but that he believed it was better for business; that free labour not only enhanced productivity on his estate, but that he believed God had in fact blessed his estate for the moral act of manumission. The Golden Rule justification for manumission could also

168 Vanessa Julye, *Radical Transformation: Long Overdue for the Religious Society of Friends, The 2021 Stephen G. Cary Memorial Lecture* (Pendle Hill Pamphlet 476, 2022), 12.

169 Julye, *Radical Transformation*, 12–13.

170 MS Box E1.8, LSF.

171 MS Box E1.8, LSF.

be underpinned by materialistic incentives. This sentiment is recurrent across the document. Howell Powell was another enslaver among the Quakers who became 'convinced of the Iniquity of the practice of keeping slaves' and subsequently 'Set them all free'. However, Powell also stressed that after having manumitted the people he held in bondage, he had "hired all my labourers to work the same farm, since which [he] had much more satisfaction in [his] Business & thrive[d] much faster in the world, than whilst [he] possessed […] poor dispirited Slaves."[172] Soloman Neall of Talbot County, Maryland, similarly became "in process of time […] convinc'd of the Iniquity of the Practice of Keeping men in a state of Slavery" and manumitted a man named James Hunter, after which Neall reported having had "more satisfaction in [his] Business' and that he 'prosper[ed] as well if not better in [his] affairs & business than before."[173] Aside from claims to morality, what these passages also promote are the benefits of manumission to the enslaver; that enslavers would be rewarded with prosperity for manumitting the people they held in bondage. Moreover, these passages evidence that many people remained economically tied to their former enslavers after emancipation, that manumission did not disrupt the power dynamics of enslavement to the degree it is implied here. The narratives of emancipated people who continued to labour on the farms and businesses of their enslavers are largely absent, and where they are included, they are not autonomously given but again mediated through a scribe.

The persistence of an unequal power dynamic is visible in other passages as well. Reference is made throughout this document to the Golden Rule, i.e., that all people should treat others as they themselves would wish to be treated. But the descriptions Quaker enslavers gave of the individuals manumitted from bondage would suggest that not all Quakers viewed emancipated people as their equals; there is a pervasive sense in this narrative that people freed from bondage could be emancipated because they possessed certain attributes that rendered them worthy of freedom, or that they displayed potential to obtain characteristics that would render them worthy of emancipation. There is an overarching concern throughout the document that people freed from slavery met certain cultural codes of European Friends and Friends of European descent. For example, significant attention is paid throughout to behaviour or attributes consistent with traditional Christian virtues.[174] A woman named Henny was described by

172 MS Box E1.8, LSF.

173 MS Box E1.8, LSF.

174 Future researchers may wish to examine this point in conversation with Max Weber's famous work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*; see: Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons, intro. Anthony Giddens (Routledge, 2005).

her former enslaver as a woman "much esteem'd for her fidelity, industry and Economy."[175] A man named Simon, "a native of Africa", is recorded in the document as having been "esteem'd for his honesty, & peaceable disposition."[176] George Palmer, "a Negroe Man brought from Africa when a Lad", is characterised as a man who bore hardship with "patience & integrity, being a steady sensible man of honest principles, an excellent labourer, & not given to excess."[177]

But what these emphases suggest is that contemporary Quakers did not necessarily view these characteristics as self-evident in emancipated people; that the elevation of these attributes as something worthy of note implies some Friends may have believed the presence of these values among emancipated people to be possible, but not necessarily usual. Howell Powell, referenced previously above, reported that following the emancipation of people enslaved at his estate, he "generally chose to employ free Negroes […] in preference to white Servants" having purportedly found "by a cause of experience divers of them to be remarkably faithful and trusty in [his] business."[178] Benjamin Parrin likewise wrote of a man named David Wallace who had, since his emancipation five years earlier, been employed by a local merchant. According to Parrin, the fact that Wallace had been "so long employed in the service of one individual" was "a token of [Wallace's] good behaviour."[179] These narratives from Powell and Parrin might be read as deeply patronising in both content and tone. Indeed, Vanessa Julye in her Pendle Hill Pamphlet, *Radical Transformations*, observes that Quakers of European descent have for centuries "treated African Americans as if they were unable to make good decisions about their lives."[180] It may be argued that the narratives contained within this document are further evidence of the treatment described by Julye, that some European Quakers and Quakers of European descent felt the need to testify to the character of the people they formerly enslaved might imply that a concern existed among them as to whether or not emancipated people could coexist as free members of society, a society they may have viewed as decisively Protestant and European.

But more than anything, this narrative conveys an absence of egalitarianism. It suggests that emancipation did not necessarily translate to equality among Friends. Indeed, efforts appear to be made throughout this

175 MS Box E1.8, LSF.

176 MS Box E1.8, LSF.

177 MS Box E1.8, LSF.

178 MS Box E1.8, LSF.

179 MS Box E1.8, LSF.

180 Julye, *Radical Transformation*, 17.

document to 'other' emancipated individuals and to maintain an implicit racial hierarchy. For instance, a common theme repeated throughout the document is the emphasis on self-sufficiency; that emancipated people either purchased their own freedom ('self-purchase') from their enslavers or that they sustained themselves as free individuals independent of any external relief.[181] Emancipated people are frequently described as having achieved their freedom through hard work and repeated reliance on values like 'patience' and 'industry'. William Chester is one man described in the document who, "far advanced in years", had "purchas'd his freedom of Charles Nabb."[182] After his wife, Maria, was later manumitted by her enslaver, the couple were reportedly "allowed to be honest, & by their Industry & Economy [to] support their family decently."[183] Casar Murray was another man who, upon his emancipation at the age of twenty-five, married his wife (unnamed) and had two children, all of whom remained enslaved until Casar "purchas'd' their freedom together at the price of 'One hundred and Twenty pounds."[184] 'Self-purchase' or the purchase of one or another's freedom was relatively rare; very few people who were enslaved could have bought their way out of bondage.[185] And yet the high percentage of accounts contained in this document of individuals who purchased either their own freedom or those of loved ones suggests that these narratives were selectively chosen to project a particular message, that Quakers (or, perhaps, their intended audience) placed considerable value on the act of emancipating oneself, of not relying on external help or assistance.

Indeed, this emphasis continues in relation to the descriptions given by Quakers of peoples' lives post-emancipation. Consistent comment is made, for example, on the ability of emancipated people to sustain themselves without external intervention. Cyrus Bustel is described as a "reputable person" who, after having emancipated at the age of thirty-six, "follow'd Loaf Bread baking a number of Years, and maintain'd his family with Credit."[186] The term 'credit' here is used to indicate that Bustel supported his family in ways Quakers of European descent deemed honourable or respectable. Likewise, Rachael Maddin, whose husband remained enslaved, was reported to have supported "by her industry […] a numerous family of Young Children."[187]

181 For more, see: 'Buying One's Freedom, Emancipation of Enslaved African Americans, African American Identity: Vol. I, 1500–1865,' Primary Resources in U.S. History and Literature, Toolbox Library, National Humanities Center, July 2009.

182 MS Box E1.8, LSF.

183 MS Box E1.8, LSF.

184 MS Box E1.8, LSF.

185 'Buying One's Freedom, Emancipation of Enslaved African Americans, African American Identity: Vol. I, 1500–1865,' Primary Resources in U.S. History and Literature, Toolbox Library, National Humanities Center.

186 MS Box E1.8, LSF.

187 MS Box E1.8, LSF.

'Industry' in this statement is intended to convey Maddin's perseverance and diligence. Certainly, great detail is placed in these accounts not only on emancipated people's ability to independently support themselves and their families, but on the values characterising the family unit as a whole. Two brothers named Thomas and James, for example, are depicted as honest, hard-working businessmen who took great pains to "inure" their children "to Labour."[188] This mention of the children of emancipated people being "inured to labour," or of children being raised accustomed to a life of toil, may be read in a number of ways: perhaps as assurance to Friends that certain Protestant values of labour and industry were again being upheld; perhaps as assurance to an anticipated white audience that emancipated people would support themselves financially and not become dependent on contemporary systems of welfare or relief; but perhaps and most insidiously, this inclusion may be read as an 'assurance' to an anticipated white readership that the labour historically performed by enslaved people of African and Indigenous American descent would continue. As shown in the examples above, many of the individuals emancipated from Quakers nevertheless continued to labour on the estates and in the businesses of their former enslavers, remaining economically tied to the sites and perpetrators of their oppression long after manumission.[189]

Finally, there is a pervasive sense of 'otherness' propagated throughout the document, particularly through explicit references to racial differences. Cyrus Bustel, referenced above for sustaining his family through bread making, is again remarked upon in this document for his ability to provide all five of his children with "a School education beyond many of his white Neighbours in equal circumstances in respect to property."[190] In other words, Bustel was reportedly able to afford a better education for his children than would many white people in similar socioeconomic circumstances. The emphasis on race would suggest the transcriber found this particularly unusual; that although of similar socioeconomic status, meaning although the family is of a similar social class or economic classification to many around them, the racial factor is what made Bustel's circumstance noteworthy. Similarly, the wife of Sharper Veree, again unnamed, is reported by the transcribers to have worked "occasionally abroad among her white neighbours, in washing Ironing Cloaths and other family business", where she was "respected & esteem'd for her industry & prudent circumspect conduct, few of the whites exceeding her in these respects."[191] Again, this passage reflects an elevation

188 MS Box E1.8, LSF.

189 Gad Heuman, 'The Apprenticeship System in the Caribbean: The World of the Apprentices,' *New West Indian Guide / Nieuwe West–Indische Gids* 97 (2023): 229–254.

190 MS Box E1.8, LSF.

191 MS Box E1.8, LSF.

of certain characteristics and virtues perceived to be 'laudable' while also maintaining a sense of physical distance – that the wife of Sharper Veree worked 'abroad among her white neighbours' evidences the degree of separation that existed between racialised communities. These accounts produced by European Quakers promote a recognition of traits and virtues while continuing to racially 'other' emancipated people. Moses Johnson, a formerly enslaved man, was employed by a Quaker named Thomas Attmore. In characterising Johnson, Attmore recorded the following: "I can with truth say, that he [Johnson] is a sober, industrious, honest man. But he is black."[192] The colour of Johnson's skin marks the end of Attmore's account; for all of Johnson's virtues and characteristics, his hardships and his strengths, he is defined in conclusion as a Black man. Whether this inclusion is indicative of Attmore's personal reflections on race or is a commentary on the wider attitudes among contemporary Friends more generally is unknowable without further evidence. But what these extracts convey is a sense of racialised othering and exclusion couched within antislavery rhetoric, a sense of 'benevolent' paternalism and not egalitarianism which precludes a full realisation of abolitionism.[193]

2.7 Conclusion

This strand has traced the development of an antislavery, not abolitionist, positionality within the Religious Society of Friends across the eighteenth century. In the period identified here, Friends as a religious body officially adopted the position that chattel enslavement was morally unjust and frequently invoked the Golden Rule of 'do unto others' as the foundation for antislavery work within Quaker communities. Primary evidence suggests, however, that the rhetoric engaged in support of antislavery action did not support egalitarianism nor inclusion within the Society of Friends, but rather reinforced racialised hierarchies of power and marginalisation. Secondary scholarship has also identified the role of internal interests in shaping early Quaker antislavery sentiment. By the end of the eighteenth century, Quaker organisations had begun to turn their attention outward, seeking to extend Friends' antislavery platform to a wider European society.[194] One notable product of these attentions was the formation of the 'Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade', established by Quakers in collaboration with Anglican supporters in 1787.[195]

192 MS Box E1.8, LSF.

193 Watkins, *Hypocrisy, Racism, and Self–Interest on the Path to Reparations*, 23–24.

194 Frost, 'From Dissidence to Sense of the Meeting,' 12–13.

195 Morgan, *The 18th Century Enslaving Industry: Lancaster Quakers Involvement*, 15.

[Strand III: 1788–present] Quakers and Reparations

3.1 Eighteenth-century Quakers and Antislavery Movements

Quakers formally moved to prohibit slavery within their communities through disownment in 1761. Nearly two decades later, however, it became apparent that not all Friends everywhere were 'fully clear' of the practice.[196] A 1783 minute issued by London Yearly Meeting, for instance, expressed concern that "a few under our name" continued their engagement in "the Slave Trade."[197] A further minute recorded in 1785 notes that many constituent Meetings were failing to "enquire whether any of their members [were] in any way concerned", effectively neglecting to enforce Yearly Meeting's advice of removal.[198] Traditional scholarship has emphasised that slavery "practically ceased to exist among accepted Quakers" by the end of the eighteenth century.[199] And yet, despite proclamations from authoritative Quaker Meetings, some Quakers remained engaged in transatlantic chattel enslavement for many years, even decades, after it became a disownable offence. The eradication of slavery within the Religious Society of Friends was therefore not accomplished immediately but rather gradually in stages and over a number of years. Further research is currently needed to ascertain the extent to which the Religious Society of Friends remained involved in perpetuating different forms of coerced labour after Friends formally prohibited enslavement within their community.

Nevertheless, from the 1780s Britain Yearly Meeting became publicly concerned with the eradication of slavery, not only among Friends but across British and American society more broadly. Indeed, the majority of scholarship written to date on the subject of Quakerism and slavery has emphasised the 'pivotal' role Friends played in early British and American abolitionist movements.[200] Friends are often credited for prompting 'the

196 Morgan, *The 18th Century Enslaving Industry: Lancaster Quakers Involvement*, 12–13.

197 Morgan, *The 18th Century Enslaving Industry: Lancaster Quakers Involvemen*t, 13.

198 Morgan, *The 18th Century Enslaving Industry: Lancaster Quakers Involvemen*t, 13.

199 Aptheker, 'The Quakers and Negro Slavery,' 355.

200 James Walvin, 'The Slave Trade, Quakers, and the Early Days of British Abolition,' in *Quakers & Abolition*, eds. Brycchan Carey & Geoffrey Plank (University of Illinois Press, 2014), 165.

transformation' of the abolitionist cause "from a marginal, minority topic into a popular political concern" in nineteenth-century Britain and America.[201] A 'committee to study the slave trade' was established by London Quakers in 1783, for instance, which informally promoted abolitionist activities such as sponsoring the publication and distribution of antislavery essays.[202] Perhaps more well known is the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, founded by an association of Anglican and Quaker collaborators.[203] Members of the Society wrote and published prolifically; it is estimated that in 1787 alone approximately 51,432 pamphlets and books were printed alongside another estimated 26,000 papers and reports.[204] Quakers became heavily active in public abolitionism campaigns despite holding a range of discordant opinions towards the subject: Friend Elizabeth Heyrick's famous pamphlet 'Immediate, not gradual abolition' (1824) contrasted sharply, for example, with the London Society for Mitigating and Gradually Abolishing the State of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions (c. 1823), an organisation which depended heavily on financial support from Quaker donors.[205] Despite differences of approach and attitudes among Friends, the advocacy of Quaker organisations and activists are, in traditional historiography and wider popular culture, commonly attributed to the success of the 1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade Act as well as the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, two landmark acts which prohibited the trafficking of enslaved people and the practice of enslavement altogether within the British Empire.

3.2 Transatlantic Antislavery Campaigning

Shortly after the passage of the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833, British Friends redirected their attention to the antislavery cause in America, where they attempted to influence a similar legislative shift through a combined approach of print circulation and popular economic sanctions. The 'Free Produce' movement, for example, was an antislavery campaign largely attributed to British Quakers and especially to British Quaker women. Free Produce, also known as Free Labour, campaigners encouraged consumers to boycott goods

201 Walvin, 'The Slave Trade, Quakers, and the Early Days of British Abolition,' 165–166. It is also worth noting that, despite the American War of Independence, it remains impossible to separate Britain from contemporary developments in not only the newfound United States but also wider North America and the Caribbean. The transatlantic Quaker community continued to be deeply intertwined and embedded in the same economic, political, and social networks, meaning the subject of transatlantic chattel enslavement and its legacies continued to be and still remain, a subject of transatlantic Quaker concern.

202 Walvin, 'The Slave Trade, Quakers, and the Early Days of British Abolition,' 170–171.

203 Walvin, 'The Slave Trade, Quakers, and the Early Days of British Abolition,' 171.

204 Walvin, 'The Slave Trade, Quakers, and the Early Days of British Abolition,' 173.

205 Catherine Hall, 'Antislavery Society (act. 1823–1833),' Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (24 May 2008).

produced by the labour of enslaved people.[206] Free Produce campaigners were active in waves between 1790 and 1860 and primarily concentrated their efforts on sugar and cotton industries – industries which depended almost exclusively on the coerced labour of enslaved people to produce goods.[207] The organisers of this campaign believed that if popular appetite for such goods disappeared, the market would collapse and the 'demand' for enslaved labour would diminish, resulting in widespread emancipation of people held in bondage.[208] The importation of goods produced by enslaved labour was a particular concern for British antislavery campaigners; despite the acts of 1807 and 1833, Britain continued to import goods produced on plantations in the Americas and elsewhere. Several critical pillars of the British economy, e.g., the textile industry, were particularly reliant on these goods – by the mid-nineteenth century, nearly 90 per cent of cotton imported to Britain originated from American plantations.[209]

3.3 Incomplete Abolitionism

And yet, as shown at length in the analysis in Strand II, to be antislavery is not the same as being abolitionist. Enslavement ceased to be 'allowable' among Friends from the mid-eighteenth century and Friends became highly visible in subsequent campaigns to prohibit the practice elsewhere in the British Atlantic. But abolitionism should mean the full inclusion and equality of all people regardless of cultural constructs such as race, sex or class. A considerable proportion of scholarly work indicates that, following the prohibition of slavery, people of colour connected to the Religious Society of Friends continued to experience marginalisation, discrimination and even exclusion from Quaker Meetings. Esteemed Quaker historian Henry Cadbury wrote in 1936 of the prejudices and segregation which pervaded Friends' institutions and practices into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Cadbury outlines a history of racialised separatism in Quaker Meetings – of separate Meetings, separate burial grounds and separate record books of marriages, births and deaths for people of colour associated with the Religious Society of Friends.[210] Recall, for instance, the

206 Anna Vaughan Kett, ''Without the Consumers of Slave Produce There Would Be No Slaves': Quaker Women, Antislavery Activism, and Free–Labor Cotton Dress in the 1850s,' in *Quakers & Abolition*, eds. Brycchan Carey & Geoffrey Plank (University of Illinois Press, 2014), 56.

207 Kett, ''Without the Consumers of Slave Produce There Would Be No Slaves': Quaker Women, Antislavery Activism, and Free–Labor Cotton Dress in the 1850s,' 56.

208 Kett, ''Without the Consumers of Slave Produce There Would Be No Slaves': Quaker Women, Antislavery Activism, and Free–Labor Cotton Dress in the 1850s,' 57.

209 Kett, ''Without the Consumers of Slave Produce There Would Be No Slaves': Quaker Women, Antislavery Activism, and Free–Labor Cotton Dress in the 1850s,' 59.

210 Cadbury, 'Negro Membership in the Society of Friends,' 154, 161–162, 168.

"Meetings" of Black and Brown people enslaved in Quaker households and established by Fox in Barbados in his 1671 sermon. Similar Meetings were held by Quakers elsewhere in the British Atlantic and continued in some places into the nineteenth century; the Meetings in Philadelphia examined in Strand I, for instance, existed in various manifestations up until at least 1805 when Philadelphia Friends determined that "they [people of colour] have now several places for worship of their own."[211] Cadbury suggests in his article that, rather than promoting inclusion, Friends instead encouraged the development of separate, parallel societies for Black converts, among them the Free African Society.[212] Organisations like the Free African Society frequently had Quakers of European descent on their boards and, in many respects, mirrored the practices and pursuits of Quaker Meetings for Worship and for Business – including the customary practice of waiting in silence.[213] Such societies evidence a continued pattern of paternalism and separatism, a pattern which originated with the first 'Meetings for Blacks' on seventeenth-century Barbadian plantations.

Indeed, evidence of the incomplete realisation of abolitionism within the Religious Society of Friends continued to appear long after Quakers formally moved to prohibit slavery within their communities.[214] For many generations, people of colour were either denied full provision of membership in the faith or otherwise faced substantial barriers to acceptance and participation. Writing in particular of the North American context, Vanessa Julye details the myriad ways in which Quaker Meetings limited the inclusion of people of African descent:

> Africans and people of African descent were not allowed to become members of the Religious Society of Friends until 1784. Worship for African descendants in the eighteenth century and nineteenth centuries took place in separate meeting houses, or if they were invited to worship in a meeting house with people of European descent, they were placed in segregated sections in the back or balcony. Friends were good about donating money and their time to establish schools for people of African descent. However, for the most part they were hesitant to admit children of African American descent into Quaker schools.[215]

211 Cadbury, 'Negro Membership in the Society of Friends,' 152–154, 156.

212 Cadbury, 'Negro Membership in the Society of Friends,' 154.

213 Cadbury, 'Negro Membership in the Society of Friends,' 154–155.

214 Aptheker, 'The Quakers and Negro Slavery,' 355; Watkins, *Hypocrisy, Racism, and Self–Interest on the Path to Reparations: Quaker Complicity with Slavery (1657–1776) and White Supremacy*, 23.

215 Julye, *Radical Transformation*, 12–13.

These examples indicate that a practice, if not formally recognised then informally implemented, of racial segregation persisted within some Quaker Meetings long after enslavement had formally been prohibited within the faith community.[216] Scholars elsewhere have described Quaker humanitarianism as a vehicle for paternalism, for "reformers intent on supervising, surveilling and controlling those freed."[217] Sentiment and actions historically labelled as 'abolitionist' within the Society of Friends have often not always been predicated on equal inclusion of all people, resulting in an incomplete realisation of abolitionism in practice.

3.4 Paucity in British Scholarship

Again, these examples are sourced from a North American context which may, at first glance, appear irrelevant to this report's stated emphasis on a history of British Quakerism. And certainly, there exists scholarly space to investigate the separate developments of British and North American Quakerism and impact of regional circumstances on their individual trajectories.[218] But Quakerism in each context remains rooted in and shaped by similar cultural origins. It is difficult, if not impossible, to fully extricate the story and legacy of one from that of the other. Nor would it be a productive way of approaching this history. As James Fletcher wrote in *Friends Journal* in 2007, Quaker culture in both the United States and Great Britain has been "reinforced through the years by a number of historical and cultural Anglo-Saxon norms. Truly multicultural we are not."[219] The histories of American and British Quakerism in regard to race and racism are separate yet interconnected parts of a comprehensive whole which has been built on a legacy of practices and culture shaped by Anglocentrism and whiteness.

There is a particular paucity of scholarship on British Quaker attitudes towards race and colonialism post-1834. Certainly, a great deal has been written about the continued involvement of British Friends in campaigns to end enslavement in America and elsewhere, as shown above, but the vast majority of the historiography on subjects of Quakerism and race in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries prioritise the American context. This

216 Margaret Hope Bacon, 'Learning from Sarah Douglass,' *Friends Journal*, 1 January 2002; Cadbury, 'Negro Membership in the Society of Friends,' 168–170, 173–174.

217 Watkins is quoting Jean Soderlunds' book, *Quakers in Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (Princeton University Press, 1985); Watkins, *Hypocrisy, Racism, and Self–Interest on the Path to Reparations: Quaker Complicity with Slavery (1657–1776) and White Supremacy,* 23–24.

218 Chadwick, Transatlantic Friends: Gender, Authority, and Regionalism in the Early Modern British Atlantic.

219 James Fletcher, 'A Quaker Speaks from the Black Experience,' *Friends Journal*, 1 January 2007.

is particularly striking, as British Quakers, like their American counterparts, continued to be invested in oppressive colonial systems long after transatlantic chattel enslavement was officially outlawed. Quakers in Britain from the eighteenth century remained heavily involved and invested in the politics, commerce and culture of British colonies and former colonies into the twentieth century.[220] Some scholarship has addressed the influence of British Friends in the debates of the 1920s and 30s concerning colonialism, particularly regarding the future of the colonies then under British dominion, but British Friends never fully reached a consensus on the subject. Indeed, Friends expressed a variety of opinions, some which advocated for equality and inclusion of people from former British colonies, others which at least echoed sentiments of paternalism as well as racial and ethnic separatism.[221]

Finally, much laudable humanitarian work has been done in recent decades, both by individuals, local Meetings and through organisations like the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC), the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) and the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO), among many others. There nevertheless remains an uneasy tension between these praiseworthy causes and the need to hold all aspects of Quaker history in conversation with one another. This tension hinders a recognition of *all* Quaker legacies, not just the positive ones. This is a particularly urgent concern as many modern institutions and systems that Friends enjoy today were shaped by or remain rooted in the legacies of chattel enslavement and racialised oppression – legacies which a global Religious Society of Friends has yet to fully address.

3.5 Quakerism Today

It is a common misconception that history is something 'written in stone' – that history exists as something constant or immutable. History is the study of people, places and events that existed or occurred in the past; it is the story we tell about life as experienced by others in a previous time. But the stories that we tell about the past are actively constructed in the present and shaped by the experiences, interpretations and biases of their narrator. History is an ongoing conversation with the people and events of the past. While some of the elements that comprise these conversations are arguably unchanging – dates, names, measurements, etc. – the narratives we choose to tell and the meanings we take away from them are ultimately social

220 For one discussion on this topic, see: Marika Sherwood, 'Quakers, colonies and colonials, 1938–48,' *Immigrants & Minorities: Historical Studies in Ethnicity, Migration and Diaspora* 10, no. 3: 19–45.

221 Sherwood, 'Quakers, colonies and colonials, 1938–48,' 26.

constructs, ones we use to make sense of our present. For this reason, it is crucial to be critical of the sources, narrators, biases and impetuses behind the formation of historical narratives which often have profound effects on our understandings of places, events and even senses of self.

The act of reading, writing and sharing history is therefore not a passive endeavour, but an active one. In constructing historical narratives, we can choose to include or exclude, to listen or ignore, narratives of the past that differ from those upheld by the mainstream tradition. And the stories we choose to tell or accept can hold enormous power to perpetuate harms or to build bridges towards peace and understanding and repair and reconciliation. More specifically, to critically re-examine Quaker history, to test or probe the narratives which have been upheld as the predominant or mainstream narratives of the past, is not a rejection of Quakerism itself. There is a tendency among Friends and scholars alike to interpret 'criticism' of Quaker narratives as being anti-Quaker. I would argue there is nothing *more* Quaker than to question, revisit and revise narratives; to speak a 'new' truth about a community's collective past as it is demanded of them. As Vanessa Julye reminds us, the concept of 'Continuing revelation is a core principle in the Religious Society of Friends. We need to be using it to assist us with invoking the transformation Quakerism is currently crying out for."[222] I intentionally place 'new' in quotations, because these truths are not new; they've been known, lived, experienced and felt by many people, Quaker and non-Quaker, for centuries. They are only 'new' because, until very recently, they have not been collectively acknowledged or accepted within the dominant narrative told by and about Friends. The voices and experiences shared by Friends today show that abolitionism has not yet been fully realised.

Many Quakers have written in recent years about experiences of racism, marginalisation and exclusion within the Society of Friends. Harold D. Weaver Jr defines racism as both "power plus prejudice" and "power plus discrimination."[223] Racism, he expands, is "the power to act on one's negative feelings about people of different skin colors, ethnicities, races, castes."[224] Weaver outlines two categories of racism: individual racism and institutional racism, the former being acts of discrimination by independent people and the latter being systemic discrimination and prejudice embedded in the structures of an institution.[225] Both forms of racism, Weaver expands, are not always conscious or intentional acts, but their impacts and effects

222 Julye, *Radical Transformation*, 11.

223 Weaver, *Race, Systemic Violence, and Retrospective Justice: An African American Quaker Scholar–Activist Challenges Conventional Narratives*, 7.

224 Weaver, *Race, Systemic Violence, and Retrospective Justice*, 7.

225 Weaver, *Race, Systemic Violence, and Retrospective Justice*, 7.

on people discriminated against are nevertheless very real and demand acknowledgment.[226]

The 'incompleteness' of abolitionism among Quakers may be evidenced by a common reluctance to acknowledge all aspects of Quaker history. Lauren Brownlee and Zenaida Peterson highlight a tendency among Friends to resist change and avoid difficult conversations in their work, *Patterns of Racial Wounding and Racial Justice in Quaker Communities*.[227] This pattern of resistance and avoidance, Brownlee and Peterson argue, preserves a status quo that has actively precluded the full inclusion of all community members.[228] This particular status quo is upheld in part, they identify, through a propensity to "look at our present through the rose-colored glasses of Quaker history", emphasising in particular "the legacy of important justice and peace work that Quakers have done over the years."[229]

As significant as this history is, Brownlee and Peterson caution that to only view Quaker history through this lens often leads Friends to "assume that everyone in our faith communities is doing their best – and always has."[230] The Religious Society of Friends has also historically been intertwined with different systems of subjugation and colonialism; this brief study has focussed in particular on the historical complicity of Quakers in transatlantic African chattel enslavement.[231] The decision to only emphasise the positive aspects of Quaker history, Brownlee and Peterson warn, "can lead to minimizing or ignoring the times that Friends engaged in harm, both historically and today" and can prevent "Spirit-led continuing revelation that could transform" Quakerism and its practices.[232] The exclusion of this history from the common narrative told about Quakers leaves the community vulnerable to the continuation of harmful practices and behaviours and prevents full inclusion of all members of the faith community.[233]

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226 Weaver, *Race, Systemic Violence, and Retrospective Justice*, 9.

227 Lauren Brownlee and Zenaida Peterson, *Patterns of Racial Wounding and Racial Justice in Quaker Communities* (Pendle Hill Pamphlet 495, 2025), 5.

228 Lauren Brownlee and Zenaida Peterson, *Patterns of Racial Wounding and Racial Justice in Quaker Communities*, 10–11.

229 Lauren Brownlee and Zenaida Peterson, *Patterns of Racial Wounding and Racial Justice in Quaker Communities,* 14–15.

230 Lauren Brownlee and Zenaida Peterson, *Patterns of Racial Wounding and Racial Justice in Quaker Communities*, 14–15.

231 For an illustrative example of this complex history, see: Dawn G. Marsh, *A Lenape Among the Quakers: The Life of Hannah Freeman* (University of Nebraska Press, 2014).

232 Lauren Brownlee and Zenaida Peterson, *Patterns of Racial Wounding and Racial Justice in Quaker Communities*, 7, 9, 14–15.

233 Lauren Brownlee and Zenaida Peterson, *Patterns of Racial Wounding and Racial Justice in Quaker Communities*, 5.

In order to fully include all Quakers within the Religious Society of Friends, Julye writes, Friends must build a community "where everyone feels welcome for who they are. One that does not cause people to leave a major part of themselves or their cultural identity outside the door."[234] Julye further warns of the existence of "walls in Friends communities" which commonly obscure "the system[s] of White supremacy" that provide "greater access to power and resources for people of European descent."[235] These walls are often "invisible to many", meaning the inequalities of these systems remain embedded and unchallenged in Quaker practices and institutions.[236] Helen Minnis also described this particular blindness in her 2022 Swarthmore Lecture using David Foster Wallace's metaphor of fish swimming in water:

> An old fish swims through the water and encounters two younger fish and says, "Hi guys, I hope you're enjoying the water today." And the two younger fish turn to the older fish and ask, "What is water?"[237]

Although these three fish all existed within the same environment, swam and lived in the same water, some of the fish never noticed the water around them because it perfectly suited their comfort levels. The old fish noticed the water because they had been made aware of the structures of their environment around them through previous experiences of discomfort. Minnis applies this metaphor to race and racism within modern Quakerism.

> Black and Brown people are usually the older fish, because they are constantly forced to take stock of their place within their surroundings […] white people are often blinded by the comfort of the water. It's hard to perceive the temperature of the water, if it were set to be exactly right for you before you were even born.[238]

As Minnis points out, it is often difficult for white Friends to recognise that current structures and practices within Quakerism do not serve Friends from all lived experiences and racialised identities. As Fletcher also concludes, this lack of awareness makes it exceptionally difficult to "struggle against white racism from within the Religious Society of Friends because so many Friends believe [they] have escaped the sin of racism. Pride and self-righteousness often blind [Quakers] to the reality of it."[239]

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234 Julye, *Radical Transformation*, 27.

235 Julye, *Radical Transformation*, 13.

236 Julye, *Radical Transformation*, 13.

237 Helen Minnis, '2022 Swarthmore Lecture – Perceiving the Temperature of the Water,' Britain Yearly Meeting, 2022.

238 Minnis, '2022 Swarthmore Lecture – Perceiving the Temperature of the Water.'

239 Fletcher, 'A Quaker Speaks from the Black Experience.'

In order to address these harms, Friends will need to hold more than good intentions. Minnis reflects that "We can be as individually good as we like", but action is also required to "dismantle" systems of racism and subjugation within Quaker institutions and broader society.[240] One step in achieving this is to be "vigilantly aware of history and the complexities of inequality"; to become informed of all aspects of Quaker history and their legacies on Friends' communities today.[241] Another is to open ears as well as hearts, to listen to the experiences of others from different ethnicities, cultures and classes, even if it is discomforting to hear.[242] Brownlee and Peterson write that when addressing the subject of equality, Friends should not "focus on sameness without acknowledging the historical and systemic disadvantages that come from experiencing war, colonization, prejudice and enslavement."[243] In other words, it is not enough nor appropriate to make claims to the presence of an equal community without understanding and addressing the deep inequalities and disparities faced by people in their different journeys to and within the community. From the perspective of a historian, this work requires re-examining the narratives told about Quaker history: who they are written by and for whom and who they omit or actively exclude. Fletcher outlines explicit examples of the inadequacies of Quaker historiography:

> Quaker history as it is written is overwhelmingly white and Anglocentric, and much more so than the reality of that history. The voices of George Fox, James Nayler, Robert Barclay, Isaac Penington, Willliam Penn, Thomas Kelly, and Rufus Jones must be joined with the voices of Paul Cuffe, Sarah Mapps Douglas, Alain Docke, Bayard Rustin, Barrington Dunbar, and others.[244]

How can a community build upon a shared narrative of equality if not all voices, perspectives and experiences are included in the collective narrative? Addressing the history is just one aspect. Without action to address injustice and inequalities, any statements made championing equality would necessarily ring hollow.[245] Indeed, further reparative actions are necessary to move forward as an anti-racist church, to achieve total abolition within the Society of Friends. Esta Nyeko-Lacek, Reparations Coordinator at Britain Yearly Meeting, articulates some of the necessary work reparations calls for:

240 Minnis, '2022 Swarthmore Lecture – Perceiving the Temperature of the Water.'

241 Julye, *Radical Transformation*, 15.

242 Minnis, '2022 Swarthmore Lecture – Perceiving the Temperature of the Water.'

243 Brownlee and Zenaida, *Patterns of Racial Wounding and Racial Justice in Quaker Communities*, 16.

244 Fletcher, 'A Quaker Speaks from the Black Experience.'

245 Minnis, '2022 Swarthmore Lecture – Perceiving the Temperature of the Water.'

> Reparations are about healing and repair, a process that is rarely easy. It can involve discomfort, difficult conversations, and the surfacing of complex emotions. Emotions that are difficult for those living within the legacies of enslavement and for those who represent, inherit, or benefit from the systems that caused the harm.[246]

Calling on all Friends to take up the cause of 'retrospective justice', Weaver urges the Quaker community to focus its central testimony of anti-violence against "systemic violence […] to consider a comprehensive […] program to compensate for and to help remove the historical inequalities and inhumanity related to the chattel slavery of people of African descent and its legacy."[247] This concept of reparations is also, as Weaver writes, "spiritual, political, cultural, psychological, as well as economic, but certainly not limited to the material" and will require a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to achieve the healing of harms as well as the promotion of true equality and inclusion.[248] This includes the formation of "a unified approach from the Society of Friends toward the legacy of slavery" which Weaver breaks down into three essential components:

> (a) an acknowledgement of an offense, told formally and publicly; (b) a commitment to truth-telling, to ensure that the relevant facts are uncovered, discussed, and properly memorialized; and (c) the making of some form of amends in the present to give material substance to expressions of regret and responsibility[249]

Although some at individual and local levels have condemned enslavement, the institutional response to slavery from international Quaker institutions has been slow and, as we have seen, often incomplete or contradictory.[250] Moreover, concrete steps are required to address the legacies of chattel enslavement that persist within Friends' communities today. To accept the call for reparative work requires listening to the voices among Friends who still experience harms and marginalisation from these legacies and to take deliberate actions to repair them through a series of acknowledgments, commitments and amends, some of which have been outlined above. It is a common misconception of history that it is always the study of people, places and events from the very far past. History is, again, the narrative we choose to tell; it is constantly made and remade using past events to explore

246 Esta Nyeko–Lacek, 'Hope is our covenant: reparations reflections,' Quakers in Britain, 17 February 2026.

247 Weaver, *Race, Systemic Violence, and Retrospective Justice*, 4.

248 Weaver, *Race, Systemic Violence, and Retrospective Justice*, 23.

249 Weaver, *Race, Systemic Violence, and Retrospective Justice*, 24, 26.

250 Weaver, *Race, Systemic Violence, and Retrospective Justice*, 24.

or explain our modern world. Weaver's powerful reflections lay the stakes bare: "Can there be peace without justice? Can there be equality without justice? In both cases, I do not believe so."[251]

3.6 Conclusion

The history of the Religious Society of Friends in relation to colonialism and enslavement is more complex than has typically been acknowledged in traditional Quaker historiography. Knowledge of this history is, however, not new; it is not something that has been recently uncovered but rather has been carried through multiple generations and manifestations of Quakerism into the present day. The legacy of this history has affected the lived experiences of Friends in different ways, with some benefiting from the economic wealth extracted from the exploitation of enslaved people and with others continuing to experience the oppression and inequalities stemming from the actions and decisions of people in the past, among them Quakers.

Recent calls within the global Quaker community to address this history and its legacies have similarly been met with myriad responses. Some Meetings have issued public statements like the one issued in 2022 by Lancaster Area Meeting, which reads as follows:

> Quakers are known as slave trade abolitionists which we were. However between 1711 and 1833 eighteen Lancaster Quakers were involved in the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Some owned enslaved people on their plantations. They were not formally censured by Lancaster Meeting despite Quakers nationally asking for those involved in the 'iniquitous trade' to be disowned. We acknowledge this history and seek to address the impact its legacy has today.

At the time of publication, Quakers in Britain have not issued a collective acknowledgment of past complicity in transatlantic chattel enslavement nor adopted a unified approach toward addressing the inequities and injustices stemming from this legacy.

The purpose of this report has been to trace the outlines of a particular history of racialised oppression within the Religious Society of Friends. It is an incomplete and imperfect report. As such, this text should not be read as a comprehensive history of Quakerism, nor as the sum total of the different voices, perspectives and actions taken in relation to chattel enslavement,

251 Weaver, *Race, Systemic Violence, and Retrospective Justice*, 30.

marginalisation and the legacies of these harms and inequities within Quaker communities. Rather, it is hoped that this report will spark reflection on the work that remains to be done. Future historical work should seek in the first instance to address archival silences like those identified in this report, to de-centre the perspectives of European and European-descended Quakers and instead centre the voices and lived experiences of people traditionally excluded from Quaker narratives and histories. Friends and researchers continuing this work within their communities might also consider how this history is directly linked to the perpetuation of contemporary systemic and social inequalities. Do all Friends experience the same access to natural resources, political representation, financial capital or civil liberties? Are all Friends given the opportunities and tools to have their voices heard equally with a global Quaker community? What abolitionist struggles are still present today? In other words, what barriers to total equality and inclusion exist within modern systems and structures of our society? How are the resources enjoyed by British Quakers today rooted in practices and institutions that are predicated on the extraction of resources and wealth from the many for the benefit of the few?[252] Consideration of these questions is essential if this research is to inform the work necessary to create a more equitable and just future for all.

252 I am once again grateful to Robert Beckford for his helpful comments in framing these final reflections.



Theological Introduction: The Report's Theological Method and Assumptions

Benjamin Wood

Opening Reflections

This report is a work of both practical and historical theology. This text is a work of practical theology in the sense that it considers the relationship between what we say and believe about the Spirit and how we feel and act in our daily lives. Practical theology is often a dynamic process, which places diverse sources into dialogue including history and systematic statements of faith, alongside lived experience. From our earliest days Quaker theology has been eminently practical. But this is also a work of historical theology. It asks questions about the relationship between the historical context of Quaker communities and how these conditions have shaped our words about God, Christ and community. A brief survey of Quaker experience will show that Quaker theological speech has always been eminently practical. With experiments in plain dress and speech, early Friends attempted to embody a particular experience of God in their interactions with insiders and wider society. Such practices of embodied belief and reasoning continue among Quakers today. But Friends have always been aware that we swim in history and that the truths of the Quaker Way have arisen in particular times and places. When early Friends reflected on the turmoil of the mid-seventeenth-century, they found in outer events the traces of inner realities. History was a canvas upon which God worked. As time moved, God was seen to respond.

This theo-historical dimension (that God's will is continuingly unfolding in time), reflects an ongoing theme in the self-understanding of British Friends and how we do theology. In our Liberal Quaker tradition, theology is not a 'closed' activity but an ongoing process of questing, discovery and refinement. Our sense of theology as something fluid and moving is rooted in what Quakers say about their experience of the Spirit in our

gathered communities. In our silent waiting, we endeavour to move towards God through an attitude of hope and faithfulness. Many Friends sense in these encounters, not sudden flashes of light but, tentative moments of illumination which are renewed through repeated acts of stillness. We are called to comprehend and inhabit the experience of God ourselves rather than having the experience mediated to us by delegated specialists or gifted visionaries. We all have vision and are encouraged in our waiting worship to be true to the measure of divine truth we have been given. As Margaret Fell recorded Fox's words in 1652:

> The Scriptures were the prophets' words and Christ's and the apostles' words and what as they spoke they enjoyed and possessed and had it from the Lord'…. 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? (QF&P 19.07).

This stance does not imply something like theological relativism. Fox's words suggest something much more demanding. What the prophets and apostles of the past experienced *we must make true of ourselves*. We must walk in the same trust which led those in past generations to the Light of Truth. Quaker theology then is the perennial attempt to bridge the gap between our words and deeds, the events of the past and the events of our own lives. As a consequence, the sources which inspire this 'living theology' are many, including the shared words we use for God (the Light, the Seed, the Inward Teacher), the treasures of historical memory (this includes what we call 'Testimony'), alongside 'the Bible, the writings of Friends and all writings which reveal the ways of God' (QF&P 1.02.5). In this general sense our Book of Discipline is both a work of practical and historical Theology, insofar as it attempts to describe and distil the Spirit-led patterns of life, speech and story which have grown up among us. It helps us understand who we are and how we became the kind of people that we are.

In our Book of Discipline, the ordinary things of life (our hopes and fears, our virtues, our failings) are brought into the orbit of the living fountain which sustains our Worship and Witness. Our personal history is brought into relation to a shared history. As *Advices and Queries* reminds us: "Be aware of the spirit of God at work in the ordinary activities and experience of your daily life" (QF&P 1.02.7). This is the necessary starting-point for all Friendly theology. We must watch, wait and listen. From this heightened attention, we can often hear God speaking to us; sometimes in words, at other times in startling images and at other times still through unexpected events. Quaker

theologians seek to record these visitations, not to capture God in a bottle, but add to the collective storehouse of our spiritual wisdom. When we bring the gifts of historical theology and practical theology together we are able to be attentive to the question of who we were and are, but also the question of where we are. Reflecting theologically on both dimensions of experience (the spatial and the temporal) permits us to understand the multilayered nature of the Quaker story and move towards the future with a greater degree of self-understanding.

For those Friends who feel estranged by the very idea of 'Quaker theology' the present writer offers the following reassurance. The chief task of Quaker theology is not the creation of intellectual puzzles, much less 'finding out everything which needs to be said about God'. Moreover, properly conceived, theology is not an activity purely of the mind to the exclusion of the heart. The point of doing Quaker theology can be summed up in one word: faithfulness. The point of writing and speaking of God should be to bring us closer to God. Theology should stir us from confusion and guide us into the gentle light of clarity; propel us from lethargy towards authentic activity. As we reflect on our history and practice in the light of the God we worship, the deeper layers of our communal story are revealed and refreshed. The work of theology in all times and places is to render the treasures of love and grace serviceable to our condition in the here and now. As we are often reminded: "Remember that Christianity is not a notion but a way" (1.02.2). In this way, Quaker theology is not merely a cold intellectual exercise, but a journey into the very heart of the Divine and ourselves. In the course of the journey words will often fail us. The point is not to craft a perfect articulation or final statement of belief, but to construct a leaky boat which nonetheless moves us closer to shore. What is true of Quaker discernment (with its sometimes messy or tentative minutes) is true of Quaker theology more generally. We seek a way forward, not in expectation of stale uniformity, but in an energetic unity, which expresses something of that generous and expansive God we feel in our Worship together. This focus on the movement of God in the present encourages Friends to view all the sources of their tradition not as a series of dusty museum pieces to be protected behind glass, but living sources of wisdom. The early Quaker theologian Robert Barclay put the matter like this in his *Apology*:

> [Because] they [the Scriptures] are only a declaration of the fountain and not the fountain itself, therefore they are not to be esteemed the principal ground of all Truth and knowledge, nor yet the adequate primary rule of faith and manners. Yet because they give a true and faithful testimony of the first foundation, they are and may be esteemed a secondary rule, subordinate to the Spirit, from which they

> have all their excellency and certainty: for as by the inward testimony of the Spirit we do alone truly know them, so they testify, that the Spirit is that Guide by which the saints are led into all Truth; therefore, according to the Scriptures, the Spirit is the first and principal leader. Seeing then that we do therefore receive and believe the Scriptures because they proceeded from the Spirit, for the very same reason is the Spirit more originally and principally the rule…[253]

Friends will find evidence of Barclay's proposition throughout these pages. Here biblical words and phrases are not fixed quanta of knowledge, but portals into the ebb and flow of divine life. They are invitations, not to dogmatism but means to personal and corporate transformation. But the words of Scripture have another function in this report. They put us in touch with the base language of the Quaker Way and draw us back into dialogue alongside, and sometimes conflict with, our Quaker ancestors. There are many points when the theological discussion which follows turns to Scripture to illustrate the past evils of Quakers and the present condition of Friends. Scripture's use is not intended to shut down debate, hide complexity, or suggest that there is only one way of responding faithfully to the present challenges posed by the Quaker past. These biblical meditations are attempts to connect Friends to the widest possible streams of spiritual insight. The meditations which follow are, to echo *Advices and Queries*: "for the comfort and discomfort of Friends […] with the hope that we may all be more faithful and find deeper joy in God's service" (1.01). But there can be no true service to God or each other if we are not willing to seek and speak the truth. Yes, we must seek truth in our world, but we must also speak and seek truth in our gathered communities. As Friends, we search after truth because we affirm that truth will set us free. In telling our story with unflinching clarity we move closer to the Spirit who is closer to us than our own self. By acknowledging our collective darkness, we fit ourselves for the task of loving service.

It is the core contention of this report that Quaker theological reflection failed in its early decades to consistently affirm the unity of the human family and reject, without qualification or reserve, the practice of mass enslavement which characterised the seventeenth– and eighteenth–century Atlantic world. It is tempting to regard this inaction as merely a form of cowardice and expediency, rooted in the private psychologies of Friends who owned, profited or traded in enslaved people. If we follow this moral logic, we are able to say that while our Quaker ancestors were complicit in mass enslavement, our theology (the things we say about God) somehow stand as it were above the Religious Society of Friends. This is not the view

253 Robert Barclay, *The Apology, The Third Proposition Concerning the Scriptures*, Quaker Heritage Press.

of this report. It was precisely the shape of Quaker theology (particularly the sense of early Friends as an Elect) which allowed Friends to pretend that the exploitation of fellow human beings in no way compromised the spiritual purity of their religious vocation. Indeed, Friends' sense that they were a sparkling remnant in a world of darkness, which encouraged early Quakers to prioritise stories of their persecution and suffering while ignoring the colonial displacement of Indigenous populations in the American colonies and the kidnap and dispossession of African people. But instead of attending to social and economic circumstances in which they found themselves, Quaker communities often adapted themselves to the logic of state-backed exploitation, systematic looting and ubiquitous social violence. In doing so, these communities (who themselves lived in a precarious social position) revealed some of the worst features of emerging Quaker theology:

- Spiritual dualism: Early Friends (the period ranging from the 1640s to the mid-1660s) tended to believe that all spiritual light was in themselves and all moral evil was vested in their opponents. This didn't mean that early Friends could not 'stray', but the early Quaker theology of perfection encouraged Friends to view themselves as spiritually superior to others. This dualistic approach lasted well into the quietist eighteenth-century.

- Radical Inwardness: The commitment to spiritual inwardness allowed first and many second-generation Friends to foster a sense of 'being in but not of the world'. External business could not compromise a pure spiritual core. As we shall see, this tendency has a long afterlife among Friends.

- Election: Friends living in the mid-seventeenth-century believed that they were a 'righteous remnant' whose personal histories were identical with salvation history. All other experiences became secondary to the Quaker story. While these tendencies gradually fell away into the eighteenth century, it left a mark of insularity within Quaker communities.

- Hierarchy: While Friends promulgated a spiritual Gospel of liberation, they tended to assume that social divisions outside the Quaker community were acceptable and could serve practical or evangelical functions. Within Quaker communities gendered and economic hierarchies continued, even if many social distinctions were jettisoned.

The fruits of these trajectories are plain in the early pages of this report. We have already met Quaker enslavers who vaunted their kindness, compassion

and dedication to the Golden Rule. We have encountered other Friends who sought the abolition of chattel enslavement, but who clung with righteous certainty to the practise of temporary enslavement (indenture). In all these instances, theology was guiding decisions and shielding Friends from the moral injury that they were inflicting on others. Quaker enslavers could readily draw on the Patriarchs (Abraham, Moses and Jacob) to justify their complicity in violence and enslavement. At the same time, Friends could wax lyrical about the unity of the human family while benefiting from the proceeds of dispossession.

The Dimensions of Liberal Quakerism

Who precisely is the God who appears in this report? To adequately answer this question, we must first consider the recent evolution of Quaker theology in the British Isles. Over the course of the nineteenth century, British Friends increasingly adopted the norms and preoccupations of Liberal Protestant theology. As Ben Pink Dandelion observes, a key aspect of this adoption was the notion of "progressive revelation", which allowed modernist Friends "to co-opt new ideas such as those regarding evolution or higher criticism […] without sensing a tension between tradition and innovation."[254] In this liberal model, God was no longer conceived as a pre-existent ruler handing down linear instructions to otherwise passive mortals, but a dynamic Reality, which entered creatively into the complexities of human life and culture. In this vein, Christianity was not regarded as a crystalised religious form, but as a work of continual modification. This decidedly evolutionary turn allowed modernist Quakers to question the viability of a whole range of traditional Christian doctrines, including sin, redemption and the resurrection. At the same time, such Friends were beginning to redefine hallowed Quaker terms in ways which accorded more easily with the subjectivist, progressivist and rationalist trajectories of mid-to-late nineteenth-century thought. The key first-generation Quaker doctrine of the 'Inward Light' was gradually recontextualised, not as a super-sensible encounter between the finite self and an omnipotent Christ, but as an expression of an inherent spiritual faculty ("a piece of the Divine residing in everybody"[255]). Likewise, 'testimony', once an expression of apocalyptic fervency, was redefined as social action formed by personal spiritual conviction. This liberalising process released much that was good and beautiful in the Quaker soul. Friends increasingly felt themselves full citizens of the world, with a faith governed by a wide and generous sympathy, able to meet the world's pain with practical compassion. This was also the era of Friendly Mysticism and the world-

254 Pink Dandelion, *An Introduction to Quakerism*, (Cambridge University Press, 2007) 132.

255 Dandelion, *An Introduction to Quakerism*, 132.

affirming Christianity of Rufus Jones. In accord with these shifts, the Christ of Quaker faith took on the warm glow of the human teacher who had lived and died in Palestine midst the poor and despised. Not only did Jesus provide a model for peace and justice at the dawn of the careering twentieth century, traditional declarations of his divine sonship offered a compelling vision for human spiritual progress. As the conscientious objector Wilfred Littleboy wrote from prison in 1918:

> Jesus's God consciousness was not a recollection from pre-existence, reclaimed without effort. But was obtained by hard struggle along similar lines to our own spiritual experience and that his teaching is an echo of his own experience. One looks at the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount in this light and not only does it live afresh, but also one's appreciation of Jesus himself grows correspondingly.[256]

At the height of its intellectual and practical mood, this Liberal Quakerism saw itself not simply as a fragment of Christianity, but a perennial wisdom which was in accord with the sages and saints of all ages. In the dying embers of the European empires, Liberal Quakers could imagine themselves as representatives of a worldwide spirit of fraternity. Universalism (in religion and politics), fellow-feeling across boundaries and hope in the future, continues to characterise the best of this tradition. But Quaker Liberalism, for all its generosity and social energy, has imposed subtle but profound costs on the internal coherence of Quaker theology. Liberal Quakerism, in its inclusion and liberality, has gradually emptied Quaker communities of a shared spiritual story. Principally, the God of Liberal Quakerism is less specific than the God of Evangelical or Conservative Quakerism. Instead of a God who wills, judges or calls individual lives and communities to account, Liberal-modernist Quakerism tends to speak of God as an inward and mystical experience, the meaning of which depends first and foremost upon an individualistic and empirical sensibility. As John W. Graham wrote in his 1920 book *The Faith of a Quaker*:

> The Quaker search for God begins from the beginning and bases whatever it builds on the sure foundation of experience. Even if what we build thereupon should be found to be not much better than wood, hay or stubble, we shall even be safe after its destruction, though saved as from fire.; for nothing however foolish which is based upon direct experience, can fall with so overwhelming destruction, or produce a desolation so hopeless, as that which is based not on facts of life but upon fantasy or tradition.[257]

256 Wilfred Littleboy, *A Quaker Conscientious Objector: Wilfred Littleboy's Prison Letters, 1917–1919*, eds. Rebecca Wynter and Pink Dandelion (Handheld Press, 2020), 111.

257 John W. Graham, *The Faith of a Quaker* (Cambridge University Press, 1920), 3.

The Fragmentation of Liberal Quaker Theology

Graham's approach to experience and tradition leaves us in something of a quandary however. Since theology is in essence the act of speaking about God in and through a shared vocabulary (we might call such shared speaking a tradition), the Liberal emphasis upon direct, often individual, experience, has led in recent decades to a radical diversification of God-language within Liberal Quakerism. Liberal Friends have tended to view this process as an expression of mystical faith; the affirmation that no set of symbols or cluster of words are adequate for expressing spiritual or eternal truths. What appears to be a suitable formulation for one generation or circumstance may not suit another. A vivid exposition of this theological attitude is found in A.S. Eddington's 1929 Swarthmore Lecture, *Science and the Unseen World*. As Eddington argues:

> In its early days our Society owed much to a people who called themselves the Seekers; they joined us in great numbers and were prominent in the spread of Quakerism. It is a name which must appeal strongly to the scientific temperament. The name has died out, but I think that the spirit of seeking is still the prevailing one in our faith, which for that reason is not embodied in any creed or formula. It is perhaps difficult sufficiently to emphasise. Seeking without disparaging its correlative. Finding. But I must risk this, for Finding has a clamorous voice that proclaims its own importance; it is definite and assured, something that we can take hold of – that is what we all want, or think we want. Yet, how transitory it proves. The finding of one generation will not serve for the next. It tarnishes rapidly except it be preserved with an ever-renewed spirit of seeking.[258]

In our own time this conscientious commitment to the paradigm of the spiritual search has blossomed into many Liberal Quakerisms. While traditional God-language has not vanished from Liberal-modernist Quaker-speech, our Liberal Quaker sense of what God is, is no longer straightforwardly tied to any particular theological vocabulary. We can think of God as the Christ within, Buddha nature, human goodness, or something more like Emerson's Oversoul. Speaking of God as possessing something analogous to a personality (something with wants or intentions) is now one option of God-language among many. The secondary impacts of this shift away from corporate God-language are vast. Most crucial for this report is the slow disengagement of Liberal Quakerism from the traditional Christian language of sin and salvation, which runs like a silver thread through the proclamation

258 A.S. Edington, *Swarthmore Lecture, 1929: Science and the Unseen World* (George Allen and Unwin, 1920), 53.

of the Hebrew prophets and the Ministry of Jesus. As Dandelion reflects: "For Liberal Friends, the idea of original sin has been replaced by the idea of original blessing or of some inner divinity. For these Friends, the concept of salvation can be a redundant one. Salvation from what?"[259] In this respect, Liberal Quakerism has become gradually less practised talking about moral failure, sin and evil. Liberal Friends are far more comfortable with sociological theories of maladjustment than roundly theological appeals to trans-generational or structural sinfulness. In this post-sin Quakerism, God may be a source of individual transformation, but cannot bid a community to change. This is because Liberal Quakerism exists under the heavy embargo of what Dandelion has called "the 'absolute perhaps."[260] Under this settlement, theological statements about God are always provisional and never definitive. Consequently, one's experience of God is merely one interpretation of divine/human encounter among others.

There is no question that a particular experience of the divine can ever achieve a wholly authoritative status, whether in the life of an individual Quaker, or for a Meeting as a whole. The greatest taboo in latter-day Liberal Quakerism is a strong sense of certainty. A Friend who speaks in Meeting against the evils of systematic racism may well be commended. But if the same Friend adds to their spoken Ministry that God calls Friends to repent of past wrongs and give away the Meeting House, the Friend may be greeted with respectful tolerance, subtle hostility or polite indifference. An Elder may even come up to the Friend after Worship and chide them for their certainty. While most Liberal Friends would be resistant to wholly jettisoning notions of the divine will altogether, most are equally uncomfortable with the idea that such a will could be clear, unequivocal and emphatic. God may message individuals with crystal-water urgency, but clear and potentially disruptive collective messages are ruled out of bounds. Consequently, it is not clear whether the vague God of late Liberal Quakerism can demand justice, take sides, or indeed condemn collective wrongdoing. This is always the sting in the tail of Liberal-modernist theology. It often prefers love without accountability, freedom without shared boundaries and interpretations over difficult truths.

Finding Our Quaker Prophetic Voice

In some now famous reflections on the perils of Liberal theology, the Queer theologian Carter Heyward observed that the normative individualism within theological liberalism "is set against collective advocacy as a primary mode

259 Dandelion, *An Introduction to Quakerism*, 197.

260 Dandelion, *An Introduction to Quakerism*, 151.

of Christian witness…"[261] Under liberal theological norms, people are expected to "make up their own minds", respect people's autonomy and reject any moral or religious demands which are either challenging or totalising for whole communities. Consciously avoided are difficult conversations about privilege, power and historical legacies of oppression. For Heywood, the God of ultra-Liberalism (an individualistic and inward deity "eternally beyond the structures of existence"[262]) is neither involved in the conflicts and tensions of human life, nor does such a God have anything distinctive to say to us about thorny matters of domination or control. Indeed, within the malleable folds of Liberal theology, it is we and not God who ultimately decide on matters of oppression and power ("What we do, each of us, about racism, sexism, heterosexism or any other human problem, is our business"[263]). As Heyward expresses this rather threadbare posture, for Liberal theology we are "first and finally moral monads, accountable to the pangs of our own God-consciousness, not to a God whose justice may be calling us to account, regardless of how we may feel or what we may think."[264] Such a sharp rebuke speaks directly to Friends as we begin to undertake reparative practice for past communal wrongs. We must relearn the chief lesson of early Friends. If we wish to unravel the enigmas of our lives, we must give up on self-led and self-willed projects and open ourselves up to God. In this way, what we are called to do in the world is not a mere extension of our narrow ego, but a giving away and a trust in a reality we do not make, cannot control, but within which, we find our meaning.

If we wish to understand and to faithfully undertake reparative practice, not simply as a secular-political enterprise, but as something which grows out of and is authentic to, the Quaker Way, we must shift our language away from individual choice and personal interpretation and towards the language of the communal and the prophetic. In his book *The Nature of Doctrine*, the Lutheran theologian George Lindbeck helpfully summarises the prophetic tradition within Scripture in this way:

> Concern for the future has traditionally been associated in Biblical religion with prophecy. Prophets proclaim what is both faithful and applicable in a given situation and oppose proposals which, whatever their apparent practicality, are doomed, because of their unfaithfulness to God's future.[265]

261 Carter Heywood, 'Sacred Contempt: Heterosexist Theology', in *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God* (HarperCollins, 1989), 63.

262 Heywood, 'Sacred Contempt: Heterosexist Theology', 65.

263 Heywood, 'A Sacred Contempt: Heterosexist Theology', 69.

264 Heywood, 'A Sacred Contempt: Heterosexist Theology', 68.

265 George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1984:2009), 111.

In previous generations, Friends have asked themselves repeatedly whose future they really wanted. Did they want a fantasy filled with their own narrow desires, or did they want the vitality and spontaneity offered by God's horizon? This is our quandary too: Do we have the courage to let go of what seems like the future to us (our plans and designs), so God can craft something we have yet to imagine? And yet, under the burden of 'the absolute perhaps', Liberal Quakerism has largely privatised the future. The prophetic no longer sits well with us, as we pursue so many semi-private spiritual projects. God may be calling the individual personality, but no collective prophetic call is possible as long as we keep hold of the idea that the isolated individual is the supreme arbiter of spiritual life. We have shifted from a community of seekers, to hermits who cluster together every now and again. But as pleasant as such looseness sometimes feels, it has no spiritual or moral depth because it will never encourage us to change. What transformation, what accountability, is possible in a community when we utter sentences like: "I think God is calling us to deeper justice, but this is just my interpretation. Maybe things are different for you"? If we are serious about acts of reparative justice and all they demand, we cannot continue within a fragmented Liberal Quakerism. To seek justice with integrity, we have to recover our sense of being held accountable by a Power we did not invite and perhaps do not always want. We have to trust again the possibility of being called, of being made uncomfortable in the name of Love and Truth.

Strand I: Theologies of 'Justification'

4.1 The Problem of 'Man'

Between the fourteenth and nineteenth-centuries, some twelve million African people were trafficked across the Atlantic by European enslavers.[266] Four to eight million people died on the voyage and millions more died in bondage through forced labour and torture.[267] We do not know how many African people died resisting enslavement.[268] When we talk rather off-handedly about the 'transatlantic slave trade', we are naming one of the worst genocides in human history, enabled by a toxic mixture of Papal fiat, state complicity, mercantile opportunism (by European and African enslavers and traffickers), alongside a deadly religious zeal. On the backs of silenced and brutalised men, women and children, European societies were able to prosper through the exploitation of expendable labour and the subsequent proliferation of cheap goods. While the direct benefactors of European colonialism were inevitably privileged elites, many secondary economic benefits (especially in the realm of imports) enhanced the fabric of colonial nations more generally. In this section we consider the theological and philosophical roots of coloniality before turning to assess how far early Quakers adopted or diverged from these ideas. In doing so, the discussion is structured around three core objectives:

1) To adequately describe the world of philosophical and theological ideas of which seventeenth and eighteenth-century Friends were part.

2) To identify the extent to which early Friends adopted or contested emergent early modern ideas about ethnicity and race.

3) To show the fundamental role of theology in justifying mass enslavement within colonial Quaker communities.

266 Tim McNeese, *The Rise and Fall of American Slavery Freedom Denied, Freedom Gained* (Enslow, 2004), 22.

267 See D. Crowe, *War Crimes, Genocide, and Justice: A Global History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 47–79.

268 Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: How a Remarkable Woman Crossed Seas and Empires to Become a Part of World History* (Harper Perennial, 2007), 6.

To respond effectively to point 1) and 2) we need to first look carefully at the history of a foundational concept in European theology and politics, namely the concept of 'Man'. By Man here, we do not simply mean the naked biological reality of being human. We do not simply mean 'maleness'. Rather, we mean a specifically European definition (or genre[269]) of humanity, which in the age of early European colonialism, provided the ideological basis and justification for the domination of the New World and the institution of mass enslavement. Here Man is in no way a given, he is an effort and an artefact. Here Man is a culturally specific way of seeing, interpreting and feeling one's humanity in the world, often set against or in opposition to, other interpretations of being human. Perhaps one of Man's earliest outings in European literature is Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, published in 1487. In this masterwork of European Humanism, Pico sets himself the task of defining 'humanity' against the stultifying realities of multiple cultural and ecclesiastical pasts. What matters most to this Italian nobleman is freedom from the constraints of Church control and dogma and the corresponding amplification of the lone inquiring mind, seeking God within and through itself. This adventurous spirit of self-discovery requires for Pico a revolutionising of human self-conception. For nearly a thousand years, Western theology had owed much of its character to the Latin Fathers, particularly Augustine of Hippo. Essential to this Latin theological legacy was a notion of an embedded human being, a creature limited by custom, geography, language and embodiment, seeking despite its fallen condition, the universal revelation of God.

In this account, human beings are irreducibly one, bound together by the multiple distortions and failures forged by Adam's original disobedience. While Augustine was no social egalitarian, his theology nonetheless groped towards a kind of equality of frailty, or we might say equal woundedness,[270]

269 The notion of 'genres' of humanity has been borrowed from the philosopher and critic Sylvia Wynter. We will explore some of the key insights of her work below.

270 As we shall see later, the notion of humanity existing in a state of *equality under sin* has continuing consequences for how white European Christians have thought, and still think, about histories of colonialism. If we are all equally bound to the historical structures of sin, there is no spiritual difference between an enslaver and the one he has enslaved. According to this account, enslavement is merely an unfortunate byproduct of the Fall, but is no worse than the various sins assumed to lurk in the body and mind of a person who has been enslaved.. The sin of the oppressed and oppressor differed in specifics for Augustine, but did not differ in essence. Augustine for his part did not see anything unacceptable about the institution of classical enslavement. Indeed, he argued, enslavement was an inevitable consequence of the Fall of Adam and Eve. Augustine could not have imagined a world in which institutions of mass enslavement would have been abolished, much less legally prohibited. For a summary of Augustine's key arguments around enslavement, see Peter Gurnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 217–8. A cynical observer might suggest that Augustine used the blanket category of sin to support and naturalise many of the hierarchies upon which late Roman caste and class systems depended, hierarchies from which Augustine (before the priesthood an Imperial official) directly benefited.

under the shared burden of sin. Pico refused to accept these theological coordinates. Instead, rebelling against the wisdom of centuries of Platonic/Christian metaphysics, the *Oration* claimed that 'Man' is not a fixed or embedded creature, confined to one part of God's creation. Through true knowledge of God and the contemplation of God's works in nature, Man could rise beyond his original station. The children of Adam, whose bodies could be traced back to the clay of the earth, could join the angels, through enterprises of intellectual prowess. If the human being for Pico was always capable of self-transcendence, there could be no question of human beings permanently enmeshed in the limits of sin. Instead, says Pico, Man is a "creature of indeterminate image",[271] able to shift its form at will, like a chameleon. As Pico has God say in *The Oration*:

> We have given you, oh Adam no visage proper to yourself, nor any endowment proper to your own, in order that whatever place, whatever form, whatever gifts you may, with premeditation, select these same you may have and possess through your own judgement and decision. The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which We have laid down; you by contrast, impeded by no restrictions may, by your own free will, to whose custody We have assigned you, trace to yourself the lineaments of your own nature. I have placed you in the very centre of the world, so that from that vantage point you may with greater ease glance round about you at all that the world contains.[272]

Thus, argues Pico, what is universal in man is his malleability, his liquidity, his ability to be unconstrained by the confines of time and space. In Pico's original scheme this radical mode of human freedom was primarily understood as contemplative. The chameleon self was for Pico fundamentally philosophic in character. It considered the world (Pico calls Man "the interpreter of nature"[273]), it did not seek to change it. But there was always something of a settler mentality at the heart of Pico's conception. If Man were radically unembedded from his world, then, through knowledge, through desire and through perseverance, Man could in theory defy the limits of history and craft a world based upon his own rational will. One could do more than glance at the world, one could grasp it. There remains something imperious about Pico, even if his thought was not strictly speaking imperial in character. In its clarity of expression and the sheer novelty of its argument, The *Oration*'s notion of self-overcoming and self-governing Man continues to haunt the European political imagination. We meet this European Man everywhere,

271 Giovani Pico della Mirandola*, Oration on the Dignity of Man* (Gateway Editions, 1956), 6.

272 Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, 7.

273 Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, 3.

in the founding documents of the French and American Revolutions, in the constitution of the United Nations, in the writings of Voltaire,[274] Adam Smith[275] and John Stuart Mill[276] and in the imaginations of Western utopians and cosmopolitans. While this restless Man has often felt liberating to the white European men who largely imagined and codified it, it has played at times an ambiguous, at other times profoundly damaging role, in the lives of people colonised (or formerly colonised) by European states. Why might this be so? Because the Man conceived by Pico and others could only pretend at universality and boundlessness. In truth it was a European self-image which carried within it the hallmarks of a much older Christendom, a cosmology which assumed a fundamentally hierarchical scale of being.

While to a great extent Pico democratised this old order, he was careful to preserve a division between the agency of Man and the relative passivity of nature. In retaining such a division, it was still possible for Picco to make a series of hierarchical value-judgements about the difference between humans and animals (as well as the relative differences between human beings) despite the fact that cosmic status was to some extent movable. For Pico, everything natural (everything which fell roundly outside the domain of Man), was either inert or brutish; that is, it was still attached to a fixed hierarchy of being, incapable of actively choosing its own station. As Pico puts it: "Oh wondrous and unsurpassable felicity of man to whom it is granted what he chooses, to be what he wills to be. The brutes from the

274 François–Marie Arouet (1694–1778), known by his pen name Voltaire, was a French Enlightenment philosopher and essayist. In his 1763 tract, *On Tolerance*, Voltaire argued that the only reasonable way to live was to treat as accidental all social, material and intellectual conditions which appeared to divide human beings from one another. What mattered, argued Voltaire, were the essential and shared needs of human beings (to be free of pain, deprivation and bigotry), rather than the temporary sects, tribes, and churches, under which people habitually gathered. Here we see a distinctly Enlightenment version of Pico's European Man, a being who cannot be defined according to its outward conditions, but only by its movable and self–perfecting essence.

275 Adam Smith (1723–1790) was a political economist and philosopher, famed for his analysis of the emerging market economy. For Smith, the primary unit of politics was a sociable individual who sought to maximise its happiness through co–operation with fellow human beings. Through his philosophical work, Smith tries to talk about the essence of human beings as such, somewhat extracted from cultural conditions. This is particularly true in Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments,* where he attempts to ascertain those core ingredients of moral psychology upon which customs, institutions and societies are built. Thus, he attempts to use the idea of 'Universal Man' to make general claims about a diverse range of social and cultural situations.

276 John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) was a Victorian philosopher, essayist, one–time Liberal MP, and social campaigner. In Mill's famed 1859 essay *On Liberty*, he argued for an updated version of Pico's notion of European Man. Mill suggested that essential characteristics of human life included a desire for improvement, growth, and ongoing personal development. Life properly lived for Mill, was an experiment, in which society harvested the long–term results. Instead of seeing human beings in terms of fixed needs and natures, Mill suggested a radically historical vision, in which human beings repeatedly adapt to changing social, philosophical and material conditions.

moment of their birth, bring with them as Lucullus says 'from their mother's womb', all that they will ever possess."[277] What appears new in Pico (perhaps we should say modern) is not his turn towards existence as an evolution but his sense of Man as self-contained, self-directed and mobile. This is the kind of imagination suitable for the crossing of seas, the dissolving of peoples, the planting of colonies and the wholesale reconfiguration of occupied landscapes. Pico's way of seeing is fundamentally rebellious, restless in its desire to reinvent and dissolve what is fixed. But there is a flipside to this hunger for transformation. If Man is radically unmoored from the kind of fixed position endured by plants and animals, it is logically possible for an indeterminate being to regress, becoming chained by foolish choices, to the fateful condition of lower beings. As Pico says:

> God bestowed seeds pregnant with all possibilities, the germs of every form of life. Whichever of these a man shall cultivate, the same will mature and bear fruit in him. If vegetative he will become a plant; if sensual, he will become brutish, if rational, he will reveal himself a heavenly being.[278]

Thus, we find that Pico's deeply equalitarian vision contains within itself an invitation to embrace radical divisions of power and status. For Pico, there are certainly grades of humanity and even humans that fall away from the position of Man. And who maintains the most direct route to European Man? The library of books gestured at in the *Oration* (a vast storehouse of Latin and Greek texts) provides the answer. Man as Pico conceives him, is cultivated most clearly within the circle of European Humanists, who lived and thought as Pico did. Here, the universal nature of Man is revealed as something decidedly particular. Radical liquidity was for some, not all. Boundlessness was Man's birthright, but it is evident from Pico that not all would or could attain it.

4.2 Sylvia Wynter: The Divided Map of European Man

How should we understand the significance of this limited and irretrievably Western vision of Man for the specifically Quaker story we want to tell? Its chief significance lies in the way it gives us access to the foundational ideas upon which Western colonial projects have been historically built. Once we have grasped these ideas, we will be in a position to offer a much richer account of Quaker history. First, what are these key ideas?

277 Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, 8.

278 Ibid.

In an illuminating essay 'Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom', the Caribbean philosopher and cultural critic Sylvia Wynter argues that it is not possible to separate the history of Humanism's conception of Man from the character and operation of Europe's empires. Despite the fact that Pico's Man took upon itself the benign mantle of universality, it was, argues Wynter, a largely fanatical concept, which saw its task as one of continual estimation, conquest and reordering, of space, time and culture. It possessed little reverence for the rooted, the solid and established. All these categories could be simply enfolded into the lower domain of the natural, becoming an object for Man's ingenuity whether in the form of material expansion (whether mining, shipping, planting) or the religious fantasies of European missionaries and apologists (spreading the Gospel to uneducated and wayward 'heathens'). This ambitious and frustrated self-image, we might even call it adolescent, wanted 'givenness' to submit to its self-image. It regarded all predefined limits as an imposition on the integrity of its own being. These defiant and grasping tendencies were rooted in Humanistic Man's irreducibly theological origins. What we now know as European Man, began within the matrix of Medieval Christendom and it was that matrix, suggests Wynter, which produced both the intellectual justification for early modern imperialism and multiple theologies of enslavement. Here then, we are confronted with something of a strange paradox. The open-ended Man of Pico, stunning in its affirmation of a borderless freedom, produced a whole raft of new cultural borders and fixed identities, which in time would divide up the world, between Black and white, enslaved and free, colonial subject and imperial master.

Wynter explains this paradox by attending carefully to the various conceptual binaries which European Humanists still carried in their heads. This mental furniture subtly policed what Pico and his contemporaries imagined as ordered and disordered, cultivated and carnal, barbaric and civilised. These binaries included the divisions between Christian and Heathen, Christ and anti-Christ, clerical and lay, orthodox and heretic, repentant and unrepentant. Later, the binary between Christian and Muslim would be added to the list. The point of all these categories was the maintenance of an overlapping system of spiritual, moral and social valuation. These various dualisms were intended to structure a firmly ordered cosmos, in which it was clear who was and who was not an insider. Moreover, liminal cases of spiritual ambiguity (we might include the Spanish Marranos[279] in this category) were dangerous, since, through their inherent liminality, they called necessary

279 The term 'Marrano' refers to communities of Spanish and Portuguese Jews, who converted to Christianity, either voluntarily or by Spanish or Portuguese coercion, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These communities were deeply problematic to civil and religious authorities because many of these converts continued to practice Judaism in secret (or were suspected of doing so).

social boundaries into question, *simply by existing*. By his own standards Pico was an enlightened man, because he was able to see all the possibilities of nature in Man (the mineral, the plant, the animal, the angelic). People were not destined to walk a single fate. They could defy the world in which they were born. But there is a sting in the tail. Within the *Oration*, there is no space for hybridity. There are definite states, one always excluding another. The relative hardness of Pico's system of categories doubtless derives from the older mental attitude of policing confessional borders. According to this vantage point, it was permissible, through the instruments of law or ecclesial coercion, to violently dispel unruly fluidity (Jews, Muslims, heretics) from the social body. Unity was maintained through clarity of identity. This aversion to hybridity will become important in our story later.

How then did these divisions between selves become entangled with explicitly colonial projects? Wynter suggests that the answer lies in the slow transmogrification of 'Christian' and 'Christianity' from a collection of theological signifiers towards becoming overtly ethnic or racial markers. In this latter mode, 'Christian' meant 'European', 'free' and/or 'white'. In this new racial scheme 'Blackness' or 'Africanness' came to signify not merely foreignness and irreligion but also automatic subjugation and/or social exclusion. This shift can partly be explained by European Humanism's propensity to reconfigure older theological categories through explicitly Classical lenses. As established confessional categories were extended and defined with greater precision (by philosophers, colonial jurists, missionaries and inquisitors), new attitudes began to slowly emerge within European societies. Divisions of culture and confession were gradually overlaid with older Aristotelian and Stoic[280] notions of 'natural law'. Natural law theories

280 The Stoics were an ancient school of Greek philosophy founded by Zeno of Citium (c. 334 – c. 262 BCE). While coming to philosophical prominence under the Roman Empire, Stoicism would have a long intellectual afterlife, influencing the direction of late Classical, Medieval and early modern thought. Significant to our story is the fact that there was a revival of Stoicism in the seventeenth– century, which in turn supported the endeavours of the new mechanical science. In its original form, the Stoic sect encompassed diverse branches of knowledge including theology, physics, astronomy and ethics. Chief among the tannest of Stoic thought included:

a) The belief that the universe was providentially organised for the benefit of all beings and objects within that universe.

b) That at a base level, the course of the universe was cyclical, finite, and ultimately predetermined.

c) The ideal Stoic sage was someone who accepted pain or misfortune as part of the course of nature, something providentially predetermined, for the ultimate good of the whole.

d) In the human world, relative social position could also be understood as rooted in the fundamental structure of the universe.

e) While social ranks were pre–determined by a higher providence, the Stoics believed that all who were rational, wise and good, belonged to an invisible and eternal community, which united people across class and status. At this level, if at no other, an enslaved person was spiritually equal to their enslaver.

assume that social moralities are built on a series of pre-human norms or ideals which are then rooted in the very structures of the world. While precise ethical norms vary from place to place, natural law theories posit that the source of particular customs lie in the wise direction of a divine intelligence.

For early modern colonialists, such a formulation of natural law functioned as a way of legitimising and describing the chasms of social status and power essential to imperial violence. In such models, persons were not simply labelled according to their religious faction, but according to some measure of rightness or essentialness, which was decided before their birth.[281] From at least the fifteenth century, differences, once understood in terms of relative social position or religious identity, began to take on a naturalised quality among European colonisers. Skin and not creed began signifying people's status in this new colonial world. Indeed, as Trevor Burnard suggests regarding the early Spanish colonies, "explicitly racist doctrines of African inferiority developed in the Spanish empire only in the late sixteenth-century, after settlement was well-advanced in the Americas. Before then, a racially diverse Spain tended to base African subjugation on people not being Christian."[282] In this latter mutation of Medieval hierarchy, people were seen as locked into predefined differences, not merely according to confession or community affiliation, but according to nature. Otherness became something inherited and not merely acquired. While theories of natural law in our own time can and do function without specifically theological foundations, the naturalising of human differences in the early modern period was still an irreducibly theological move, dependent upon a particular conception of Divine Providence.

This latter element in the genealogy of European Man, encouraged Christians (especially among European elites) to discern the direct hand of providence

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f) True freedom is found not in external things, but in the inner action of will, which can decide how to react to external conditions, even if the person cannot change them.

281 A possible factor in the consolidation of this attitude towards the character of 'peoples' was the rediscovery of the Justinian Law Code in the eleventh–century. At the heart of this compilation of late Roman civil law, was a strong conception of the link between the achievement of a stable and rational social order and the universal status of divine authority. In this vein, the task of the Justinian jurist was to apply the worldwide content of divine law (the essential law of nature) to temporary and changing social conditions. The afterlife of the Justinian compilation within elite European culture was significant, impacting the operation of both civic and ecclesial courts, a trend transmitted and reinforced through an emerging network of European universities. It is easy to see how such ideas could have a direct impact on how persons might be conceived in those societies who lived in the imaginative afterglow of the law code's rediscovery. If social order was underpinned by nature, then divergences within that order might also pre–exist any and all social conventions. Here we see the faintest glimmers of embryonic racial justifications for social status, sitting alongside older accounts of human difference.

282 Trevor Burnard, *The Atlantic in World History, 1490–1830* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 68.

in structuring social and economic differences between peoples. When European colonisers began to displace and dispossess newly discovered 'cultural others', they attempted to apply these newly naturalised categories of latter-day Christendom to novel and potentially disruptive realities. These new persons were gradually thought of as sub-persons or even non-persons, excluded from the essential rationality, agency and refinement of European Man. We see the culmination of this attitude in attempts by Christian apologists from at least the sixteenth century onwards to understand African subjection through the proof text of Genesis 9:24–27, (often dubbed 'The Curse of Ham'). The history of the text's long reception need not detain us here, other than to note its significance in the history of embryonic racial categorisation in both early modern Christian (and Islamic) contexts. In this strange Bible narrative, Ham, the son of Noah, is condemned for seeing his father's nakedness, while Ham's son, Canaan, is condemned to perpetual enslavement via Noah's curse. This condemnation was transmitted to Canaan's progeny. Noah says:

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Shem!
May Canaan be the slave of Shem.
May God extend Japheth's[a] territory;
may Japheth live in the tents of Shem,
and may Canaan be the slave of Japheth.[283]

According to later traditions of Islamic exegesis, transmitted to Europe during the Middle Ages, Canaan was identified as the originator of the peoples of sub-Saharan Africa[284] (who were frequently the victims of raids by Islamic enslavers). Thus, Canaan was understood not simply as an individual, but as the founder and archetype of a nation. What was ordained by Noah would be the lot of all who followed Canaan across the generations. It should be noted however, that in Islamic settings, this narrative interpretation of Genesis 9:24–27 never achieved an unchallenged providential-racialised character, in part because the notion of an ethnic curse competed with a well-established theory among Islamic interpreters that climate rather than direct divine decree, explained human diversity.[285] This suggested, among other things, that human differences were largely contingent rather than fixed or predetermined. People could be otherwise if external circumstances changed. In the second place, the Curse of Ham is not found in the Quran, meaning that any racial justifications built upon the story's foundations, had

283 See Genesis 9:24–27.

284 Bruce S. Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa*, 1600–1960 (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 47.

285 Werner Sollors, *Neither Black Nor White Yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 90.

less obvious authority for Muslim readers.[286] In contrast to many Muslim interpretations, the Curse of Ham became a crucial theological tool in justifying mass enslavement among European Christians in the transatlantic world. This interpretation came to prominence, despite the fact that key texts in the Christian tradition (including the Book of Genesis and the Pauline corpus) emphasised the unity of the human family and God's salvific care across ethnic boundaries). This is suggestive that deeper theological currents were at work under the surface of early modern European society, currents which depended, as we have suggested, not simply on Scripture, but a decidedly imperious and domineering mode of human identity. It was through this Man that Genesis was read. Unsurprisingly, avaricious eyes found themselves reflected in the text.

4.3 New Humans and the Arrival of Protestantism

What does the consolidation of this new racialised theology signify in the historical long run? How did it shape the world in which we still live? In a helpful distillation of Wynter's work, Nandita Sharma has suggested that when we look at the vivid shift from confessional segregation to racial exclusion, it is not simply that certain colonising societies started caring about race, which implied they had racial categories before (like Burnard's 'racially diverse' Spain). Such an implication is wholly anachronistic. The concept of 'race' became socially significant in the early modern period because that is when European racial categories were themselves created. Race was an ideological byproduct of imperial expansion, or perhaps we should say, the result of theological and philosophical reflection done in the context of and service to, expanding colonial violence. A key date in the creation of 'race', says Sharma, is 1492, with the discovery of the New World. The mapping of this new terrain was not simply a physical act of cataloguing and ordering an alien environment, but involved an act of moral and philosophical imagination. In order to rule this unknown continent, European colonisers needed to generate new accounts of humanity and animality, which could contain, discipline and de-fang the unknown. The end result was a world of thousands of fragments, human, sub-human and decidedly un-human, whose relative status could be controlled (at least imaginatively) by the colonisers. As Sharma puts it:

> In the making of a new world, new social bodies and new social imaginaries were made as well. Indeed, many (most?) of the identifications through which people across the world now see

286 Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa*, 1600–1960, 47–8.

> themselves would have been unrecognisable before 1492 (and in many cases much later). Certainly, our 'races' and 'nations' […] the very existence of 'Europeans', 'Americans', 'Africans', 'Asians', 'Pacific Islanders' and so forth, are 'modes of representation', as Wynter puts it, that would have been incomprehensible to humans five hundred years ago (and less). Certainly, none of the people enmeshed within the relationships of empire in 1492 would have understood themselves through these categories.[287]

Here we arrive at a central point in our story. Those whom colonial Europeans first captured and ensnared were thought chiefly as 'enemies of Christ' who were to be placed in bondage as a prohibition against idolatry or depravity. But through this process of punitive moralisation, these outsiders became not simply the inheritors of a foreign culture or religion, but were understood as containers of an alien nature which could not be changed by either force or conversion. Thus, according to Wynter, this transformation of hostility from theological condemnations to racial demotion, produced a new attitude among European colonisers, namely the normalcy of European social and religious experience against which numerous other lives could be categorised or measured. As Wynter suggests:

> For the indigenous peoples of the New World, together with the mass-enslaved peoples of Africa, were now to be reclassified as 'irrational' because 'savage' Indians, and as 'subrational' Negroes, in the terms of a formula based on an a-Christian premise of a by-nature difference between Spaniards and Indians, and, by extrapolation, between Christian Europeans and Negroes.[288]

Here it is useful to return to Pico. If European Man is all about self-creation and the power to transcend boundaries, what else can something designated *not-Man* be, other than something in bondage to nature? In the lecture room Pico's vision of boundless Man was liberating, at least for the elite circle of readers for whom the *Oration* was addressed. When Man crept from the pages of books, it transmuted into a creed of domination. It is an easy step from Pico's fixed lower natures, to a racially infused theology where Man denies agency to all forms of humanity other than itself. From the perspective of a pious enslaver, such an attitude possessed inherent attractions. If enslaved Africans were part of Man, then it was right and proper that they

287 Nandita Sharma, 'Strategic Anti–essentialism: Decolonising Decolonisation', in *Sylvia Wynter: Being Human as Praxis*, ed. Katherine McKittrick (Duke University Press, 2015), 165.

288 Sylvia Wynter, 'Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument', in *The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 296.

should hear the Gospel and accept Christ. And if they accepted Christ then they should be treated as fellow 'brothers in Christ' and could no longer be treated as a mere tool of the enslaver. To concede that Africans were reflections of Man opened up the wholesale destruction of an entire life-world. But if the enslaved African victim was simply 'a brute', incapable of the faith and truth-seeking needed to make a baptised Christian, there need be no abandonment of perpetual enslavement. The order of domination and torture could continue without qualification or interruption. In this latter account, European Man was immutably white, with the right to discipline and objectify all that did not match his unalloyed and superior humanness. As Wynter summarises the implications of this subordinationist model:

> The large-scale accumulation of unpaid land, unpaid labour and overall wealth expropriated by Western Europe from non-European peoples, which was to lay the basis of its global expansion from the fifteenth century onwards, was carried out within the order of truth and the self-evident order of consciousness, of a creed-specific conception of what it was to be human – which, because a monotheistic conception, could not conceive of an Other to what it experienced as being human and therefore an Other to its truth, its notion of freedom.[289]

There are moments in our story, when the emergent myth of race, could have faltered and cracked under the weight of obvious theological contradictions. How could churches that proclaimed the unity of the human family become instruments for the fracturing of human experience? Early Protestantism, with its disdain for the naturalising discourse of an older Catholic theology and its reliance on Scripture facilitated through individual conscience, had the potential to dissolve both the dualities of the Medieval world and Pico's indeterminate European Man. In its initial phase (particularly under the polemical stewardship of Luther) embryonic Protestantism turned decisively against the Christian/Platonic imagination and instead attempted to reinscribe Augustine's conception of boundedness under sin on the European theological landscape. This had the potential to reintroduce the notion of a shared human situation, in a Christian world which was beginning to see humanity as a set of distinctive and divergent spheres, some interlocking, others distant and incommunicable. The freedom prized by early Protestant preachers was not Pico's indeterminacy of being, but a new identity in Christ, accomplished not by works, but by faith. This new status came quite apart from the intercession of priests, the authority of Church councils, or the ministry of the sacraments. Moreover, it emerged, against the grain of Pico's Humanism, quite apart from any refined knowledge of nature.

289 Wynter, 'Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom', 291.

All that was needed was the pure preaching of the Word of God and for the errant heart to believe firmly in Christ's promise of redemption. No social position, no distinction of class or caste could interfere with this evangelical imperative. The Protestant obsession with the translation and dissemination of Scripture into the vernacular, spoke to a desire to wash the Gospel in the waters of ordinary life. God would speak to each believer in the way most suited to him or her. No longer was the believer cordoned off from the presence of Christ, but encouraged to cultivate a horizontal relationship with the source of their faith. All social customs which stood in the way of the pure preaching of the Word (no matter how venerable) should be torn down. Looked at from the outside, early Protestant theology appeared like a stern antidote to the limited particularities and chauvinisms of European Man. Many Protestant evangelists observed the operation of the emerging racial hierarchy with a degree of shock. But this initial discomfort did not cause Protestants to radically diverge from the practice of their Catholic neighbours. Indeed, Protestantism ended by adopting the slave economies of Spain and Portugal in the Americas, often expanding their reach and deepening their cruelty. How should we understand this process of accommodation? Part of it can be explained by the hard facts of commercial interest. Protestant states, as they made inroads into Catholic imperial zones, found readymade structures of labour and income-generation which would have been expensive and commercially counterproductive to dislodge or dismantle. But this grim pragmatism was supported and rationalised by a cluster of theological propositions and assumptions which young Protestant Christianity already believed. Like their Humanist and Catholic forebears, the Protestant reformers still operated in and through the categories of Medieval Christendom. Developing Protestant societies found readymade validations for slave-economies, including social dispossession and exclusion based upon confession. As Alec Ryrie observes:

> [When] Dutch traders in the Far East found that household slavery was the norm for the wealthy classes of the region, it was only natural for them to pick up the pattern. There was really only one uncomfortable feature of this practice for them. Christian merchants suddenly found that their households were filled with infidels, pagans and idolaters. That distinction made it all the easier to justify keeping such people as slaves; contemporary views of bonded labour usually had a religious inflection, most obviously in the common rule in Europe that Jews might not keep Christians as servants or apprentices, but the other way round was actively desirable, since that way Jews might be brought to conversion. The head of a Christian household, it was assumed, had a paternal responsibility for all those under his care, whether his actual family, his servants or indeed his slaves.[290]

290 Alec Ryrie, *How Protestant Missionaries Encountered Slavery*, given on 9th March 2022, Gresham College.

But as Katherine Gerbner has shown, alongside these more familiar dualities, embryonic racial categories also played a significant role in Protestant theological discourse. While early Protestantism had been critical of natural law theories (especially in its Aristotelian form[291]) within just a few generations, Protestantism re-embraced it, especially via the Reform theology of John Calvin.[292] While Protestant natural law theory tended to be more tentative than its Catholic equivalent, there was an emerging consensus among Protestant users of this tradition that natural law could and should be used to complement and supplement Scripture, especially in situations where the biblical data was ambiguous. This readoption and rearticulation of natural law by Protestants would have significant implications for both early Protestant attitudes to emergent racial categories generally and chattel enslavement in particular.

Gerbner identifies the way in which Protestant thinkers like Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) and Alberico Gentili (1522–1608) applied natural law traditions to justify a range of social and legal customs, including the enslavement of African and Indigenous American people.[293] Gentili argued (drawing on the work of both Augustine and Thomas Aquinas) that 'slavery' was legitimate as a punishment for sin.[294] Since, says Gentili, nothing happens by chance, enslaved people must deserve their plight, in accord with the order of nature willed by God. Pagans and Muslims were prime targets for Gentili's punitive conjecture. In the case of Grotius, 'slavery' was understood as an extension of natural justice. Captives were understood as reparations in the context of just war. It is worth dwelling for a moment on what Grotius considered 'just'. As Mikki Stelder notes: "For Grotius, a just cause for invasion consisted of non-Christians resisting free trade and the establishment of trading posts, the

291 Aristotle (384–322 BCE) was a philosopher and early natural scientist whose work had a significant impact on Western philosophy, theology and medicine throughout the Middle Ages and into the early modern era. A key element for Aristotle's theory of natural law for our purposes is his idea of 'natural slavery', see Aristotle, Politics, 1254b16–21. Aristotle argued that there were two kinds of enslavement, one ordained by convention (brought about by the rules of a given society) and slaves by nature; those who (due to mental or bodily endowment) were best fitted to be under the control of a master. In the Reformation period, Aristotle's approach to natural law came under attack by Protestant theologians who argued that, due to the pervasiveness of human sin and the feebleness of the human intellect, it was not possible for people to distinguish what was conventional and what was natural; the things ordered by God and the things invented by human institutions, beliefs or preferences According to this view, the only reliable source for the discovery of the divine will was the Bible.

292 Seung–Joo Lee, *The Orders of Nature and Grace: Thomistic Concepts in the Moral Thought of Franciscus Junius (1545–1602)* (Brill, 2004). 108–9.

293 Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 22.

294 Jean Alain, *Slavery in International Law: Of Human Exploitation and Trafficking* (Brill, 2012), 38.

improper cultivation of lands, or breaking contract."[295] It should be noted on the latter point that Grotius believed it perfectly legitimate for Dutch traders to impose contracts on Indigenous peoples simply on the basis of 'Christian superiority'. It was not necessary for non-Christian peoples to consent to any of the arrangements being imposed upon them. In Grotius's scheme the only legitimate response to colonisation was passive acceptance.

Once enslaved for breach of contract, suggested Grotius, a captive could be punished or even killed by their enslaver with the full protection of the law. In the case of non-Christians, says Grotius, enslaved people could be taken, even if the circumstances under which they were captured later transpired to be manifestly unjust.[296] Here we see the universality of natural law being slowly transformed into a charter for ethnic, specifically European, privilege. One significant result of such speculation was the widespread adoption by Protestants of a category which first emerged in and through the Catholic slave trade, that of 'the hereditary heathen'.[297] This category allowed European colonisers to assert two significant things. Firstly, there were irreducible differences between persons that could not be remedied by missionary efforts or conversion. Secondly, given that certain persons were intrinsically opposed to the lives of white, Christian Europeans, it was necessary to curb and control them. Immovable otherness justified the permanent exclusion of such persons from European societies (at the level of religion and manners) and lent credence to the notion of '*once a slave always a slave*'. Gerbner labels this naturalistic theological turn 'Protestant Supremacy'[298], which, she suggests, constitutes the ideological precursor of European conceptions of racial hierarchy.

4.4 Early Quaker Theology: Against European Man?

Now we have considered some of the philosophical roots of coloniality (alongside the chief theological justifications for early modern chattel enslavement), we are in a position to assess the degree to which early Quaker leaders and preachers adopted or diverged from the board outlines of European Man as described above. A few key findings should be flagged before we begin this discussion in detail.

295 Mikki Stelder, 'The colonial difference in Hugo Grotius: rational man, slavery and Indigenous dispossession', *Postcolonial Studies* 25, no. 4 (2021): 574.

296 Stelder, 'The colonial difference in Hugo Grotius: rational man, slavery and Indigenous dispossession', *Postcolonial Studies*, 571.

297 Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 47.

298 Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 12.

1) While Quakers in the middle of the seventeenth century would have encountered nascent theologies of race, there is limited evidence early Friends engaged in any sustained way with emerging racialised theologies.

2) The ethnic and social categories largely used by early Quaker communities were not derived from the new theologies of race, but from older Biblical typologies instead.

3) Quaker scepticism regarding notions of natural law made it harder for racialised conceptions to take root within early Quaker communities.

4) Early Quakerism's tendency to emphasise the universal accessibility of the Inward Light tended to mitigate against more racial or chauvinistic accounts of evangelism.

5) These various theological inoculants did not prevent Friends from accepting the existence of systems of violence and control based on nascent models of race.

6) Quaker theological distinctiveness did not in the end prevent Friends from adopting racial categories and enslavement practices.

What Were Early Quakers Thinking? Even a cursory glance at early Quaker sources reveals a community which was fumbling towards a distinctive understanding of humanity, one which positioned itself against *European Man*. In diverse tracts and letters, first-generation Friends poured scorn on the fragmented humanity of both Catholic Christendom (the old Medieval labels of 'Christian, 'Muslim', 'heretic' and 'heathen'), alongside the mobile humanness articulated by Pico. Friends attacked these conceptions from two distinct but interlocking directions. In the first place, early Quakers questioned the dependability of most metrics for establishing genuine Christian identity. Given their commitment to the universalising presence of the Inward Light, early Quaker preachers concluded that nearly all traditional confessional typologies for establishing insider/outsider status were unreliable at best. Such descriptions relied, not upon God, they insisted, but upon fallible human judgments. Only Christ, the physician of souls, could know the spiritual condition of each professing believer. As George Fox tells us in his *Journal*:

> About the beginning of the year 1646, as I was going to Coventry, and entering towards the gate, a consideration arose in me, how it was said that all Christians are believers, both Protestants and Papists;

> and the Lord opened to me that, if all were believers, then they were all born of God and passed from death to life, and that none were true believers but such; and though others said they were believers, yet they were not.[299]

Words for Fox could never grasp the essence of faith. Only 'experiment', that is, direct experience, could be the ground and guarantor of Christian identity. At the beginning of the second period of Quakerism, Isaac Penington rearticulated Fox's embryonic revelation in this way: "Now everlasting happiness and salvation depends upon true Christianity. It does not depend upon having the name of a Christian only, or professing such and such Christian doctrines, but having the nature of Christianity…"[300] Such a formulation had potentially revolutionary consequences. If many who claimed to be Christian were in fact not Christian, was it possible that some of those habitually called non-Christian by churches were in fact closer to Christ than their false counterparts?

Throughout his early Ministry, Fox felt keenly that the Light which shone in his heart did not automatically exclude anyone. In a spirit not too dissimilar from the European Anabaptists, Fox began to see that many of the habitual borders placed around Christian communities by past generations had no direct basis in Scripture. This realisation encouraged the first Friends to embrace two radical postures which set Quakers apart from the wider religious landscape of seventeenth-century England. In the first place, early Friends were able to conceive of a God who could communicate with human souls, without means of religious organisation, external preaching or the direct transmission of Scripture. As the early Quaker missionary Samuel Fisher wrote in this vein, "even Gentiles as well as Jews, Heathens and Indians as well as Englishmen and Christians (so-called) […] all have some measure of that Grace nigh them, which in the least measure is sufficient to heal and help them."[301] In the second place, first-generation Friends were willing to concede a wide measure of social and religious inclusion within an otherwise highly sectarian religious environment. As Fox expressed this spacious attitude: "And let him be Jew, or Papist, or Turk, or Heathen, or Protestant, or what soever, or such as worship sun or moon or stocks or stones, let them have liberty where everyone may bring forth and have free liberty to speak forth his mind and judgement."[302] Alongside the exaggerated

299 George Fox, *The Journal,* ed. Nigel Smith (Penguin, 1998), 10.

300 Isaac Penington, 'An Exhortation to True Christianity', in *Writings, Volume II* ed. Jason R. Henderson (Martin Street Fellowship, 2015), 129.

301 Samuel Fisher, *Rusticus ad academicos* (printed for Robert Wilson, 1660), Michigan University Digital Collections, 133.

302 George Fox, *Gospel truth demonstrated, in a collection of doctrinal books* (Marcus T.C. Gould, 1831), 278.

Quaker tendency towards toleration, we also find a marked propensity in early Quaker writing to seek to understand the religious and cultural other. In contrast to thinkers like Grotius for whom non-Christians were merely expendable infidels, fit only for enslavement, early Friends attempted to comprehend their interlocutors in ways highly uncharacteristic of the wider ideology of Protestant Supremacy. In a striking letter of 1662, Fox writes:

> [People] are saved by Christ, they will say; but while you are upon earth, you must not be made free from sin. This is as much as if one should be in Turkey a slave, chained to a boat and one should come to redeem him to go into his own country; but say the Turks, thou art redeemed, but while thou art upon the earth, thou must not go out of Turkey,[303] nor have the chain off thee. So say Satan's messengers, you are redeemed, but must carry a body of death about you and cannot go to your father Adam's house before he fell, but you must live in your father Adam's house in the fall, while ye be upon earth. But I say you are redeemed by Christ; it cost him his blood to purchase man out of this state he is in, in the fall and bring him up to the state man was in before he fell…[304]

In a century defined by fears of Muslim invasion of Christian Europe, this letter must have possessed a dangerous sting. Here, Fox draws an equivalence between his Puritan contemporaries with those his society most feared. Just as Muslim enslavers chained the bodies of Christians in North Africa, so Puritan preachers chained the consciences of believers, with talk of inescapable sin. For Fox, it was they, not Muslim invaders, who endangered the truths of Christ. Such an approach shows an imaginative sympathy, which arises directly from Fox's apprehension of the universality of Christ's saving light. The consequences of God's ubiquitous activity are starkly visible for Fox. The defining human divisions in the world were not natural or congenital, but theological and experiential. In such a world, presumed insiders could be suddenly discovered to be enemies, while enemies could be revealed as potential friends (in both senses). This manifestly undercuts the logic of Christian slavery with its assumption of English or European cultural superiority. Fox possesses no such illusions. Fox's Puritan nation is in many ways no better (and in many ways much worse) than places that have never heard of Christ. Thus, the tone of Fox's evangelism is markedly

303 Here we see a troubling spiritualisation in Fox which treats outward slavery, not as a social violation or as a spiritual vice, but a test for righteous souls. Those brought to bondage must use their captivity to the glory of the Gospel. As we shall see later this tendency towards the spiritualisation of slavery explains in part how many Quaker communities came to accept slave–owning as acceptable even if not strictly speaking ideal.

304 George Fox, 'Epistle 222', in *George Fox's Epistles text from Works (1831), v 7–8, somewhat condensed with biblical references and allusions identified* (Earlham College).

different from its Puritan or even Anglican alternatives. In a 1683 letter to Friends being held captive by Muslim enslavers in Algiers, Fox calls upon Friends to display holiness before their kidnapers in the expectation that God will be manifest directly in the traffickers' hearts:

> [Be] careful of God's glory, you who profess the name of God and his son, that your lives and words and conversations may preach godliness, righteousness, holiness, virtue, sobriety and modesty, both to Turks, Moors, Jews and to your patrons and to the families where you live; for Christ hath enlightened every man that comes into the world [John 1:9], he hath enlightened the Turks, Jews and Moors, with the light, (which is the life in him the word [John 1:4],) that all in the light might know God and Christ; and 'the grace of God which brings salvation hath appeared unto all men [Tit 2:11];' so to the Turks, Jews and Moors, yea, to all nations; so that with the grace of God they may be taught to deny ungodliness and unrighteousness and live righteously and godly [Tit 2:12]; and therefore all must come to this grace of God in their hearts…. [305]

Within such a generous theology there was no question that human beings could be captured and enslaved on the basis of perceived or actual religiosity, as one finds in Grotius or Gentili. Neither was there in Fox's theology the kind of ontological separatism assumed by the racial theologies built upon the Curse of Ham. In early Quaker thought, the doctrine of the Inward Light grounds a surprisingly free and conscientious human subject. The roots of Quaker slave-owning cannot in the first instance be attributed to any kind of wholesale Quaker adoption of a nascent theology of race. As we shall see however, this did not insulate Friends from either direct participation in the slave-economy, or developing theological frameworks which actively supported both its operation and continuance.

Radical Freedom from Natural Law: If first-generation Quakers resisted whole systems of early modern categorisation, they were equally suspicious of natural theologies which sought to justify habitual social, economic and gender inequalities. When early Friends felt Christ present among them, they sensed a corresponding lessening of social boundaries. Customs and institutions seemed to melt away as Friends were enfolded into the immediate presence of Christ. As opponents of the early Quaker movement soon recognised, such experience possessed potentially revolutionary consequences. If the will of God could be felt immediately in the minds and bodies of believers, what need did true believers have for law courts, churches, priests or even kings? Like the Levellers, many early Friends advocated a

305 George Fox, Epistle 388*, Sermons & Devotionals by George Fox* (2026), Bible Portal.

radical critique of social and economic orders. A particular concern of this prophetic stream was the damaging impact of landed class and political hierarchy on notions of Christian fellowship. The 'boy martyr' James Parnell, Edward Burrough and James Nayler exemplified this attitude in their stern rejections of feudal privilege, monopolistic private ownership alongside drastic inequalities of wealth, power and social status. As Burrough vividly summarised this stream in Quaker thought in his tract *An Account of Some Grounds and Reasons of the Innocent Sufferings of the People of God, Called, Quakers*:

> Hath not God made of one mould and one blood all nations to dwell upon the Face of the Earth? And doth not he that respects Persons commit sin? […] must it now be an Offence not to put off the Hat and give respect to the Person of him that hath a Gold Ring and fine Apparel? Hath not all the earthly Lordship and Tyranny and Oppression sprung from this ground, by which Creatures hath been exalted and set up one above another, trampling under Foot and despising the Poor?[306]

In this passage the unity of humanity serves as the foundation for an uncompromising egalitarian ethic which refuses subordination of all kinds (Acts 17:26–28). Underlying this stance was the notion that while other creatures obeyed the fixities of natural law, human beings had become detached from its structures. But instead of regarding this unmooring as liberation (as one finds in Pico), early Quaker apologetics tended to understand such dislocation as the source of all human corruption. As William Smith wrote in his 1661 pamphlet, *The New Creation Brought Forth*:

> When the pure creation was finished […] it rested in the holy order of life and was in the pure harmony and oneness with the Creator […] There was a part that did not keep its station, but moved out of the wisdom and brake the order and did aspire towards the equality of the Holy Essence, for which cause it was cast down by the power and driven into the lowest part of creation and was there to have its place and habitation at the furthest distance from God.[307]

Here human mobility signifies the loss or diminution of a primordially harmonious and restful nature, which neither desired to possess the world,

306 Edward Burrough, *The memorable works of a son of thunder and consolation namely that true prophet and faithful servant of God and sufferer for the testimony of Jesus, Edward Burroughs, who dyed a prisoner for the word of God in the city of London, the fourteenth of the twelfth moneth, 1662*, University of Michigan Library Digital Collections.

307 Quoted in Stuart Masters, 'In Unity with Creation: The early experience of Friends' (*Quaker Stew*, 06/03/2012).

nor control its inhabitants. After the Fall, in place of this original concord, now stood a disjointed, egoistical and violent creature who sought to rule like a little god on earth. This warlike spirit was everywhere, in the home, in the marketplace and in the relationship between humanity and nature. As Burrough expressed this predicament: "And (man) being possessed with evil and corrupted, he makes all creatures evil in his exercise of them and he corrupts them and perverts them to another end than wherefore they were created […] and ruling over them in oppression and cruelty and hard-heartedness and not in the wisdom of God."[308] But, according to emergent Quaker theology, the Light of Christ opened a way back to the embryonic harmony of natural law. Those who worshiped without form, in Spirit and in Truth, could forsake their egoistical mobility and once again find rest in the still harmonious centre of God. But such a restoration was not the same as returning to something like stale fixity. Instead, early Friends described being radically free from the multiple pains and dominations of the world. This new reality was manifested most starkly in the lives of many first-generation Quaker women. In Christ, Quaker women felt that the old dispensation of gendered domination was at an end and that a new saved and equal humanity could be reinstated. As Margret Fell had expressed this radical theology in her *Woman's Speaking Justified*:

> [The] Darkness is past and the Night of Apostacy draws to an end and the true Light now shines, the Morning Light, the bright Morning Star, the Root and Offspring of *David,* he is risen, he is risen, Glory to the Highest for evermore; and the Joy of the Morning is come and the Bride, the Lamb's Wife, is making herself ready […] And this is that free Woman, that all the Children of the Promise are born of; not the Children of the Bond-woman, which is *Hagar,* which genders to Strife and to Bondage and which answers to *Jerusalem,* which is in Bondage with her Children; but this is the *Jerusalem* which is free, Which is the Mother of us all. And so this Bond-woman and her Children, that are born after the Flesh, have persecuted them that are born after the Spirit, even until now.[309]

At the heart of this vision of heaven breaking into the present was the radical language of Galatians: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (3:28). In the freeing of women from male headship, Fell described the arrival of a new community, one in which old powers of government and family would finally be subordinated to the peaceful rule of Christ. In Fell's

308 Edward Burrough: *A Memoir of a Faithful Servant of Christ and Minister of the Gospel, who Died in Newgate, 14th, 12 Mo., 1662*, (Adam & Charles Black, 1851), 218.

309 Margaret Fell, *Women's Speaking Justified,* Quaker Heritage Press.

reading, dismantling patriarchy by necessity called into question a general logic of domination. The renewal of women is nothing less than one outward sign of a general 'breaking in' of God into time. It is for these and similar postures that early Friends could be described as (sometimes) Christian anarchists – a people so swept up in the immediate and unfolding presence of Christ that worldly norms no longer intruded. What then can we say about the relationship between the free spiritual self of early Quakerism and the hierarchical chauvinism of European Man? Given that First-generation Quakers were evidently suspicious of the ethnic, naturalised and confessional categorisations upon which notions like 'hereditary heathen' were built, it is reasonable to conclude that early Quaker theology was either hostile or uninterested in emerging racialised theologies. This does not mean of course that individual Friends did not or could not utilise the assumptions of European Man in their daily lives, only that the imaginative structure of early Quaker theology tended to mitigate against many of its basic assumptions. But if this was so, what then explains the Quaker enslavement of Africans in the Caribbean and elsewhere? And how was it that explicit Quaker opposition to transatlantic enslavement did not fully crystallise until the eighteenth century? The answer to both questions has to do with the ways Quaker theology became shaped by and responded to intense persecution. We suggest that explicitly survivalist habits of mind allowed Friends to come to terms with the world in ways which largely left the world's structures of extraction and domination theologically and ethically unexamined. In the next section, we shall see how Quaker approaches to community survival frequently crystalised into a form of pro-slavery theology which sat at odds with much else early Quakers said and believed.

4.5 The Psychology of Justification

In this discussion, we consider the internal elements of the Quaker Way which may have inclined Quaker communities towards a general acceptance of African enslavement. A core contention in this discussion is that the acceptance of African enslavement across the transatlantic world was linked to Friends' experience of persecution and their theological and psychological strategies for navigating social stigma and intense civil and sectarian violence. We suggest the very mechanisms which allowed Friends to survive intense hardship also led Quaker communities towards an accommodation with the colonial slave economy. Early Friends were characterised by a profound sense of otherness. In their dress, speech and mode of worship, the first Quakers sensed themselves to be a separate people, who looked at their world, as if from the outside. In a society that blithely conflated Christendom with culture and crown, Friends poured scorn

on the notion that faith in Christ could be either inherited or crystallised into a set of human institutions. Turning to their outward world, many early Quakers felt an exaggerated disdain for seats of learning, kingly courts or the decisions of magistrates. Truth was acquired neither by the dissection of outward experience nor transmitted by tradition, but according to the work of Christ in the heart. Corresponding to this profound sense of inwardness, early Friends frequently described themselves as a pure remnant Church (captured in a metaphorical Egypt or Babylon), the most intuitive response in such circumstances was to turn drastically inward, expending greater energy on the maintenance of internal self-understanding, discipline and organisation. The ultimate goal of such redirection was the creation of a bordered community, capable of distinguishing itself from the spiritual ambiguity and moral danger which existed outside its walls.

To cohere as a spiritual community meant remaining unstained by the terrors and corruptions of the outside world. This impulse was largely inherited from the sectarian Puritan culture from which Quakerism arose. In this model, the Church is an uncontaminated island of holiness amidst a sinful and godless majority. The object of the Puritan preacher was to wean the faithful off the manifold follies of human desire and convention, towards the pure fountains of Scripture and moral reformation. There was already plentiful biblical precedent for such spiritualisation. In his letter to the Christian community in Galatia, Paul had used the polarity between slave and free, not to criticise institutions of outward bondage, but to describe the freedom from cultic restriction heralded by the coming of Christ. As Paul expressed it:

> For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise. These things are being taken figuratively: The women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free and she is our mother. (Galatians 4:22–27)

Here Scriptures become removed from the messy and ambiguous domain of human life and instead illustrate timeless inner states. What we have here is a spirituality of stolid inwardness. The two most solid entities in such a cosmos are God and the self. The world (with all its circumstances and attendant conditions) is mere backdrop, a series of functional occasions for the soul and God to move closer or further apart. The world, its persons and

its unruly particularities are almost entirely absent from such a devotional lens. In this account, the most important practical activity is the saving of souls and not the restitution of bodies.

The impact of such a posture comes fully into view with the arrival of George Fox on the island of Barbados in 1671. In undertaking this missionary excursion Fox had two significant objectives. The first was to raise his apologetic ire against Anglican persecution of Quakers on the island, while the second was to defend Quakers against charges of social and religious subversion. In both causes Fox was not concerned with the inbreaking of God into history, but rather with a much narrower activity, that of sectarian lobbying. His reflections against island-wide persecution are preserved in his 1672 tract, *To the ministers, teachers and priests (so called and so stileing your selves) in Barbadoes*. What is so peculiar about this text is its startling unconcern with transatlantic chattel enslavement. As Fox walked the streets, this stern Quaker evangelist must have been surrounded by large numbers of enslaved people. And yet, all Fox wished to perceive was the suffering of his particular people. Friends mattered; others mattered much less. As Fox recounts one experience with an Anglican priest on Barbados:

> That he is no True Minister of Christ Jesus, the Lord of Life and Glory; for his Fruits make him so manifest. Once I went to his House Civilly, to ask for some Goods that were due to me and he did fall upon me with several hard Blows and with Violence Thrust me out of his Porch and gave me one bad Kick in the Small of my Back, as I went, or was down the steps of the Porch. Now let all Sober People judge and to God's Pure Witness in all Consciences I leave it to be judged, Whether Priest Lessley's Dealings with me do not manifest him to be one of those whom Christ Jesus speaks of, saying, Many shall come in Sheep's Cloathing, but inwardly they are Ravening Wolves; by their Fruits ye shall know them.[310]

Here violence is for Fox the mark of anti-Christ and an outward condemnation of the priestcraft practised on the island. But compared with the visceral description of his situation on Barbados, Fox's discussion of the condition of enslaved people always possesses a certain lofty unreality. An early example can be found in Fox's letter *To Friends Beyond The Sea, That Have Blacks And Indian Slaves (1657). Fox* writes:

> I was moved to write these things to you in all those plantations. God, that made the world and all things therein, giveth life and breath to

310 George Fox, *To the ministers, teachers, and priests (so called and so stileing your selves) in Barbadoes* (1672), University of Michigan Library Digital Collections.

> all and they all have their life and moving and their being in him, he is the God of the spirits of the flesh and is no respecter of persons; but "whosoever fearth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him." And he hath made all nations of one blood to dwell upon the face of the earth and his eyes are over all the works of his hands and seeth every thing that is done under the whole of heaven; and "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." And he causeth the rain to fall upon the just and the unjust and also he causeth the sine to shine upon the just and the unjust; and he commands to "love all men," for Christ loved all, so that he "died for sinners."[311]

This letter is clearly a repudiation of European Man and its subsequent theologies of race. Fox wishes to affirm the unity of the human race and that no one is above any other in God's sight. But nowhere in this letter does Fox call for enslavers to abolish the institution of mass enslavement. The moral remarks in this epistle are exhortative but vague. Indeed, they are platitudinous, containing no evidence of concrete knowledge of the economies of enslavement to which they are addressed. The unity of humanity to which Fox appeals does not translate into any specific courses of action, either on the part of enslaved persons or their Quaker enslavers. There is tacit acknowledgement of God's judgement, but there is no reflection on particular sins or infractions. Unlike the Turks, who Fox acknowledges have brought oppression on Friends, he is strangely silent about this dynamic of oppression in the case of Quaker enslavers. Fox either did not think this dynamic of oppression applied to Friends (of a people owning others without violence), or more likely, that matters of slave-management fell outside the scope of his spiritual concerns. In either case, Fox appears to have cocooned himself in an exalted vision of salvation to the manifest neglect of historical concreteness. The Quaker predilection towards radical otherness prevented Fox from productively allowing his religious meditations to touch mud and blood. We can grasp the consequences of this spiritualising attitude by studying the difference between Fox's letter of 1657 and his later Barbados anti-priest tract of 1672.

For Fox, the condition of enslaved people could be scattered over a few pastoral sentences, whereas Quaker travails must always be dug into for their providential meaning. In Fox's writing, Quakers always have a voice. The enslaved on the other hand are always silent. They never address, but they are always being addressed. For Fox, Friends must be protected from oppression. Those already oppressed (African people who have been kidnapped and daily brutalised) are for Fox almost invisible. Fox does not

311 George Fox, 'To Friends Beyond The Sea, That Have Blacks And Indian Slaves' (1657), University of Michigan Library Digital Collections.

concern himself with the beatings and humiliations which were foundational in maintaining a slave society on Barbados. Fox's righteous indignation in his own case (while surrounded by enslaved people) renders his advocacy mere egotism. His sectarian mission was his central purpose. In this context of Quaker self-involvement, Fox's now infamous letter to the Governor of Barbados in 1671 must have seemed to the author a sublime expression of his enlightened religious principles. As Fox insisted:

> [A] slander which they have cast upon us is, "that we teach the negroes to rebel"; a thing we utterly abhor in our hearts; the Lord knows it, who is the searcher of all hearts and knows all things and can testify for us, that this is a most abominable untruth. For that which we have spoken to them is, 'to exhort and admonish them to be sober and to fear God; to love their masters and mistresses and to be faithful and diligent in their masters' service and business; and then their masters and overseers would love them and deal kindly and gently with them; also, that they should not beat their wives, nor the wives their husbands, neither should the men have many wives; that they should not steal, or be drunk,-- should not commit adultery, or fornication,--should not curse, swear, lie, or give bad words to one another, or to any one else: for there is something in them that tells them, they should not practise these or any other evils.[312]

Behind this statement of political harmlessness[313] was the contested enterprise of Christian evangelisation in the New World. In the course of the seventeenth century, Barbados became an extractive slave society, which depended for its existence on a complex web of ecclesiastical and colonial networks. In this predominately Anglican society, Quakers were habitually understood as subversive religious dissidents. With their interlocking refusals of outward sacraments, bishops and paid ministers, they appeared

312 George Fox, 'Letter of George Fox and others to the Governor of Barbados' (1671), Quaker Heritage Press.

313 Fox's repudiation of the claim that Quakers were preaching rebellion is suggestive that many of Fox's co–religionists possessed versions of the Quaker doctrine, which even at this early date, existed in direct opposition to economies of enslavement (on the supposition that, 'there is no smoke without fire'). Even a cursory exploration of Fox's own early radical pronouncements (particularly his identification with Christ and his apparent commitment to a theology of divinisation) gestures at the possibility of a mode of Quaker evangelism which had as its aim the suspension of all temporal markers of status and belonging, in a direct experience of divine indwelling (see in particular Richard G. Bailey, 'The Making and Unmasking of a God: New Light on George Fox and Early Quakerism, *in New Light on George Fox 1624–1691: A Collection of Essays*, (William Sessions, 1991), 110–128. As we will see later, the historical record does preserve isolated instances of moral (and by extension theological) protest, although as Fox's reaction shows, Quaker leaders were largely unwilling to countenance any direct assault on a key institution of the transatlantic world.

to established observers to be spiritual anarchists, who brought a rebellious Gospel of personal revelation and spiritual autonomy to otherwise powerless people. Clergy and enslavers feared that Quaker teaching and preaching would offer the enslaved a new identity, which could not be controlled, either by clergy or overseers. Fox, after experiencing over a decade of fierce persecution at home in England, was keen to demonstrate that, despite the obvious peculiarities of Quaker Worship and theology, that Friends were conventional Protestants who could at least live with African enslavement. This is why the letter contains an extended example of creed making. Confronted with accusations of subversion and heresy, Fox chooses the path of survival, reassuring the Anglican authorities that there is nothing seditious in Quaker theological convictions. As Fox insists:

> … we now plainly and sincerely declare, that we own and believe in God, the only wise, omnipotent and everlasting God, who is the creator of all things both in heaven and in the earth and the preserver of all that he hath made; who is God over all, blessed for ever; to whom be all honour, glory, dominion, praise and thanksgiving, both now and for evermore! and we own and believe in Jesus Christ, his beloved and only begotten Son, in whom he is well pleased; who was conceived by the holy ghost and born of the virgin Mary; in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins; who is the express image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature, by whom were all things created that are in heaven and in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, dominions, principalities, or powers; all things were created by him. And we own and believe that he was made a sacrifice for sin, who knew no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; and that he was crucified for us in the flesh, without the gates of Jerusalem; and that he was buried and rose again the third day by the power of his Father, for our justification; and we believe that he ascended up into heaven and now sitteth at the right hand of God.[314]

We see in the above remarks something like the snake which eats its own tail. So fixated is Fox on the evangelical imperative (that inward saving of souls) that he actually jettisons other key dimensions of emerging Quaker doctrine. The ecstasy and vision of early Quaker experience, the doctrine of Inward Light, the notion of Christ's immediate indwelling, are largely erased here, replaced by theological categories hardly distinguishable from those of the broader institutional Reformation. It is in this context that Fox turns to the enslaved people of Barbados. His primary concern is not the cruelty of enslavement (despite his obvious knowledge of such cruelty), but his ability

314 Fox, 'Letter to the Governor of Barbados', Quaker Heritage Press.

to defend the evangelism of Friends in public. As part of this program of Quaker mission, Fox laid out the responsibility of enslavers to evangelise the people they enslavedand keep the outward lives of the enslaved in good order. As Fox reflects:

> We declare that we esteem it a duty incumbent on us to pray with and for those in and belonging to our families and to teach, instruct and admonish them; this being a command of the Lord, disobedience whereunto will provoke his displeasure; as may be seen, Jer. x. 25, 'Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not and upon the families that call not upon thy name.' Now Negroes, Tawnies, Indians, make up a very great part of the families in this island; for whom an account will be required by him who comes to judge both quick and dead…[315]

It is worth dwelling for a moment on what this extract does not say. It does not dwell on the institutional violence of enslavement, nor does it exhort enslavers to set enslaved people free. What it does say is deeply disturbing. If Quakers fail to establish disciplined households in which the enslaved are incorporated, moulded and taught, Friends will open themselves up to divine judgement. But in Fox's mind this strategy was a repudiation, albeit subtle, of Barbados' slave-owning class, who believed that evangelism would agitate and embolden their human property. Fox refuses to accept that a forced division between believers and the unconverted could be justified on the basis of Scripture. But by advocating such forced households, Fox adopted the very structures of European Man. He generates a Quaker specific justification for why white European Quakers should continue with the practice of African enslavement. In 'Gospel family-order', Fox places the white European in the automatic position of religious controller, forcing various social others into conditions of pure docility. True enough, Fox repudiates European Man with great theological vividness, but in the end, he embraces its deeply racist effects. What stopped Fox from developing a comprehensive condemnation of enslavement? We can only speculate on precise causes, but a likely source of justification was the peace theology which Fox had been developing as early as the 1640s. Fox's understanding of peace was rooted in two vital theological strands. The first was the notion of righteous Christian suffering in the face of persecution. The second strand involved the passive acceptance of imprisonment or dispossession as a form of co-suffering with Christ. While the Hebrew tradition repudiated the dispossession and servitude inaugurated by Egyptians, if slavery was brought upon God's people, it must be accepted as purgative or providential (Genesis 50:20). In this vein, we find the prophet Jeremiah telling a weeping

315 Fox, 'Letter to the Governor of Barbados', Quaker Heritage Press.

and homesick population of enslaved people to pray for those who have colonised them: "Work for the well-being of the city where I have sent you to and pray to the Lord for this. For if it is well with the city you live in, it will be well with you." (Jeremiah 29:7). In early Quaker texts, Friends frequently identified themselves with enslaved Israelites, kept in bondage by a cruel ruler. Like the Hebrews, Friends were to accept their fate, waiting for God and not look for human devices to deliver them. But there was a flipside to biblical images of enslavement which possessed profound implications for European Protestants in the transatlantic world. If enslaved people are to accept their condition, enslavers should be praised if they show consideration to their captives. We might think of the preference that Potiphar offered to the enslaved Joseph (Genesis 39:2–6). In Fox's hands these traditions functioned as a codicil to documents like *The Declaration* of 1660 wherein Friends were framed as agents of social harmony and quietist passivity. As the *Declaration* expresses it:

> For this we can say to all the world, we have wronged no man, we have used no force nor violence against any man: we have been found in no plots, nor guilty of sedition. When we have been wronged, we have not sought to revenge ourselves; we have not made resistance against authority; but wherein we could not obey for conscience' sake we have suffered the most of all people in the nation. We have been counted as sheep for the slaughter, persecuted and despised, beaten, stoned, wounded, stocked, whipped, imprisoned, haled out of synagogues, cast into dungeons and noisome vaults, where many have died in bonds, shut up from our friends, denied needful sustenance for many days together, with other the like cruelties.[316]

In these threads of Quaker thought we find ripe justifications for the acceptance of enslavement, an acceptance which could readily morph into an uncritical support for slave-owning. In a sense, Fox permitted Friends the option of inhabiting two possible realities. In the first, Friends could understand themselves as the supreme victims of England, wronged and never wrong. And in the second place, Friends could imagine themselves playing the part of the benevolent Potiphar, while characterising their 'good slaves' as akin to Joseph (see Genesis 39). In either case, early Friends were placed outside the bounds of moral accountability. If early Quakers were imprisoned or enslaved, Fox would have it that they were righteous co-sufferers with Christ. If Friends owned enslaved people, they could become virtuous evangelisers who diligently looked after the spiritual welfare of their household.

316 See *Quaker Spirituality*: *Selected Writings, ed. Douglas Van Steere,* (Paulist Press, 1984), 106.

4.6 Fox's White Saviourism

In all this mass of evidence, one question is probably going to be foremost in the minds of Quaker readers: How could Fox use the Quaker conception of peace and peaceableness to justify the backbreaking world and obvious violence of the plantations? The way in which Fox seems to deal with this tension is by constructing a vision of idealised enslavement, which overlooked the realities of capture, degradation and torture. In his 1676 tract, 'Gospel family-order', Fox seeks to construct an image of the enslaved as divine gifts, as benefits to their Quaker enslavers and as trainees in pious religion. Through these images of the 'good slave', Fox attempts to illustrate the generous humanity of the Quaker confession, while at the same time, imagining an idyllic relation between people enslaved and their enslavers. The first of these ideal slave images comes in the form of Ebed-Melech the Cushite, high court official to the king of Babylon, mentioned in the book of Jeremiah. Cushite refers to those people and the languages associated with the ancient Kingdom of Kush, located in what is now Sudan and Nubia. According to Jeremiah 38, the prophet Jeremiah is rescued from imprisonment and possible death by Ebed. As Fox recounts the story:

> Jer. 38. there you may see an Ethyopian, a Black-moor, how serviceable he was made unto Jeremiah (the Lord's Prophet) in the Day of his Suffering in the Dungeon, how he went to the King and told him that the Prophet was like to perish there and the King commanded him to go and take thirty Men and draw him out of the Dungeon before he dye; so here this Black had more Sence then the great Professors of Jeremiah's Innocency; and he was in Favour with the King, being one of his Eunuchs.[317]

While mistaking Ebed-Melech's ethnicity, the slave's Africanness is unmistakable to Fox ('a Black-moor'). This story is for Fox embedded in a much larger theological argument, rooted in two radical conclusions (based upon, from Fox's point of view, firmly biblical premises). Fox affirms 1) There is no obvious connection between spiritual worth and enslavement and 2) that the differences between free Europeans and the African enslaved are differences in knowledge, not differences in humanity. As Fox summarises these points:

> Now consider this, if the Children of Israel transgress the Law of God, were they not accounted as Ethyopian Children: And so you Christians

317 George Fox, 'Gospel family–order being a short discourse concerning the ordering of families, both of whites, blacks, and Indians', University of Michigan Library Digital Collections.

> now, who profess Christ in Words and transgress his Law of Love, of Life, of Faith and the New covenant, are you not to the Lord as Children of the Ethyopians: what Difference is between you? It is not a Profession and talking that makes the Difference, but the Possession of Christ.[318]

If God could place his own chosen people in bondage (and if enslaved people could be the rescuers of God's prophets) then it is no reflection on the spiritual or moral status of African captives that they too have been reduced to the position of property. Fox is perhaps thinking here of the old providential warrant for Israelite suffering: "For whom the LORD loves He chastens and scourges every son whom He receives" (Hebrews 12:6). In the face of systematic dispossession, we may rightly regard such sentiments as cold comfort or even a fig leaf. But viewed from Fox's own vantage point they are in fact a stern critique and a fairly radical one of other Protestant groups that sought to segregate non-European populations from whites. Fox's willingness to make this kind of argument is itself a repudiation of a whole tradition of early modern colonial literature which regarded those who were made slaves as 'savage', 'bestial' and barely human. On the back of such antiracial exegesis, Fox arrives at the radical inclusiveness of Christ's redemption on the Cross. In place of ethnic separatism, Fox emphasises the universality of Christ's saving work:

> And so now consider, do not slight them, to wit, the Ethyopians, the Blacks now, neither any Man or Woman upon the Face of the Earth in that Christ dyed for all, both Turks, Barbarians, Tartarians and Ethyopians; he dyed for the Tawnes and for the Blacks, as well as for you that are called Whites.[319]

What should we make of these remarks? Such an argument appears at first glance to be radically subversive of new racial hierarchies. But, looked at more closely, Fox's approach to evangelism subtly reinforces such hierarchies by assuming that white Quakers possess a spiritual advantage over their non-white hearers. Despite the fact that Friends insisted that anyone could hear and come to Christ without Scripture or institutions, in practice, it was assumed that only white Europeans were really in possession of the Christian truth. Fox wants to incorporate various ethnic others into households precisely because he does not believe that the Gospel will work in the hearts of "blacks and tawnies", unprompted by Quaker intervention. Thus, despite repudiating many of the proto-racial theologies of the seventeenth-century, Fox reveals himself as a punitive advocate of white saviourism – the belief

318 Fox, 'Gospel family–order'.

319 Fox, 'Gospel family–order'.

that it is the white European who will eventually rescue various ethnic others from inferior social, economic or religious conditions. While such attitudes often explicitly repudiate racial theories of domination, they implicitly reinscribe and reinforce them by framing Black and Brown persons as wholly passive recipients of what the incurious European regards as 'benevolence'. The operation of white saviourism is even more evident later on in 'Gospel family-order', when Fox examines the New Testament story of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8.27). As Fox interprets the story:

> [The] Lord commanded Philip to go toward the South and he arose and went and behold a Man of Ethiopia, a Eunuch of great Authority under Candace Queen of Ethiopia, who had the Charge of all her Treasure, how this Man came up to Jerusalem to worship the Lord and how this Ethiopian, this Black, was converted to Christianity by Philip, who preached Christ to him: And therefore now you should preach Christ to your Ethiopians that are in your Families, that so they may be free Men indeed and be tender of and to them and walk in Love, that ye may answer that of God in their Hearts…[320]`

The notion that you should 'preach to your Ethiopians' rather blatantly places European enslavers in the position of Philip. But Philip does not own the eunuch in the original narrative. This identification is Fox's own. This choice of reading raises profound theological questions. In similar retellings Fox says to his readers that unbelievers (Potiphar or North African Moors) are in possession of the Inward Light. But the Ethiopian eunuch is in no such position. He is entirely passive before Philip's proclamation. Fox repeats in multiple places that European Christendom does not contain the truth of Christ. He claims that neither outward preaching nor knowledge of Scripture is necessary for one to come to Christ. Only Jesus's presence, felt and followed, can lead to Christian truth. But in Philip Fox sees a colonial saviour of the unfortunate and the oblivious. By identifying the enslavers with Philip, Fox reneges on the radicalism of his own religious experience, conceding that Europeans have spiritual advantages over enslaved people. They already know the truth. This is nothing less than a concession to a much more conservative Protestantism, one which either downplayed or rejected the immediate indwelling of Christ. How did Fox arrive at such a conservative interpretation? Principally by smoothing out the complexities in the original narrative in Acts. This high court official was "in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means 'queen of the Ethiopians')" (8:27). In the ancient world, eunuchs were often used as slaves to serve as close attendants in royal households. According to the Gospel writer, the eunuch "had gone to Jerusalem to worship." This detail places the eunuch firmly among what the

320 Fox, 'Gospel family–order'.

New Testament writers called 'God-fearers' (theosebeis). These were non-Jews who, despite never converting to Judaism, chose to revere the God of Israel, read the Jewish scriptures and celebrated some Jewish rites. In Acts therefore, the eunuch thus occupies a liminal space between insider and outsider, the familiar and the unfamiliar. The religious and ethnic status of the Ethiopian official is further complicated by his bodily ambiguity. In the cultic laws of Israel, a eunuch was a ritually impure person, excluded from acts of sacrificial worship. As the Torah defines this prohibition: 'No one whose testicles are crushed or whose male organ is cut off shall enter the assembly of the Lord' (Deuteronomy 23:1). In a society which prized the gifts of fertility so highly, the eunuch appeared to be a repudiation of divine favours. When the official encounters the Apostle Philip, he is reading a scroll of the Prophet Isaiah. This fact is significant because within the text lies a radical promise which reverses the status of the Eunuch as an impure stranger. As God tells Isaiah:

To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,
  who choose what pleases me
  and hold fast to my covenant –
to them I will give within my temple and its walls
  a memorial and a name
  better than sons and daughters;
I will give them an everlasting name
  that will endure forever.
And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord
  to minister to him,
to love the name of the Lord,
  and to be his servants,
all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it
  and who hold fast to my covenant –
these I will bring to my holy mountain
  and give them joy in my house of prayer (56:3–7).

Thus, we can see why the Ethiopian eunuch would have mattered to Fox, faced as he was by Barbados enslavers who refused to incorporate enslaved people into their Christian households. This foreigner and slave thus becomes an obvious symbol of the Quaker evangelical task. But in his eagerness to map the eunuch onto the experience of enslaved people in Barbados, Fox misses several key features of the narrative. Most obviously, Fox here ignores the eunuch's implied status as a God-fearer. Fox does not mention the scroll of Isaiah which the eunuch is already reading. Fox makes the eunuch a mere accessory to Philip's spiritual knowledge rather than a spiritual agent in his own right. Why won't Fox concede such autonomy?

Something of Fox's thought process can perhaps be reconstructed from a stray remark found in his tract *The Great Mystery* where he identifies those captured by steeple houses as those "who are Egypt spiritual and Ethiopian black."[321] Here Fox allegorises Africanness, identifying it with irreligion and spiritual ignorance. In the same text he decries "all the transgressors in Ethiopia and Egypt" by which he means those who have fallen under the darkness of the Apostasy. This ethnically charged symbology explains why Fox does not concede spiritual sovereignty to the eunuch. Fox sees in the Ethiopian a kind of spiritual deficiency which can only be addressed by the outside missionary. While Fox's account is not an example of the 'hereditary heathen' motif (Fox does not treat irreligion as essential or immutable), it is undoubtedly an obvious precursor of a much more racialised attitude, insofar as it connects physical characteristics with inner states. Commitment to such a symbolic framework also explains why Fox completely ignores the significance of the eunuch's presence at the Jerusalem Temple. If the eunuch symbolises the dark cloud of unbelief, there can be no sense in which he possesses a proper knowledge of God. The original audience of Luke-Acts would have understood the eunuch's presence there as the fulfilment of the Messianic promise of Isaiah (that of a peaceful world where the nations come to worship the God of Israel):

> A time is coming when the Lord Almighty will receive offerings from this land divided by rivers [Ethiopia], this strong and powerful nation, this tall and smooth-skinned people, who are feared all over the world. They will come to Mount Zion, where the Lord Almighty is worshiped. (Isaiah, 18:7).

In this passage, the Ethiopians, the enemies of Israel, finally come in peace to Yahweh's temple as supplicants. Interpreted through this lens, the eunuch is an example of the Gospel writer's affirmation of a new sacred order breaking into history, one which dissolves the habitual differences between insiders and outsiders. Enemies become friends, the impure are purified, the foreigner is brought in. But in Fox's hurried attempts to baptise the othering and slavery of his own time and place, he completely fails to engage with these potentially radical dimensions of the text. Like many Protestants of his epoch, Fox habitually understands the Jerusalem temple, not as a place of universal reconciliation, but of ritualism, priestcraft and corruption. This conclusion emerges from a long tradition of Christian anti-Judaism which identifies 'Jewishness' as a distillation of hollow ceremony and false doctrine. In his own preaching, Fox repeatedly identifies the Jerusalem temple as identical with those figures and forms which have been superseded by the Inward

321 George Fox, *The great mystery of the great whore unfolded; and Antichrist's kingdom revealed unto destruction* (Harvard University: Marcus T.C. Gould, 1831), 376.

Coming of Christ (the liturgical year, clergy, Catholic formalism). Thus, in Fox's supersessionism, not only is Judaism stripped of spiritual validity, but the Eunuch's spiritual life is downgraded, from one who knew something of the truth (evidently the starting point of Luke-Acts) to one who is enmeshed in false religion. Here Quaker anti-Judaism functions as a way of erasing the inclusive message which the author of Luke-Acts attempted to convey. If Fox's treatment of the Ethiopian reveals his desire to centre the work of the white Quaker evangelist as against the ignorance of the speechless African, this same story reveals Fox's unwillingness to engage with the realities of contemporary enslavement. When Philip arrives on the scene, the eunuch is reading the following passage from the text:

> Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter
> and like a lamb before its shearer is silent,
> so he opens not his mouth.
> In his humiliation justice was denied him.
> Who can describe his generation?
> For his life is taken away from the earth. (Isaiah 53:7: Acts 8:32–33).

The above passage concerns a motif important in both Jewish and Christian interpretation, the image of 'the suffering servant' (Isaiah 53). The passage is significant since it speaks of silencing, injustice and bodily violation, echoing the humiliation that the eunuch likely felt in his castration and enslavement. When the eunuch asks Philip to whom the passage refers, the Apostle preaches about Jesus, another who has been silenced and humiliated. The connection between the eunuch, the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 and the Gospel message is suggestive of an ethic of solidarity between Christ and all those who have been silenced and violated. But Fox shows complete disinterest in these subversive elements of the text. The closest he comes to acknowledging such an identification with the suffering of the enslaved is his remark in 'Gospel family-order:'

> [Consider] with your selves, if you were in the same Condition as the Blacks are (and indeed you do not know what Condition you or your Children, may be reduced and brought into, before you or they shall dye) who came as Strangers to you and were sold to you as Slaves; now I say, if this should be the Condition of you or yours, you would think it hard Measure; yea and very great Bondage and Cruelty.[322]

Why does Fox not infer from this moment of imaginative empathy that the institution of enslavement should be abolished? Part of the answer lies in his almost singular focus on the process of evangelism. The only freedom that

322 Fox, 'Gospel family–order'.

matters for Fox is the spiritual knowledge of Christ. As Fox notes in some remarks composed for a Quarterly Meeting in Barbados:

> Friends, all that have Negroes to your Servants, let them have two or three Hours of the Day once in the Week, that Day Friends Meeting is on, or another Day, to meet together, to wait upon the Lord; for this would be a good Savour among all the rest; for therein you deny your selves, for the bringing them to the Knowledge of the Lord God; and this would be a good Pattern to all the Island and an Example to all other Masters, to bring their Servants from under Oppression to know the Lord.[323]

By necessity this attitude elevates the evangelist and demotes the evangelised. Only the Apostle has spiritual agency. The enslaved must wait to be brought to Christ. They cannot find the light independently, without a European enslaver. Thus, it can be concluded that while Fox does not participate in the new nascent discourses of European racism, his focus on evangelism, to the exclusion of concrete conditions, has the effect of consolidating the hold and impact of these emergent categories. This latter fact should remind us that seeking out the presence of racism concerns not merely the beliefs or intentions of a given individual but is bound up with the impact of practices and systems, which function to subordinate and oppress people, regardless of the conscious attitudes of those who operate such systems. In the case of early Friends, a kind of moral universalism (an evocation of abstract humanity,' without reference to status or power) allowed Friends to cloak their complicity in a bracing vision of human solidarity. Friends held power over other human beings while seemingly making the operation of such power invisible to themselves. The coercion they exercised was all in the name of the ultimate cause of the Gospel. One detects here the slippery tendrils of ends justifying the means. We see other examples of this attitude later in our discussion of the antislavery theology of the Keithian Quakers.

4.7 William Penn: The Afterlife of Pro-slavery Quakerism

Now we have considered the role of George Fox in the formation of a pro-slavery Quaker theology, next we consider the afterlife of these theological attitudes, noting how and where they became directly enmeshed in the institutions of European enslavement. A particular concern of this discussion is to identify the key cultural ideas which may have consolidated Quaker slave-owning in

323 Fox, 'Gospel family–order'.

the transatlantic world after 1670. The key criticism of this section is that while Friends in the late seventeenth century possessed internal theological resources to condemn and rhetorically combat institutional enslavement, the surviving evidence shows that a surprising amount of theological and legal energy was expended by colonial Quaker communities in the defence of mass enslavement. Nowhere are its numerous compromises, moral failures and stunning duplicities more in evidence than in the life of the Quaker statesman, William Penn (1644–1718). In popular Quaker hagiography, William Penn appears as a kindly Christian radical who promoted political and religious tolerance in an age of bigoted extremes. According to this account, 'The Holy Experiment' in Pennsylvania represented an unrivalled advance in European conceptions of individual liberty and civil rights. But under the surface of this portrait are social and economic interests, which place Penn firmly at the centre of elite social and commercial concerns, which included enslavement and of course colonialism.[324]

This moral fissure in the life of Penn was noted early. In his 1832 history of the colonisation of the United States, George Bancroft observed: "William Penn employed blacks without scruple." In 1682, Penn, like Fox, had opposed perpetual chattel enslavement and instead supported African indenture, with a duration of fourteen years. But by 1684, Penn reversed course in the face of labour shortages in the new colony. He accepted the import of enslaved people and supported new slave-trading ventures which originated in the capital of Philadelphia.[325] In November 1684, around 150 Africans disembarked from the Isabella to be sold into slavery in Philadelphia. Their transportation had been organised by a Bristol shipping company.[326] Bancroft notes that while Penn attempted (in his own eyes) to improve the condition of his human property, "he died a slave owner."[327] Penn's Last Will and Testament of 1701 would have freed all of Penn's enslaved labourers, but the Will appears to have been overridden by an earlier version of the text, meaning the people

324 The present writers do not wish to attribute to William Penn any kind of omnipotence regarding the character of the Pennsylvania colony. Clearly Penn's activity as a statesman and proprietor frequently placed him in a position of negotiator and fixer rather than a petty king or autocrat. There would have been much which occurred at local level over which Penn would have had little knowledge and over which he exerted minimal control. We do not wish to suggest that Penn could have, by some unilateral action, dismantled African enslavement in the colony. The institution of enslavement predates Penn by some decades. He did not create the slave–economy among the settler population. He inherited it. Our reasoning for focusing so heavily on Penn's life and conduct here is due to the wealth of textual evidence he leaves us. Through Penn's tracts and letters, we are able to reconstruct the mind of a Quaker enslaver with considerable vividness.

325 James Oliver Horton, Lois E Horton, *Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700–1860* (Oxford University Press, 1996), 6.

326 See Oscar Reiss, *Blacks in Colonial Americ*a (McFarland & Company, 1997), 90.

327 George Bancroft, *History of the United States* (Little Brown and Company, 1874), 401

enslaved in Penn's household remained in bondage after his death.[328] Due to what appears to have been negligence, Penn's human property was passed onto heirs after his death.[329] Penn's latter-day irresolution is compounded by his nakedly mercurial attitude towards the enslaved. What mattered to Penn was the orderly running of the new colony. If that meant jettisoning higher ideals, he was seemingly prepared to do it. Penn used chattel enslavement on his own plantation, on the basis that they were a more reliable source of labour than indentured servants. He noted to the overseer of his plantation, Pennsbury Manor, that: "It were better they were blacks for then a man has them while they live." [330] Any unease he may have felt was subordinated to the imperatives of social stability and statecraft. In these respects, Penn was not that remarkable in his world. There are other Friends preserved in the historical record who did not even consider the vexed moral and theological problem of indenture versus chattel enslavement. When the English Quaker James Claypoole decided to move to Philadelphia in 1682, he asked his brother Edward to arrange enslaved people to serve in his household. His only concern was that the enslaved Africans were to be pliable and good natured. The matter of enslavement's duration simply did not arise. As Jean R. Soderlund observes: "Claypoole was not an exception among the wealthy Quakers that founded and governed early Pennsylvania and New Jersey."[331] If these problematic dimensions of Penn's life and world have often been hidden from us, these realities were all the more obscure to Penn himself. The slave-owning strategy of masking and evasion is painfully evident in Penn's political theology.[332] Penn was willing to risk ink for abstract rights to freedom and justice, but he refused to challenge institutional structures.

328 Beverly C. Tomek, *Slavery and Abolition in Pennsylvania* (Temple University Press, 2011), 33.

329 See William Penn, T*he papers of William Penn, Volume 4: 1701–1718* eds. Craig M, Horle, Alison Duncan Hirsch, et al. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987) 114.

330 Quoted in Mary K. Geiter, 'The Cromwellian Legacy of William Penn', *The Experience of Revolution in Stuart Britain and Ireland*, eds. David Smith, Michael Braddick (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 251.

331 Jean R. Soderlund, *Quakers & Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (Princeton University Press, 1985), 54.

332 It is common in contemporary society to separate theological/religious motives from more 'concrete' motives, including social and economic interests (or reducing religious motives to covert social interests). But this is particularly unwise when interpreting early modern sources. People have always had material and social motives, but in early periods these motives were filtered through sacred loyalties, doctrinal disputes and forms of widespread collective worship. Unlike secular modern people, early modern communities in Europe were still shaped by public identities of religious belonging. Whole disciplines of human knowledge were still regarded as an outgrowth of, or subservient to theology (whether academic or popular). While it would be tempting to separate what Penn says about business and politics from his Quaker theological claims, the result is likely to be anachronistic. While there are nascent signs of secularism in Penn (the separation between politics and religion) Penn is not as far along in this process as we are. To acknowledge this, the present writer uses 'political theology' to denote the internal unity between faith and public practice which still shaped Penn's thought.

He was certainly unwilling to curtail commerce and profit in the name of his beliefs.

***Natural Rights for Some*:** A fruitful way into the personal and theological failings of William Penn is via a consideration of his conception of natural rights. As we have already noted, natural rights refer to those fundamental and universal demands which philosophies of natural law consider innate to human societies and as such have priority over any private rights or liberties. These ethical demands take precedence over any and all local customs or civic institutions and are themselves the wellspring of all good and just local statutes. As the Roman philosopher and statesman Cicero summarised this vision in his treatise *On the Laws*:

> For there is but one essential justice which cements society and one law which establishes this justice. This law is ultimately the exercise of right reason, which is the true rule of all commandments and prohibitions. Whoever neglects this law, whether written or unwritten, is necessarily unjust and wicked.[333]

As we observed in our earlier discussion, first-generation Friends were deeply incredulous about theories of natural law. Both the immensity of human sin and the falsity of so many social and religious institutions made it seem obvious to Friends that there was no readily accessible standard for social conduct apart from what was revealed in and through divine revelation. Nor could early Friends embrace the modification of this tradition postulated by Pico. The notion of human beings acting apart from natural law merely explained to Friends the human propensities for violence, conceit and grasping. It was not mobility human beings needed for true freedom, but a return to stationary serenity in God. Penn possessed no such theological aversions and like his Protestant counterparts wholly embraced theories of natural law to ground his understanding of religion and his theory of politics.

While the natural law tradition has postulated a range of rights (which can neither be denied or negated by human government), Penn's political theory stresses the central importance and inviolability of individual conscience: "I ever understood an imperial liberty of conscience to be the natural right of all men."[334] What then was conscience for Penn? Conscience was nothing less than the law of God operating in each person (Romans 2:15), accessible (as Cicero had postulated) via calm reflection and the judicious exercise of reason. In Penn's understanding, it was both just and desirable that each

333 Cicero, *The political works of Marcus Tullius Cicero, Volume* 1., trans. F. Barham, (Edmund Spettigue, 1841), 55.

334 William Penn, *Political Writings* (Liberty Fund, 2002), 6.

person should follow his apprehension of God, as long as this personal understanding did not intrude upon the routine operation of civil government. To deny this to individuals would invite, Penn believed, the displeasure of a Deity who valued conscientious devotion, authentically practised and freely chosen. Included in this natural right to conscience, Penn enfolds a clear prohibition against social coercion aimed at religious conformity and identifies a corresponding right to privacy (quietude). After all, Penn reasoned, one could not practice one's religion freely in conditions of civic strife. A clear summary of this approach can be found in Pennsylvania's 1701 *Charter of Liberties*:

> I do hereby grant and declare that no person or persons inhabiting in this province or territories, who shall confess and acknowledge one almighty God, the creator, upholder and ruler of the world; and profess him or themselves obliged to live quietly under the civil government, shall be in any case molested or prejudiced in his or their person or estate because of his or their conscientious persuasion or practice, nor be compelled to frequent or maintain any religious worship, place, or ministry contrary to his or their mind, or to do or suffer any other act or thing contrary to their religious persuasion.[335]

Alongside this right to hold and practice one's convictions peaceably, Penn established both freedom of commerce and a right to individual property. Penn's aim was to further lessen the exercise of arbitrary or tyrannical power over the lives of citizens. He was aware that confiscation of property was a common tactic used against religious minorities. The imperative to establish stable property relations was doubtless informed by the recent memory of Quaker persecution, although of primary consideration for Penn was probably the establishment of a steady rental income, which could reimburse him for the substantial personal wealth he had sunk into the colony.[336] As Penn reflected on this latter dimension of liberty: "Property, that is, Right and Title to your own Lives, Liberties and Estates: In this, every Man is a Sort of Little Sovereign to himself: No Man has Power over his Person, to Imprison or hurt it, or over his Estate to Invade or Usurp it."[337] Penn's notion of self-sovereignty is close to John Locke's[338] conception of individual rights. Here,

335 See Charles Kettleborough, *The Federal and State Constitutions, Colonial Charters, and Other Organic Laws of the State, Territories, and Colonies Now or Heretofore Forming the United States of America, Volume 5* (B.F. Bowen & Company, 1908), 3077.

336 See Douglas Gwyn, *The Covenant Crucified: Quakers and the Rise of Capitalism* (Pendle Hill Publications, 1995), 338.

337 Penn, *The Political Writings of William Penn*, 6.

338 John Locke (1632–1704) was an early modern political philosopher and sometimes theologian, who made key contributions to early modern theories of property, individual rights, and constitutional government. Locke was particularly preoccupied with finding a

labour and property are understood as expressions of the self. For Locke, the violation of property rights or the free operation of commerce in turn violates the individual's fundamental right to ownership over himself, his own body and his own life. Property is an expression of will. To dispossess someone is to negate their will and their person. Stalking the imaginations of both men was the fear of the lawless monarch, who with a flick of the pen, could destroy someone's life without public justification or redress. As Penn notes in *Some Fruits of Solitude*: "Rex & Tyrannus are very different Characters: One rules his People by Laws, to which they consent; the other by his absolute Will and Power. That is call'd Freedom, This Tyranny." This fear highlights a profound form of cognitive dissonance on the part of early liberal constitutionalists. Penn was able to own human beings and at the same time, proclaim the universality of human fellowship. He could declare property and conscience as universal rights but deny these to those he kept in bondage. What free conscience could possibly be exercised when one is owned by another? How is the white enslaver any different from the arbitrary king of early liberal nightmares?

***An Education Fit for Elites*:** Penn could sidestep uncomfortable questions like these on account of his cultural education, namely the Classical Humanities in which he was schooled. These traditions offered three vital things for elite Europeans. In the first place, Penn had imbibed the notion (evident in classical authors such as Aristotle and Cicero) that hierarchies of wealth and power were not merely socially desirable, they were natural and God-given. If Friends like Burrough and Nayler had once proclaimed a Gospel of social equality and the just cause of the poor, Penn had no such radical impulses. His Christianity was wholly at home with politics as it was. He expected social deference from his servants and obedience from members of his household. His conversion to Quakerism did not drastically alter gender or class relations on his estate. His attitude to enslaved people was in this way a mere extension of his broader social conservatism. In Worship people were free and equal, but before one's enslaver, the world imposed necessary restrictions. [339] It could be said that Penn's education merely exaggerated the socially conservative theology which Fox had employed in Barbados.

If Classical wisdom readily justified the position of elites, it offered a second benefit. It often helped elite actors to justify their self-seeking activities, both to themselves and wider society. Enslavers could understand themselves,

basis for liberty of religious conscience in a world of absolutist monarchies and sectarian violence. Many of the moral intuitions concerning religious liberty that Fox had grasped experientially, Locke attempted to ground intellectually. Locke's work would have a major influence on the framers of the American Declaration of Independence.

339 Anthony R. Murry, *Liberty, Conscience, and Toleration: The Political Thought of William Penn* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 9.

not as grubby peddlers in human flesh, but as humane patrons and social benefactors. This substitution was achieved through an ideology of cultural refinement. According to this few, aristocratic and commercial authorities were made up of superior persons, who exemplified virtues of poverty, thrift, humility and moral rectitude, while simultaneously living comfortably (even idly) off the labour of others whether enslaved people or hired servants. But this condition of parasitism was often invisible to those who benefited from it. Thus, despite his privilege, in his *Fruits of Solitude*, Penn was able to recommend honest labour to his leisured and educated readers:

> Love Labour: For if thou dost not want it for Food, thou mayest for Physick. It is wholesome for thy Body and good for thy Mind. It prevents the Fruits of Idleness, which many times comes of nothing to do and leads too many to do what is worse than nothing.[340]

The contradiction is resolved through an appeal to inwardness.

Since the most essential part of the human being abided in the soul (according to these Classical Humanistic traditions), the enslaver could live a perfectly commercial, perfectly grubby life, but as long as his inner world remained fixed on high thoughts and high ideals, the outward world need not compromise inner purity. This necessary illusion allowed one to cause others to suffer and toil, while remaining blameless. This mental and moral displacement is essential to the operation of all forms of maltreating hierarchy. Without it, perpetrators would be overwhelmed by their culpability and capacity for cruelty. Distance is vital. An excellent example of such cultivated disassociation from the outward is found in the *Meditations* of the second century Roman emperor and Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius (with whom Penn was familiar).[341] Marcus doubtless wrote this text both amidst the intrigue of high court politics and on campaign while brutally putting down the enemies of Rome. The focus of the *Meditations* is however, not on these mundane facts, much less the enslaved people who met Marcus' basic needs, but on his inner world, on the taming of vice and the expansion of his virtue. He could examine his motives and the state of his soul while ignoring the rod and the whip his society routinely used to discipline enslaved bodies. Peace could be maintained within even if the outside world was full of violence and disorder. In one entry Marcus tells us:

340 Penn, *Some Fruits of Solitude In Reflections And Maxims* (1682), Internet Modern History Source Book.

341 Edward Corbyn Obert Beatty, *The Social Philosophy of William Penn* (University of Chicago thesis, 1936), 297.

> Men seek retreats for themselves, houses in the country, sea-shores and mountains; and thou too art wont to desire such things very much. But this is altogether a mark of the most common sort of men, for it is in thy power whenever thou shalt choose to retire into thyself. For nowhere either with more quiet or more freedom from trouble does a man retire than into his own soul, particularly when he has within him such thoughts that by looking into them he is immediately in perfect tranquillity; and I affirm that tranquillity is nothing else than the good ordering of the mind. Constantly then give to thyself this retreat and renew thyself; and let thy principles be brief and fundamental, which, as soon as thou shalt recur to them, will be sufficient to cleanse the soul completely and to send thee back free from all discontent with the things to which thou returnest. (Meditations, 4:3).[342]

Penn was a keen admirer of the Stoics. In *No Cross, No Crown* he praises Zeno, the school's founder, for his self-control, diligence and simplicity of life. He notes:

> Zeno, the great Stoic and author of that philosophy, had many things admirable in him, who not only said, but practised. He was a man of that integrity and so reverenced for it by the Athenians, that they deposited the keys of the city in his hands, as the only person fit to be entrusted with their liberties…[343]

Given his admiration for the Stoic school, it is hardly surprising that Penn follows recognisably Stoic attitudes in *Some Fruits of Solitude*. Here, the inner self (undisturbed by the troubles of the outward world) takes moral priority. In a tone not altogether dissimilar from that of the *Meditations*, Penn says:

> If one went to see Windsor Castle, or Hampton Court, it would be strange not to observe and remember the Situation, the Building, the Gardens, Fountains, &c. that make up the Beauty and Pleasure of such a Seat? And yet few People know themselves; No, not their own Bodies, the Houses of their Minds, the most curious Structure of the World; a living walking Tabernacle…[344]

But to prioritise one's inner landscape means actively devaluing those outward terrains of money, labour and power which could trouble one's conscience.

342 Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations 4*, trans. George Long, Lexundria.

343 Penn, *Some Fruits of Solitude In Reflections And Maxims (*1682).

344 Ibid.

***The Inner World*:** At the very beginning of Quakerism, inwardness served an eschatological function. To worship inwardly, disinvested of most outward forms, signified that Christ had come again to teach and heal his people, concretely and in real time. No longer did Friends need the complex ritual structures of the Church Calendar, nor the sacramental rites of Baptism or Eucharist. All that these things signified were immediately present within the Quaker believer, making symbolic actions or representations entirely redundant. In this respect, early Quaker teachers were particularly attached to Paul's formulation in his letter to the Colossians: "Therefore let no one judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a feast, a New Moon, or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the body that casts it belongs to Christ" (Colossians 2:16–18). But under explicitly colonial, and in Penn's case bourgeois, conditions, Quaker inwardness underwent slow but definite modification. 'Going within' was slowly intertwined with new liberal sentiments around domesticity, individualism and privacy.[345] For Penn (as for the Stoic ancients), the wise man was he who could disconnect, shield and protect himself from social pressure, crowds and institutions. In this vein, Penn says:

> And till we are persuaded to stop and step a little aside, out of the noisy Crowd and Incumbering Hurry of the World and Calmly take a Prospect of Things, it will be impossible we should be able to make a right Judgment of our Selves or know our own Misery.[346]

One was to direct one's attention to the only place in which one could reasonably be free, the inward domain of the conscience.

How was this attitude of retreat linked to the practice of enslavement? The process of self-distancing had for the Stoic one important consequence. One could say to oneself: 'I am a soul forced to live in this place, this body. I am forced to live this life chosen by Providence. I am a slave to circumstance. I am not the master of anyone. If anything, I am under orders.' Thus, the Roman emperor could ignore his mastery of others while cultivating the illusion that he was himself powerless, free only in soul. Best of all, nowhere in these Latin Stoic traditions was there any condemnation of the institution of enslavement as such. If we were all slaves to fate, what did it matter if

345 In this period, inwardness was becoming irrevocably mixed with desires for self–knowledge, self–direction and individual wellbeing, albeit through the spiritual life. What modern sociologists have called 'holistic', 'therapeutic' or individualistic spirituality was already present among cultivated English–speaking Protestant elites, at least in outline. Penn is an almost archetypical expression of these social and intellectual trends. His retreat into an inner world is perfectly adapted both to justifying economies of enslavement and participating in early modern Capitalism. Such a self, personally focused and inwardly directed, could extract from the world without feeling any moral qualms in doing so.

346 Penn, *Some Fruits of Solitude In Reflections And Maxims* (1682).

one person exercised formal ownership of another? The master was equally unfree, propelled onward by the caprice of fortune. Viewed psychologically, the refuge of inwardness allowed an enslaver to tyrannise their chattel while in their own mind cultivate the highest degree of benevolence. In devotion to the soul, one's business interests, one's buying and selling, became conveniently depoliticised. But these traditions had a third valuable aspect for enslavers. Through the past worlds of ancient Greek and Latin authors, elites could play-act as sages and philosophers, even attributing to themselves a lowly station in the world (poverty, marginality, unworldliness, asceticism) without giving anything up. A vivid instance in antiquity of such privileged fantasy can be found in the Emperor Julian's fourth-century satirical epistle *The Misopogon* ('Beard-Hater'). In the text, the emperor (who earlier in life had styled himself an austere student philosopher in Athens) identifies himself with Cynicism, a Greek philosophical sect which rejected laws, customs and slavery. Cynics took the view that the hierarchies of the world were corrupting and that one should live a beggarly existence, pouring scorn on civilisation and convention. In the letter, Julian opines:

> The mode of life that I practise is very strict indeed. I banish myself from the theatres, such a dolt am I and I do not admit the thymele within my court except on the first day of the year, because I am too stupid to appreciate it; like some country fellow who from his small means has to pay a tax or render tribute to a harsh master. And even when I do enter the theatre, I look like a man who is expiating a crime. Then again, though I am entitled a mighty Emperor, I employ no one to govern the mimes and chariot-drivers as my lieutenant or general throughout the inhabited world.[347]

Here we see Julian, principal of an empire, describe himself as a simple, stupid and poorly dressed country bumpkin. The Cynic posture undoubtedly allowed Julian to ignore, perhaps even cope with the fact, that he sat at the top of a power pyramid and was in possession of functionally boundless wealth. He wanted however not to be an imperial plutocrat, but, like his beloved Socrates, a wandering sage, who was bound neither by wealth nor position. It is to these same traditions of philosophic humility that Penn turns in *No Cross, No Crown*. Of the Cynic and Stoic Schools, Penn wrote:

> Their diet was slender, their food only what would satisfy nature. Their garments exceeding mean. Their habitations solitary and homely. They affirmed, those who lived with fewest things and were contented, most nearly approached God, who wants nothing. They voluntarily

347 Julian, *Misopogon, or, Beard–Hate*r, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press.

> despised riches, glory and nobility, as foolish shows and vain fictions, that had no true and solid worth or happiness in them.[348]

Drawing on these ancient examples Penn contends that Friends are now the inheritors of Stoical and Cynical austerity. Through such identification one could be transformed in one's own mind from the son of a wealthy and well-connected courtier into a budding sage who distanced himself from all wealth, status and comfort. One could look away from one's own life and indulge the fiction of philosophic poverty, much as Julian had done. Once immersed in this self-image it was possible to be a wealthy enslaver who both rejected wealth and called for universal rights. Through this strategy, one could see oneself as one wished to be, not as one was. In Penn's case this ignored the fact that, as Murray notes, this self-styled Cynical Stoic "consistently lived beyond his means and never lived without servants."[349] His simplicity and humility were mostly rhetorical. On his estate Penn "spent liberally to support his station – for example, between 1672 and 1674 he ordered three coaches built; [and] ordered food to set a luxurious table."[350] Unlike Fox and Nayler, who condemned blood sports as a form of gluttony against the creatures of God, Penn hunted foxes on his estate, conforming squarely to the unsentimental expectations of his class. But like many a pampered aristocrat, he felt underappreciated, describing himself in one letter as that "Old kind abused landlord."[351] In polite society he never deviated from what he was, a high-born member of the English establishment.

***Vicarious Love: Inclusion of Imagined Others*:** In the 1640s, Fox's early experiences of the Inward Light served to show him that God was immediately present to all who sought him. Seekers who waited humbly on the visitation of Christ would find him in their midst. Soon after these formative experiences, Fox was led to conclude that the Light of Christ crossed social and cultural boundaries, calling the habitual territory and ethnic claims of Christendom into question. Fox declared that Heathens, Turks and Jews were included in the visitation of Christ, whether or not these people had ever heard the Gospel proclaimed. The assertion was a radical one, in its capacity to relativise differences between peoples and validate those who were once considered 'spiritual outsiders' in the Christian body politic. In Penn's hands the doctrine of the Inward Light is domesticated through Classical sources, becoming an appendage to his respectable and unchallenging use of Greek

348 William Penn, *No Cross, no Crown: a discourse showing the nature and discipline of the holy cross of Christ* (Edward Marsh, 1849), 309.

349 Murray, *Liberty, Conscience, and Toleration*, 9.

350 Mary Maples Dunn, *'*The Personality of William Penn*', in The World of William Penn*, eds. Richard S. Dunn, Mary Maples Dunn (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 12.

351 John A. Moretta, *William Penn and the Quaker Legacy* (Pearson, 2007), 247.

and Latin Philosophy. Here Quakerism is rendered something in which the refined could take a cultural interest. Penn suggests in a number of places that the Inward Light was the Logos of Stoic speculation, the animating fire of the universe, which brought life and order to the cosmos. In other places, Penn identifies the Light with the daemon of Socrates (that divine spirit that guided him in his personal and philosophical endeavours). These connections allowed Penn to build a cosmopolitan vision of religion, which included the religions and philosophies of the ancient Mediterranean world. As Penn muses on the Light in his tract *The Christian Quake*r:

> Nor are other Histories silent, but loud in their acknowledgment of very Divine Attainments, which by this Light several Famous Gentiles arrived at; and for their Belief of One Eternal Being, his Communication of Divine Light to Men and of an Immortality, with their Strickt Conformity thereto, are left upon Record. by Credible Historians; and their Praises not a little added to by after Ages, even of those called Christians too. Such are Reputed, Pythagoras, Timeus, Solon, Bias, Chilon, Anaxagoras, Socrates, Plato, Antisthenes, Xenocrates, Zeno, Antipater, Seneca, Epictetus and others.[352]

Unspoken but implied in this framing is the notion of a universal religion which could be grasped by all who intended sincerity and piety. Penn found a venerable justification for such a conclusion in the remarks of the early Church Father Justin Martyr who suggested that: "He [Christ] is the Word of whom every race of men were partakers; and those who lived reasonably are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists; as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus and men like them" (Apol., i. 46, ii. 10).[353] The divine knowledge of the pre-Christian world was proof that God was known or could be known by all. Viewed in isolation, we might be inclined to treat Penn's presentation as a mere elaboration of Fox's doctrine, a philosophical rearticulation of a precognitive experience. But placed in the context of Penn's colonial project, appeal to a cosmopolitan and boundary-crossing Light can be seen as a way of experiencing a love for the Other vicariously. Penn liked to think of himself as gentle, loving and tender. But this self-understanding ran counter to the painful demands of running a colony on enslaved labour. Penn was a chief executive determined to make substantial profits from his undertaking. At the very least, this fact must have sat uncomfortably with his beliefs. And so it turned out. 'The Holy Experiment', far from being a pious and tolerant society, replicated the

352 William Penn, *A Collection of the Works of William Penn In Two Volumes: To which is Prefixed a Journal of His Life. With Many Original Letters and Papers Not Before Published*, *Volume 1* (J. Sowle, 1726), 525.

353 Justin Martyr, *The First and Second Apologies,* trans. Leslie William Bernard (Paulist Press,1997), 55.

power-structures of English culture, divisions exaggerated by the trafficking of enslaved African people. As Douglas Gwyn notes, Penn's early attempts at constructing a constitution, mirrored seventeenth-century English norms "to a surprising extent": 'Replicating England's Commons, Lords and Crown, the Pennsylvania government combined a democratic body (an Assembly with a quasi-aristocratic body (a Council and a quasi-monarchic authority (a Proprietor – Penn himself').[354]

Since Pennsylvania hardly resembled the ideals in Penn's mind (particularly his more fraternal and egalitarian rhetoric), he had to square the contradiction in himself or risk seeing the truth of what he was. The Inward Light provided something of a solution. In Quaker theology the Light is intended to break us open and help us see what we do not wish to see, so that in time we may grow in love and grace. But for Penn, this Quaker affirmation was one of the ways by which he avoided unpalatable truths. If Penn could not forge a society of brotherly love, he could at least imagine a perfect and universal religion among his books. In this beautiful sanctuary he need not think about the terrible things the overseers might do to enslaved people on his plantation; he did not have to dwell on the conditions inside slave ships, or how his money brought misery. In the company of Greek and Latin authors, he could stand aloof from his soiled world, as previous generations of educated enslavers had done. By rhapsodising about Plato, Plutarch or Seneca, Penn could kindle a love for distant others he rarely felt in his business dealings (extracting rent from fellow Quaker colonists was a source of conflict)[355] in his daily management of a house and the plantation. Amidst the painful disjunction between principle and reality, retreat into revelry with the ancients was perhaps a source of consolation. Penn could believe that somewhere, at some time, the True Godly Society existed, even if his own experiment was far from matching it. Inspected from the vantage point of our century, we might understand this withdrawal into an imagined world as the kind of pathology which was always bound to attack an idealistic enslaver eventually, since there can be no human traffic without violence, no violence without a rapid decay of fellow-feeling, no indiscriminate flow of money without an indifference towards individual human life. Penn could not acknowledge this without injury to his psyche. Vicious hierarchies, the prerequisite for his wealth and success, had to be hidden from his perception.

***Modernity, Acquisition and Natural Rights*:** Before considering the implications of our psychological portrait of Penn, we should briefly return to Penn's use of the natural law tradition. Why did Penn utilise it? And what does its use tell us about Penn as a political and theological thinker? Behind the renewed

354 Gwyn, *The Covenant Crucified*, (Pendle Hill Publications, 1995) 338.

355 Gwyn, *The Covenant Crucifie*d, 339.

interest in natural law theories in the seventeenth century was a desire to find philosophical and theological resources to challenge the remnants of feudal power, autocratic monarchies and oppressive church regimes (Protestant and Catholic). Core to all of these enterprises was a need to ground the dignity and autonomy of minorities or individuals against oppressive social institutions and repressive social traditions. In undertaking this project, particular strands of the Natural Law tradition became vital. While Aristotle's own theory of natural law had shaped secular philosophers and churchmen for a millennium, Aristotle's teleological cosmos[356] tended to mitigate against radical change and had, in the hands of Thomas Aquinas, been used to underwrite many aspects of Medieval life. Fresh religious and philosophical resources were needed to make sense of the world after Christendom. A solution came through the early modern recovery of Stoicism, particularly the Stoic theory of self-preservation (oikeiosis): "The Stoics say that each of us is born with an inherent, natural instinct for our own self-preservation" (Diogenes Laertius [DL] 7.85).[357] In ancient Stoic traditions, one discerns a commitment to ethical individualism (something that appealed to Penn). Here, one was to place one's self and one's moral duty ahead of any social considerations. As Marcus Aurelius notes:

> [A] man's true greatness lies in the consciousness of an honest purpose in life, founded on a just estimate of himself and everything else, on frequent self-examination and a steady obedience to the rule which he knows to be right, without troubling himself […] about what others may think or say, or whether they do or do not do that which he thinks and says and does.[358]

356 'Telos' (τέλος) means 'end' or 'purpose'. A 'teleological' cosmos is a world with an aim, or a state of affairs where every part of nature is moving towards a final goal of perfection, or ultimate equilibrium. This contrasts with a universe in which events are basically random, haphazard, or purposeless. In a teleological world, nothing happens purely by accident. Each component part of the universe possesses some integral function in relation to the whole. Everything has a meaning which, in a sense, is 'given' to it and exists beyond it. In Aristotle's treatise *Nicomachean Ethics*, this ultimate purpose is illustrated by an arrow reaching a target. The ultimate goal of all things is to be the most perfect version of what something is. Thus, the telos of a frog, a microbe, or a human being may differ radically in specifics, but they all share this same striving towards the ultimate aim of perfection. It is possible to be a conservative or a revolutionary using teleological arguments. For the former, the positing of a final goal for every life means we must remove all social and material impediments which prevent the metaphorical arrow reaching its goal. In this account, we need to free people so they can perfect their natures. For the conservative however, teleology implies that it is folly to drastically change social conditions. In this version, abolishing enslavement, or inequality would be like trying to force a fish to suddenly live on land. We must respect the given purposes of each thing in nature and society, and not seek to force things into resolutely unnatural shapes. William Penn is very much in the latter camp.

357 Diogenes Laërtius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers, Book VII* (Loeb Classical Library, 1925).

358 Marcus Aurelius, *The thoughts of the emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus*, trans. by G. Long (Oxford University Press, 1906), 27.

For the ancient Stoics, preserving oneself was not simply about arbitrarily doing what one wished, but about preserving one's goodness and long-term interest. But this account underwent a subtle but important mutation in early modernity. In the hands of Thomas Hobbes[359] and Benedict Spinoza[360] oikeiosis was transmuted into a general view of human nature, one which accepted self-love and self-direction as foundational to ethics. Egotism and self-interest were transformed from grievous sins, into essential ingredients in the strife, but also the stability of human societies. As Hobbes noted in Leviathan:

> Whenever a man transferreth his right, or renounceth it, it is either in consideration of some right reciprocally transferred to himself, or for some other good he hopeth for thereby. For it is a voluntary act: and of the voluntary acts of every man, the object is some good to himself. (Leviathan, Ch. 14)[361]

In this account, natural rights are the concrete expression of the human creature's desire to preserve their being against external threat. To assert an absolute right to one's labour and one's own property, was merely to assert what was wholly natural and essential to one's being. For Hobbes and Spinoza, trade, material expansion and the utilisation of external resources were the indelible core of all living things. Humans need not be ashamed or embarrassed about these natural facts. Instead, we should use knowledge of our own self-interest to better organise and govern ourselves. This vantage point had profound political implications. If the Catholic Middle Ages had assumed a monopoly on a single conception of social good, then

359 Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) was an English philosopher and constitutional theorist who came to prominence during the civil war period in England. Frequently denounced by contemporaries as an atheist, Hobbes applies the insights of the new mechanical science to both politics and human behaviour. The result of his labours was an image of a human being dominated by fear and motivated by a desire for protection. On this philosophic base, Hobbes argued that the installation of an absolutist political regime was in the direct self–interest of such fearful subjects. Such a ruler could guarantee the necessary order for a stable and peaceful society. A corollary of this account was Hobbes' contention that human morality was rooted not in ultimate ideas of good or evil, but upon the sensory apprehension of whatever is thought to help or hinder the aims of the individual human organism. According to this description, politics is not the quest for some higher goal or virtue, but the necessary management of conflicting desires and interests.

360 Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677) was a philosopher, free thinker and lens grinder. While spending his early life within the Sephardic Jewish community in Amsterdam, he was banished by community elders in his early twenties for unspecified heresies. He spent the rest of his life pursuing philosophical explorations of the human condition, and conversing with religious nonconformists, including Quakers. A key insight in Spinoza's work was the link he drew between intellect and freedom. Spinoza believed that the more rational control we can exert over our emotions, the freer we become. The truly rational subject for Spinoza is the one who can combine individual interest with the general good.

361 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan: As Contained in Selections from His Works* (Ginn & Company Publishers, 1898), 148.

the new order assumed (in principle) a multiplicity of social goods and interests. Community was generated, not in the absence of conflict, but in the creative clash and negotiation between competing interests. Under these conditions, the role of the statesman was not to pretend singleness, but to permit a balance of interests, allowing a prudent measure of liberty sufficient to guarantee social peace between individuals and groups. This notion of politics as a series of calculated trade-offs is acknowledged by Hobbes, despite his insistence on the importance of strong central authority. The moral implications of this approach are equally radical. Selfishness, Spinoza and Hobbes seemed to suggest, if carefully managed and carefully channelled, could promote common goods.[362] Thus, Spinoza and Hobbes unwittingly provided the philosophical foundations for later eighteenth-century justifications of enlightened self-interest, as we find in Adam Smith and Bernard Mandeville.[363]

Such arguments, even in embryonic form, were beneficial for the rising class of Europeans who were engaged in an increasingly complex web of mercantile activities. In a world of burgeoning markets and rival polities, the trader was no longer a mere appendage to the whims of monarchy or Church, but a self-directing individual, who must make their own way in the world. Between birth and death, life was a struggle for existence. To succeed, the self-directed individual needed to develop a new set of virtues: careful measurement of his time, self-control and short-term thrift for long-term satisfaction. Here we see the nascent outline of early modern Capitalism. But there is another more troubling dimension to this new philosophy of self. Such a reconfigured notion of oikeiosis constituted a social imaginary that was highly hospitable to early modern developments in the areas of exploitative industry, colonial expansion, the subordination of Indigenous peoples and the furtherance of mass enslavement. An ideology of oikeiosis as property made the world a storehouse of commodities that the industrious and the rationally self-interested prospector could freely make use of without scruples. The possibility of imperialism was implicitly written into these ideas. In this respect, Penn must be included in this new self-consciously egoistical class and must be regarded as a contributor to its governing ideology. Penn's colony was a monument to many of

362 Jonathan Bennett *A Study of Spinoza's 'Ethics'* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), 277.

363 Bernard Mandeville (1670–1733) was a Dutch political economist, satirist, and physician. He became famous for his 1714 poem *Fable of the Bees*. In it, Mandeville argued that despite people's public pretensions to virtue and altruism, most people were in fact self–seeking, envious and competitive. Instead of leading to social chaos however, Mandeville suggested that such egotism could generate a kind of social equilibrium by which convergent self–interests provide stable conditions for accumulation, trade, and general social betterment. Selfishness, far from being automatically destructive, is recast in Mandeville as a means of achieving shared objectives. This view of egotism would go on to influence the ideas of the Scottish philosopher Adam Smith.

these ideas and consequently, expressed most, if not all, of their hideous consequences. But once again, Penn could not perceive the ideology under which he operated. He saw himself as pious and benevolent even when he was undertaking projects or indulging in justifications which obviously ran counter to Quaker convictions. In *Some Fruits of Solitude* (without a hint of self-consciousness) he condemns those who commodify the world. Penn writes:

> And it would go a great way to caution and direct People in their Use of the World, that they were better studied and known in the Creation of it. 13. For how could Man find the Confidence to abuse it, while they should see the Great Creator stare them in the Face, in all and every part thereof? 14. Their Ignorance makes them insensible and that Insensibility hardy in misusing this noble Creation, that has the Stamp and Voice of a Deity everywhere and in every Thing to the Observer.[364]

This from a man who used enslaved persons to clear forests so his colony could pay him dividends. And what of those who already lived on the land? Fox had failed to condemn African enslavement and even gestured towards its Christianisation, but he was at least not mired in Penn's species of extractive hypocrisy. Fox belonged to a fundamentally different religious and social imaginary. For him, it was not the individual who was the primary spiritual unit, but (like a good Puritan) the saved Church. Fox's idea of life was not rooted in the acquisitive individual enjoying serene retirement, but the Apostles, sharing all in common and upholding one another in prayer. Fox didn't desire solitude. He desired communion.

***Refusing to Look in the Mirror*:** Surveying Penn's public and theological writings, we could justly regard Penn's appeals to natural liberty and rights as (to borrow the terminology of psychoanalysis) a 'compensation fantasy'; a waking dream intended to make up for the fact that Penn found it impossible to embody the radical imperatives of Quaker theology in his daily life. He not only justified the institution of African enslavement, in the manner of Fox, but he also endorsed, facilitated and directly profited from it. He doubtless knew that his life as an English courtier could not be reconciled with the manner of life and worship he espoused, but he could not, or would not, break with his comfortable life. His inability to reconcile himself to this fact doubtless led him to fashion imagined worlds of equality and peace in which these convictions could be lived out. Some of these alternative realities are embodied in the early constitution-making of Pennsylvania. Instead of being an expression of the shaking and quaking which brings judgement and transformation, Penn's theology is here revealed as artful justification,

364 Penn, *Some Fruits of Solitude.*

special pleading or even escapism. What is perhaps most troubling about Penn is that through his engagement with the Cynics and the Stoics, he would have had access to a political imaginary which could conceive of a world without African enslavement. This was not necessarily the case for Fox whose religious convictions were shaped almost exclusively by *b*iblical material which was heavily weighted towards slave-owning, with small but significant pockets of dissent.

Penn swam in wider theological and philosophical waters, a fact which should incline us to hold him to the kind of high intellectual standards which he frequently displays in his writing. He could have used his philosophical and theological learning to demolish African enslavement and be heard among elite circles. His training in the natural law tradition and the philosophers of antiquity would have guaranteed him a hearing among his class. In this regard, he fails to utilise either his Quaker creed or his philosophical training to do anything other than to support the social relations of his own society. He makes the pagan philosophers of the past collaborators in his conservatism, stripping from them any subversive quality. While later Stoics kept slaves, Zeno, their esteemed founder, imagined a society without dominator and dominated, conceiving of a universal human family, who conducted their affairs on the basis of common interest. In this ideal city there would be no law courts, no temples and no money. Citizens would be bound not by contract but friendship. As Plutarch (another favourite author of Penn's) summarised this vision:

> The much-admired Republic of Zeno, the founder of the Stoic sect, may be summed up in this one main principle : that all the inhabitants of this world of ours should not live differentiated by their respective rules of justice into separate cities and communities, but that we should consider all men to be of one community and one polity and that we should have a common life and an order common to us all, even as a herd that feeds together and shares the pasturage of a common field.[365]

While Zeno's surviving words do not contain a direct rejection of enslavement (indeed some surviving traditions suggest Zeno owned at least one person[366]), it is difficult to imagine the institution of slavery persisting in Zeno's desired utopia. Seneca, a relatively late Stoic source, recounted,

365 Plutarch, 'De Alexandri magni fortuna aut virtute', quoted in James Brown Scott, *Law, the State, and the International Community* (Exchange, 2011), 99.

366 John T. Fitzgerald, 'Stoics and Early Christians on the Treatment of Slaves', in *Stoicism in Early Christianity,* eds. Ismo Dunderberg, Troels Engberg–Pedersen, Tuomas Rasimus (Baker Academic, 2010), 161.

unlike some philosophical contemporaries, Zeno did not keep enslaved persons.[367] While we cannot conclusively settle this issue, the key point is that Penn was exposed to philosophical traditions which were at the very least sceptical of the ancient institution of Latin slavery. Penn's intellectual complicity is compounded, when we consider his familiarity with Cynicism. Diogenes, the controversial originator of Cynicism, disdained slavery. In Dio Chrysostom's recollection of this Cynic tradition, the institution is regarded as doing damage to both the enslaver and the enslaved. As Jean-Manuel Roubineau notes, "Diogenes and those who followed him, sought to be the slave neither of anything nor of any person."[368] Such a stance was evidently utterly unthinkable to Penn. For him, no dissident voices were permitted to intrude upon his ordered and hierarchical solitude. While the ancient philosophers recommended many good and noble things, they could be easily contained behind the walls of his Estate. Philosophical virtue could remain conventionally inward, never forcing, never demanding, any outward change. We can see the extent of Penn's moral failure when compared to the theology of Fox. In some ways, Penn was far more socially conservative than Fox, relying less on the interpretation of Scripture and more on the purely local bounds of English custom. If Fox wanted to 'absorb the world in Scripture' (to use George Lindbeck's vivid phrase) Penn was content with the cumulative wisdom of English common law as a guide to public affairs. This brings us to an important point. When early Friends considered their public obligations, they drew heavily on the biblical language of human–divine covenant. For early Friends this implied that the primary and original law of God (as found in Scripture and sometimes gleaned in creation) superseded all laws and traditions. Since the first human beings had deviated from this primordial Covenant, it was not possible to look to natural reason as a justification for social conduct. People and cultures were too enmeshed in sin to distinguish between divine direction and the delusions of their errant hearts. Only Christ could restore the proper relation between human beings and society, human beings and nature and human beings and God. As Edward Burrough articulated this theological scheme:

> And [man] being possessed with evil and corrupted, he makes all creatures evil in his exercise of them and he corrupts them and perverts them to another end than wherefore they were created […] and they become a curse unto man and not a blessing, though in themselves are neither cursed, nor evil, nor defiled […] and ruling over

367 See Seneca's *Consolation of Helvia* for an antislavery depiction of Zeno. A useful summary of some of these traditions can be found in Ilaria Ramelli, *Social Justice and the Legitimacy of Slavery: The Role of Philosophical Asceticism from Ancient Judaism to Late Antiquity* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 48.

368 Jean–Manuel Roubineau, *The Dangerous Life and Ideas of Diogenes* the Cynic (Oxford University Press, 2023), 50.

> them in oppression and cruelty and hard-heartedness and not in the wisdom of God […] and this ought not to be for it is out of the covenant of God, in which all creatures were made and in which all stand, except the creature man, who degenerated out of God's covenant.[369]

Looking at his time and place, Burrough was repeatedly struck by the unbearable gulf between the moral claims of a 'Christian society' and the structure of that society. Words about love and fellowship flourished, while stocks and prisons, whips and chains abounded. The poor were crushed in the acquisitive towns, much as beasts of burden were abused on the land. Burrough was sensitive (as was Woolman after him) to the institutional violence all around him. The wellspring of Burrough's vision of Quakerism was his simple but socially disruptive insistence that life should conform to the spirit of truth which Friends knew and worshipped. If that meant the abandonment of manmade constitutions and conventions, so be it. Similarly, Fox wanted, as is the way with religious rebels, to conform the particular to a universal standard of rightness and truth. Fox manifestly failed to carry out this vision with anything close to consistency, but it was still the chief motivator for the vast majority of his activities. In contrast, Penn wanted radical freedom for the conscience but otherwise wanted to keep the particular untouched. Thus, on vexed issues of power and property Penn says:

> We are English men […] a title full of liberty and property, the foundation of the government of this kingdom to claim which is not only our interest but our duty […] We have a right to our lives, liberties and estates and that none of these are to be taken from us but by the judgment of twelve of our peers […] this has for ages been the common and fundamental law […] We take further leave to remind you that the civil society or government of this country is antecedent either to protestancy or popery.[370]

Two things are worth noting about this passage. Firstly, whatever the radical dreams of some early Quaker leaders, Penn was no Leveller. There was no place for God's unsettling Covenant in his stable and class-bound Quaker polity. As Gwyn notes: "In his [Penn's] political writings, he is a classic philosophical liberal, unabashedly contractarian and humanistic."[371] As an articulate advocate of property owners as 'little sovereigns', Penn saw no

369 Edward Burrough, *A Memoir of a Faithful Servant of Christ and Minister of the Gospel, who Died in Newgate,* 14th, 12 Mo., 1662 (Charles Gilpin, 1851), 218.

370 Petition to Parliament, ca. November 1680, in *The papers of William Penn, Volume 4: 1701–1718*, eds. Craig M, Horle, Alison Duncan Hirsch, et al. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 52.

371 Gwyn, *The Covenant Crucified*, 340.

justification for upsetting the arrangements of birth, title and property which sustained the late seventeenth-century English class system. If some first-generation Friends had been supportive of republicanism and greater civic equality, Penn was a creature of king and court. Secondly, we should study Penn's evocation of Englishness as another angle from which to understand his acceptance and promotion of African enslavement. This notion that rights and liberty are in some sense particular and 'ethnic' may have constituted a further barrier in the mind of Penn to the idea that enslaved people uprooted from other lands should enjoy the same constitutional rights as established Englishmen. If this is so, we may discern in Penn's failure to extend English liberty to those forcibly transported from Barbados, the beginning of the biological and essentialist narratives of race which dominated the colonialism of the eighteenth century. Whatever the truth of the latter supposition, it is absolutely the case that Penn regarded enslaved Africans as a distinct class who existed outside the normal structures of the English social and property system. The protection against dispossession and forced seizure did not apply to them, since the *Magna Carta*'s purview only extended to the life of English subjects and not to subjects of the English.

It is perhaps comforting to dismiss the political arguments and moral preferences summarised above as merely the troubling expression of one man's public and religious biography. Perhaps we might even be inclined to place Penn on the outer limits of Quakerism, a kind of slave-owning Deist (in the pattern of Thomas Jefferson). But this would be a mistake. So much of the evidence amassed here are from public documents which would have been intended for wider circulation within both Quaker and wider colonial circles, Penn, the political theorist and constitutionalist, is unlikely to have expressed assumptions or concepts which would have been wholly alien to other enslavers (particularly Quaker enslavers) within the colony. The political preferences at the heart of Penn's theorising (the sanctity of property, the upholding of privileges and the legitimacy of forced plantation labour) are intended as a template for shared social conduct. This contrasts with Fox's letters, many of which are vague exhortations to a more spiritual, much more open-ended mode of action. Is there any evidence that Penn attempted to rebel against convention? Our answer must be no. Any dissent from the property-bound and hierarchical vision of the early Enlightenment would doubtless have been reflected in Penn's early constitution-building. Such ideological dissidence is simply not there. Universal liberty remains theoretical and not brought into concrete social life. Indeed, as observed above, the unconcern of someone like James Claypoole can be said to be entirely typical of the early Quaker colonists. In the final analysis, Penn was a Quaker conduit for those emergent liberal property and natural law traditions which were busily justifying English colonial expansion and

European supremacy. Penn is perhaps unusual for the intellectual rigour which he brought to the validation of the status quo, but as we shall see in the next section, his preference for the normalcy of enslavement persisted for a long time in his colony, despite some protest and unease. How should we link Penn's beliefs about enslavement with the wider Quaker movement? Penn's thought-world was undoubtedly a distinctly colonial artefact. It was premised on the realities of European imperialism and the political theories which supported it. But the framework Penn devised could not have been so coherent unless Fox had not done the preliminary work of 1) establishing the spiritually chosen status of Quakers and 2) making the slave-economy palatable to the wider Quaker conscience. What Fox had expressed in pious platitudes, Penn later codified as rights and property-relations. The sense of Quaker exceptionalism, of moral and spiritual superiority, is present in both.

4.8 Reflections on the Persistent Reality of Race

In the above survey of early Quaker theology several key findings should be highlighted before we proceed further. Our first key finding is less significant than it first appears; George Fox (and many of the Friends around him), were not racist, if by 'racist' we mean the explicit adoption of those racial and quasi-biological categories (described by Wynter and others) which played an increasingly pernicious role within Europe's colonies from the mid-seventeenth century onwards. Indeed, as we have seen, early Friends adopted a series of biblical social categories which (at least on paper) actively went against the grain of a highly racialised colonial ideology. There is no evidence that early Friends adopted any of the new racial mythologies beloved of European slaveholders, perhaps most egregiously the Curse of Ham. For George Fox, the fact that Christ had died for all, meant that humanity was in possession of one blood and one parentage which made bluntly racial categorisations totally incoherent. Moreover, the emerging Quaker doctrine of the Inward Light, with its attendant affirmation of Christ working through all and any, made purely racial theologies of subordination much harder to justify within the basic grammar of Quaker thought. But justified they were. And herein is our second key finding from the available evidence. Early Quaker commitments to the universality of the human family did not significantly impact the way many first and second-generation Friends behaved when they encountered economies of mass enslavement. Friends could and did imagine all kinds of perfect worlds which, at least of the level of religious rhetoric, had the capacity to undermine colonial power-relations. As we will see in the next section, it is possible to find isolated examples of Quaker moral protest against enslavement relatively early.

But there is no evidence that these gestures made a mark on the general character of transatlantic Quakerism. When confronted with the hard economic realities of the transatlantic world, many Quaker communities actively accommodated themselves to the norms of colonial slaveholding, producing explicit theologies of authority and community which could be used to normalise, moralise and perpetuate these conditions.

These theologies of justification were coherent for their users because of the overarching imperative to evangelise those who were obviously non-Christian. Friends persuaded themselves that the obvious brutalities of enslavement were entirely permissible when understood through the lens of missionary activity; this position itself a product of explicitly theological reflection. But couldn't Friends see the contradiction between what they said about humanity in general and the treatment of enslaved people in particular? Some evidently did feel the sting of this contradiction, but what prevented this tension from becoming a rupture was the sheer pervasiveness of Quaker inwardness. So extreme were the embryonic Quaker habits of positioning themselves as the heroes of their own story and of spiritualising outward conditions, that colonial-era Friends largely failed to confront or acknowledge the horrors of mass enslavement. The figure of the transatlantic Quaker that emerges from our surviving evidence is much closer to the image of the brutal missionary hypocrite, as preserved in the memory of the formerly enslaved nineteenth-century abolitionist Frederick Douglass (1818-1895), than the courageous moral activists of later Quaker hagiography. As Douglass reflected:

> We have men-stealers for ministers, women-whippers for missionaries and cradle-plunderers for church members. The man who wields the blood-clotted cowskin during the week fills the pulpit on Sunday and claims to be a minister of the meek and lowly Jesus. The man who robs me of my earnings at the end of each week meets me as a class-leader on Sunday morning, to show me the way of life and the path of salvation. He who sells my sister, for purposes of prostitution, stands forth as the pious advocate of purity. He who proclaims it a religious duty to read the Bible denies me the right of learning to read the name of the God who made me. He who is the religious advocate of marriage robs whole millions of its sacred influence and leaves them to the ravages of wholesale pollution. The warm defender of the sacredness of the family relation is the same that scatters whole families, – sundering husbands and wives, parents and children, sisters and brothers, – leaving the hut vacant and the hearth desolate. We see the thief preaching against theft and the adulterer against adultery. We have men sold to build churches, women sold to support

> the gospel and babes sold to purchase Bibles for the Poor Heathen! All For The Glory Of God And The Good Of Souls![372]

Douglass was speaking about the nineteenth century and not the seventeenth, but he was nonetheless describing a basic material and religious reality which had not changed in its rudiments since Fox had disembarked on Barbados in 1671. Evangelism was the chief justification for the silencing and objectification of fellow human beings in the transatlantic world. The Gospel and its proclamation were inextricably bound up with the desires and tactics of European expansion. What else were Fox's patriarchal households but an evangelical cover for violence and dispossession? Any community the enslaved in these religious households experienced was wholly at the whim of their Quaker enslavers. The invented Quaker 'family' the enslaved were forcibly grafted into must have seemed like a grotesque parody of the families and communities from which they had been compulsorily extracted. The Quaker enslavers who preached against theft and swindling in First Day worship were themselves thieves and swindlers. In this way, Friends of the mid-seventeenth-century reveal themselves not as some morally exceptional minority, but painfully typical when compared to the longer histories of the European empires. As the African American theologian Willie Jennings has shown in his book *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*, it was not necessary for the earliest Spanish colonialists to have a fully systematised idea of race to justify and perpetuate conditions of mass enslavement. It was missiology[373] and not nature in the first instance, which provided the most fertile ground for stories of domination. Proselytiser zeal directed towards 'unfortunate' non-Christians emptied the transported and colonised of any voice and agency. This pattern of thought continued as Protestant powers began to encroach and supplant older Catholic colonial zones. At the heart of these evangelical projects was the contention that both African chattels and Indigenous 'heathens' were not human beings (at least not in the way Europeans were human). The various marginal others of the colonial economy were more like canvases upon which the colonisers could inscribe and plan their projects. As Jennings has summarised this attitude:

> European Christians, from the Iberians through to the British, saw themselves as agents of positive, if not divine, change as it were, the markers of creaturely contingency. They saw themselves as those ordained to enact a providential transition. In doing so, they

372 Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 100–101.

373 See Willie Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (Yale University Press, 2010), 84–85.

> positioned themselves as those first conditioning their world rather than being conditioned by it. They performed a deeply theological act that mirrored the identity and action of God in creating.[374]

Just as God had created the world through His sole utterance, Europeans of this era were unilaterally making the world anew through their stories of Christian mission and crucially, categorisation. Once such an attitude is practised and lived in for generations, it is easy to see how settler Christians (Quakers included) came to divide up the world according to ethnic blocs of 'blood'. Once enslaved people were made objects, it was possible to fill these empty people (people without stable ties, land and culture) with the new ingredient of 'race'. This new way of seeing made the condition of the dispossessed something given, immutable and natural. By being cut off from their original landscape and pasts, enslaved persons could be reduced to their 'Blackness', marking them forever as the passive and usable shadow of European whiteness. Thus, colonial agents took on themselves a distorted repetition of the role of the first human being, Adam, who, as Scripture tells us, named all the animals under his rule. Like the former procedure, the early modern naming of 'race' (the calling into being of incommunicable blocks called 'Blackness' and 'whiteness') confirmed Europeans in their favourable condition, not just of natural supremacy (as with the first Adam) but of cultural domination as well. As Jennings puts it:

> Before… the idea of 'race', 'the scientific concept of race', the 'social principle of race', or even a fully formed 'racial optic' on the world, it was a theological form – an inverted distorted vision of creation that reduced theological anthropology to commodified bodies. In this inversion, whiteness replaced the earth as the signifier of identities.[375]

At the height of European colonial hubris (which was always at root theological), settlers imagined themselves as the supreme measurers of their world. white western eyes would discern what the world meant, while colonial hearers could decide what counted as speech. Those at the racial margins would be made to mimic the colonial norm or be rendered invisible by their difference. The long-run historical results of this attitude are, argues Jennings, still all around us. The perverse creative utterances of Western coloniality have fostered violent chasms between persons and bodies, first within the new colonial zones, then within colonialism's various successor iterations: "People would henceforth (and forever) carry their identities on their bodies, without remainder",[376] suggests Jennings. Fox appears in

374 Jennings, *The Christian Imagination,* 60.

375 Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 58.

376 Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 59.

this story as one who takes the first step in this colonial act of creation. He empties Black enslaved subjects of agency, overlaying their lives with biblical motifs. The centre of salvific activity is not in the enslaved African, but in the white European who alone knows and proclaims the Gospel. By the time the Quaker story reaches William Penn, we see the second step in the configuration of race. Penn is beginning to see the white European not merely as evangelically central, but as a rights-imbued, autonomous subject, that in some sense, lives beyond the conditions of 'past' or 'primitive' cultures. This subject has the right to own and control his world. Nothing from his history will constrain his perfect and unimpeded quest for freedom. Here the white European represents universal and perfect humanity, the measure of all other humans. In Fox's experience of the Inward Light, there was the possibility of Friends understanding that they 'lived' inside a given place, a given time and a given culture. To say that Christ dwelt in all (without institutions or mediation) could have bloomed into that sublime mood which Spinoza called sub specie aeternitatis.[377] If Christ's face is in the enslaved and the European enslaver, in the Indigenous and the coloniser alike, there can be no question of Western–European cultural primacy. Each portion of the family of God must take its own path to Christ. It cannot be forced down the path without invaliding the journey. But Fox does not take this road, nor does Penn. Instead, they allow themselves to be imprisoned within colonial projects and end by justifying its hideous results.

As we look back at this troubling history, it is seemingly tempting to retrospectively follow this road not taken in an attempt to transcend race. But Jennings has a warning for us. We cannot simply go back to a world before 'race'. For Jennings, it would be like trying to move a mountain by "turning one's face away from it."[378] Our history is our history. We cannot pretend it did not happen, nor can we proceed as if its impact no longer reverberates both within us and outside us. Moreover, any attempt to simply bypass race as a means of reconciliation risks inadvertently robbing people of their roots, stories and overlapping historical identities which have

377 Sub specie aeternitatis (under the aspect of eternity) is derived from the thought of Benedict Spinoza. It denotes that which is universally and irreducibly true, without references to material or cultural contingencies. Implied in such a posture is the recognition that no human being is a wholly objective observer and that one lives inside conditions of historical and cultural contingency (we all 'come from somewhere'). Looking at his situation from above as it were, Spinoza found himself able to love and pity the painful tangles of his fellow human beings, while being sensitive to the limitedness and partiality of his own perspective. Such humility is absolutely irreconcilable with the logic of colonialism. If early Quakerism had found a way of grounding this sensibility theologically (as Spinoza had done so philosophically) Friends would have possessed a radical resource through which to critique their own and others' conduct in regard to the institution of mass African enslavement. As it was, the doctrine of the Inward Light was insufficient to wrench Friends from the norms of colonial chauvinism.

378 Jennings, *The Christian Imaginatio*n, 63.

grown up in the wake of colonial/racial formations. In this way, observes Jennings, the power to deny race is in fact the power "to deny and undermine geographically sustained identities."[379] Respecting others means honouring all that they are; their stories, their language and the tangled web of their time and place. This ubiquitous honouring includes the very wound of race. To pretend that they and we do not have stories and are not embedded within definite histories, is merely imperialism under the guise of universality and anti-racism. A similar thing can be said of attempts to repudiate colonialism through a generalised rejection of Quaker Christianity. Given the disturbing contents of this report, this reaction is understandable, but it does not get us beyond the habits of colonialism but merely reinforces them. In the act of studious forgetting who we are in the name of the past, we merely repeat the rootlessness and the emptying performed first by European colonialists on their world. As Jennings suggests, any attempt to transcend our memory-inflected, story-led selves, produces "odd configurations of individualism which are spiritually vapid."[380] If we simply consign Christianity to the past in an effort to side-step the realities of 'race', we will cut away the very ground under our feet. This leads us inevitably to a potentially thorny conclusion. Any self-consciously postcolonial Quakerism which fails to understand itself as irreducibly Christian will cease to have a definite location and vantage from which to address the past, to understand it and appropriately wrestle with its ongoing results. A better (more challenging) course is to subvert the theological wound of race through the wound of race itself. We must not treat the past simply as something to get away from, but the means through which we make sense of our present and learn, (if tentatively), something like a new way of being. We can contest race's damaging confines only by bringing its myths and structures to the surface of our consciousness and allow that knowledge to change us. Once we grasp how race has transformed us as a human family (how it has damaged minds and bodies), we can begin to imagine a better future. The Christian story is undoubtedly the key to the harm Friends have done historically and the harm we continue to do. But Christianity is, as we shall see later, also the means of rendering Quakerism serviceable to those it has harmed. By digging into the roots of our theology, Friends can rediscover a radical form of peaceable living. This, as we shall see, is rooted in the ancient biblical notion of Covenant.

379 Jennings, *The Christian Imagination,* 63.

380 Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 64.


RMAKERS

Strand II: Theologies of Abolition

5.1 The Problem of Abolitionism

In this section we consider why and how British Quakers began to embrace overt theologies of antislavery, paying particular attention to the theological sources and debates which supported this change in perception. By theologies of antislavery, this discussion means theological positions which attack the fundamental moral and religious assumptions upon which mass enslavement is built and/or theological positions which, in a more limited way, attack the violence and degradation of enslavement and trafficking as practically incompatible with Christ's commandment to love neighbours, strangers, enemies and perceived 'social others'. The mildest form of antislavery theology is abolition, which is characterised by a blanket rejection of formal institutions of enslavement and dispossession. The focus on formality is important because theologies of abolition have historically been strictly speaking incurious about what institutions of slavery tell us about the structures of power more generally. In most cases abolitionism does not consider how systems of domination manifest in and through interlocking categories of gender, ethnicity, class or caste. In other words, theologies of abolition fall short of a general excavation of domination, beyond the obvious divisions between enslaver and enslaved, imprisoned and free. As the African American Sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois reflected on the condition of those eventually set free in the United States:

> The first decade was merely a prolongation of the vain search for freedom, the boon that seemed ever barely to elude their grasp, – like a tantalizing will-o'-the-wisp, maddening and misleading the headless host […] He [the one made free] felt his poverty; without a cent, without a home, without land, tools, or savings, he had entered into competition with rich, landed, skilled neighbours. To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships. He felt the weight of his ignorance, – not simply of letters, but of life, of business, of the humanities; the accumulated sloth and shirking and awkwardness of decades and centuries shackled his hands and feet.[381]

381 W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk,* ed. Brent Hayes Edwards (Oxford University, 2008), 10–12.

All this, despite the fact that, "Emancipation was the key to a promised land, of sweeter beauty than ever before the eyes of weary Israelites"[382]. But it was soon discovered, says Du Bois, that in the end, all the manumitted had gained was the freedom not to be chattel. This was not, as it turned out, the freedom to be fully human nor fully citizens. The freedom offered by white abolitionism was essentially negative and not positive. Torture had been removed, but the former enslaved had not won the right to be their own irreducible centres of action. Here Du Bois draws our attention to a vital point about Quaker, indeed, all abolitionist efforts. The abolition of one violent institution does not take away conditions of servitude and violence at the level of fundamentals. The shackles and the whip may have been removed, but the recently enslaved can still go hungry or be forced to live without adequate shelter. A manumitted person is still landless and precarious, He or she can still be despised, stigmatised and barred from society. Negative freedom (the freedom not to be enslaved) raises no significant objection to other (subtler) forms of social violence. It is for this reason that abolitionism on its own never achieves its stated demands. It never really abolishes manifest conditions of unfreedom. It merely transfers subordination from explicit institutions to more diffuse, but less pervasive forms of control (through racial othering, segregated spaces, or racial injustice overlaid with the buttressing of class and caste). Abolitionism possesses merit in its historic rejection of extreme and arbitrary violence, but it does not inquire into the ongoing life of racial mythologies which reproduce poverty, injustice and despair. Theologies of abolition rarely ask about the social and economic burdens carried by those who have been enslaved, much less the social and material burdens carried by their descendants. In this way, abolitionist approaches are oblivious to racism and the structural manifestations of racial stigma. Rarely do theologies of abolition acknowledge the close connection between racial hierarchies under mass enslavement and the ongoing exclusions experienced by ethnic others in a 'free marketplace'. Once enslaved people are free, economic power (deployed by an employer or landlord) can create new forms of brutalisation without recourse to direct enslavement. In this respect, theologies of abolition differ markedly from theologies of Liberation.

The latter consider the effects of power through the widest possible lens, subjecting economic domination (wage-slavery) or gendered hierarchy to the same critical gaze of neighbourly love. In highlighting the moral insufficiency of abolitionism in general, we should highlight a particular insufficiency about Quaker abolitionism. Friendly abolitionism was not something which simply appeared whole and entire in the transatlantic world, sometime in the middle of the eighteenth century. Those who would be later dubbed Quaker abolitionists represented, at least in the first instance, a vocal and

382 Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 10.

creative minority in their Quaker community, who were reacting against the established consensus regarding Friends and African enslavement. For most Friends abolitionist positions were arrived at, not through the conviction of this or that Quaker prophet, but more slowly and more haphazardly. As we have already seen in this report, the motives behind these postures were mixed, from a paternalistic reading of the Golden Rule to a self-interested assessment of the productivity and profitability of 'free' Black labour. Abolition was the culmination of a process of moral and theological adaptation, the outcome of which could not be seen in advance. It might be said that Quaker abolitionism (insofar as it was a coherent position) was the sum of a whole series of unintended consequences, not the product of a systematic effort. While we do not wish to minimise the lives of Friends who were directly stirred by the injustice of African enslavement, the evidence we have surveyed suggests that such Quakers were a tiny minority whose initial impact on their Quaker communities were exceedingly limited. What antislavery theology existed remained firmly on the margins until the late eighteenth-century.

5.2 Fox's Contested Legacy

If theologies of abolition were unlooked for and largely unintended in their formation, what brought them into being? The answer lies in part in the complex and ambiguous legacy of foundational Quaker texts. Within the pages of early Quaker tracts were many conflicting theological imperatives; Christ's Light in all people, but an imperative to evangelise; spiritual equality for all men and women, but a desire to have ordered and stable households; social action and profound spiritual inwardness. These tensions served as ripe for a range of theological currents and counter currents which made Quaker identity both dynamic and unstable well into the 1690s. If we want to track the birth of Quaker antislavery, we should do so in and through this internal instability. We can see hints of emergent abolitionism if we study the reception of George Fox's remarks on African enslavement. As we saw in the previous discussion, Fox's scattered remarks on the theme of African enslavement were highly ambiguous. Fox never condemned the institution of slavery outright and showed something of a preference for evangelisation through indenture.[383] On the other hand, Fox affirmed the equality of all human beings, the universal work of Christ and in the abstract, a rejection of brutality towards the enslaved. When enslavers heard Quakers use this kind of rhetoric, they readily assumed that Friends wanted to free the enslaved. It is unlikely that Fox would have written to the Governor

383 See Jon R. Kershner, '*To Renew the Covenant': Religious Themes in Eighteenth–Century Quaker Abolitionism* (Brill, 2018), 12.

of Barbados if the antinomian quality of Quaker rhetoric in this area was not evident to both Quaker missionaries and their theological opponents. The tension between potentially radical rhetoric, combined with relatively conservative outcomes was also evident in the thought of Fox's co-evangelist on Barbados, William Edmundson (1627–1712). In his travels in America and the West Indies, Edmundson was able to observe Quaker enslavers at close range. He became frustrated in the failure of Quaker enslavers to follow even a modicum of Fox's exhortations towards tender treatment, including providing the enslaved with opportunities for gathered worship.[384] He repeated many of Fox's lines of exhortation, for instance reminding enslavers that they and the enslaved were part of a single human family and to observe the Golden Rule. Edmundson adds to Fox's stock argument that enslavers of Africans did not have a sound basis for their actions. In one surviving letter, he asks enslavers why they enslaved African people but did not enslave Indigenous people. What was the difference? As Brycchan Carey suggests, "he [Edmundson] saw there was – at best – a deep vein of hypocrisy in American Quakers' attitude towards slavery.'[385] But this evident unease did not naturally lead Edmundson to oppose enslavement whole and entire. Instead, Edmundson backed Fox's preferences for a combination of Gospel family-order households[386] and indentured enslavement. Indeed, Edmundson argued that enslaved people should be manumitted after thirty years.[387] Given that few of the enslaved would live to see their indenture expire, the institution of perpetual enslavement was still intact. Despite this position, Edmundson was accused of inciting enslaved Africans to revolt in 1675 (doubtless as a consequence of his organisation of Quaker meetings among enslaved islanders). Given the ecstatic nature of early Quaker worship, it is easy to see why a mixed multitude of enslaved and free, would have aroused intense suspicion among enslavers.[388] Afterall, if Christianity were the badge of colonial superiority, introducing Christianity to enslaved people, without the supervision of priests and ministers, could only stoke rebellion. For his part, Edmundson refuted this accusation by arguing that Quaker evangelisation, far from making the enslaved Africans rebellious, was the surest way of averting insurrection. As Edmundson told the island's governor, bringing the enslaved:

> to the Knowledge of God and Christ Jesus […] would keep them from Rebelling, or Cutting any Man's Throat: but if they did rebel and cut

384 Kershner, *'To Renew the Covenant'*, 12.

385 Carey, *From Peace to Freedom*, 66.

386 Carey, *From Peace to Freedom,* 63.

387 Kershner, *'To Renew the Covenant'*, 12.

388 Gerbner, 'The Ultimate Sin: Christianising Slaves in Barbados in the Seventeenth Century', in *Slavery and Abolition* 31, no. 1 (March 2010): 67.

> their Throats […] it would be through their own Doings, in keeping them in Ignorance and under Oppression, giving them Liberty to be common with Women (like Beasts) and on the other hand starve them for want of Meat and Cloaths convenient: so giving them Liberty in that which God restrain'd and restraining them in that which God allow'd and afforded to all Men, which was Meat and Cloaths.[389]

Thus, according to Edmundson, a combination of evangelisation and improved treatment would place the institution of mass enslavement on a much more stable footing. Failure to provide the basic needs to the enslaved (including the Gospel) would merely provoke violence. Edmundson maintained that Quaker enslavers must maintain a sense of paternalistic authority over the people they held in bondage. Indeed, in a letter to Rhode Island Friends, Edmundson recommended that enslavers prevent some unspecified 'filthy' immorality.[390] Despite all of Edmundson's qualms and qualifications, he ends by rendering Quaker preaching and worship as an effective means of guaranteeing docility among Barbados' enslaved population. This ambiguous position upon which many early Quaker missionaries also landed, was summarised in Fox's Journal: 'I desired also, that they would cause their overseers to deal mildly and gently with their Negroes and not to use cruelty towards them, as the manner of some had been and that after certain years of servitude they should make them free.'[391] This rather conflicted, even naive sensibility, meant that at the end of the seventeenth century, contradictory impulses were already embedded in Quaker theological thought; a rejection of cruelty but a practical acceptance of violence, spiritual equality, but not social equality, unity in Christ's redemption, but with the redeemed divided according to increasingly hard racial categories. The Quaker enslaver could take comfort from Fox's patriarchal households of Christian enslavers and Christian enslaved.

Evidence of such a process of hardening can be found in the life of the Barbados Quaker convert and planter George Gray (d. 1718). who moved to Philadelphia in 1696. In an undated tract [392]called *A Testimony for Family Meeting and keeping Nigro as Servants*, Gray not only argued that slave households were legitimate on evangelical grounds (citing William Penn and George Fox in defence[393]), but he added a further element to Fox's

389 Quoted in J. William Frost, 'George Fox's Ambiguous Anti-Slavery Legacy', in *New Light on George Fox, 1624–1691: A Collection of Essays* (William Sessions, 1993).

390 Carey, *From Peace to Freedom*, 64.

391 George Fox, *A Journal of George Fox* (Northcott, 1694), 354.

392 Gerbner, *Christian Slavery,* 72.

393 Kershner, *'To Renew the Covenant'*, 12.

original theology[394], namely that the enslaved were "heathens by nature." Such people, this logic ran, could never become Christians on account of their birth. This category of inherent otherness represented a radical rupture with earlier biblical and ecclesial typologies of human difference. Instead of focusing on religious or cultural status (which could always be altered through conversion), the notion of the hereditary heathen assumed that a certain class of human beings were in fact sub-human – predetermined to be inferior, godless and ripe for exploitation. Herein enslavement was not a misfortune, but rather a natural condition. Not only that, but the emergent category of 'race' began to exist alongside the assumption that each individual belonging to a given racial group possessed a predictable and immutable intellectual and moral character.[395] Under this new dispensation, Blackness and whiteness were reconfigured as irreconcilable states of being. God had not only created an ordered world of high and low, the creator had also introduced an irreducible chasm between Black and white, free and enslaved. We find a particularly vivid instance of the concept of the hereditary heathen in Anabaptist Thomas Tryon's antislavery tract of 1684 – an imagined dialogue between a European enslaver and an Ethiopian captive. The enslaver endeavours to explain the mysteries of the Christian religion to the protesting man, with the reservation that, 'I think it will be to as little purpose, as to go about to wash thy Skin white, to inform such dark stupid Heathens as you are; nevertheless I shall endeavour to gratifie your Curiosity'[396]. Later on in the same dialogue, we hear the enslaver chide:

> Does not your very Hue, that sooty Skin of yours, serve for an Emblem of the darkness of your Minds? You eat all unclean Foods, Carrion and Vermine without scruple; you have no Order nor decent Ceremonies at your Marriages; you go naked and have not wherewithal to cover your Shame; in a Word, you are in most particulars the very next Door to Beasts…[397]

Tyron has his Ethiopian interlocutor reply in a way intended to subvert the new racial theologies:

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394 Kershner, *'To Renew the Covenant'*, 12.

395 Thus, in the late seventeenth–century, we begin to see a decisive shift from confessional accounts of human difference, towards an essentially biological conception of human differences. Herein lies the root of the various 'scientific racisms' which possessed such currency in the European empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth–centuries. In this way, Social Darwinism, American segregation, and European 'social hygiene' and eugenics can all be understood as off–shoots of roundly theological conceptions.

396 Thomas Tryron, *A discourse in way of dialogue, between an Ethiopean or negro–slave, and a Christian that was his master in America. By Philotheos Physiologus*, 152, Michigan University Library, Digital Collections.

397 Tryron, *A discourse in way of dialogue, between an Ethiopean or negro–slave, and a Christian that was his master in America*, 190.

> As for our Complexion, 'tis the Livery of our Creator, the property of the Climate and Soil, wherein his good Providence disposed of us to be born and bred; we made not our selves Black, nor do you make your selves White; wherein then have you any thing to brag of above us? If for this cause you despise us; you at the same time despise that adorable Power, which is the Maker both of us and you: And thought White be an Emblem of Innocence, yet there are whited Walls filled within with Filth and Rottenness; what is only outward, will stand you in no stead, it is the inward Candor that our Creator is well-pleased with and not the outward; have a care therefore that you be not found as black within, as we are externally.[398]

In these passages, skin colour is directly linked to both confessional and moral traits. Here we see clearly the transition from the enslaved as war captives and/or foreign unfortunates in need of Christ, to becoming congenital docile objects who wear their subordination and irreligion on their bodies. What does the presence of such a racial physiognomy in Gray signify for our understanding of Quaker history? It demonstrates clearly and unambiguously that despite the resistance of early Quaker thought to Protestant racial theologies, evidence of their intrusion appears relatively early in the Quaker historical record. Far from observing a community existing counterculturally, outside colonial norms, we observe Friends adopting a wider set of Protestant racial assumptions. Gray, far from seeing their inclusion as an outside innovation, viewed them as part of the theological and practical consensus of the Quaker community. While Penn and Fox were not direct contributors to the new Protestant theologies of race, Gray shows how the latter's authority came to serve as ideological justification for them. How was such pro-slavery sentiment greeted by Gray's contemporaries? Surviving evidence suggests that Gray's tract encouraged Pennsylvania Friends to close ranks on the matter of African enslavement and cluster around Fox's original conclusions. Gray's tract perhaps helps to explain why Philadelphia Yearly Meeting republished 'Gospel family-order' in 1701.[399] As J. William Frost has pointed out[400] there existed in the early eighteenth-century unease among Philadelphia Quakers regarding the morality of African enslavement. The official reassertion of Fox's muddled acceptance of the slave economy was evidently an attempt to forestall internal strife and moral disunity among colonial Friends. In this respect, Fox's 'Gospel family-order' served a long-term reactive function in Quaker theological thinking

398 Tryron, *A discourse in way of dialogue, between an Ethiopean or negro–slave, and a Christian that was his master in America*, 193.

399 See J. William Frost, 'George Fox's Ambiguous Antislavery Legacy', in *New Light on George Fox, 1624–1691: A Collection of Essays* (York: William Sessions, 1993), 70.

400 Frost, 'George Fox's Ambiguous Antislavery Legacy', 70.

during a period of consolidation for Quaker slave-societies, in America and Barbados. It offered something of a messy compromise, neither abolishing the practice of enslavement outright, nor keeping the institution of enslavement wholly unchanged.[401] But there was always the unsettling possibility for institutional Quakerism (inherent in the radical immediacy of Quaker revelation of reading Fox against Fox). For those Friends who held fast to the Inward Light's universality, Fox's pronouncements provided a basis for disputing the economic structures of European slave economies at the root. Perhaps the earliest example of a more radical reading of Fox's theological premises can be found in a short letter by the Lancashire missionary Alice Curwen (1619–1679). Writing to a Barbados enslaver, Curwen condemns the recipient for tyrannising the enslaved in their household and ignoring the equality between all human souls. As Curwen chides:

> And as for thy Servants, whom thou callst thy Slaves, I tell thee plainly, thou hast no right to reign over their Conscience in Matters of Worship of the Living God; for thou thy self confessedst, that they had Souls to save as well as we: Therefore, for time to come let them have Liberty, lest thou be called to give an Account to God for them, as well as for thy self: So in thy old Age chuse rather, as a good Man did, that both thou and thy whole Family may serve the Lord; for I am perswaded, that if they whom thou call'st thy Slaves, be Upright-hearted to God, the Lord God Almighty will set them Free in a way that thou knowest not; for there is none set Free but in Christ Jesus, for all other Freedom will prove but a Bondage… [402]

On the surface this brief letter appears to be a restatement of Fox's position. Curwen is reaffirming Fox's exhortations that the enslaved to be evangelised and included in Quaker Meetings. But the letter contains a sentiment absent from Fox. Not only is the text exceedingly condemnatory in tone but its claim "that the Lord God Almighty will set them Free in a way that thou knowest not" could be suggestive either of inward spiritual freedom (in line with Foxian inwardness), or that God will find a way of miraculously freeing those in bondage in a way which defies the enslaver's understanding. If Curwen intended the latter possibility, she would have been claiming a clear and revolutionary continuity between Quaker religious experience and the Exodus of Moses. At the centre of this story is a God who frees the Israelites so that His people could freely worship their god (see particularly Exodus 5:1–5). According to this latter interpretation, there is no practical difference between freedom of conscience and being free in body. For the writer of

401 Kershner, *'To Renew the* Covenant', 12.

402 Anne Martindell, *The Relation of the Labour, Travail and Suffering of that faithful Servant of the Lord Alice Curwe*n (1680), 18.

Exodus, the Hebrews could not worship God under enslavement, but only in a state of faithful wandering. Curwen would have known this story well and the politically potent nature of the Hebrew's demand. At the very least Curwen's short missive demonstrates the radical potentialities which existed within Fox's pastoral and theological rhetoric. The jostling and contradictory status of these theological impulses can be seen clearly when we study two texts from the late seventeenth century. The first is undoubtedly the most famous. *The Germantown Petition* of 1688 constitutes the first unambiguous Quaker statement against mass enslavement. The second text was a likely response to the first. It was composed by a group of Quaker schismatics in 1693, entitled *An exhortation & caution to Friends concerning buying or keeping of Negroes*. Both texts illustrate something only heavily implied in Curwen's letter, namely the theological procedure of reading Fox's theology against itself. But when we study their content and reception, what is revealed is not a straight road towards a theology of abolition, but a painfully slow process of changing justifications, avoidances and deflections.

5.3 A Brief Outline of the Petition: Context and Significance

The Germantown Petition was composed by a small group of Pennsylvanian Friends who objected strongly to the slave economy which had come to dominate the daily life of Penn's 'Holy Experiment'. The author of the *Petition* was a lawyer and schoolmaster by the name of Francis Daniel Pastorius. Pastorius came to Pennsylvania in the early 1680s and by the time of the *Petition*'s composition, was the clerk of Germantown Friends Meeting.[403] T*he Germantown Petition* (sometimes called the Germantown Protest), has subsequently gone down in history as one of the earliest unambiguous statements of a theology of abolition from a Quaker pen. But it is important that we do not treat this text as any kind of *i*ndication of any widespread antislavery sentiment among colonial Friends. On the balance of historical evidence, it is reasonable to conclude that the *Petition* was an exceptional document in its era, not merely on the basis of its self-conscious commitment to a logic of antislavery in general, but its willingness to use Scriptural logic to fundamentally undercut the power structures and assumptions of the colonial slave-economy in particular. The text's relative moral and theological clarity can be partly explained, less as a shift in Quaker consciousness, but as a reflection of the peculiar conditions of Germantown itself. The township, before becoming a notable Quaker settlement, had been distinguished for its population of Mennonites, who had fled to Penn's colony in response to European persecution. Among the diverse sects of the Reformation, early Mennonite practice and theology was characterised by a

403 See Tomek, *Slavery and Abolition in Pennsylvania* (Temple University Press, 2021), 27.

radical commitment to active nonviolence and an equally radical suspicion of the state, including courts and civil authorities. Heralding from that wide pool of religious dissidence called Anabaptism, Mennonites held that true Christians must always shun violence, not merely at the level of armed conflict, but also at the level of Church and intercommunity relations. Thus, we could say that early Anabaptist peace theology was not partial or qualified in its scope, but radical, self-critical and comprehensive in its ambition. Since Christ had been willing to die rather than combat his betrayers, those who followed in his footsteps, the Anabaptists reasoned, should be willing to suffer and die, rather than forsake Christ's Gospel of peace. As the founder of the movement, an ex-Catholic priest named Menno Simons, once exhorted:

> The prince of peace is Christ Jesus; His kingdom is the kingdom of peace, his Word is the word of peace, his body is the body of peace; His children are the seed of peace; and His inheritance and reward are the inheritance and reward of peace. In short, with this king and in His kingdom and reign, it is nothing but peace.[404]

These Mennonite settlers (many of whom had experienced generations of religious persecution) would in time embrace Quakerism.[405] What might this mean for our understanding of the Germantown Petition? It is reasonable to suppose that the *Petition* was a unique result of a fusion of religious radicalisms within Germantown society. Thus, we cannot use the *Petition* as a guide for Quaker thinking and action elsewhere. While Mennonite communities were often passive in the face of colonial enslavement, Mennonites had also fostered a long opposition to the practice. Given this context, it is not unreasonable to suppose the theological vividness of the *Petition* is not purely the result of internal Quaker reflection alone, but was partially augmented by an earlier Anabaptist peace theology which, in its habitual suspicion of civil power, slowly radicalised Quaker communities within Germantown. It is worth noting that three of the *Petition*'s signatories had a Mennonite background.[406]

5.4 Key Themes of *The Petition*

Now let's consider some of the central themes of the Petition**:**

404 Menno Simons, quoted in *Concern for Anabaptist Renewal: A Radical Reformation Reader,* 1971, eds. Virgil Vogt & Laura Schmidt (Wipf & Stock, 2022), 138.

405 Achim Kopp, *The phonology of Pennsylvania German English as evidence of language maintenance and shift* (Bloomsbury Academic, 1999), 18.

406 Brock, *Pacifism in the United States From the Colonial Era to the First World War* (Princeton University Press, 2015), 161–2; see also *The Mennonite Quarterly Review, Volumes 33–34* (University of Iowa, 1959), 43.

The Revolution of Moral Equivalence: As we saw in our previous discussion, on some occasions Fox would appeal to empathy to reform the harshness of Quaker enslavers. This argument was sometimes twinned with the recollection of Quaker trafficking in North Africa. It is these two arguments which frame the opening part of the *Petition*:

> Is there any that would be done or handled at this manner? viz., to be sold or made a slave for all the time of his life? How fearful & fainthearted are many on sea when they see a strange vassel – being afraid it should be a Turk and they should be taken and sold for slaves into Turkey. Now what is this better done, as Turks doe? yea, rather is it worse for them to say they are Christians, for we hear that the most part of such Negers are brought heither against their will & consent and that many of them are stollen.[407]

Here the *Petition* draws upon two important pieces of historical context to frame its opening argument. Firstly, the text gestures at the widespread fear, common throughout the European sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, of Turkish (read Muslim) incursion, breaching the political and religious walls of Christendom. Much like the mid-twentieth-century fear of Communism in the Anglosphere, 'the Moor' was a figure cloaked in an aura of conspiracy, subversion and brutality. The second fact, known by Quaker readers, was the phenomenon of white European Friends held in bondage in North Africa. What is remarkable about this text and the Quaker community which produced it, is that the *Petition* is evidently an early document of post-Christendom. Unlike earlier documents which explored cultural otherness, the *Petition* no longer divides the world according to Medieval boundary systems of believer/unbeliever, heretic/heathen. Instead, the text is marked by an exaggerated notion of universal humanity, one in which human differences were incidental rather than fundamental. We might say that the *Petition* is a natural outgrowth of early Quaker scepticism that true faith could be schematised in political or national terms. According to this view, it was not possible to estimate the value of an individual according to religious or ethnic markers, much less decide upon someone's liberty. But unlike other Quaker engagements with the realities of mass enslavement, the *Petition* applies the subversive logic of Quaker theology vigorously, by rejecting religious and moral chauvinism in the name of true religion. In this respect, the shape and force of the *Petition*'s argument is deeply Scriptural. As the text says later: "He who know that men must not comitt adultery, some doe comitt adultery in others, separating wifes from their housbands and giving them to others. and some sell the children of those poor Creatures

407 *A Minute Against Slavery, Addressed to Germantown Monthly Meetin*g (1688), Quaker Heritage Press.

to other men."[408] A few decades earlier Fox had applied Scriptural logic to justify the institution of indentured enslavement. He took the examples of the Patriarchs and the Mosaic law as templates for the Quaker attitude. But, in the *Petition*, the moral logic of Scripture is turned on the squalid lives of enslavers. In the Gospel of Matthew adultery is defined comprehensively, not simply as unlawful sexual contact, but as a whole economy of desire, where the eyes and heart betray the self. As Jesus says in the famous discourse on marriage: '"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (5:27–8). But for the authors of the *Petition*, the same generalised sanction against the betrayal of the lustful eye is applied to enslavers. Those who lust after the bodies of other human beings for their own comfort and profit are likewise condemned on the same basis. The enslaver has stolen what is not theirs to take, the liberty of a fellow human being. Thus, the *Petition* belongs to a strand of religious radicalism which would in time make a contribution towards liberal and secular premises. The Turkish and Christian slavers are put on the same moral level. The mystery and the danger of the Moor is absent, replaced by an almost empirical attitude which is concerned less with religious ideology and ethnic distinctions and more concerned with ethical practice. As the text notes:

> Now tho they are black, we can not conceive there is more liberty to have them slaves, as it is to have other white ones. There is a saying that we shall doe to all men licke as we will be done ourselves; macking no difference of what generation, descent or Colour they are. and those who steal or robb men and those who buy or purchase them, are they not alicke? Here is liberty of conscience [wich] is right and reasonable; here ought to be likewise liberty of the body, except of evildoers, is an other case. But to bring men hither, or to robb and sell them against their will, we stand against. In Europe there are many oppressed for Conscience sacke; and here there are those oppressed which are of a Black Colour.[409]

Alongside the evident radicalisation of an earlier Puritan notion of 'free conscience' we find here an early anticipation of the liberal Harm Principle; the conviction that persons can only be legitimately coerced to avoid harm to others. They cannot be compelled based on someone else's perceived estimation of their 'own good'. Such a premise is, the *Petition* recognises, wholly incompatible with attempts by civic authorities to impose religious conformity on individuals. But on the same basis, enslavement of bodies is

408 *A Minute Against Slavery*, Quaker Heritage Press.

409 Ibid.

also an illegitimate use of public power, unless it can be shown that the use of coercion is preventing some public evil.

***The Petition* and Physical Slavery:** Undoubtedly, the two dominant themes of the *Petition*, are that of human equality and reciprocity (see Matthew 17:12). On the latter theme the *Petition* exhorts:

> Pray, what thing in the world can be done worse towards us, then if men should robb or steal us away, & sell us for slaves to strange Countries, separating housband from their wife and children. Being now this is not done at that manner we will be done at, therefore we contradict & are against this traffick of men's body.[410]

The text's resistance to the suggestion that human particulars should impact moral consideration is certainly striking for its period, in both implications and scope. Fox would speak in such universal terms, but he did not link this moral universalism to any comprehensive or consistent critique of the political economy of his own time. He took on the churches, the preachers and the moral libertines, but he did not take on the institution of African enslavement. In this respect, Fox is partly imprisoned by his Puritan formation. He was concerned chiefly with a sectarian, suffering people, amidst the inequities of the world. The structure of the world itself (the pattern of its wealth, its institutions and mores) did not interest him, in the way that they grieved a soul like John Woolman living a century later. There is in Fox a marked moral individualism (not unlike that of John Bunyan) which extricates persons from their wider conditions and focuses instead on personal acts of resistance, righteousness or failure. Sin in Fox's thought is at times remarkably asocial and non-systematic. Fox often took refuge in a pronounced spiritual inwardness, which, paradoxically, permitted a surprising amount of compromise with the world. In contrast to such a dynamic, the *Petition*[411] displays a radical this-sidedness. The world is not merely a briar patch of personal temptation which must be avoided, but the field in which souls are tested, challenged and formed. The Friends who compose the 1688 *Petition* are acutely aware that they live in a wider world and that not all who glance their way will find the sight of Quakers spiritually edifying. As the *Petition* puts it:

> Ah ! doe consider well this things, you who doe it, if you would be done at this manner? and if it is done according Christianity? You surpass Holland and Germany in this thing. This mackes an ill report in all those Countries of Europe, where they hear off, that the Quackers

410 Ibid.

411 Ibid.

> doe here handel men licke they handel there the Cattle. and for that reason some have no mind or inclination to come hither. And who shall maintaine this your cause, or plaid for it? Truely we can not do so, except you shall inform us better hereoff, viz: that christians have liberty to practise [these] things.[412]

The *Petition*'s condemnation is striking. Despite their claim to inward righteousness, colonial Friends, wallowed in a trade consisting of brutalised human bodies, mirroring the wider Protestant slave economies in greed and cruelty. And for this, Friends are adversely judged from afar. Unlike the relative otherworldliness of Fox, for the writer of the *Petition*, the wider world matters since Friends are called to do more than simply serve their insular interests. They are to serve a wider humanity. Fox would not have disagreed with this, but he simply refused to grasp the extent to which the institution of African enslavement blighted the claims early Friends made about themselves. In contrast to Fox's obvious avoidance, the *Petition* notes:

> When is Pennsylvania to have a good report, instead it hath now a bad one for this sacke in other Countries. Especially whereas the Europeans are desirous to know in what manner the Quackers doe rule in their Province, & most of them doe loock upon us with an envious eye. But if this is done well, what shall we say is done evill?[413]

A Refusal of Double Standards: Early on in this report, we saw a sample of self-justifying Quaker narratives of manumission. In these narratives, Friends are often seen manumitting enslaved people on the basis of the perceived moral virtue of the enslaved. Those removed from chattel or indenture were to be hardworking, honest, industrious. They were to demonstrate meekness in personal conduct and a resignation to their condition. The subconscious pretext of such accounts is that the Quaker enslavers were themselves personifications of such virtue, to which the enslaved were being inducted. It is easy to imagine all the voices and lives which were left out of this record of goodly slaves and goodly Quaker enslavers. We hear no mention of people held in bondage who resisted their enslavers, either violently or through subtle acts of sabotage and non-compliance. These self-justifying narratives do not concede (indeed, how could they?) the double standard under which Quaker enslavers of the enslaved operated. One rule for the enslaver and another for the individual being enslaved. There is no such double standard in the *Petition*. The moral centrality of reciprocity and the radical reinterpretation of adultery leave such moral double standards nowhere to hide. As the *Petition* expresses the matter forcefully:

412 Ibid.

413 Ibid.

> If once these slaves (which) they say are so wicked and stubbern men) should joint themselves, fight for their freedom and handel their masters & mastrisses, as they did handel them before; will these masters & mastrisses tacke the sword at hand and warr against these poor slaves, licke we are able to belive, some will not refuse to doe? or have these Negers not as much right to fight for their freedom, as you have to keep them slaves?[414]

There is the radical acknowledgement here that one cannot condemn the use of force by enslaved people to gain their freedom, while justifying the use of force to keep people in bondage. This is a rare example before the eighteenth century among Quakers of a comprehensive interpretation of an emergent theology of peace. To be a peaceful people here meant more than a simple rejection of war. For the framers of the *Petition*, it evidently meant a rejection of all manner of coercive violence. Such an interpretation was evidently only a latent possibility in Fox and as we have seen, was a vision rhetorically gestured at, but practically absent in the public conduct of William Penn.

5.5 The Reception of *the Petition*

Katherine Gerbner, in her treatment of the *Germantown Petition*, rightly draws our attention to the relative strangeness of the document within the context of late seventeenth-century transatlantic Quakerism. In its comprehensive vision of human equality, the *Petition* constituted a significant departure from the arguments of an earlier generation of Quaker moralists.[415] Did the revolutionary arguments of the *Petition* settle anything for Friends in Pennsylvania or indeed elsewhere? The answer must be no. Those hoping to find a clear theological line from the Mennonite–Quaker radicalism of the Germantown *Petition* and later Quaker abolition efforts, are liable to be disappointed. The apparent exceptionality of the text is underscored by its reception among Friends. Instead of clearly resolving the issue of slaveholding for transatlantic Quakers, the *Petition* would ultimately disappear from view after the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting rejected the text.[416] There has been some suggestion, for instance by David Chanoff[417] (among others), that the *Petition* possessed something of an afterlife among Pennsylvanian colonists. Apparent echoes of the text's central

414 Ibid.

415 Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, 70.

416 Frost, 'George Fox's Ambiguous Antislavery Legacy', 75.

417 See David Chanoff, *Anthony Benezet: Quaker, Abolitionist, Anti–Racis*t (University of Georgia Press, 2025), 49.

arguments can be found in the later work of English sailor Ralph Sandiford (1693–1733). Having previously worked in Barbados, Sandiford moved to Pennsylvania, becoming one of enslavement's fiercest critics from within colonial Quakerism.[418] Even if such an ongoing influence is granted, however, we must still conclude that the impact of the *Petition* was limited in scope, especially in the decade after its publication. While it would be wrong to say that there were no pro-abolitionist stirrings as a result of the *Petition* (we will consider the response of the Keithian Quakers below), the text cannot be credited with any significant impact, for the simple reason that it was not widely circulated. The *Petition* was completely unknown to later generations of Quaker abolitionists like John Woolman, Benjamin Lay and Thomas Clarkson[419]. Indeed, the *Petition* would not be widely reprinted in North America until 1844.[420] In so far as we can reconstruct the deep causes for the *Petition*'s cool reception, the most likely explanation for this outcome lay in the widespread acceptance of the theological framework set out by Fox a generation before. Fox's unwavering focus on evangelisation to the neglect of social conditions had laid the groundwork for a 'conservative' Quakerism which actively refused to question the moral legitimacy of economies based upon enslavement.

5.6 The Keithian Schism and Antislavery

Now let's turn to another important text in the history of Quaker antislavery, *An exhortation & caution to Friends concerning buying or keeping of Negroes*. In order to understand the import of *An Exhortation*, it is first necessary to consider the internal Quaker conflicts from which the text emerged. The Scottish apologist and missionary George Keith (1639 –1716), was undoubtedly one of the most significant figures in early Quakerism – matching Robert Barclay in his depth of theological sophistication. Keith's name no longer takes centre stage in early Quaker history however, on account of the deep schism he and his followers produced among Friends across the transatlantic world. Embittered by his theological battles with co-religionists, Keith would eventually leave the Religious Society of Friends and join the Church of England. His eclipse is unfortunate because a study of his life enables us to grasp an important aspect of later seventeenth-century Quakerism, namely, the extent to which the internal Quaker theological project was still in flux. Despite the considerable polemical efforts of Fox,

418 Kershner, *'To Renew the Covenant'*, 50.

419 David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 309.

420 See Diego Pirillo, *The Atlantic Republic of Letters: Knowledge and Colonialism in the Age of Franklin* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2026), 104.

Robert Barclay and William Penn, there were still deep doctrinal tensions. Much of Quakerism's theological contents was still sketchy, a hangover from the movement's first decade, when ecstatic experience and not apologetics, was most central. George Keith's theological endeavours were to expose these tensions, in ways that proved, for a short time at least, profoundly destabilising.

At the heart of the so-called Keithian controversy was the relationship between the Quaker doctrine of the Inward Light of Christ and the historical Jesus of Nazareth, who lived, died and rose from the dead, some 1700 years before. Keith was determined that Quakerism should be firmly rooted in the historical specificity of the Christian revelation. This theological dispute had for Keith eminently practical implications. A Quakerism divorced from the Bible was also a Quakerism prone to self-delusion and self-justification. As David Brion Davis has characterised this dispute: "It appeared to Keith that the leading Quaker ministers and magistrates in America had lost sight of Christ the saviour and by disregarding the imperatives of 'immediate revelation' had compromised themselves with a sinful world."[421] In this context, for Keith and his followers, African enslavement was merely one issue which proved that Friends had become corrupt and worldly. Such was the intensity of Keith's personality that a group of Friends split away from the Yearly Meeting in Pennsylvania, forming 'The Christian Quakers'. The link between this group and the *Germantown Petition* seems clear. Keith did not live far from Germantown in this period (having settled in East Jersey three years before the Petition had been written).[422] Moreover, one of the signatories of the *Germantown Petition*, Abraham op den Graeff, sided with Keith in the ensuing schism.[423] Now we are in a position to understand the significance of our second text. While not written directly by Keith, *An Exhortation* was composed by a circle of Friends clearly familiar with Keith's opinions. Frost calls this tract "the most eloquent early Quaker protest against slavery."[424] While the tract's eloquence is not in doubt, it is necessary to qualify the nature and extent of the text's antislavery protest. In essentials, the text meets the rough criteria for an abolitionist text. The tract both questions key assumptions of the European slave economy and shows the incompatibility between the violence of enslavement and Christian commitments towards love of neighbour and enemy alike. Given this, it is a peculiar fact that this text does not conclude with a blanket abolition of African enslavement, but remains attached to a restricted form of indentured servitude. Enslaved

421 Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 310.

422 Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 309.

423 See *Proceedings and Addresses of the Pennsylvania–German Society* (The New Era Printing Company, 1899), 202.

424 Frost, 'George Fox's Ambiguous Antislavery Legacy', 75.

persons cannot be freed all at once the tract suggests, but must first be educated for freedom. Thus, the basic direction of the tract is a modification of many of Fox's key beliefs, albeit the modification is a radical one.

The Unity of Humanity: The tract begins by sketching out a theological terrain doubtless familiar to earlier readers of the *Germantown Petition*. The tract argues that it is axiomatic to the Quaker creed that every person belongs to a single human family and therefore consequently God possesses equal consideration for each human being, regardless of ethnic origin. The tract notes:

> Seeing our Lord Jesus Christ hath tasted Death for every Man and given himself a Ransom for all, to be testified in due time and that his Gospel of Peace, Liberty and Redemption from Sin, Bondage and all Oppression, is freely to be preached unto all, without Exception and that Negroes, Blacks and Taunies are a real part of Mankind, for whom Christ hath shed his precious Blood and are capable of Salvation, as well as White Men; and Christ the Light of the World hath (in measure) enlightened them and every Man that cometh into the World; and that all such who are sincere Christians and true Believers in Christ Jesus and Followers of him, bear his Image and are made conformable unto him in Love, Mercy, Goodness and Compassion, who came not to destroy men's Lives, but to save them, nor to bring any part of Mankind into outward Bondage, Slavery or Misery, nor yet to detain them, or hold them therein, but to ease and deliver the Oppressed and Distressed and bring into Liberty both inward and outward.[425]

In this respect, this tract goes much further than affirming human equality than anything in the *Germantown Petition*. Here it is suggested that equal moral consideration arises out of Christ's redemptive work. In the defeat of sin, all human beings have a share in the love and liberty of God. Fox in an earlier letter of 1679 writes similarly:

> And also, you must instruct and teach your Indians and negroes and all others, how that Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man and gave himself a ransom for all men, to be testified in due time and is the propitiation not for the sins of christians only, but for the sins of the whole world.[426]

425 *An exhortation & caution to Friends concerning buying or keeping of Negroes*, University of Michigan Library.

426 George Fox, 'To Friends in America concerning their Negros and Indian', in *A collection of many select and Christian epistles, letters and testimonies, written on sundry occasions, by that ancient, eminent, faithful Friend and minister of Christ Jesus, George Fox* (Marcus T.C. Gould, 1831), 160.

But even in the above opening paragraph of this tract, we can see some radical differences emerging between Keithian Quakers and Fox. Fox begins and ends his exhortation in terms of the evangelical task; the preaching of the Gospel. Fox's tone is paternalistic and didactic, whereas the Keithian tone is emphatic and declaratory. This speaks to theological and moral differences between the two. Fox places himself on an evangelical pedestal. Friends are spiritual patrons to "their Blacks and Indians." Fox wants to improve these cultural others. He does not feel the need to improve himself. The language of *An Exhortation* is much more radical. This text sets a standard which it feels the Quaker audience are not meeting. We see this contrast clearly throughout Fox's 1679 letter. He is in full didactic mode. He has knowledge which he thinks "blacks, indians and tawnies" need to hear. He is uninterested in their social position, or the structures and practices which render them objects of colonial exploitation. He is spiritual in a way which is socially and morally evasive. As Fox writes,

> you must teach and instruct blacks and indians and others, how that God doth pour out his spirit upon all flesh in these days of the new covenant and new testament; and that none of them must quench the motions of his spirit nor grieve it nor vex it; nor rebel against it, nor err from it, nor resist it; but be led by his good spirit to instruct them; and with which they may profit in the things of God; neither must they turn from his grace into wantonness, nor walk despitefully against the spirit of grace, for it will teach them to live soberly, godly and righteously and season.[427]

It may be objected by those more sympathetic to the early Quaker leader, that Fox was giving the same kind of spiritual advice to cultural others as he would a Quaker community in the East Riding of Yorkshire. Thus, despite Fox's complicity in the face of African enslavement, a more generous interpretation of him may wish to point us towards his essentially egalitarian spirit; that he preached the same message regardless of people's particular situation or relative social status. But to ignore people's social and material conditions is not in itself egalitarian. To pretend that spiritual obstacles are the same for enslaved Africans as they are for white English subjects is not merely unrealistic, it is a self-serving fantasy. Such spiritual equality ignores the reality of power, to the direct benefit of Quaker enslavers. In this respect, Fox's letter contains no admonishment to either colonisers or enslavers. Fox's account of moral restitution goes in one direction only, while his account of salvation is metaphysical, not political. We cannot say the same for Keithian Friends, for whom salvation signifies "ease" for "the Oppressed and Distressed" and involves "Liberty both inward and outward." It seems

427 Fox, 'To Friends in America concerning their Negros and Indian', 160.

likely that the *An Exhortation*'s affirmation of outward Liberty is intended to recall Jesus' reading of the prophet Isaiah, which for the Gospel writers, served as a confirmation and summary of his Messianic mission:

> The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
> because he has anointed me
> to proclaim good news to the poor.
> He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
> and recovery of sight for the blind,
> to set the oppressed free,
> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. (Luke 4:19, Isaiah 61:1)

Our text is not content to confine the healing of Christ to some ethereal otherworld however, but expects the reconciliation of Christ in the present through faithful discipleship. To attend to the Inward Light requires more than preaching the Word. It also requires the rejection of all social practices which are evidently incompatible with the imperatives of love and healing. As the tract puts the matter sternly:

> [To] buy Souls and Bodies of men for Money, to enslave them and their Posterity to the end of the World, we judge is a great hinderance to the spreading of the Gospel and is occasion of much War, Violence, Cruelty and Oppression and Theft & Robery of the highest Nature; for commonly the Negroes that are sold to white Men, are either stollen away or robbed from their kindred and to buy such is the way to continue these evil Practices of Man-stealing and transgresseth that Golden Rule and Law, To do to others what we would have others do to us.[428]

This argument closely echoes the one found in the *Germantown Petition* of 1688. In both texts, the Christian commitment to moral reciprocity disallows any suggestion that some may be treated as free while others are dragged down to the status of property. Moral reciprocity (that what we want for ourselves we should want for others) means an equality of moral consideration within a single human family. Since the enslaved were not criminals and had done nothing to deserve their captivity, such a state was obviously unjust. For the authors of the tract, public coercion should be used exclusively to reduce or deter social harm.[429] As *An Exhortation* puts it:

428 *An exhortation & caution.*

429 Again, like the *Germantown Petition*, Keithian Friends developed a fascinating anticipation of the Millian Harm Principle.

> Because Christ commanded, saying, All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them. Therefore, as we and our Children would not be kept in perpetual Bondage and Slavery against our Consent, neither should we keep them in perpetual Bondage and Slavery against their Consent, it being such intollerable Punishment to their Bodies and Minds, that none but notorious Criminal Offendors deserve the same. But these have done us no harm; therefore how inhumane is it in us so grievously to oppress them and their Children from one Generation to another.[430]

This argument concludes:

> What greater Oppression can there be inflicted upon our Fellow Creatures, than is inflicted on the poor Negroes! they being brought from their own Country against their Wills, some of them being stollen, others taken for payment of Debt owing by their Parents and others taken Captive in War and sold to Merchants, who bring them to the American Plantations and sell them for Bond Slaves to them that will give most for them.[431]

On this basis the text argues that Friends should, as a matter of principle agitate against the kidnapping, trafficking, and holding of enslaved persons in bondage:

> It is our Duty to come forth in a Testimony against stollen Slaves, it being accounted a far greater Crime under Moses's Law than the stealing of Goods: for such were only to restore four fold, but he that stealeth a Man and selleth him, if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to Death, Exod. 21. 16.[432]

In Fox's hands the Torah was a tool for the partial justification of mass enslavement. In Keithian hands, the same texts became radical tools for the condemnation of enslavement and the moral elevation of those who have been enslaved. What remains remarkable about this text is the extent to which it offers an explicit condemnation of enslavers and not merely condemnation of the abstract owning of slaves. Fox did neither. Keith is uncompromising, the cruelties visited on enslaved people by their enslavers will bring Divine judgement on the enslavers:

430 Ibid.

431 Ibid.

432 Ibid.

> Because Slaves and Souls of Men are some of the Merchandize of Babylon by which the Merchants of the Earth are made Rich; but those Riches which they have heaped together, through the cruel Oppression of these miserable Creatures, will be a means to draw Gods Judgments upon them; therefore, Brethren, let us hearken to the Voice of the Lord, who saith, Come out of Babylon, my People, that ye be not partakers of her Sins and that ye receive not her Plagues; for her Sins have reached unto Heaven and God hath remembered her iniquities; for he that leads into Captivity shall go into Captivity, Rev. 18. 4, 5. & 13. 10.[433]

Here the Keithian authors recognise that Revelation concerns the operation and consequences of an idolatrous empire. For Keithian Quakers, Babylon is nothing less than the American plantations where men, women and children are labouring in bondage. There is a nascent Quaker political theology here, one which suggests that those who profit from the wealth of imperialism are complicit in its idolatry. It would reappear later in the eighteenth century, principally through the apocalyptic pen of Ralph Sandiford, who, like the earlier Keithians, detected the presence of the beast amidst the speculative riches of the plantations.[434] This vision contrasts strongly with Fox, who had a pronounced tendency to confine apocalypticism to the realm of spiritual transformation within the heart of the individual. There is however in the Keithian argument some hesitation regarding the abandonment of enslavement (especially as indenture). The tract suggests that Friends should certainly avoid buying enslaved people, although they could still do so if the aim of the sale was to eventually set the enslaved person free. In achieving that aim a short period of service could be permissible. As our text notes:

> Therefore, in true Christian Love, we earnestly recommend it to all our Friends and Brethren, Not to buy any Negroes, unless it were on purpose to set them free and that such who have bought any and have them at present, after some reasonable time of moderate Service they have had of them, or may have of them, that may reasonably answer to the Charge of what they have laid out, especially in keeping Negroes Children born in their House, or taken into their House, when under Age, that after a reasonable time of service to answer that Charge, they may set them at Liberty and during the time they have them, to teach them to read and give them a Christian Education.[435]

433 Ibid.

434 See Kershner, *'To Renew the Covenant'*, 50.

435 *An exhortation & caution*.

Here our text radically tightens the criteria for legitimate enslavement but it doesn't quite reach the point of blanket abolition. It still holds on to Fox's insistence of limited (and in the minds of earlier Quakers) kindly servitude. This is in contrast to the more straightforwardly absolutist line expressed in the *Germantown Petition*. The Keithians could not quite disentangle themselves from the notion that it is still Friends' role as Christian Europeans to use coercive power to spread true religion. It does not occur to the writer of the tract, either that enslaved peoples should be freed and left alone to find or reject the Truth on their own terms, or that the imposition of 'Christian Education' is an expression of violence. Evidently Keithian theology could not let go of the beguiling self-satisfaction of being a teacher, a parent, or a patron. It is the Evangelical impulse that is preventing minds and hearts, otherwise able to see the profound violence at the heart of enslavement to draw back from total abolition. The missionary mindset in which the world is dark but the preacher is luminous is a path strewn with multiple temptations, the refusal of self-criticism among them. Such was the Keithian sense of their own light, especially compared to other Friends, that it evidently did not occur to them that power, even in the name of light, was still power. The Keithian attitude in essential outline was still that of a coloniser, even if such Friends were beginning to see its human costs and moral evasions. Thus, it may be said that while this tract represents a milestone on the road to Quaker antislavery, it should not be treated as a fully worked out expression of it.

5.7 The Reception of *An exhortation & caution to Friends*

What kind of reception did *An Exhortation* receive? As far as we can tell, the tract had no immediate positive impact on nascent Quaker antislavery theology within the bounds of Penn's colony. It is even arguable that the appearance of this Keithian denunciation of slavery simply hardened attitudes towards slave-owning among Quaker conservatives. Afterall, now antislavery sentiment could be tied to theological and doctrinal disunity, it was a simple matter to identify Quaker enslaving as a proxy for the opposite; social and doctrinal stability. The existence of such conflation can be gleaned from the fact that George Gray (that stringent advocate of pro-slavery orthodoxy) had signed a letter publicly condemning Keith and his schematic group.[436] There is some evidence however, that the Keithian protest did produce discernible ripples within Pennsylvanian Quaker society. As Frost notes, there were two Quaker antislavery protests between 1696-1698[437], initiated

436 See John Thomas Scharf, *History of Philadelphia, 1609–1884: Volume 2, Part 1* (L.H. Everts & Co, 1884), 1243.

437 Frost, 'George Fox's Ambiguous Antislavery Legacy', 75.

by Cadwallader Morgan (1654 – 1711) and Robert Piles (d. 1730). Morgan cautioned Friends against keeping enslaved people on account of the lure of worldly riches to the neglect of the spirit.[438] For Morgan, the problem of African slave-owning was primarily one of moral purity rather than the suffering and humiliation experienced by the enslaved. The argument clearly possessed weight. In response to Morgan's declaration, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting advised Friends not to traffic any more enslaved people into the colony.[439] Piles' protest was closer in focus to the moral and theological coordinates of the *Germantown Petition*. In particular, Piles questioned the compatibility of the Golden Rule with chattel enslavement, acknowledging the misery upon which his local slave economy depended. But, going further than either the *Germantown Petitio*n or the Keithian tract, Piles argued that those who indirectly benefited from enslavement also bore moral guilt for the practice.[440] In subsequent discussions, Piles called for the Quarterly Meeting to oversee manumissions.[441] This proposal was not followed, nor is there evidence that Friends took any notice of the earlier advice to limit new slaveholding in the colony.[442]

Away from Business Meetings however, there is evidence that Keith's followers had ignited a moral sensitivity among Friends which had been largely absent before. Writing to the Quaker Minister James Dickason in 1698, a Maryland Quaker merchant by the name of Richard Hill, attached to his letter a short poem, comparing the plight of enslaved Africans to the oppression of the Israelites in Egypt.[443] What is so peculiar about the text is that Hill was himself an enslaver, suggesting something of a divided or conflicted conscience. Hill's poem remained unpublished and probably influenced no one.[444] But for Frost at least, Hill's letter is demonstrative of a slow groundswell of antislavery sentiment in the wake of the Keithian schism (although it is difficult to infer such a groundswell from a single source). Despite the vividness of these moral snapshots, institutional Quakerism remained wedded to slave-owning in the early eighteenth century. The above prophetic voices may have prompted soul searching among individuals, but they did not substantially alter the fabric of colonial Quaker society. And what of the London Yearly Meeting in this story? In the midst of ruptures in Pennsylvania, Friends at the imperial centre appear to

438 Frost, 'George Fox's Ambiguous Antislavery Legacy', 75.

439 Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 19.

440 Kershner, *'To Renew the Covenant,'*, 45.

441 Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 19.

442 Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 19.

443 Frost, 'George Fox's Ambiguous Antislavery Legacy', 76.

444 Thomas P. Slaughter, *The Beautiful Soul of John Woolman, Apostle of Abolition* (Will & Wang, 2009), 109.

remain largely unaffected. On the matter of Keith and his sect, Friends in England were exclusively preoccupied with matters of unity and doctrine, not Keithian views of enslavement. The Yearly Meeting had ejected Keith from membership in 1695. The following year, the Yearly Meeting had advised Pennsylvania Friends to not import any more enslaved people to the colony. But in a clear concession to Quaker enslavers, the same Minute discouraged meetings from condemning those who held people in bondage.[445] Perhaps the most direct line of influence from the Keithian controversy to later eighteenth-century Quaker abolitionist theology is via the English Friend and fervent antislavery advocate Benjamin Lay (1682– 1759). Among eighteenth-century Friends, Lay was perhaps the most well-versed in his own Quaker tradition, being a voracious bibliophile.[446] Lay had read the work of Keith and was familiar with some of the earlier controversies in Pennsylvania over African enslavement.[447] In a notably warm reflection on Keith's character, Lay wrote:

> As to George Keith, he was an extraordinary man while he kept to the testimony of Truth in his own heart, I do firmly believe, according to the Account of him by friends. And a great sufferer for Truth, by imprisonment and other ways and an excellent writer. And [he] ministers in defense of Truth's principles for about 30 years, as I remember, as many of his books manifest, to the judgment of men that have read them, of right mind and good understanding in things relating to God's kingdom.[448]

While Lay's remarks here seem to refer to the coordinates of Keith's spirituality rather than any aspect of his public witness, it is possible that the dissident theology of the Keithians shaped Lay's own comprehensive rejection of the slave economy many years after Keith's death. The fact that the Keithian protest and Lay's activism both ended in failure is instructive about the wider character of institutional Quakerism in this period. Friends had established an ordered life which many were profoundly unwilling to change. It is not simply that Colonial Friends were slow to grapple with the moral and theological costs of African enslavement, many Friends actively resisted attempts to contest the institution at Meeting level. In the case of the Keithian controversy, Quaker conservatives identified their own material

445 Carey, *From Peace to Freedom*, 113.

446 See Nathaniel Smith Kogan, 'Aberrations in the Body and in the Body Politic: The Eighteenth–Century Life of Benjamin Lay, Disabled Abolitionist', *Disability Studies Quarterly* 36(3).

447 Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 310.

448 Benjamin Lay, *Some Discourse with Robert Jordan concerning Slave–Keeping, and Something concerning George Keith and New Jerusalem* [Works of Benjamin Lay, 1738 edition, pages 67–74].

benefit with the unity of Quaker communities. As much as we might wish it, there is no pleasing arc of moral development in our sources, only sporadic protest, invariably met with either disdain or quiet neglect. In either case, very little changed in the Quaker transatlantic world for many decades. African people continued to be trafficked and enslaved; the misery went on, whole generations died in rootless suffering, as Friends continued to mutter but not act. As already noted, it was not until 1717 that the London Yearly Meeting explicitly censured the enslavement of other human beings in an epistle sent to Philadelphia Friends. The core of the epistle's admonition rests on the Golden Rule and like Morgan's protest a century before, was chiefly concerned with the moral purity of Friends. It is also notable that a total abandonment of enslavement was not formally accepted by New Jersey Friends (a community which had experienced vivid signs of past antislavery fervour) until 1770.[449] Let's consider before we close what these declarations lacked. They did not acknowledge the generational dispossession in which Quaker communities had been engaged. These statements did not directly address the problem articulated with such vividness by Du Bois; how could people formerly enslaved really be free in a white world? What was abstract freedom without social dignity? The suffering and cruelty condemned by these minutes are largely interpersonal. They do not stray into the systematic and the societal. In this they express the essential failure of Quaker abolitionism; an offer of freedom without solidarity; the dissolution of visible bondage, replaced by new and subtler deprivations. These documents are above all concerned with the moral rightness of Quakers in their own eyes and do not consider the enslaved as autonomous subjects in the moral universe. In this context, manumission is primarily a demonstration of Quaker goodness rather than an acknowledgement of shame. In these narratives, it is Friends who magnanimously free the enslaved. It is Friends who are purified and elevated through their efforts. What should be made of these uncomfortable facts? At the very least, we should look with a more sceptical eye at the uneven story of Quaker abolitionism. While we must readily acknowledge the courage of many individual Friends in questioning the unthinking norms of their society, we should not erase the broad pattern of reaction and avoidance which characterised institutional Quakerism for over a century. The repeated instances of moral evasion, institutional slowness and practical timidity, appear a far cry from the exhilarating image of Quaker abolitionism, one, which British and American Friends were constructing for themselves with such gusto in the century which followed.

449 Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery in the British Empire* (OUP, 2007), 153.

5.8 Conclusion: Divine Activity and Silenced Voices

> The life of Christ is not an exhibition of over-ruling power. Its glory is for those who can discern it and not for the world. Its power lies in its absence of force. It has the decisiveness of a supreme ideal. – Alfred North Whitehead [450]

At the heart of this discussion has been the notable haphazardness of the Quaker response to African enslavement in the transatlantic world of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. In our surviving sources, there is no sense of an uncomplicated line of moral and theological evolution from George Fox to Benjamin Lay. Antislavery was not an uncomplicated outflow of Quaker theological convictions. What we see instead are isolated or disconnected moments of moral revolt, accompanied by spasms of institutional inertia or outright resistance. There is no evidence in the early eighteenth century of any linear or progressive process of expanding theological or moral insight, only hesitant half-measures and qualifications. On rare occasions, where the Quaker condemnation of African enslavement is unambiguous (as with the *Germantown Petition*) the argument is not consistently pursued by Meetings and institutional Quakerism proceeds largely unaffected by the initial challenge. In the case of the Keithian tract, there is no evidence that the issue of African enslavement was pursued by 'Christian Quakers' after 1693.[451] Morgan, after his initial disquiet about enslavement, does not seem to have returned to the issue. Morgan had either decided to hold his peace, or otherwise found himself content with the subsequent Minute of the Yearly Meeting. What about Piles? Although the latter supported manumission, Piles would distance himself from the kind of radicalism proposed by Germantown Friends and instead came to stress the 'humane' treatment of slaves, including an emphasis on providing enslaved people with a Christian education.[452] The crystallisation of Piles' protest into something more conservative, was perhaps foreshadowed in his reasons for opposing African trafficking and enslavement in the first place. Like Morgan, Piles' concern was with personal spiritual purity and not with the humanity of the enslaved. Unlike later abolitionist Friends, like Woolman or Lay, Piles did not develop any systematic or absolutist objection to slaveholding as violating human dignity. Piles' protest was ultimately about his status as a faithful Friend, not about the moral status of the enslaved.[453] This frustrating

450 Quoted in Alfred North Whitehead, *Alfred North Whitehead: An Anthology*, F. S. C. Northrop, Mason Gross (Cambridge University Press, 1953), 488.

451 Gerbner, *Christian Slavery,* 71.

452 See Katherine Gerbner, 'Writing Against Slavery: Germantown Quakers and the Ethnic Origins of Antislavery Thought', in *The Babel of the Atlantic,* ed. Bethany Wiggin (Penn State University Press, 2019), 188.

453 Gerbner, 'Writing Against Slavery', 188.

pattern of sporadic, double-minded and fragmentary protest persisted for a long time, so that despite decades of tension and disquiet on the matter of African enslavement, Benjamin Lay was treated with the kind of disdain earlier reserved for Keithian schematics. Despite the *Germantown Petition* and its discursive fall out in Pennsylvania, most Quaker communities in the early eighteenth century refused to change. London Yearly Meeting, watching events unfold from afar, offered the mildest of rebukes, one which was neither abolitionist nor liberatory. In the face of this mixture of justification, half-heartedness and moral inertia, one is tempted to dust off Hegel's grim observation: 'That which is taught… by experience and history, is that peoples and governments have never learnt anything from history and have never acted according to doctrines that could have been inferred from them.'[454] And yet, as we know, Friends did embrace the cause of antislavery, coming to understand this posture by the nineteenth century as not merely the irrefutably right position, but an indelible expression of Quaker moral and theological genius. Quakers have been telling this positive story about ourselves ever since. So how then did the shift come about, given the repeatedly limited nature of early protests? Part of the answer is provided by the American philosopher William James in his illuminating discussion of the acquisition of new beliefs. As James suggests:

> Our minds… grow in spots; and like grease-spots, the spots spread. But we let them spread as little as possible: we keep unaltered as much of our old knowledge, as many of our old prejudices and belief, as we can. We patch and tinker more than we renew. The novelty soaks in; it stains the ancient mass; but it is also tinged by what absorbs it. Our past apperceives and co-operates; and in the new equilibrium in which each step forward in the process of learning terminates, it happens relatively seldom that the new fact is added raw. More usually it is embedded cooked, as one might say, or stewed down in the sauce of the old.[455]

In the case of Quakers and enslavement, Friends began with a series of jumbled and contradictory intuitions about the unity of humanity, the universal redemption of Christ, evangelisation and the rightness of the patriarchal household. Each of these conceptions, although held in a single perspective, gradually tugged on and qualified one another until new possibilities emerged from the mix and collision of older beliefs. Quaker conservatives tried to hold on to the constellation of affirmations Fox had offered, but his declarations were irretrievably changed by one another as

454 G.W.F Hegel, quoted in Ágnes Heller, *A Theory of History* (Taylor & Francies, 1982), 191.

455 William James, 'Pragmatism and Common Sense', in *Pragmatism* (Dover Publications, 2018), 64.

they were messily applied to new situations. People variously ignored or resisted the process of alteration, which itself produced further modification within the Quaker community and its internal theology. What accelerated this process was the half-ignored experience of Friends, who experimented with new understandings. We get a glimpse of this in the poem of Richard Hill. This Quaker enslaver begins to see through the thin justifications of Fox and just for a moment, is propelled into a new theological landscape. In this way, Quaker abolitionism was decidedly not a sudden revelation, which appeared complete and entire, rather it was a process, something discovered and not received.

Where was God in all this? This report is reluctant to speculate too much on this potentially thorny question, lest by evoking providence, we give the impression of absolving past Quakers through some 'invisible hand' (some Panglossian sense that 'everything has turned out for the best'). But we must risk saying something or leave the equally unhelpful impression that history is just a series of accidents. Perhaps the best place to start sketching what we might call a 'Quaker theology of history', is to be a little bold. How would it be if we renamed the process of knowledge acquisition described by James as 'grace'? This redescription helps us to draw into view the essential quality of all God's gifts, that what God gives allows new realities to spring forth from the old. From sin and defeat comes exaltation and from failure and betrayal comes an astounding restoration. For the people caught up in such stories, God's gifts take their recipients as they are and offer unforeseen newness within the confines of the familiar. The miraculous is not the suspension of nature, but the drawing out of hidden depths already there. In Manna from heaven or the Messianic child, we are confronted with the actualisation of possibilities that we cannot achieve and cannot earn. But our Quaker worship teaches us something which is often missed in these retellings of Scripture. God rarely appears as a lightning bolt in our experience and instead frequently appears as a feeling of patient abiding, as gentle attention, or the healing sensation of an unintrusive love. It is frequently the experience of Friends that God works in us, not as an internal explosion (simply upending our old selves) but proceeds as a slow influx of loving presence, which tenderly transforms our perceptions, until a fresh reality has been opened up, completely unawares. God, gently, subtly, puts the agency of creatures to unexpected uses so that beauty, truth and knowledge can persist in the world, despite external circumstances. If we fail, despoil or injure the realm of created being, God will pick up the pieces, not by mending all the hurt, but by seeding new life in the wound. This is the scandalous logic of the Cross – the promise that wholeness can emerge from horrors, that hope can spring from despair.

In the Quaker tradition, we name this experience 'the still small voice' (see 1 Kings 19:11–13, KJV), the divine presence which does not demolish us, but whispers, inspires, prompts and persuades. This is the living water that gets into the cracks of our experience and by doing so, allows new life to grow in the gap. Back in the last century, the English philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (the descendent of the early Quaker preacher George Whitehead) spoke of God as 'luring' us towards what is good, rather than commanding our conformity. By 'lure',[456] Whitehead did not mean a trap but had in mind a situation more like a bee, drawn by the prospect of future sweetness towards a flower. God likewise draws out from experience the sweet nectar of new possibilities so that finite creatures can participate in new dimensions of beauty, complexity, symmetry and goodness. God does this by turning chaos and fracture into the setting for reconnection and renewal. As Whitehead muses: "How the past perishes is how the future becomes."[457] What we can say as Quakers, as Christians, is that with God, there will be a future. But God for Whitehead does not force us to accept or refuse anything in this ongoing horizon. Instead, the Divine Life invites us, through the sheer attractions of the future, to become more than we are. This possibility of the More, is always present, even when we refuse to take up the offer. This ethic of persuasion was for Whitehead the very essence of Christ's revelation; the God revealed in Christ operates on us in love and conscience, with subtle wisdom and tender patience, not with imperial caprice.[458] As Whitehead expresses this tender vision of God:

> The essence of Christianity is the appeal to the life of Christ as a revelation of the nature of God and of his agency in the world. The record is fragmentary, inconsistent and uncertain. It is not necessary for me to express any opinion as to the proper reconstruction of the most likely tale of historic fact. Such a procedure would be useless […] But there can be no doubt as to what elements in the record have evoked a response from all that is best in human nature. The Mother, the Child and the bare manger: the lowly man, homeless and self-forgetful, with his message of peace, love and sympathy: the suffering, the agony, the tender words as life ebbed, the final despair: and the whole with the authority of supreme victory.[459]

Thus, for Whitehead, God is not a celestial enslaver of people; God is not an emperor nor a despot. The God revealed in Christ will not prevent our failure, our wrong turns, our wilful resistance to love. Such a God does not

456 Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (The Free Press, 1978), 89.

457 Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (The Free Press, 1933), 238.

458 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 342.

459 Whitehead, *Adventure in Ideas*, 167.

from on high disallow slavery and genocide. The Divine in Christ will even allow us to crucify the very Face of God. Such is the extent of our awesome and terrible freedom. Christ reveals God, not as an authorising power, but, says Whitehead, as 'the great companion – the fellow sufferer who understands.'[460] When then is the messy terrain of history? History is the space in which we deny ideals and possibilities, only for God to open the world up again. This opening up is accomplished not by power, but only by love. If the Spirit does not belong to the world of the oppressor, but suffers with the world, how then should we understand the failures and even the horrors of Quaker history? Without excusing or justifying the past, we must trust ourselves to God, who redeems the past. The one whom we worship is, to use Whitehead's evocative imagery, "the creative Eros"[461], that unitive element at the heart of Reality, which actively holds within it, "ideals, with the urge to their finite realisation, each in its due season."[462] God wants us to enjoy life and have this life abundantly, despite the forces of Death stalking the open future. God is perpetually embedded in conditions of dissolution and discord, so that Goodness can persist even within destruction. God will not let the world totally fall from goodness. This is Christ's promise to us.

This essential promise teaches us something vital about the past moral failure of Friends. While generations of Friends busied themselves justifying and perpetrating inhumanity, the Light was busy undoing theological certainties and making space for the voiceless. The Spirit soaked into our faulty conceptions and began to transform them. Against the design of many Quaker leaders and evangelists, 'the still small voice' lured Friends to become a vessel for forces of antislavery. God made failure and complicity serve new possibilities never intended. These agents of abolition were not themselves evangelists of freedom. As our discussion has shown, examples of Quaker manumission in the later eighteenth-century were stained with egotism, paternalism and superiority. Even after manumission, Friends continued to control the people they formerly held in bondage through the instruments of debt and landlordism. Instead of repenting of this parasitism or offering material restitution to their victims, former Quaker enslavers tried to make themselves the centre of a story in which Quakers became moral heroes for freeing the very same people they had enslaved and exploited. But the point is surely this. These disreputable vessels, these self-involved personalities, nonetheless served something larger than themselves, a decisive movement in the human spirit, which they unwittingly aided, but did not themselves want or foresee. As Paul reminds us, God makes different vessels for different purposes, some for mercy, some for power and others for wrath (Romans 9:21–23).

460 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 351.

461 Whitehead, *Adventure in Ideas*, 276.

462 Whitehead, *Adventure in Ideas*, 277.

Whatever our devious and self-serving human designs, it is God's will which will be accomplished. God will subvert the lives we have planned for ourselves, so that we can begin to serve a Larger Life. Another name Whitehead has for God is "Adventure", since God is the One who draws us from the possible to the actual. For Whitehead, we know God intuitively as 'novelty', as the experience of the unexpected outcome, which renews what was thought dead or moribund. Herein we are introduced to something of a mystery. All that has seemingly been hollowed out, emptied, or walled in, God unfurls and repurposes. In failure, Divine Originality lurks. As Whitehead observes: "Each tragedy is the disclosure of an ideal – What might have been and what was not: What can be, The tragedy… is not in vain."[463] This vision of the novel inside the old is God's perpetual gift to us. In this field of verdant possibility, Abolition was one such flush of novelty. It was God's loving revenge on all past attempts to close down the future. But embracing Adventure, both the openness and contingency of life, is not a call to superficial jollity, it is a call to failure and risk. Not everything will turn out right. Much will go wrong, but even these blights will serve God. As Whitehead muses: "The Adventure of the Universe starts with the dream and reaps tragic beauty." [464] Quaker institutionalists believed they were building God's world in their houses staffed with enslaved people. But the real truth of God's world was contained both in the lives of the minority of Friends who dreamt of a free world and the lives of African people, who, midst suffering, refused to disavow the call to freedom. It is they, not the enslavers, who served God's world. They still do. Of course, the dissolution of the slave economies of Europe, did not end servitude. Today millions are still enslaved, denied the possibilities of abolition. But the Spirit did introduce a new Idea into the world, one which belongs in essence to the Kingdom of God. Long ago, the Apostle Paul spoke of a shackled and wounded creation groaning, as a new world came to be in and through Christ. Abolition was and is a partial answer to that process, a reflection of something unexpected, emerging anew from the womb of history. In this part of God's story, an outsized role has been played by prophets, heretics and outsiders; Friends who for reasons of sentiment or schism were ignored by institutional Quakerism. At these fragile margins, God worked to force the older Quakerism to outgrow and defy itself. Thus, we should treat the theology of antislavery at which Friends slowly arrived in the later eighteenth century, not as a product of some evolved Quaker sensibility, but a subtle reworking by God of a Quaker Way which was becoming an obstacle to the beauty of God's future.

Yet, if our story simply ends there, the moral and theological implications are less than satisfactory. This project concerns Quaker complicity with

463 Whitehead, *Adventure in Ideas*, 286.

464 Whitehead, *Adventure in Ideas*, 296.

the dehumanising structures of colonialism. But in offering this much-needed account, we must not centre Quaker experience, to the manifest detriment of those whom Quaker communities enslaved. In seeking to tell stories of emergent antislavery, we must not forget the lives and agency of enslaved people themselves, many of whom strained to free themselves, long before any white European 'declared' them free. Through sabotage, non-cooperation, insurrection and escape, enslaved African people signalled that white enslavers would not define their lives; that they had a future all of their own. The fact that these stories of resistance are fragmentary in the historical record is not in itself surprising. History is habitually written by the victors at the top of any power pyramid. For centuries, institutional Christianity has authorised existing systems of power and control to the detriment of the poor, the brutalised and the silenced. But a counternarrative of Black life, love and freedom is there, if we choose to look for it. The belief in an open future, a world beyond the chattel system, is present in the lives of enslaved people, who despite the risk, maintained their original languages and spiritual traditions, often hidden in plain sight under the guise of Christian piety. The same hope was encoded in the songs enslaved people sang and the stories they told in secret or out on the plantations. Such a future was even interwoven in the Gospel. As the Black theologian of Liberation James L. Cone has reflected:

> Enslaved blacks who first heard the gospel message seized on the power of the cross. Christ crucified manifested God's loving and liberating presence in the contradictions of black life – that transcendent presence in the lives of black Christians that empowered them to believe that ultimately, in God's eschatological future, they would not be defeated by the 'troubles of this world,' no matter how great and painful their suffering.[465]

And amidst the depths of despair and the glimmers of hope, Cone reminds us also of the subversive joy of Black life, a repeated defiance, an inward struggle which would not give in to the meaninglessness imposed on them by enslavement or false emancipation. As Cone observes, many of those who were rendered silent and brooding victims by their predicament, actively refused their status of marginality forced upon them. They did so, says Cone through a peculiar impulse "to keep the painful details and episodes of [one's] brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy, but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic-lyricism.'[466] Thus neither hope nor joy is sugary or sentimental. It is hard, passionate and ferocious

465 James L. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Orbis Books, 2001), 2.

466 Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 13.

like the proclamations of Israel's prophets. In this act of transmutation, pain remained, but it took on a new redemptive aspect. It became a tool for living out and imagining a new life. Doubtless, Whitehead would have called such sweet overcoming a sign of God's unruly creativity – the mark of a freeing presence that will not forsake the future.

Cone, in his extended reflections on the Black American experience has written vividly of the strange dialectic of hope and despair which defined the daily existence of Black enslaved people, a tension which has persisted in the lives of their stigmatised and terrorised descendants. Cone demonstrates how, for generations, Black communities in the American south (and elsewhere) have lived in conditions of fear and yet crafted lives that frequently exemplify faith, hope and exuberance. This is not to romanticise the horrors which produced such creative defiance. It is simply to observe that there exists an alchemy in pain which can liberate its possessors. This is a testament to the grace of God. Such transformation, says Cone, teaches us about who God is and how God works. God was present, says Cone, in the overcoming of the paradox of humiliation and affirmation which has constituted Black life in Europe and America for the last few centuries. This astonishing overcoming has been expressed through the cross-shaped assertion at the heart of so much Black spirituality: *Liberation will come from the depths of despair.* Black Christians have tested the reality of this claim in their own lives and frequently have found Christ speaking to their condition. And as contemporary Black Theology continues to insist, this liberating work goes on in the lives of those who find themselves marred and diminished by the legacies of colonialism. Indeed, as the theologian Anthony Reddie puts the matter succinctly: 'One of the foundational constituent elements of Black Theology lies in the belief in God's decisive breaking into human history, in order to effect the promises of liberation that have been declared through the historic praxis of the Jesus who is the Christ.'[467] This liberation is not some otherworldly consolation for temporal injustice, it is a living reality which impinges on all aspects of life, from our relationships to our economic systems. Black theology's demand is that society should reflect the radical justice of God. In this framework, every day is the Year of Jubilee – that moment when Israel cancelled debts, righted wrongs and freed the enslaved (Leviticus 25). Any structure which denies this divine reset, whether social, ecclesial or economic, must be cast aside. God is love, but that does not mean that God is neutral. As people who are also inside God's story of liberation (as people who need the Spirit's renewing presence), we Friends should walk with considerable humility. We must let go of the image of the virtuous Quaker who thinks of herself as an

467 Anthony G. Reddie, 'Introduction', in Black Theology, in *Slavery and Contemporary Christianity: 200 Years and No Apology*, ed. Anthony G. Reddie (Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 7.

engine of the world's progress and instead, be willing to be taught afresh by people and stories our conceited ancestors thought valueless. We can learn more from Cone's portraits of Black life about the God of Quaker worship, than ever we can from the accounts of self-justifying Quaker enslavers who manumitted the people Quakers held in bondage. The God who grounds our waiting silence stands now and always with the crucified peoples of history[468], holding each wounded life in the fullness of their humanity, promising them the final wiping away of tears and the mending of broken hearts. If we wish to transcend the cage of the past, we should get to know this God once again.

468 Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 26.


QUAKER
EPISTL

Strand III:
Theologies of Liberation

In this section, we consider whether contemporary British Quakers can speak and act clearly, not merely in the cause of abolition, but in the service of liberation. Unlike earlier models of abolition which we have surveyed, liberation takes as its moral and spiritual starting point the active removal of systematic violence experienced by dispossessed, stigmatised and historically brutalised communities. A liberative approach to theological ethics and public practice assumes that we cannot tackle the ongoing legacies of colonialism, unless and until, we develop a multilayered structural account of racism, othering and inequality. In this vein, it is impossible to contest the long shadow of African enslavement theologically unless we understand how successor systems of division and violence continue to shape our society, politics and economy. By unearthing these structures of social and economic power, the proceeding discussion seeks to show how Friends can help to foster practices of care, justice and equity. This opening section, which introduces the concept of reparations, is not exhaustive, and the proceeding discussion is not a blueprint for any kind of single 'Quaker vision of reparations. Instead, the latter part of this report considers three key questions:

- Does the Quaker Way have a theology of Liberation which can sustain and resource contemporary reparative practice?

- How can Quaker theological tradition help us define the nature of harm?

- Can our Quaker words about God, world and community help us reflect fruitfully on the nature of ongoing moral responsibility?

In seeking to answer these questions, the proceeding discussion will draw on a variety of Quaker stories, biblical motifs, sociological models and theological concepts to give Friends tools, starting places and insights, to begin reparative work in their own lives and Area Meetings. Not all the reflections contained in this section will sit comfortably with all Friends. The themes explored here are controversial and may stir strong reactions. We encourage Friends to both sit with these initial reactions and to carefully

read the proceeding words for any truth or insight they may contain. The present writers suggest that reparations are not a singular goal. It is a journey towards a fuller, richer life. Repair cannot be reduced to one act or a predefined set of actions. Repair must be constantly renewed through moral practice, prayerful reflection and gathered worship. This section's overriding claim is that what Friends say corporately will be of little use, unless individual Friends are able to find a way into these complex issues, at the level of the heart and the worshipping community. And midst all the words and public statements, we must return again and again to this central question: What is God calling us to do? Discerning the right way forward will take time, patience and no small degree of trust. We are not at the end of a process. We are at the beginning of the beginning.

6.1 Defining the Dimensions of Repair

Before we can offer a theological account of reparative practice, it is necessary to consider what the term 'reparations' may include. The contemporary concept of reparations is multilayered, encompassing a range of personal, legal, political and social remedies to redress military and colonial atrocities, and their long-term societal impacts. Some forms of reparations in response to conquest or enslavement (especially when conducted between states) have involved extended discussion of substantial damages being paid to survivors or their representative governments. This approach to reparations has played a decisive role in contemporary debates regarding a range of issues, including global development, climate change and poverty reduction. In these international models, it is deemed the responsibility of former colonial states to provide financial resources to formerly colonised peoples, as a means of tackling societal inequality, reducing the drivers of social conflict, or/and addressing conditions of endemic scarcity. In this vein, *The Caribbean Community Reparations Commission* has argued that: "Support for the payment of domestic debt, the cancellation of international debt and direct monetary payments where appropriate, are necessary reparatory actions to correct the harm caused by colonialism."[469] In recent years, reparative conversation has encompassed the role of imperialism and resource extraction as both sitting at the root of the present climate crisis, but also preventing historically occupied nations from investing in climate resilience and ecological repair. It is on this basis that CARICOM has argued that reparations should include environmental justice through the payment of damages by rich European countries to severely impacted island nations.[470]

469 '10–point Reparations Plan', CARICOM Reparations Commission.

470 '10–point Reparations Plan'.

Alongside this theme of material transfer within reparation movements, there has also been great attention given to the social and economic structures of dispossession and segregation which continue to shape postcolonial societies. In an effort to acknowledge the deep social and economic roots of racism, activists and scholars have emphasised the need for social institutions of countervailing equity. In this mode, reparative practice has been understood in terms of providing just access to public resources by historically victimised groups, alongside dismantling institutions or processes which perpetuate social partition and/or disadvantage. Initiatives to tackle poverty, housing insecurity, educational barriers and precarity (by government or civil society) can all be understood as a form of reparative practice according to this approach. At the heart of this framing is the insight that reparative actions will not be effective within a society which is radically unequal in terms of wealth and power. As the South African scholar Brandon Hamber notes:

> Where society remains unjust at different levels, or power is unequally distributed, claims for reparations are likely to be more evident, especially where the injustice of the present can be explained through the continuities of historical oppression. The seemingly increasing number of claims for reparations (especially for historical crimes and oppression against individuals who are no longer living), is a direct reflection of ongoing injustice within society – they cannot be understood outside of this. Structural inequality and ongoing oppression are two of the most destructive factors that undermine a conducive context for granting reparations.[471]

In this latter spirit, Helen Minnis suggested in her 2022 Swarthmore lecture, that Friends[472] should be ambitious in actively countering the deep social impacts of racism through directly supporting the educational ambitions of Black and Brown young people. As Minnis writes: "The hard fact is, if we don't work hard to promote the progress of individuals and communities which have been historically disadvantaged then we are increasing inequalities and perpetuating' a 'centuries-old caste system'."[473] Alongside economic, developmental and structural remedies, contemporary reparative practice

471 Brandon Hamber, 'Narrowing the Micro and the Macro: A Psychological Perspective On Societies in Transition, in *The Handbook of Reparations*, ed. Pablo De Greiff (OUP, 2006), 578.

472 In the final analysis, there can be no single model of reparations, applicable to all communities and situations. The precise dimensions of the repair pursued will depend upon the needs and wishes of affected communities, alongside differences in history and geography. The moral demands placed upon Quakers will by necessity be different from the response of say the Anglican Church, given the distinctive historical position of the Religious Society of Friends in the UK religious and cultural landscape.

473 Minnis, *Perceiving the Temperature of the Water*, 40.

frequently encompasses important symbolic acts of apology, repentance and collective sorrow (understood as an essential first step towards repairing the dignity of communities harmed by the legacies of colonialism). Indeed, as CARICOM argues, 'remembering' is a key dimension of repairing the damage done by imperial dispossession and chattel enslavement.[474] A vivid element of this expansive reparative literature is the distinction between explicitly racist policies and attitudes (institutional segregation, stigma and race-based violence) and white supremacy. As the African American scholar bell hooks defined this distinction in her 1995 book *Killing Rage, Killing Racism*, white supremacy names a range of subtle social attitudes which assume the superiority or centrality of white individuals and communities, as against variously defined racial 'others'. This manifests principally according to hooks, in the ongoing desire of white Americans to establish a degree of public control over Black communities through policies of forced integration and assimilation which aim to propel Black communities into the educational and professional expectations of bourgeois white society.[475] But to reduce Black people to a political question or an abstraction, indicates to hooks that African Americans are still being perceived and treated as objects and not as persons. In this form of reverse segregation, various 'racial others' must be socially monitored and adapted so that their difference is minimised. We might think of this as an attempt to overcome racism through racism. All this, despite the fact that the official institutions of American society (at least when hooks wrote) proclaimed the equality and autonomy of all citizens. This alerts us to a thorny problem with which all reparative practice must necessarily deal. While white people in postcolonial states might will commonly repudiate forms of public organised racist domination, hooks suggests that white liberal consciences often leave white[476] supremacy untouched, namely, the priority given to white experience (assumptions of visibility and agency) to the repeated detriment and neglect of the voices, histories and experiences of Black and Brown people. According to this subliminal view, even in institutionally open politically liberal societies, there can still be drastic divisions of power and autonomy between 'whites' and various racially defined others. In these societies 'whiteness' is construed as 'standard', 'normal' and 'neutral' while 'Blackness' still signifies otherness, distance and/or something incommunicable. Such pervasive binaries of perception manifest, argues hooks, in the long historical tail of racially

474 '10–point Reparations Plan', CARICOM Reparations Commission.

475 bell hooks, *Killing Rage, Killing Racism*, (Penguin Books, 1995), 186.

476 'White' here signifies all the assumptions enfolded into that designation, including notions of relative societal advantage and the assumed status of being automatically included within a societal in–group. Whiteness doesn't refer to anything fixed or immutable about a person or group, but rather is a short–hand for the position of a person or group within society. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore observes: 'If race has no essence, but racism does', *Abolition Geography Essays Towards Liberation*, ed. Alberto Toscano, Brenna Bhandar (Verso, 2022), 137.

defined inequity, neglect and stigma, despite official claims that a given society is based around the neutral application of individual rights.[477] As hooks observes:

> When white liberals fail to understand how they can/do embody white supremacist values and beliefs, even though they may not embrace racism as prejudice or domination (especially domination that involves coercive control), they cannot recognise the ways their actions support and affirm the very structure of racial domination that they profess to want to see eradicated. [478]

Some of hook's above observations are painfully illustrated by the UK's ongoing Windrush Scandal. British officials, who believed they were operating a series of value-neutral processes of asylum and immigration, were actively enforcing racially inspired exclusion and dispossession under the cloak of liberal citizenship. The operators of the system said they were doing one thing, while the system they collectively operated did something else. Their official perceptions did not match with their deep assumptions, which were neither neutral or rights-based. This doubleness, argued hooks, has profound implications for ideas of racial equity and moral repair. For hooks, there can be no meaningful reparative justice or restorative practice without challenging the master assumption upon which racial stigma and othering are always built, namely that some people are intended for subordination and enforced docility, while others are meant for agency and autonomy. According to this more systematic view, we cannot tackle racism or the legacies of colonialism until we subject the hierarchical nature of our societies to unsparing interrogation. What then is the essence of reparative claims? Despite significant differences of remedy and emphasis, the broad goal which unites all reparative strands is a vision of restorative justice, one which takes as its loadstone the experiences of those who continue to be harmed, disadvantaged or brutalised by colonially rooted structures of hierarchy, stigma and state-sponsored violence. Given the complex, contested and wide span of current reparative proposals, the latter part of this report will consider how Friends in Britain Yearly Meeting might understand reparations through the lens of our own theological tradition and distinctive historical experience. Any Quaker account of reparative justice must by necessity be open-ended and partial. It cannot be a top-down plan

477 In the British context we may detect a similar desire for control in the various moral panics about the success or otherwise of multiculturalism. Over the last decade, we have seen Hard Right and Nativist strands of opinion develop various strategies for excluding non–white citizens from the circle of national belonging, first by insisting that recent immigrants must prove their belonging through escalating demands of loyalty and latterly denying social belonging on specifically racial grounds.

478 hooks, *Killing Rage, Killing Racism,* 185.

of action, but something which emerges organically from our prayerful attention, our corporate insight and personal commitment.

6.2 Acknowledging the Complexities: The Wisdom of Jonah

Before we consider the question of whether British Quakers have a theology, not just of abolition, but of liberation, it is necessary that we acknowledge the complexities and ambiguities implied by such an inquiry. Do we even know what liberation, much less reparation, means for us as British Quakers? Who or what are we trying to repair or liberate? Who are we to start repairing or liberating anything? We can only begin to make sense of these questions once we have come to terms with the scope of what restorative justice in this situation calls us to do. It is often easy to caricature reparative justice in terms of a simplistic binary of monolithic victims and a bloc of oppressors, indebted and beneficiaries. But this assumes that the world is neatly divided into hard moral categories and that repair is just a matter of moving resources or moral approval from one place to another. This naïve attitude is a mistake. As the above discussion illustrated, reparations have multiple dimensions (social, economic, personal). Restoration is more than material or moral transfer. It encompasses societal attitudes, collective memories, institutions and economic systems. Moreover, what counts as meaningful moral restitution will be understood in different ways within any historically marginalised group, especially in terms of gender, geography and class. When exploring the roots of racism and colonial power, we are not simply dealing with individual wrongdoing, or even wrongdoing committed by clearly demarcated groups. Instead, we are grappling with deeply ingrained structures which distort every aspect of life in postcolonial societies, from economics, to criminal justice, to healthcare. As Minnis puts the matter sharply: "Daily discrimination causes premature death."[479] A society that daily piles stigma and voicelessness onto historically disadvantaged people will end by slowly destroying them, suggests Minnis, first their dignity and then their health.

In confronting the legacies of racial hierarchy, we therefore encounter something which is much bigger than its parts. This means we must adopt a much more multilayered conception both of harm and wrongdoing. Instead of seeking something like personal culpability in the story of colonial Quakerism, the present writers suggest that those engaged in reparations work should seek instead a deeper mode of reflection which considers the sources of our ideals, the genealogy of our certainties and the underpinning

479 Minnis, *Perceiving The Temperature of the Water,* 24.

of our easy assumptions. This is about extending our sense of collective responsibility rather than magnifying individual guilt or blame. Theology is the natural terrain for such an enterprise of communal discernment and accountability, asking as it does questions of ultimate value and purpose. If we wish to contribute towards deep and lasting healing, we must engage fully in the task of bringing the past to light, in all its multisidedness. In doing so, we may yet learn the nature of our ongoing responsibility as Friends. How do we begin to engage with such complexity? Many of these thorny issues can be helpfully explored through the enigmatic Book of Jonah.

In the vast library of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Book of Jonah stands out as a strange and beautiful meditation on the temptations of hard moral categories. Who is good and who is evil? Who is responsible and who is exempt from responsibility? The answer of the Book of Jonah is that failure never exists without the possibility of goodness, just as goodness is never present without the possibility of a corresponding capacity for moral failure. With every appeal to light, there is a shadow-side which must be faced if human life is to be whole, balanced and lived in right relation. The harm we do is often linked to our inability to acknowledge the capacity of good in the heart of the failed and the presence of wickedness in those who feel themselves righteous. Jonah typifies this lack of moral perception. The premise of our story is on the surface a fairly simple one. Jonah is called by God to bring a message of judgement and possible destruction to the city of Nineveh. In the ancient Near East, the city served as the capital of the Assyrian empire. In the ancient world, the Assyrians were known for their regular use of capture, torture and mutilation as a means of breaking their enemies. Between the eighth and seventh century BCE, Assyrians captured tens of thousands of Israelites and deported them from their homeland. Thus, on the surface, we might expect a simplistic moral tale about the righteous versus the ruthless. But this is precisely not what the Book of Jonah is about.

Jonah is in the final analysis a compromised prophet. When he is given a prophetic vocation, he fails to follow it. God gives Jonah a leading role, but he refuses it, sailing away in the hope of avoiding his mission altogether (Jonah 1:1–3). And yet, despite his failure, Jonah still sees himself as superior, telling the pagan sailors he meets that unlike them, he worships the true creator of the universe – “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” (1:9). But despite his own self-righteousness, a lethal storm exposes Jonah’s superiority. The one who with his lips cherishes the true God is the cause of others calamity. Jonah decides to throw himself overboard in an effort to calm the dangerous waters. The waters are calmed and Jonah is engulfed by

a great fish. Jonah remains "in the belly of the fish three days and three nights" (1:17). He is finally released from his underwater prison house once he repents of his faithlessness and "the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time" (3:1). Chastened, Jonah travels to Nineveh and proclaims the destruction of the city in forty days unless the people repent of their sins. The king issues an edict in which he says: "Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish" (Jonah 3:8-9). The people repent of their past sins and God does not destroy the city. It is at this point that Jonah fails again in his prophetic task. The seer who ran away now openly disagrees with God's mercy and reveals the reason he refused to heed God the first time:

> "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live" (4:2-3).

Jonah would rather die in his superiority and spite than see God show mercy to others. He would rather ignore his own failure and destroy others for theirs, than bring a message of divine love to lost people. Jonah does not understand the logic of reparations. He wishes to be exempt from the past, while allowing others to be swallowed by theirs. True reparations are concerned not with a selective use of the past, but the appreciation of a messy and painful whole. And from such an appreciation, we find midst history's shattered shards reasons for renewed justice, mercy and love. We find reasons to humble ourselves before ongoing wrongs, losing our pretensions and trusting the wisdom of our tears. When Jonah challenges God, the Divine replies: "should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left – and also many animals?" (4:11). God loves the oppressed and the oppressors, without letting the oppressor off the hook for their crimes. This is a God not concerned with our petty desire to be in the right or to point out the wrong, but rather is chiefly concerned with the restoration of right relationship. Blame is the beginning and not the end. The goal of repentance is to prevent destruction and not glory in it. But as Friends we should be cautious about trying to leap over condemnation too quickly. Reconciliation takes time. It is neither easy nor pain free. Sometimes we have to go down to the depths before understanding what true repair and true love really means. Thus, Jonah has much to teach Friends, both about the nature of divine judgement and the character of moral repair.

It is possible to find resonance with the historic experience of Quakers at various points in the Jonah narrative. A surface reading of the book of Jonah may suggest that Friends in the past were subsumed within the spirit of Nineveh. We have delighted in our wealth rooted in human captivity and violence. True enough. But it is perhaps more accurate to say that Quakers have acted like Jonah. Friends have been failed prophets in their enslavement of others. Instead of being a blessing, our Quaker ancestors brought storms of misery on the lives of the dispossessed while cloaking themselves in an aura of spiritual superiority. In this respect, the message of Jonah to Friends is painfully clear. The one who thinks of themselves as superior is liable to reveal themselves as a fraud. Those who seek to sustain a code of righteousness to seemingly outshine others are in danger of ignoring their own failure. If we wish to become genuine prophets, like Jonah, we must repent of our faithlessness. But how do we avoid Jonah's lack of moral vision? We must dispel simple moral poles. There must always be the generous acknowledgement that to live in the world often means finding oneself in ambiguous moral binds according to which people are both victims of past wrongs and beneficiaries of wrongdoing. In the Quaker case, we should recall that some early Quakers were held captive in North Africa by Ottoman enslavers.[480] Friends mourned and Friends suffered. And yet the Religious Society of Friends did not use this direct experience of enslavement to swiftly condemn it. They accepted their situation believing themselves to be like Daniel, trusting in the providence of God, but they were like Jonah, running away from the divine command. Their inaction revealed their complicity. When Quaker history is told in this way, we see that at various points Friends have been both victims and oppressors, wronged and the material beneficiaries of deep wrong. Both facts are true and must be acknowledged in the telling and retelling of the Quaker story. The same Quaker community that perpetuated the horrors of mass enslavement also experienced hideous persecution.

The same moral complexity is evident when we consider the lives of those whose ancestors were the victims of colonial displacement. Someone of Afro–Caribbean heritage living in London is undoubtedly a material beneficiary of the legacies of colonialism. It was after all via London's ports and through its clearing houses that the proceeds of enslavement were collected, catalogued and processed. This wealth still sustains much of London's infrastructure and public space. And yet the same individual may also be subject to inadequate housing, poor health and racist intimidation from members of the UK's white majority.

480 A useful study in this regard is Justin J. Meggitt, *Early Quakers and Islam: Early Quakers and Islam: Slavery, Apocalyptic and Christian–Muslim Encounters in the Seventeenth Century* (Wipf and Stock, 2016).

This too is a legacy of dispossession. Thus, such a person lives a complex reality, in which they benefit from one of the wealthiest cities on earth, while simultaneously continue to live with the ongoing legacies of displacement, othering and racialised violence. Both poles of experience are true and must be affirmed in any Quaker response to legacies of enslavement. We owe it to those we have harmed and those we continue to harm, the dignity and grace of complexity. Simple stories do not serve the imperatives of love and they will not heal the world. A reductive language of blame is tempting. It may be a necessary first stage to healing, but it is not a solution in itself. Moral accountability must lead to a better world or it serves no purpose.

There are some who may look at such moral binds and conclude that midst the tangled web of history (its paradoxes and ambiguities) it is impossible to kindle meaningful healing. But such a counsel of despair is premature and perhaps in the worst case, subtly self-serving. It is worth recalling that for all his manifest failures to live up to his mission, God did not release Jonah from his prophetic task. Friends have failed miserably to express God's love, but we are not released, despite the difficulties of the task to which we have been called. It is certainly true that if we treated reparations as akin to a balance sheet and thought of moral responsibility in terms of debts and debits, it is not possible to condense reparatory actions into a simple formula of fixes and transfers. The evils to which we seek repair are deep, interlocking and global. They lie with institutions, banks and churches, clearing houses and cotton mills, millions of consumers, alive and dead. We cannot unknit the past. True enough. But we can certainly see our Quaker influence running through the architecture of both enslavement and empire. We can begin to uncover the misery enacted and wealth extracted. And since we live in a society which still prospers on the foundations of past wrong, we have a responsibility to help set the future on a new and better course. By holding these trails of past failure in front of us, by holding them in the Light, we discover what is our part then and now. We know from experience that there are prophets inside and outside our Quaker community who will hold us accountable for this work. In the spirit of Jonah however, we must recognise that these prophetic voices are not called to be perfect, just as the community they address is not wholly devoid of goodness. Friends will doubtless struggle with this work and it is right they should. But they are not starting from a place of total depravity. Many Friends are already seeking out new patterns of life in response to the legacies of colonialism. We are recovering painful old stories and telling new ones. There is growing recognition that we must change. Nineveh was at the very centre of empire, but when God called to it, it turned away from the destructive patterns of the past. We can make the same choice.

Many Friends have already learnt through hard and bitter experience what it takes to unknit the legacies of transgenerational violence. We will need such Friends in the years ahead, as we seek to extend patterns of peace to the structure of our own Quaker community. As we face one another and our failure, we must show tenderness to each other as we struggle to meet brokenness with love. What is required is mutual healing and mutual recognition, not the lording of some over others. We must dispel any sense that moral repair means the diminishment of some lives in order to achieve the lifting up or amplification of others. Reparations are neither about vengeance nor somehow a simple swapping of places. It is about a new reality breaking into the old. We need something better, a world in which healing and repair are open to both wrongdoer and wronged. This is the only way to beat Nineveh. As the African American prison abolitionist scholar Ruth Wilson Gilmore has suggested,[481] moral binaries like guilt or innocence allow us to evade the sheer wrongness of systematic violence within our society. Punitive justice gives us the seductive allusion that the conditions of humiliation, othering and stigma which contribute so much towards conditions of social disjunction and violence are in fact the means for undoing them. The binary says to us: *These people don't deserve our moral consideration*. A very imperious and imperial conclusion. But as Gilmore suggests, this attitude merely diverts us from the real moral problem, one which goes beyond simple blame. Instead of deciding who should be dispossessed in the name of justice, we should instead be asking how to kindle a society in which violence and dispossession are no longer the primary instruments of diffusing deep social ruptures.[482]

Both the wronged and the wrongdoer need compassion and care. Woundedness cannot be healed by indignity or coercion. This does not mean that the moral status of oppressor and oppressed are somehow the same (the Augustinian parity of sinners). Those who have been harmed, or continue to be harmed, have the right to demand repair and resources from those who have, or who are still engaged in, wrongdoing. Not all sins are equal. Moral responsibility is not evenly shared. But for reparative practice to be truly transformative, it has to leave behind the logic of dominator and dominated that lies at the heart of all colonial projects. For the real goal of reparations is the dismantlement of all forms of extractive coloniality. To do this, we (wronged and wrongdoer) need a love ethic, not a punitive ethic. Jonah's failure was not merely a moral failure, it was a political failure. He did not see that the attitudes of imperialism cannot undo imperialism.

481 Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Abolition Geography Essays Towards Liberation*, eds. Alberto Toscano, Brenna Bhandar, (Verso, 2022).

482 Ruth Wilson Gilmore, 'Race, Capitalist Crisis, and Abolitionist Organizing' in *Beyond Walls and Cages: Prisons, Borders, and Global Crisis*, eds. Loyd, Mitchelson, and Burridge (University of Georgia Press, 2012), 43.

Nothing can be repaired with a simplistic swapping of status. Only the dismantlement of status can accomplish justice. If Jonah had possessed the power to destroy Nineveh, he undoubtedly would have done so. But its destruction would have simply heralded another system of domination, a blunt repeat of the dynamics of the past. True repair can only come through a concerted effort of mutual dignity, mutual learning and the repeated practice of love, not by ignoring the past, but by actively addressing it.

6.3 Do Quakers Have a Theology of Liberation?

Now that we have considered the inherent challenges of reparative practice, let's consider whether British Quakers have something like a theology of liberation already implicit in our words and ways of worship. Or to put it another way, do Quakers in the UK have an adequate practical theology to address the ongoing legacies of colonialism and enslavement? One useful way of answering this question is to explore the early Quaker concept of 'Covenant'. The story of early Quaker theology is irreducibly the story of a people living in and through a Covenantal relationship with God. Recalling the decisive religious experiences of his youth, George Fox tells us in his Journal: "I being brought up into the Covenant, as sanctified by the Word, which was in the beginning, by which all things were upheld; wherein is the unity of creation."[483] In the biblical record, the Covenantal relationship between God and human beings is the predominant theme. The Five Books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Leviticus and Numbers) tell the story of humanity (and then a particular people) being drawn into a direct relationship with the divine. The first Covenant in the Scriptural record is that made between God and Noah (Genesis 9:8–17). After the destruction of the deluge, God guarantees his blessing to the earth and Noah's family. It is to this first Covenant that Paul alludes in Romans, where he speaks of an original law in the heart which gives each a knowledge of right conduct before God (Romans 2:15). In later ages, a Covenant relationship is struck between God and Abraham, then again with Abraham's distant descendants, freed from enslavement in Egypt. Unlike the earlier two, this third Covenant brings into being a Spirit-led community, bound together by a series of divine commands and strictures. The partakers of this Covenant are to be a "holy people" (Deuteronomy 14:2) and a blessing among the nations of the earth (Genesis 12:2). Being in Covenant with God, according to many of the Scriptural writers involved the double action of separateness and service to the world. When early Christians inherited the language of Covenant from the Hebrew Scriptures in the early centuries of the Common Era, the emergent Church began reframing it through the life, death and resurrection

483 George Fox, *The Journal*, ed. Nigel Smith, 4.

of Jesus. The Gospels record Jesus speaking of a new Messianic Covenant which would encompass lands and peoples beyond Israel (Luke 22:20). This Covenant, unlike its older national form, would not be based upon rituals, commandments or ethical distinctions but somehow written on the heart (very much like the first Covenant of Noah).[484]

Within a few centuries, the notion of the divine/human Covenant was taken from its original Hebrew context and recontextualised as the bond between God and a faithful Church. By the time the concept was being used in Quaker communities in the England of the mid-seventeenth-century, God's Covenant had become inflected through the prism of the theology of the Protestant reformer John Calvin. At the heart of this conception of Covenant was the notion of the Church as a 'mixed multitude' of sinners and saved.[485] The Covenantal people of God (hidden as they were in fallen and compromised congregations) would shine out their light on a fallen world, drawing the elect to true faith and worship.[486] Calvin, in the introduction to his work, *Institutes of the True Christian Religion,* draws on the image of the solitary and deserted Elijah, to argue that the true Church does not rest on tradition or organisational form, but on faithfulness to the Word of God as revealed in Scripture. Indeed, says Calvin, "God miraculously keeps his church as in hiding places."[487] Such an insular attitude to salvation made many of the Puritan successors of Calvin uninterested in the structures of society; in issues of ownership, rule, right or matters of gender. The rule of Christ did not challenge the accepted hierarchies of society. What mattered was the inward turn to God's saving grace in the heart. Those not in the true Church were destined to eternal perdition. Early Quakerism, with its profound sense of divine immediacy and apocalyptic expectation could not accept such a limited and in the end, self-congratulatory understanding of God's call to Covenant. In their worship and public witness together, they sensed something far more unruly. God was calling out, not simply to a scattered elect among the churches, God was calling out to the whole of creation. God's promise through Christ was that all people and all things would taste the love and joy of God's fellowship. As Douglas Gwyn summarises the Quaker reorientation of Covenant:

> [The] early Quaker Covenant of Light was founded upon the conviction that God's Light abides in all persons. Anyone, high or low, could

484 See Jeremiah 31:33.

485 A significant source for this model of spiritual covenant can be found in fourth century theologian and exegete Augustine of Hippo. See for instance Augustine, *City of God*, 1.15.

486 Douglas Gwyn, 'Seventeenth–Century Context and Quaker Beginnings', in *Early Quakers and Their Theological Thought*, 1647–1723, eds. Stephen W. Angell, Pink Dandelion (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 22.

487 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, II,* The Library of Christian Classics (SCM Press, 1953), 1014.

> turn to the Light and be savingly transformed in obedience to it. The gathering of men and women in communities and networks under Christ's own teaching experientially defined the parameters of the Covenant. And although the Covenant was most overly defined in its gathered community, it extended indeterminately in three directions. The Covenant was indeterminate towards God in that creedal formulations were renounced in favour of lived experience of the Light. It was indeterminate towards other humans, since anyone, regardless of knowledge or belief in the gospel, could turn to the Light and live savingly into its guidance. Finally, the Covenant was indeterminate towards creation as the natural world is an expression of God's wisdom and integral to the Light's redeeming work.[488]

In this sense for early Friends, Covenant was both the tight-knit chosen-ness signified by Abraham but also one of universal concern as signified by God's Covenant with Noah. The decidedly fuzzy edges which existed between the Quaker community and God, allowed first-generation Friends to say potentially radical things about the nature of Christian community, notions of harm and the boundaries of moral responsibility. Liberation, for at least some early Quakers, was general, systematic and pervasive. It involved the breaking in of the grace and concord of God into all relationships; social, personal, economic, ecological. Perhaps one of the most stunningly beautiful aspects of this early Friendly conception of Covenant is the repeated insistence in early Quaker tracts on the role of Friends in the healing, not of this or that moral injury, but of the whole of creation. This open-ended commitment to liberation of all people and all creatures is vividly expressed by James Nayler in his 1657 tract, *The Lamb's War*. In it Nayler reassures his reader:

> The Lamb's quarrel is not against the creation, for then should his weapons be carnal, as the weapons of the worldly spirits are: "For we war not with flesh and blood," nor against the creation of God; that we love; but we fight against the spiritual powers of wickedness, which wars against God in the creation and captivates the creation into the lust which wars against the soul and that the creature may be delivered into its liberty prepared for the sons of God. And this is not against love, nor everlasting peace, but that without which can be no true love nor lasting peace.[489]

For Nayler, to live in the Light meant to shun all social mechanisms of cruelty, humiliation and torture. Unlike the institutional churches of Christendom

488 Gwyn, 'Seventeenth–Century Context and Quaker Beginnings', 22.

489 James Nayler, 'The Lamb's War', *The Works of James Nayler in three volumes*, Quaker Heritage Press.

who worked their will through "whips and prisons, tortures and torments on the bodies of creatures, to kill and destroy men's lives."[490] Friends should resist through patterns of humility and of peace. But coercion for Nayler is more than whips and swords. Violence is committed by social and economic inequality. As Nayler chastises, "Can you live at ease and in your pleasures and profits and cover yourselves with worldly glory, while Christ Jesus is glorified in his temples with mockings, stockings, stonings, whippings and all manner of evil entreatings?"[491] People live in comfort, oblivious to the horrors that sustain that comfort. In contrast to such wilful self-absorption, Nayler exhorts Friends to discover a New Life in Christ, characterised by "meekness, truth, peace, love, patience." What do we learn here about emerging Quaker Covenantal theology? For Nayler at least, living in Covenant was not an otherworldly disembodied union with God. Rather it is the indwelling of God in each believer, an immense searching light which challenges all conditions of violence, exploitation and subordination. For Nayler, to give oneself to Christ is to be unshorn of the calculating and grasping ego (in all spheres of life), to be refashioned in the image of Christ. Thus, we might say that part of restorative justice for Nayler (that is restoring all of creation) involves sustaining a radical peace-making which is endlessly self-critical and inquisitive about interlocking systems of social violence. The Lamb's War was a subversive conflict, for it struggled in the name of an end to struggle. It entered spiritual combat, so that all combat would become vain and empty. The image of the warrior is here reconfigured as the servant of cosmic peace. Nayler, who was himself an officer in the New Model Army, is here refashioning the social expectations of his world. True power is only found in the relinquishing of power.

What does this insight mean at the level of our personal relationships? Alongside this radical reworking of the traditionally masculinist motif of 'battling' on behalf of the creation, Cherice Bock and Christy Randazzo have observed how early Quaker women in particular made a distinctive contribution to the emerging Friendly vision of Covenant. Drawing on the generative images in Scripture, particularly Romans 8:22 ("the whole of creation groans") Bock and Randazzo argue for a resolutely webbed conception of both human moral responsibility and social harm. As they observe: "Quaker women often elected to emphasise images of the Divine as Creator, birthing a new world, where the divine natality (of, or relating to the capacity to, give birth) was reflected in the human roles of Quaker women as mothers…"[492] This allowed Quaker Covenant theology to insist that Quaker

490 Nayler, 'The Lamb's War', *The Works of James Nayler in three volumes*, Quaker Heritage Press.

491 Ibid.

492 Cherice Bock & Christy Randazzo, *Quakers, Ecology, and the Light* (Brill: 2023), 9.

moral responsibility was not merely defensive, but creative. Living in the Covenant meant avoiding harm to the creation and an active fostering of new life and new possibilities through values of care and interdependence. These themes, note Bock and Randazzo, are particularly visible in the writings of Margaret Fell, with maternity signifying authority. After the Lamb's War, Quaker women would build a new world.[493] Whether one adopts Nayler's image of struggle or Fell's images of care, the theological insight is the same. The Covenantal relationship cannot leave the world as it is. Creation must be freed and cared for. For early Friends, the structures of the world must be dissolved and new modes of relationship initiated by Christ's indwelling power. This change is not partial, but general, not local, but cosmic. Vital newness would overtake the old. Violence would be conquered by the meekness of the Lamb.

6.4 Rediscovering the Language of Liberation

How might the language of Covenant help us sustain a viable reparative practice? Principally, the language of Covenant allows us to locate the roots of Quaker moral complicity and identify a series of pathways leading to the slow recovery of a truly liberative Quaker theology. Indeed, as Douglas Gwyn has observed, the obscuration and diminishment of Covenant Theology among early Friends, in response to persecution and internal conflict, generated a less countercultural atmosphere within Quaker communities. As Gwyn reflects, by the 1660s and 1670s, Quaker Covenantal demands dimmed, "the meaning of redemption" becoming "spiritualised into vagueness. Redemption… is not given concrete social definition as an abatement of economic exploitation as stated in the jubilee laws of Moses… "[494] Instead of understanding the experience of the indwelling Christ as something public, political and socially transformative, Friends began to see Quaker revelation as something akin to a private and sectarian dispensation. In this latter mode, Covenant came to be understood as something of a fence, the bond between the community and God, which would keep out a corrupt and corrupting world, while regulating the manner and morals within Meetings. Friends' commitment to Covenantal relationships became a mark not of social and cosmic transformation, but a theological expression of a rather defensive denominationalism. Under this settlement, Friends were increasingly content to blend into the background of society, keeping their distinctive theological insights, without systematically applying them to the outside world. But there is a message of hope hidden in this story. We can see the fate of Quaker Covenantal theology as something of a road not

493 Bock & Randazzo, *Quakers, Ecology, and the Light,* 9.

494 Gwyn, *The Covenant Crucified*, 331.

taken and a road Friends can still take. There were moments, particularly in the eighteenth century, when Friends partially recovered the language of Covenant in both theological writing and in moral life, with great social effect. Indeed, Jon R. Kershner has shown, the notion of renewing the Quaker Covenant in this period, provided a major theological justification for Friendly involvement in campaigns for abolition. [495] While it is clear from Kershner's account that eighteenth-century Friends recovered notions of Covenant as both universal in scope and binding on gathered Quaker communities, this retrieval often neglected the more unruly, revolutionary and cosmic strands of some early Quaker theology. As this report (and Kershner's work) has shown, eighteenth-century Friends were interested in moral conformity (particularly the application of the Golden Rule) and maintaining communal purity.[496] This renewed covenantal theology rarely strayed into the cosmic territory which had preoccupied earlier generations of Quakers. There were of course exceptions to this paired down conception. The abolitionist John Woolman seemed to have grasped the subversive demands of being in a community rooted in the ongoing story of God. As Bock and Randazzo remind us:

> Woolman consistently acknowledged the human capacity for cruelty, particularly towards creation and insisted that people consider the casque of consequences that rippled out from every human action. In this way, Woolman demonstrated an awareness of the structural nature of injustice, where something as simple as riding a horse, involved an entire spiral of injustice…[497]

Woolman was able to see (just as Nayler saw) the links between poverty, violence and extractive economics. From this he was able to draw the conclusion that Covenant Peace meant more than the negative action of non-participation in violence, but the active contestation of those social and material structures which kept human beings locked in perpetual hostility towards other fellow human beings and towards the more than human world. Woolman is an inspiration for Friends today and rightly so. But we should remember that Woolman failed to help Friends see this moral expansive vision of Covenant in his lifetime. Woolman represented a road of theological and moral recovery absolutely not taken, either in Britain or across the Atlantic. His vision was more radical than many of his contemporary abolitionists, precisely because he wrestled with social systems, and not merely with small patches of human wickedness. This draws us towards a painful realisation about the nature of our Quaker theological tradition up to

495 Kershner, *'Renew the Covenant'*, 2.

496 Kershner, *'Renew the Covenant'*, 100.

497 Bock & Randazzo, *Quakers, Ecology, and the Light*, 10.

the present. As Gwyn laments: "The deep structures of the Quaker tradition continue to communicate a utopian vision, even though the modern sense of history is inadequate to express it."[498] Friends in the modern era have often embraced variants of progressive, leftwing and liberal politics. While these commitments have often made Friends attentive to the problems of rights and power, modern Friends have perhaps been less attentive to the radical multilayered peace implied by the early Quaker theology of Covenant. For the first Friends, social harmony was not just a matter of personal truthfulness, religious liberty and just legal processes. Peace meant the reorientation of society towards a God who opposed violence in its manifold forms. To live according to the Covenant was to decisively break with all previous political forms.

Whence the early Quaker utopia? For early Friends, the spiritual journey was itself a realised utopia. As Friends walked outwardly and inwardly, they felt themselves moving towards and living in a whole and healed creation. They both waited for deliverance and stood beside the empty tomb simultaneously. Through this strange and majestic journey they discovered (or hoped to discover) more about what this New Creation would look like. By walking (or in the Quaker case waiting) Friends realised something of their journey's end in the present moment. Christ was both immediately present, but also a horizon which stretched beyond any one Friend's perception. This sense of the Spirit as both immediately present and yet somewhere beyond allowed Friends to sense God as an all-enfolding reality, while seeing in the structures of human culture deep barriers between people and the divine, the divine and the more than human world. The early Quaker posture was largely prophetic, declaring the indwelling of the Spirit in a world which resisted it. But Friends did not live up to the borderless and open-ended conception of Covenant community they proclaimed. Too often, Friends placed their evangelical zeal ahead of the more radical imperative to see the presence of Christ in all. Thus, our Covenant language and its historical fate, allows us to see the full scope of our failure, but it also helps us to see a way forward, as we confront the nature of past Quaker wrongdoing in relation to human trafficking and enslavement. Nayler's voice among early Quaker writers offers us a distinct challenge in the context of reparative practice, since Nayler's understanding of the roots of alienation and violence are general and comprehensive. We cannot bring peace to one area of life, without seeking peace and reconciliation in another. We cannot for instance challenge the legacies of colonial violence without considering issues of poverty, environmental degradation, alongside political and economic structures. We cannot learn the love and empathy needed for a postcolonial Quakerism, unless we foster the wellsprings of love and truth

498 Gwyn, *The Covenant Crucified,* 347.

in our lives, in ways big or small. Covenantal living demands that we cast a critical eye over all our modes of life and institutions and ask, what in them is serving God and what is serving power. In the light of Covenantal theology, unmasking the ongoing legacies of enslavement and dispossession is part of a process of being faithful to the Quaker vision of a God-given and Spirit-ordered community and world. Friends in Britain are slowly recovering the dimensions of Covenantal relationship, particularly through our emergent 'Earth Testimony'[499] and our repeated calls, in Yearly Meeting sessions and elsewhere, for the explicit twinning of social and environmental justice. Such commitments are reminding Friends daily that harm to one is harm to all and that deep legacies of injustice are not just about individual moral injury, but concern interlocking systems of politics, trade, culture and commerce. The insights of this theologically informed activism on behalf of fragile ecosystems are exactly the same insights of interconnection and solidarity we need in response to the legacies of enslavement and ongoing structural racism. As Eden Grace observed in her Swarthmore lecture of 2019:

> The pulse of the ocean and the pulse of my blood felt like they became synchronised as my heart beat in unity with the earth's circulatory system, I had a heightened awareness of the physical singularity of the planet in the micro and macro aspects- my body and the earth's body became one, a single body of water shared by all life on earth, circulating between oceans, clouds, rivers and the bodies of all living things. I experienced what George Fox called "the unity of creation…"[500]

What Grace is expressing here is the sense that we cannot defeat violence and alienation if we continue to insist on seeing the world and ourselves as separate. Our world's wounds can only be healed if we attend to the intuitions of deep unity between ourselves and the earth, ourselves and the rest of humanity. In Epistle 46, Fox exhorts: "All Friends, mind the oneness and that which keeps you in the oneness and unity."[501] But unity for Fox was not theoretical, it was embodied and practical. To live according to oneness is to repeatedly unmask the conceits of hierarchy and domination, that there are unbridgeable gulfs between us, that the diversities of history, geography or language imply that some should dominate while others should be ignored or silenced. In the context of this report, Fox's call to unitive experience possesses a definite import. 'Race' is the ultimate conceit, since it proclaims that the oneness of divine love, imaged in creation is a lie,

499 See Pam Lunn, *Swarthmore Lecture, 2011: Costing Not Less Than Everything: Sustainability and Spirituality in Challenging Times* (Quaker Books, 2011).

500 Eden Grace, *The 2019 Swarthmore Lecture: On Earth as in Heaven: The Kingdom of God and the Yearning of Creation* (Quaker Books, 2019), 61.

501 'Epistle 46', in *George Fox's Epistles text from Works (1831), v 7–8, somewhat condensed with biblical references and allusions identified*.

that we are irreducibly made as fragments, to be catalogued and forcibly arranged. This is not so. We are expressions of one love, bound to one gift-giver who delights in diversity. When we enforce domineering sameness, harden ourselves to the face of Christ in another, we repudiate both the gift of creation and the gift-giver. Talk of creation is not separate from what we might call 'political theology' (spiritual reflection on the nature of community and power). It is intimately bound up with it. We cannot love God's creation while perpetuating modes of life and habits of heart that divide it, crystalise it and exploit it. Racism is a symptom, a sign that a culture or a community has forsaken the unitive principle underlying the world. It is our task as Friends to return to the vision of created unity and live according to it. We will often fail, but failure is also intrinsic to Covenant. Jonah failed, but he did not cease to be in relation to God. He was not freed from his given task. Likewise, the inability of Friends to live in God's primordial unity does not excuse us from the divine demand to do so.

6.5 Community, Sin and Covenant

How do we live as Friends inside a Covenantal understanding? How might such a commitment challenge and change us? The essential lesson of the above discussion is that Covenantal community differs radically from other forms of human association. Its aims are generated and organised in part by ongoing revelation, by trust in an open-ended and revising Spirit which is not satisfied by artificial boundaries and barriers, but delights in a multilayered unity in which all of creation comes under the gaze of immediate moral concern. If our ordinary modes of relation are concerned with insiders and outsiders, or the maintenance of social order, covenantal relationships calls us to more expansive modes of relating, one which prioritises faithfulness and trust, above and beyond the simple construction of a stable social world. In the proceeding discussion, we'll consider how some of these differences in attitude and perception might impact directly on the meaning and practice of reparations undertaken in Quaker communities. One of the persistent emotional or intellectual barriers to our acceptance of any concerted practice of reparations may be the sense that our lives and actions are private possessions, the significance of which terminates at our death. So many modern cultures are structured around this idea. According to this modern myth, each birth, each generation, each election, is a new beginning. Anything that came before is wiped away in the promise of a 'progressive' future. In this vein, once the original perpetrators of a deep wrong are dead, there is no one left to be responsible for the wreckage they have left behind. Once their original victims are dead there is nothing for the living to do except regret the past. There is perhaps something good, even noble in such a progressive

personality. It emerges from the desire to stop repeating the past; the desire not to see ghosts around every corner; the desire to look on the world with hope and not fear. Above all such an attitude subsists on the notion that no one should be condemned for the past deeds of another. Moral individualism declares that each is judged according to their character and merits and is never the plaything of unchosen forces. According to this ideal, we must each find ways of making the best of our own lives and treat the past as another country, mercifully separated from the vigorous marching present. As the radical Thomas Paine once expressed it:

> Every generation is and must be, competent to all the purposes which its occasions require. It is the living and not the dead, that are to be accommodated. When man ceases to be, his power and his wants cease with him; and having no longer any participation in the concerns of this world, he has no longer any authority in directing who shall be its governors, or how its government shall be organized, or how administered… [502]

This is a passage about not being bound by the traditions of the past. It takes as its guiding assumption that the dead are irretrievably disconnected from the lives of the living. Thus, what Paine is offering us here is the alluring prospect of a wholly democratic future, in which we can choose to be what we wish, irrespective of what has gone before. But the notion of such a radically open future does not survive contact with reality. When this attitude is taken as unflinchingly true, each life is treated as a self-contained island that can only be held responsible for its conscious and self-willed actions. But so much is left out of this individualistic picture, not least the fact that the dead still do direct the course of events, despite our contemporary belief to the contrary. As human beings we do not live as self-guided atoms, but are enfolded in multiple continuities across time and space, chains of history and causation which we did not and could not have chosen but we must live within. The child with their umbilical cord points backwards to a chain of births. In our language, our dress, our habitual patterns of thought, the past continues to live in us. The person who walks in the world convinced that the past is dead will likely be dismayed by the fact that time alone does not heal all ills.

How should we name this encroachment of the past on the present? What does this partial foreclosure of the future by the past signify? Its proper theological name is ‘sin’. By sin we do not mean to suggest what other Christians have called ‘original sin’. We do not wish to imply (as the Augustinian tradition

502 Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man: In Two Parts: Being an Answer to Mr. Burke’s Attack on the French Revolution* (D.M. Bennett, 1877), 8.

does) that every baby is born imputed with some ancient and unavoidable guilt,[503] nor do we wish to suggest that this guilt is somehow transmitted through sexual intercourse. By sin we mean something more general and more profound. We are referring to patterns of knowing and relating which perpetuate systems of alienation, domination and violence across time. This reality is not simply personal; it is structural and communal.[504] Sin is made manifest, not simply as personal psychological flaws (various 'sins'), but in and through wider conditions of social, cultural and economic brokenness, which, in their substance, deny the love of God. As Gustavo Gutiérrez summarised this approach in his classic study *A Theology of Liberation*:

> … sin is not only an impediment to salvation in the afterlife. Insofar as it constitutes a break with God, sin is a historical reality, it is a breach of the communion with each other, it is a turning in of individuals on themselves which manifests in a multifaceted withdrawal from others. And because sin is a personal and intrahistorical reality, part of the daily events of human life, it is also and above all, an obstacle to life's reaching the fullness we call salvation.[505]

503 For instance Robert Barclay outright rejected the suggestion that babies were imputed from guilt descended from Adam, He was happy to own the consequence of this position, namely the damnation of unbaptised infants. See Caroline Spencer, 'Early Quakers and Divine Liberation from the Universal Power of Sin, in *Good and Evil: Quaker Perspectives*, ed. Jackie Leach Scully, Pink Dandelion (Ashgate, 2007), 43–44.

504 In seeking to ground sin in social and political structures, Gutiérrez was attempting to avoid the tendency (notable in the traditional Augustinian doctrine) of turning sin into something wholly universal and abstract. If we are all implicated in the sin of Adam, then it is impossible to distinguish between the sins of rulers and ruled, the sins of oppressor. Human woundedness becomes mutual and shared, but in a way that actively erases the differences between the powerful. Peter Brown has noted that much of the debate between Augustine and Pelagius (on the power of the will and the role of sin) hinged upon practical questions of power and social status. Pelagius took the view that riches were a definite manifestation of sinful enmeshment and that wealthy Christians should voluntarily dispossess themselves. Augustine on the other hand, argued that the rich and poor were equal at the level of their complicity in Adam's sinfulness.This meant that wealthy Christians should not feel obliged to reject riches entirely, but rather give away their surplus little and often: See Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 AD* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 361–365. As Anthony Reddie has suggested, such an account of sin has significant consequences when White European Christians think about histories of colonial mass enslavement. If we are all equally enmeshed in sin, then, it is tempting to suggest that colonial torturers possess the same status of the history of salvation than the lives of silenced African people who were dispossessed and tortured. Here universal sinfulness becomes a device for escaping both the reality of power dynamics, issues of and moral accountability. In place of such grotesque evasion, Reddie draws our attention for God's repeated siding of the oppressed in Scripture against social wrongdoers. See Reddie, *Is God Colour–Blind: Insights from Black Theology for Christian Faith and Ministry. Revised and Updated Edition with a New Afterword on why Black Lives Matter* (London: SPCK 2009).

505 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (SCM Press, 1971), 85.

In seeking to ground the doctrine of sin within various intrahistorical and collective realities, Gutiérrez is careful not to turn sin into a force so general and so abstract that we lose sight of the people and situations in and through which sin becomes manifest. Sin is not simply a wind blown in from prehistory, but concerns present-day living agency which requires both our willingness and complicity. Sin is always bound up with who we choose to become. The withdrawal of relation represented by sin at some level is always wanted, desired and argued for. Sinful conditions are always larger than a single personality, but personality is never absent from conditions of sin. As Gutiérrez notes: "Things do not happen by chance and that behind an unjust structure, there is a personal or collective will responsible – a willingness to reject God and neighbour."[506] What is it like to live inside conditions of sin? A core experience of being inside sin is the sensation of helplessness. When historical events stand under the sovereignty of sin, they take on the bounded character of a grim eternal recurrence, as voiced in Scripture by the fatalistic sage of Ecclesiastes:

> What has been will be again, /what has been done will be done again;/ there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, / "Look! This is something new? It was here already, long ago;/it was here before our time. /No one remembers the former generations, /and even those yet to come/will not be remembered/by those who follow them. (NIV, 1:9–11).

As Fox preached to early dissenting communities, he was repeatedly stalked by the same sensation of eternal recurrence. As he stared into the faces of opponents, he saw people unconsciously replicating the personalities and patterns first unfolded in Scripture. As Fox recalled of his early ministry:

> I saw the state of those, both priests and people, who, in reading the Scriptures, cry out much against Cain, Esau and Judas and other wicked men of former times, mentioned in the Holy Scriptures; but do not see the nature of Cain, of Esau, of Judas and those others, in themselves. And these said it was they, they, they that were the bad people; putting it off from themselves; but when some of these [later] came, with the light and spirit of Truth, to see into themselves, then they came to say, "I, I, I, it is I myself that have been the Ishmael and the Esau," etc. […] But when these, who were so much taken up with finding fault with others and thought themselves clear from these things, came to look into themselves, with the light of Christ thoroughly to search themselves, they might see enough of this in themselves; and then the cry could not be, it is he, or they, as before,

506 Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (SCM Press, 1971), 25.

> but I and we are found in these conditions {…] I saw also how people read the Scriptures without a right sense of them and without duly applying them to their own states.[507]

Once sin is treated as a form of destructive repetition rather than a congenital attribution of guilt, the story of Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden becomes less of a solitary event with long-term blame and more, something that has happened and crucially, keeps on happening. Sin is a kind of entanglement which keeps drawing us back into conditions of wrongdoing and the pitfalls of asymmetrical relationships. Sin's seductive power lies in the fact that there is a perverse safety in dysfunction and distance, just as an experience of genuine love and equality can often contain feelings of terror and disorientation as we are forced to let go of the old world and embrace something new. We would rather huddle in a predictable fantasy of winter frost than acknowledge the beautiful openness of springtide. There is also the sense that sin signifies something like a cut in us that we refuse to let heal. Instead of permitting repair to take place, we scratch at the old damage and end up replicating the original rupture. The wound inaugurated in Eden is reopened in the murder of Abel, the hubris of Babel and the exploitation of Sodom. Genesis 3 is a paradigmatic statement of a repeated tragedy, of a world locked in stasis without equilibrium, in motion without change. The Fall expresses, in mythological clothes, the predicament of a creation repeatedly cutting itself off from the reality of God's renewing love. Are we then condemned to simply repeat this pattern of diminishment and loss? Both Gutiérrez and the Quaker tradition must say no. The priests and ministers of Fox's recollection taught that sin was the immovable reality of this life and could only be removed at death. Fox called this "pleading for sin",[508] which he saw as nothing less than a Gospel which merely rarified despair. Such preachers were telling their weary hearers that there was an earthly destiny which even Christ's redemptive death could not dissolve. We must endure a dark and starless night until we are rescued from "this body of death" (KJB Romans 7:24). We can easily recognise the substance of Fox's complaint. There are many siren voices in today's world that habitually plead for sin: 'war is the chief reality of life', 'its human nature', 'there will always be injustice', 'your efforts are a drop in the ocean', 'give up trying'. The motto of the demons is always: 'be realistic'. To his enduring credit, Fox could not accept this fatalistic picture of life. Surely, he reasoned, it is always in God's power to take away the closed circuit of the past? Surely God would not prolong evil if he had the means to contest it? Surely (with God's help) people can turn from sin? And so, Fox found. When he let Christ into his life, the love of God took away patterns of eternal recurrence, not in some far away

507 Fox, *The Journal*, ed. Nigel Smith, 30.

508 Fox, *The Journal*, ed. Nigel Smith, 50.

Heaven, but in the here and now. Fox found he could breathe easy again, that hope rose up in him where only hopelessness had existed before. He could see himself as having a future inside God's future.

Herein we see something like a distinctive Quaker doctrine of sin. If sin is that power which keeps us locked in our old selves and old conditions, Christ introduces something new into the structures of the world; a future no longer enclosed by the logic of previous wrongs. Salvation is in this sense a precious freedom from necessity, to become more than our individual or collective histories. But this New Life embodied in Christ is not a kind of zero point or a radical forgetting of the past. Instead, Jesus shows us that freedom from necessity does not destroy history, but reveals latent possibilities within it. This is illustrated in two facts of Christ's story. The first is the obvious fact that God appears, not as a thunderbolt from above, but from below as a child. Every baby is the product of predictable physical and biological laws. On the surface each birth is a reaffirmation of the cage of history, of immovable laws of necessity. And yet at the same time, every child is the emissary of incalculable newness. No child is exactly the same as any other and as the child develops and grows, the unfolding life becomes something unique and unrepeatable.[509] Thus, Christ comes into the world as the chief emissary of unfurling originality. His life is not just unrepeatable in the biological sense, but becomes a template and a call for each life to embrace its inherent newness within the borders of time. Thus, Christ reconciles history, he does not dissolve it. The same message is given to us at the Resurrection. Christ returns to his friends not as a perfected and disembodied spirit, but as a wounded man, as one brought back from death, but with a body immutably marked by the past. This body has overcome the logic of the world by incorporating the hard facts of life into itself without being destroyed by them. Christ's embodiment honours the dead, but it is alive, new and renewed. Christ holds history in himself while ultimately transforming it. Looked at in this way, we can regard reparative action, both as a means of contesting sin (rather than 'pleading' for it) and a means of affirming our faith in a God that makes everything new. These are the essential insights which characterise Covenant community. In Covenant, we let go of a self-guided life and accept our interdependence, our woundedness, and our needfulness. Covenant community reveals the situation of sin, that we exist, not as isolated individuals, cut off from the past, but as persons radically enfolded within multiple histories. And yet, such enfoldment is never final. We are not doomed to simply repeat what we have done before. The original Quaker revelation was that, in gathered

509 The present writer is indebted to the philosopher Hannah Arendt and her concept of social renewal through birth (natality) for the many insights about sin, responsibility and restoration embedded in this section.

community, we could transcend all that was, in exchange for God's healing presence. Through divine activity, all we are and all we were, are opened up to the future. The demands of covenant reveal our inability to break free from old patterns, while the promises of covenant (of peace, love and fellowship) ground us in a greater hope, that of an open-ended life, as joyous and as liquid as the Spirit itself.

There are doubtless many Friends reading these words, who, while they struggle with the traditional Christian language of sin and resurrection, nonetheless can appreciate the essential insights being gestured at here. As Friends who work in peacebuilding know all too well, violence can be perpetuated in cycles across generations. Such Friends can prove from their experience that estrangement and despair are contagious in communities which have been ignored, despised or brutalised. We know shared traumas are transmitted from the original survivors to their descendants. We know that past hatreds serve as fertile soil for new ones. The deaths of individuals do not dissolve the transformations they have wrought on the world. Such Friends know too that if communities can be caught in cycles of self-reinforcing harm, peace and reconciliation are possible. This double-edged affirmation of sin and renewal sits at the very heart of an authentically Quaker sense of Covenantal community. To become a truly loving and serving community, we must claim all that we are, not only those aspects which comfort or inspire us. In May 1652 Fox had a vision on Pendle Hill of a 'great people to be gathered'. Fox's vision is instructive as Friends learn to grapple with the meaning of reparative practice. The eyes of the spirit reveal that communities are as real and concrete as individuals and that encountering one another in and through community we attain a fullness, a reality, which we cannot attain alone. In community we take ownership of the chain of births and transformations which have brought us to the present. Together we join with those who have come before us, cherishing, sifting and contending with the past. Underlying this communal possession for Quakers is doubtless the mystical view that what we do together echoes across time and into eternity. As Jesus says to Peter: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19). We may discern from this rather elliptical saying a general spiritual truth; that our actions do not fade but have an eternal life. The death of the individual is utterly irrelevant to such a principle of continuance. The Covenantal relationship continues across time, encompassing ourselves and our Quaker ancestors.

6.6 How Does God See Us?

The above observation touches inevitably on the very nature of God. The Divine life sees things holistically and not merely atomically. God perceives us as interdependent human wholes, as connected threads and not just so many scattered fragments. In Scripture God does not simply bless and judge individuals, but rejects and affirms human relationships as communities. God sees people, but the divine life also sees the systems in which people are caught. These, says Scripture, can and must be judged. If we follow through on the moral logic of this perspective, this may offend our modern sensibility towards an exclusively personal conception of responsibility. Why should Quakers today feel responsible for the actions of members of the Religious Society of Friends long dead? Two answers can be offered to such a question. Firstly, since the past still lives in us, those who benefit from past wrongs are themselves secondary participants in the very same failure. Secondly, since we are all bound together across time, we cannot escape our ancestors. They are gone but their actions condition our experience. This is true in the perfectly ordinary sense that many Quakers worship in historic spaces which were partly financed and sustained by the trade in enslaved persons. Our Quaker material culture, from which Meetings and individuals still directly benefit, is stained by stories of suffering which are now mostly invisible to us. Our Quaker ancestors and their moral failures are cast in stone and brick. We continue to be supported and sheltered by the fruits of their moral ruin.

But there is a deeper sense in which the Quakers of the past continue to impinge on the present. Our Worship together assumes that what has passed into the invisible is still part of a Living Reality. As Thomas R. Kelly once observed: "We are in communication with one another because we are being communicated to and through, by the Divine Presence. Such indeed is a taste of 'the communion of the saints'."[510] With communication comes responsibility however. If we truly live in a community of the invisible, we are responsible for recovering lost voices even if we would prefer not to hear what they have to say to us. If we say, "I am not responsible", "this is just history", what we're actually saying is: "I do not wish to be in community. I wish to skim on the surface of community life, taking the treasures which suit me. But I do not want the cost and discomfort of life together." Being in a community means that we do not get to choose who is already there. Included in the Eternal Now of our waiting worship are enslavers and those who in the course of their lives accumulated great material wealth off the backs of the enslaved. In Worship together, what should we say to these past Friends from whom we may now recoil? What do their lives reveal about

510 Thomas R. Kelly, 'The Gathered Meeting', *Tract Association of Friends*, 1947.

us? Are we so different with our out of sight sweatshops and our opaque international supply chains? Aren't their failures ours? In speaking to and with the invisible, we must take responsibility for the souls who have shaped us, for good or ill and we must learn from them. Taking responsibility means affirming that the complicities, duplicities and evasions of our ancestors belong to us. We recognise the past as a living mirror in which we see something of ourselves.

Nonetheless upholding such a general, possibly ceaseless, notion of responsibility may prompt feelings of shame, disgust or powerlessness. How then should we begin true repair? We take responsibility first by recalling the past. In the Bible, deep memory is the ground of all stable and just relationships. Social memory is the ground of empathy and solidarity such as Scripture's injunction: "Do not deny justice to the foreigner or the fatherless and do not take a widow's cloak as security. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from that place. Therefore, I am commanding you to do this" (Deuteronomy 24: 17–18). Collective remembering frees us from our self-absorbed myths of independence and moral immunity and draws us into ambiguity and responsibility for others. Once we let go of cosy righteousness and self-justification we can begin to truly care and truly love. To intentionally forget, to wilfully fail to recall is the beginning of a spreading void which ends in social dysfunction, violence and dispossession. Forgetting is no true basis for love because love is always about wholeness, of selves coming into connection with thorny, difficult and flawed totality. Love without truth is not love, it is rather self-fixating fantasy. The right use of memory is paradoxically the beginning of living a new life. In this vein, reparations may be thought of as the act of freeing us from ourselves (from our precious sense of goodness) so that we may serve others. As people who sit with and alongside the invisible in our silent waiting, the task of reparations should make more sense to Quakers than to purely secular people. Our common Quaker experience is that what cannot be seen is still nonetheless present. This spiritual insight is applicable to our wrestling with the living legacies of empire. The institution of chattel enslavement may be gone and the Friends involved dead and buried, but the ripples of dispossession, oppression, stigma and uprootedness continue. We must face these ripples in our Worship, in the attention of deep prayer and out in the world, where lives remain wounded by the past. We must ask on the bench and street corner: Have I heard the cry of my neighbour? What more is demanded by my community in opening the way to healing? Must we step forward or stand back? Must we now act, or is it better that we first listen?

There may be a further obstruction in undertaking tasks of reparation. As contemporary people we may feel intuitively that such remembrance is

either self-destructive (some fruitless navel-gazing) or some kind of energy-sapping revelry which merely rakes over past wrongs. The whole structure of our politics, our media and our economy embed a thoughtless and self-forgetting motion. No sooner is a good purchased, an idea assimilated, a grief observed, a wrong uncovered, we have already moved on. But Scripture teaches us a different lesson. There is power in standing still, in holding the past in view, in not moving on until wisdom has gripped us. And what is this wisdom? It is knowing the steps of our old journeys so that better journeys can finally begin. In the Bible, memory always gives birth to new stories and new possibilities, whereas deliberate forgetting brings repetition and stasis. What is known is always the door to the unknown. The act of remembering is a gesture of utmost creativity and an invitation to unruly newness. Scripture recalls the conception of Joseph, who would go on to play a central part in the story of Israel: "God remembered Rachel. He listened to her and opened her womb" (Genesis 8:1). And again, the liberation of Israel from conditions of brutal enslavement begins with an act of divine remembering: "God heard their groaning and He remembered His Covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (Exodus 2:24). God's 'long' memory then is not merely about rebuke, but the deepest tenderness. God recalls all that we are, the good and the bad, because of boundless love. The Divine never looks away. All is held and known, even when we ourselves seek to look away from what is shameful or painful. And in looking into all that has been, God finds those growing places where the iron cage of the past may be broken into. It might be said therefore that the practice of reparations is a fragile attempt to imitate the divine gaze, to keep all before us, to remain with discomfort, to abide in ambiguity and be faithful to the past. Love means attention to the past, love means holding earlier deeds in the Light, love means turning all that is haunting into an opportunity to bear with greater tenderness the suffering of others. In this sense reparations should never be about us, our conscience, our sense of moral mission, but about others to whom wrong has been done and continues to be done. In refusing to look away, new possibilities may spring from the very things which we cannot change. Here we find displayed the wonderful and subversive logic of grace. From the wreckage of the past, God can open new points of hope through the portals of memory.

6.7 The Wisdom of our Worship: Reckoning with Harm Together

If moral individualism can make us recoil from what seems like the scandalous and counterintuitive demands of reparative practice, a pervasive sense of atomism may prevent us from engaging deeply with the nature of past harm. Confronted with the painful contents of much Quaker history, we may feel profoundly alone in the task of repair, unequal to the task of

lessening the weight of past wrongs. But this self-focus is entirely the wrong place to begin reparative practice. It is not through the self that we begin the process of seeking repair and justice as Quakers, but by turning to our community and our shared Quaker discipline. We must remember the harm of Friends communally, just as repair must be sought in and through each gathered community. We must turn first and foremost to our practice of waiting worship, finding in its structure the means for deep repair and true justice. One helpful motif in early Quaker writing for exploring the meaning of reparations is that of nakedness. In the story of primordial humanity, Adam and Eve are transparent to each other and transparent to God. When God cries out in the garden: "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9) this seems to signify a new opaqueness in the human being, an unwillingness to let the truth shine out. Deep disorder and rupture are symbolised by the couple's desire to cover this nakedness out of shame. Quakers, as a people convinced of an indwelling and immediate return to the first creation, would often treat the return to nakedness (symbolically and sometimes literally[511]) as the giving up of a deceptive, grasping and egotistical self and the re-embrace of an Original Self in Christ.[512]

Thus, in worship, some early Friends described being made vulnerable and transparent to the divine gaze. As Fox exhorts in one Epistle, Friends should live in "innocency and simplicity and nakedness of heart and spirit."[513] In this way, it could be said that reparative practice is ever and always a form of spiritual and moral nakedness. It is a painful practice of bringing the wholeness of ourselves, all that we are and all that we were before God for judgement so that we might discover something of a lost wholeness. Thus, there is nothing in the ongoing tasks of reparations which are not already present in the very structure of Quaker worship. In recalling painful memories and in bringing to the surface present failure, we are being shown our darkness so we can finally taste the Light of Truth. Within the glare of the Divine gaze is complicity, evasion and the long tendrils of transgression.

511 Kristen Poole, *Radical Religion from Shakespeare to Milton: Figures of Nonconformity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press,2006), 167.

512 But for early Friends, the practice meant far more than an individual renunciation of the old patterns of the world however. Going naked in public also signified a communal affirmation of sitting under divine judgement; that the apocalypse was breaking into the world one life at a time. For those Friends who participated, Judgement Day was here and now and all that was 'chaff' would be burnt away. See Clement Hawes, Mania and Literary Style: *The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 54. Using this troubling image as a basis, we could regard reparative practice as a means of submitting our Quaker community to the searching gaze of the Spirit. Which aspects of ourselves as a religious body urgently need to be consumed by divine wrath? Which communal patterns, assumptions, or beliefs are preventing us from confronting ongoing wrongdoing and injustice? What do we have to leave behind in order to be transformed by divine love?

513 Fox, 'Epistle 181', in George Fox's Epistles, Earlham College.

But the judgements of the Covenant community are not the same as the disciplinary judgements of the wider world. The gathered community does not reveal its failure merely to punish those who have failed. When humans judge they often seek to distance themselves from the wrongdoer. But the eyes of God are not human and for that we should be grateful. Without grace the human eye looks for injury to itself, is constantly vigilant concerning its own power and privilege. When God sees our compromised wholeness, transparency neither objectifies nor reduces us; it instead heals us. As the early Quaker William Shewen wrote of this experience:

> Now it is a heavenly state to live under the government of Christ, to know and experience him, swaying the sceptre in the heart and established in the throne thereof. But none come to enjoy this, till they have first known him to sit as a refiner with fire and as a fuller with soap and as a spirit of judgment and burning and as the stronger man to dispossess the strong man, spoil all his goods, sweep and cleanse the house and to furnish it again with heavenly goods, thoughts, desires and meditations and all other things that become the house of the Lord.[514]

Dispossessing the strong man (Mark 3:27–29) may mean much in the life of a Meeting; the worshipful threshing of our past, the examination of our failings and a reckoning with the sorrowful and exploitative basis of our own comfort and security. But, as already said, reparative practice is more than accounting blame or feeling shame. These emotions may be the foundation of deep personal and collective transformation, but they cannot be considered an end in themselves. Reparative practice is the positive and repeated breaking free of the cocoon of racism and systematic violence which keeps us imprisoned in the imperial illusion of us and them, high and low, those who are meant to be powerful and those destined for powerlessness. The goal of reparations is not to be right, pure, or worse, relevant. In this respect acts of reparation affirm this basic spiritual principle: "The truth will set you free" (John 8:32). Thus, the final goal of accountability in the Covenant community is not shame or control, but to become more human, to act as well as believe in, the unity of the human family and loving liberation of God. In this sense, reparations are not a mere extension of philanthropy, the good intentioned transfer of funds from patron to recipient. Nor are reparations chiefly about individual moral flaws, whether this or that person is racist. Rather, deep repair, concerns a pattern of life, a way of knowing and a way of seeing. It is about finding ways out of old patterns of distance and privilege which prevent us from loving deeply and caring fully. It involves a careful

514 William Shewen, *Meditations and Experiences*, ed. Jason R. Henderson, Friends Library Publishing (2015).

appreciation of past damage and ongoing harms, both as individuals and as communities. As such a starting point makes clear, reparations are the work of a lifetime. It is not a once for all destination. There can be no fixed plan, no final blueprint for justice. Healing must be worked on and worked through. Like Quaker worship itself there is no final endpoint to reparations, no point of total achievement. There is simply continued faithfulness to what we are called to do. In this task, we must consider the pictures of human life which we have inherited and reject those which bear the hallmarks of exploitative power. The logic of empire teaches us that misery is inevitable, that loss and dispossession represent the order of things. But if we wish to be faithful to the Quaker message, we must affirm and embody a life after empire, suffused not with egoistical jostling, but compassion, service and a resolute refusal to reduce human beings to mere objects of use. Here the words of Jesus must be our pattern and our measure:

> You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their superiors exercise authority over them. It shall not be this way among you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:24-7)

At the heart of these words is Jesus' dismissal of kyriarchy. From the Greek κύριος, kyrios, 'lord, master' and the Greek: ἄρχω, árcho, 'rule', kyriarchy, refers to all pervasive systems of human domination, whether rooted in conceptions of race, sex, gender, occupation or bodily capacities. Part of the wider goal of reparative practice is uncovering these hidden hierarchies of thought and feeling in ourselves and place them under judgement. In our gathered community there is no room for the division between bossed and boss, of dominated and dominator, of master and subordinate in the kingdom of love. Service, and not authority, is the primary value of a life made new in Christ. Thus, Paul reminded the converted in Galatia: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). If we heed these words, we may be called to live differently as we come to understand the seeds of enslavement which are still hidden in our diversions, our comforts and our employment.

As we have seen, early Friends themselves failed to live in this spirit of radical love. Early in our history the Light of Christ, which compelled Quakers towards a new world, was smothered by the imperatives of expediency, evangelical zeal and social acceptance. Fox must be placed in the position of the faithless Apostle Peter. When he is pushed, Fox, like Peter, denies the

knowledge he has been given. He denies the one he truly loves (Luke 22:54–62). We were given a precious flame to guard, but we attempted to extinguish it. The Apostle illustrates the deep and original tragedy of life together. We are always betraying and betrayed. This is Church. In this respect Friends are no different from other communities. We have not been gifted a clean vessel, yet it is still our responsibility to cherish it, despite its flaws and blemishes. But we can't do this alone. We need our Meeting, we need our disciplines, we need the voices of those whom Friends have wronged, we need the Spirit, who uses us despite our failure. We remain Quaker, not because we have a perfect past or a faultless present, but because, in spite of ourselves, God still calls to us in the still waiting. We are continually willed to accept the power of God's goodness, despite our repeated inability to receive it. Of course, recognising this fact does not make the task of deep and loving repair any less painful and difficult. When Fox envisioned the patriarchal households in slave-owning Barbados, he had failed to heed the Spirit. He had naturalised what Christ had deemed unnatural. He had succumbed to what Friends themselves called 'the Old Adam' (those modes of thought, feeling and acting that sat ever and always opposed to the 'breaking' in' of Christ). Fox wished there to still be a world where some rule and others are ruled over. He did not delve into the violent basis of the food he ate, the ships he travelled on, or the clothes he wore. He did not wish to see the basis of life, as Margret Fell had seen it, that are words are full of goodness and grace, but there is no goodness and no grace in us: "We are all thieves, we are all thieves" (QF&P 19:07). How painful and prophetic it is to read these words in the context of Quaker colonialism.

6.8 Being Ravens, Not Prophets

> I expect to pass through this world but once. If, therefore, there be any kindness I can show, or any good thing I can do any fellow human being let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I will not pass this way again. (Writing of an unnamed Quaker, as quoted in Scott's Monthly Magazine Vol. VII, No. 6 (June 1869, p. 475, edited by William J. Scott).

> Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah: "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. You will drink from the brook and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there." (1 Kings 17:2-4).

In this section, we have considered how Friends today might describe and embody a form of reparative practice, one which confronts the legacies of

the past and seeks to nurture a future of mutual care and mutual healing. At the heart of this discussion has been the contention that Friends not merely have a theology of abolition (that is, freedom without solidarity) but have symbols to cherish and words to speak that draw us into a theology of liberation. In this latter way of seeing, no human being is their own little island, no life and no story, is separate from any other. In God, we discover ourselves to be creatures belonging to a mighty river, flowing and interwoven. Each person made voiceless, each community discarded, constitutes an injury to God's Covenant in which we are all enfolded. In attempting to live out this generous vision of interweaving, we must remember an essential truth. No one act, no single posture can reverse centuries of damage. Friends living in the UK live inside a successor state to global empire. The practices of contemporary globalised Capitalism subsist in the same lineage of imperial expansion. In the desire to commodify and homogenise the world, global economic projects are suffused with the logic of colonialism. Closer to home, our lives as British Friends are indelibly marked by the indignities and systematic cruelties of racial domination. In the fabric of our streets, in the character of our public buildings, we witness monuments to hubris, dispossession and greed. In racial harassment, in the poor housing and health endured by ethnic minorities, we perceive the long shadow of colonial displacement. As Quakers, we must not despair of seeking justice. We are not called to shoulder the whole responsibility of putting the world right, nor could we be expected to try. Those who belong to historically wronged communities will doubtless possess far more insight into the nature of the healing to be done than many of us. Instead of busying ourselves with grand plans concerning others (an attitude so reminiscent of our enslaving ancestors) we are called instead to be faithful alongside others. In a world scarred by the legacies of racism and empire, we are summoned to find goodness, truth and healing wherever we are. Much of what we do may never achieve attention, impact or thanks. That is not the point. The point is to let love lead us and do what we can, even when things seem too immense for our capacities. God will be beside us, but we must listen attentively.

This dedication to repeated goodness in the face of the living past is the only means of finding God's love, despite our shared failure. In the annals of ancient Israel, we are told of a time of famine which parched the land. But God protects the prophet Elijah by telling ravens to bring him "bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening" (1 Kings 17:2-16 NIV). These birds, often ignored or maligned by the wider world, had the task of feeding and sustaining a prophet. In their beaks were held whatever morsels they could find to keep the channels of life and vision open. For us, this should serve as a parable for Friendly reparations. We must not think of ourselves as heroes, saviours or restorers. Instead, we must be ravens, with

our hearts fixed on feeding and sustaining prophetic voices in the world. We must gather up what spiritual and material sustenance we can and offer it to those in need. In Worship, we seek the food to care for God's world. Scripture tells us: "He provides food for the animals and for the young ravens when they call" (Psalm 147:9). But, if in this story we are the young ravens, we must not keep God's gifts to ourselves but share them with others. In opening our homes and meetinghouses to groups seeking racial and social justice, we are helping to clear the path for truth and healing to grow. From the outside these gifts of time and space may appear invisible and inconsequential. But viewed through the eyes of grace they may serve as points of living water in a time of drought. Christ's earthly ministry was soaked through with this anonymous and to outward observers, meagre goodness. At wedding feasts, beside sickbeds, in chance encounters with strangers, Jesus seemed to say 'the world cannot see what I am doing. What I say and do here is invisible to the powerful. But my love is greater than any power, any wrongdoing, any empire. It is the running water that wears away the hard sediment of history.' In Christ we discover that no goodness is ever wasted. The interconnected nature of the world ensures that past wrongdoing continues to reverberate through our daily experience. Old grief often transmutes into new forms of injury. Past traumas become fertile soils for new forms of injustice. But if the world is indeed a web (with the past always pressing upon the new), then care, love and empathy can travel along its fibres too.

Even if our attempts at repair seem to us small, every act possesses a cumulative power which brings new possibilities to light. In this, Christ is our teacher. Jesus did not break in on the world with a plan of total and immediate restitution. He entered it slowly and concertedly, his hand outstretched, not to theories of justice, or grand plans, but to the precious and unrepeatable human encounter. He began at the human level and worked slowly outwards. When invited to take refuge in superficial appeals to power or transformative plans he refuses: "Do you think I cannot call on my Father and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53). But Jesus calls no angels to his side. Christ's way is not the forcing of history into new shapes. This is the pattern of Caesar. The world must remain the world and love must work within it, not for favour, or credit, but because the world finds its completeness in little fragments of goodness which gesture at a new reality. We are not the authors of this reality, although we may be channels for it. It is our part to gather these fragments in our own lives, in our Meetinghouses, in our homes and workplaces. It is our task to seek small goodness in the experiences of others. It is our part to uncover patches of God's fresh green world obscured by the snow of sin's long winter. Here again, the raven is our wise companion. We are told in Genesis of Noah's raven, who flies "back and forth until the water had dried

up from the earth" (Genesis 8:7). Here the raven is a symbol of a guided life. It does nothing of its own initiative but seeks to be a messenger and a conduit for God's green newness. It serves. It is not trying to control its situation, but rather is focused on finding solid ground upon which to land. It witnesses a New Life. It does not make it. This is what we are called to be, not co-creators, but bearers, holding God's gifts in our beaks, ready to give them away.


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Additional Suggested Reading

Beckford, Robert. *Documentary as Exorcism: Resisting the Bewitchment of Colonial Christianity*. Bloomsbury, 2014.

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Reddie, Richard S., ed. *Race for Justice: The Struggle for Equality and Inclusion in British and Irish Churches*. Monarch Books, 2022.

Weaver, Harold D., Jr. *Race, Systemic Violence and Retrospective Justice: An African American Quaker Scholar-Activist Challenges Conventional Narratives*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet 465, 2020.

Suggested Discussion Questions (Queries)

What is your reaction to the material presented here? How do you feel about what you have read?

What do you find difficult or challenging and what offers new Light and new understandings?

Does the call to become a Covenant community committed to social justice resonate for you?

What would you like your local Quaker community to do given what you have read here?

Do you feel called to do anything personally?

What would you like Britain Yearly Meeting to do next in terms of reparations?

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“Love and justice require us to tell the truth, as best we can, about historical and contemporary injustices”

Britain Yearly Meeting 2022, Minute 27

In 2022, Quakers from across Britain came together in worship and careful discernment and made a commitment to examine the historic involvement of Quakers in the slave trade, as well as consider what reparation might be made in response.

Following this commitment from Britain Yearly Meeting, a Reparations Working Group (RWG) was established for four years with a remit to:

- research our past
- consult with those today experiencing the legacies of British Quaker involvement in enslaving and trafficking Africans across the Atlantic, in Quaker colonialism and economic exploitation and
- make recommendations to the BYM Trustees on reparation for the harms caused on which ultimately Friends attending a Yearly Meeting will discern the way forward.

The aim of this report is to address the history of the Religious Society of Friends in relation to colonialism and enslavement.

The first section examines Quakers’ historical complicities in enslavement across three periods: 1650s-1727, 1728-87 and 1788-Present.

The second section explores the ways Quaker theology may have been used to justify, normalise or ignore the grave injustices of widespread enslavement.

The full report is available here: **www.quaker.org.uk/reparation-action**

If you have any queries, please send them to: **equity@quaker.org.uk**

For more information on Quakers in Britain’s work on reparations visit:

www.quaker.org.uk/reparations