

# A Quaker Response to Christian Fundamentalism

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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COMMITTEE  
BALTIMORE YEARLY MEETING  
RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

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## Introduction

This curriculum was born of necessity. Valley Friends Meeting, in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, is located in an area of strong Christian conservatism. Recently our Meeting discovered that, despite their Quaker upbringing and First Day School education, a number of our children were unprepared to meet the challenges of Christian fundamentalism. When friends, schoolmates or neighbors challenge them, as they frequently do, insisting upon certain theological views, our children often do not know what to say or think. If the exchange turns into a verbal attack, as it sometimes does, and our children are told that they are going to hell because they don't hold the "true" religious beliefs, they may be shocked, sometimes quite frightened.

We live in a world in which religion can be quite aggressive, even with children. I have always thought that one of the functions of religious education for children is to protect their minds and spirits while their own religious experience and insight is developing. Instruction in Friends' beliefs, history and practices, instruction even in the Bible, while necessary, has not been enough for our children. They needed to directly talk and think about the challenges they were frequently receiving from their Christian fundamentalist peers. Upon investigation, we could find no curriculum suitable for youth that directly addressed this problem from a Friends' perspective. So I decided to develop one.

The objective of this curriculum is to help our Quaker youth understand Christian fundamentalism and our differences from it, so that they will not be intimidated, overpowered or confused in their interactions with their

Christian fundamentalist peers. The goal is not to enable our youth to argue better with fundamentalists, but to understand their own religious tradition better in the context of a prevalent challenge that they face in the world today. While they are likely to find many points of difference from their fundamentalist peers, they may also find some points at which they may be able to build bridges of understanding. I was also very pleased to discover that examining these issues is a very good way to understand more deeply what Quaker belief and practice are all about.

This curriculum was designed with high school aged youth in mind. I also hoped it would work for sufficiently mature middle school youth, but I did aim at the level of high school age knowledge and thinking. In the end, it was used in a First Day school class consisting of high school, middle school and one exceptionally deep-thinking elementary school aged youth.

It did work for us with that age span, though I do not recommend it for any but exceptional children younger than middle school age. It is a “wordy” curriculum; most of the time we just talked together. We made some clay available to keep the hands of the younger children busy. Some adults sat in on the class from time to time and remarked that they would like to use the curriculum in an adult setting. Given that many liberal Friends are “refugees” from more conservative Christian denominations, and many more of us are personally challenged by the strong presence of fundamentalism in our larger society, it may be that this curriculum would be useful among adult liberal Friends. We have not tried this, but I think it would work. This curriculum presupposes both verbal and experiential knowledge of basic Quaker ideas and practices.

This curriculum is a response to Christian fundamentalism. By fundamentalism I do not mean the many

conception of the light of Christ Within, which is also universal and in every single being, provides a theological resource and a theological way into constructing a kind of Christianity which is both true to its own inspiration and at the same time fully able to recognise truth and the workings of God in those of other faiths. (John Punshon, 1991)

Every religious system has its 'Quakers' – those who turn from the outward and the legal and the institutional and focus their attention on the Divine that is within. There is much fellowship between Friends and the mystics of other religious systems. Let a Mohammedan or Hindu mystic teacher come to this country, and we realise at once how much we have in common with him. We believe that we have something to give him, but we realise also he has something to give us. (Gerald Hibbert, 1924)

We are conscious of Christianity as one among a number of religions competing for the allegiance of intelligent and spiritually-minded men, and the relationship between them exercises men's minds and hearts. The world is much smaller, much more interdependent than it used to be.... An increasing number of people have had personal contacts with humble men and holy of heart in all walks of life of whom they dare not deny that they have been taught by God. (Margaret B. Hobbling, 1958)

I owe all to God in Jesus Christ and say so to all sorts of people, but if someone says he finds the same in Ram or Buddha, what right have I to say he does not?... 'Where love is, God is'; where the fruits of the spirit are displayed, there the spirit must be – the Eternal Christ, the loving caringness of God expressed in time and in human form, but not to be equated only with the Carpenter of Nazareth. (Mary Barr, Quaker from about 1934, co-worker with Gandhi from 1932)

We live in a world in which there is great strain between races, cultures and religions, and the question of interfaith dialogue is, I would say, the most important religious question facing any person of faith.... How can Friends play a part in this? My own feeling is that the

other kinds of Christian conservatism or evangelism, and I certainly do not mean mainstream Christianity. I mean the kind of fundamentalism popularized by such televangelists as Jerry Falwell. I have in mind the set of views that includes: Biblical inerrancy and literalism, salvation through the substitutionary atonement of Jesus, strong emphasis on human sinfulness, and strict Christian exclusivism. It is the kind of fundamentalism that many of our children will encounter on college campuses in the form of the Campus Crusade for Christ and Intersity Christian Fellowship.

There are, of course, many Quaker responses to Christian fundamentalism. This curriculum could not possibly represent all Friends' thinking and does not intend to. It is a response from the perspective of one Friend from Baltimore Yearly Meeting, in the unprogrammed tradition of liberal Friends. It is informed primarily by my own experience as a Friend, as well as by input from other liberal Friends, my reading of Friends' materials both historical and contemporary, and my academic training as a scholar of religion. On the fundamentalist side, it is informed by fundamentalist students from the university where I teach and by my exposure to fundamentalist radio and publications. It has very much been shaped by my experience of working with it in our First Day School with our Valley Friends youth.

I believe that one source of our Quaker children's feeling of being at a disadvantage in discussions with fundamentalist peers is our liberal Quaker avoidance of doctrine and, in many cases, Bible study. We generally feel religious truths cannot be put into words very successfully. While I highly esteem this attitude and the reasons for it in Quaker spirituality, it can make some of our youth (and adults!) rather tongue-tied when faced with fundamentalist

peers who know exactly what they think and can put it into a few, clear words, delivered with a great deal of passion. However, having worked through the ideas in this curriculum, I have come to the conclusion that we Friends actually are in a particularly strong position to understand what we think about fundamentalism and how we differ from it because of our emphasis on the Light Within. Once we bring this idea to bear on the matter, what seems at first to be a complicated subject becomes very simple and straightforward.

Many thanks to the youth in the Valley Friends Meeting First Day School, January to June, 2001, for their many real and substantive contributions to this curriculum. Some of their words are presented below. Thanks to Steve Keffer for the experiential Bible reading. Thanks to Chuck Fager and the Baltimore Yearly Meeting Religious Education Committee for important contributions made during the editing process.

Note:

- The following represents what I said and did. Please adjust it to reflect your own ideas and experience and the interests and experience of the class.
- Everyone participating in this curriculum should have his or her own Bible in class. It will be easier to follow if everyone uses the same translation, but, on the other hand, some interesting insights can come from noticing differences between translations.
- We took turns having the youth read the Bible passages aloud, but then asked for volunteers to explain the passage, rather than having the youth who read also explain it (sometimes it is difficult to think about the meaning of a passage while reading it aloud).
- The day by day sequence should be taken as a rough

There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath had different names. It is, however, pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion nor excluded from any, where the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, of what nation so ever, they become brethren, in the best sense of the expression. (John Woolman, 1761)

Love was the first motion, and thence a concern arose to spend some time with the Indians, that I might feel and understand their life and the spirit they live in, if haply I might receive some instruction from them, or they be in any degree helped forward by my following the leadings of truth among them. (John Woolman, 1763)

They (Quakers) rejoice to find that of God in people of every caste and creed; they wholeheartedly agree with a great Christian thinker of the second century, Origen, that “no noble deed among men has ever been done without the Divine word visiting the soul.” The same Indwelling Spirit who has opened their eyes to behold the beauty of Christ, enables them also to behold spiritual beauty wherever it is found, whether in the great scriptures of the religions of the East, in the wisdom of their saints, or in the honest minds and humble, loving hearts of those who claim no religious allegiance at all. (Marjorie Sykes)

God enlightens every soul that comes into the world, communes by his Holy Spirit with all men everywhere, illumines the conscience with a clear sense of the right and the wrong course in moral issues, and reveals His Will in definite and concrete matters to those who are sensitive recipients of it. (Rufus Jones)

Friend Margaret Tennyson has published a fine set of “Statements by Friends Regarding Other Faiths” in her book, *Friends and Other Faiths* (pp. 43-47). These make excellent foci for discussion. I transcribe those our class found most interesting below. The teacher should copy and distribute to the class for discussion either this set or the more complete set given in *Friends and Other Faiths*. I have added one additional well-known quotation from John Woolman.

Be still and cool/ In your own mind/ and Spirit from/  
Your own thoughts/ And then you will feel the principle of  
God. (George Fox, 1658)

The Church (is) no other thing but the society, gathering or company of such that God hath called, to walk in his light and life – of whatsoever nation, kindred, tongue or people they be, though outwardly strangers, and remote from those who profess Christ and Christianity in words and have the benefit of the scriptures, as become obedient to the holy light and the testimony of God in their hearts – there may be members therefore of the Catholic Church both among heathen, Turks and Jews. (Robert Barclay)

The humble, meek, merciful, just, pious, and devout souls are everywhere of one religion; and when death has taken off the mask they will know one another, though the divers liveries they wear makes them strangers. This world is a form; our bodies are forms; and no visible acts of devotion can be without forms. But yet the less form in religion the better, since God is a spirit; for the more mental our worship, the more adequate to the nature of God; the more silent, the more suitable to the language of the Spirit. (William Penn, 1693)

guide. You may find that you cover things more quickly or slowly, depending upon your group.

- It is helpful to have a blackboard or other large surface on which to write the main points that are made as they emerge in the discussion. We posted several large sheets of paper divided down the middle from top to bottom, with “Quakerism” as the title of the left column and “fundamentalism” as the title of the right column. As points were made, we would write them up in the column in which they belonged. This gave us a visual side by side comparison for each point. Using paper had the advantage of allowing us to re-post the sheets for review purposes.

- I would greatly appreciate hearing from Friends who read or use this curriculum about your experience in using it or your ideas for improving it. Ideas for more experiential elements in the curriculum would be particularly welcome. Any such comments could be addressed to the Religious Education Committee of Baltimore Yearly Meeting, c/o BYM 17100 Quaker Lane, Sandy Spring MD 20860 ([Email: bymrsf@igc.org](mailto:bymrsf@igc.org)).

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## DAY SEVEN: Relations with Other Religions

As is well known, fundamentalist Christianity is strictly exclusivistic. That is, they believe that their views exclusively (alone) are true, all other religions, including other kinds of Christianity, are false, and that they exclusively have access to salvation. Friends' Christianity, however, has a strong universalist stream. That is, Friends believe that others besides them – in fact, all human beings – possess the Light Within and therefore others' religious teachings also likely contain elements of religious truth.

### BIBLE STUDY:

Here is the passage most frequently cited by fundamentalists to justify their view that only Christianity gives access to salvation: John 14:6. On the surface this may seem to validate Christian exclusivism. Ask the students if they can think of any other way to understand it. Here is how Friend Samuel Caldwell resolves this problem: "It is really quite simple: Friends have always identified the Inner Light with the living Christ. Christ, in Quaker theology, is the Light." That means that John 14:6 can be understood as saying: "the Light is the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through the Light." The Light is present in all persons, not only Christians.

Biblical passages that seem to point in a universalist direction: Mt. 7:21 (It is not the one who professes belief in Jesus as savior who "gets to heaven," but the one who behaves morally.) Mt. 10:40-42 (Similar.) Matthew 25: 31-46 (God's Judgment will be based on our deeds, regardless of our doctrinal ideas.) John 1:9 (If everyone has the Light Within, which gives them the truth, how can only some be on good terms with God?)

we are not separate from God. Many feel a confidence in this God, in whom “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Feeling this presence and confidence, many feel that whatever happens at death, it will be alright, God will continue to be with us.

### 3. BIBLE STUDY:

For good insight into two contrasting views of God pertinent to this issue, read and discuss Mt. 18:23-35, Mt. 20:1-16, and Luke 10:25-37. All three are parables taught by Jesus.

Mt. 18:23-35 may be seen as expressing a view of God with which fundamentalism is more sympathetic. In it, the king may be interpreted as God and the slave as humankind. In fundamentalist interpretation, this parable shows God as a judge and humans as sinners who cannot pay their debt. God gives us the justice that we deserve for our sins.

Mt. 20:1-16 is entirely different in tone and portrays God in a way more in keeping with Friends’ experience. When the landowner in the parable is interpreted as God, God is shown in a very non-judgelike light. In fact, this parable challenges legalistic approaches to spirituality. Here, the landowner (or God) gives and gives and gives without reckoning or judging, rejecting any notion of some people deserving one treatment and other people deserving another. The landowner/God just gives, gratuitously. This reinforces an idea of a loving God, who gives to us just because that is the nature of God, out of spontaneously overflowing love.

Luke 10:25-37, the Parable of the Good Samaritan, reinforces this more generous view.

In this story, the man who shows how to “inherit eternal life” is the one who has a good heart and does what is right – despite the fact that as a Samaritan, his religious – and doctrinal ideas are considered to be all wrong.

## DAY ONE: What is Christian Fundamentalism?

### PART ONE

Introduce the subject of the curriculum: a Quaker response to Christian fundamentalism. It is good to begin experientially. The instructor could explain what s/he means by Christian fundamentalism by relating a story or two of his/her experience in dealing with Christian fundamentalists, either while growing up, or as an adult.

**EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE.** Invite the youth to tell stories of their own encounters with fundamentalism. Ask how they handled the situation and how they felt about it. Our youth were eager to share these stories and every one of them had things to tell. Give everyone a chance to tell a story and allow them time to talk with each other.

Depending on how much time you have, you could do role playing and act out some of these stories. (If the story telling was vivid enough, this would not add anything.) Emphasize that what we are not doing in this class is trying to learn better ways to argue with fundamentalists. We are trying to get clear on what we think about what fundamentalists say to us.

**TEACHER BACKGROUND:** If anyone asks, “What is fundamentalism?” or “Where did fundamentalism come from?” the following information may be helpful:

What we call “fundamentalism” is a movement that began with a series of pamphlets published between 1910 and 1915 by conservative Church leaders who wanted to defend Christianity against the threat that they perceived in critical Biblical scholarship and Darwinism in particular, and the encroachment of science and reason upon religion in general. They drew up a list of “fundamentals,” belief in which they considered to be essential to the Christian faith.

Those fundamentals included belief in: the literal truth (and sometimes inerrancy) of the Bible, the deity of Christ,

the virgin birth of Christ, the bodily resurrection of Christ, the immanent second coming of Christ, and the substitutionary atonement of Christ's death. Note that fundamentalism can be differentiated from evangelicalism. The latter emphasizes being "born again" in Christ. Fundamentalism is theological; evangelicalism is experiential. The two groups can overlap but don't always.

### PART TWO

THE KEY POINT differentiating Quakerism and Christian fundamentalism is our respective views on human nature, on what a human being most fundamentally is. *Quakers emphasize the divine Light within. Fundamentalists emphasize human sinfulness.* Our views on human nature are virtually opposite. This is the key point because this is the starting point of thinking for both groups. From our beliefs on human nature, everything else in the two religious views follows. Introduce and explain this point and write it on your Quakerism/fundamentalism chart.

**BIBLE STUDY.** We can illustrate this point by looking in the Bible. Have the class open their Bibles to Genesis. Explain that there are two accounts of creation in Genesis; Genesis 1:1-2:4a and Genesis 2:4b-3:24.

Point out that fundamentalist scholars and churches do not accept that there are two creation accounts; they read the two passages as blending together. But this is not the view of mainstream and liberal scholars who have studied the Bible critically. Ask them to look for differences between the two accounts as they are read. (You may want to break up the reading into smaller pieces.) Particularly stress the accounts of the creation of humans: 1:26-27 and 2:7, 2:18-25 and the story of the Fall, Genesis 3.

As you go along, ask the class to point out differences between the two accounts. Be sure to solicit differences between the accounts of the creation of humans. When done, our chart looked like this:

that while formerly, the Jews gave offerings to God through their High Priest once a year to atone for their sins and make themselves right with God, Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice that serves once and for all to atone with God for the sins of humankind (Hebrews 7:20-28 and 10:1-10). Point out that, unlike the idea of original sin which cannot be found in the Bible, the idea of substitutionary atonement can be found in the Bible. However, it is not found in the words of Jesus himself; these passages are interpretations of the meaning of Jesus' life made by some of his important followers, such as Paul.

2. Ask the class: How do Quakers talk about salvation? (The students may draw a blank, or they may say "they don't!") Actually, Quakers seldom talk about salvation. Ask the class: Why is that, do you think? (The following points came out in our discussion. You may want to bring some of these out if they don't emerge spontaneously:)

Quakers feel there is nothing to be saved from in the fundamentalist sense. That is, Quakers do not accept that we are inherently and inevitably sinners, that sin separates us from God. We are not separated from God because we have the Light Within, so there is no need of something or someone external to us to intervene on our behalf to put us right with God.

Quaker experience of the Light Within is salvation here-and-now. When we experience the Light Within and allow it to guide us we are "saved," that is, we live in right relationship with God and in the fullness of our own human potential as beings made "in the image of God."

Quakers don't talk very much about what happens after death. Why not? For one thing, we don't know what happens then. And for many, the experience of the Light Within is an experience of the presence of God. It is an experience that makes many feel confident that God is with us, that

sinfulness, it is just for God to condemn us; we deserve to pay a penalty for our sins; we deserve the eternal damnation in a fiery hell that we have earned. However, as an unearned, undeserved gift, God has given us his only Son, Jesus. Jesus is sinless, perfect. Jesus does not deserve death. Nevertheless, Jesus dies an undeserved death on the cross. Jesus' undeserved death is given as a substitute for our death, the death we deserve for our sinfulness. This free gift of Jesus' death for us is a kind of sacrifice. It is an *atonement*: amends given to God by Jesus for our sins, the sins of humankind. Jesus dies a sacrificial death, a *substitutionary* death for us so that we don't have to die and burn in hell forever. This atones, or makes up to God, for our sins. This pays the penalty for us. Jesus is raised from the dead and sits at God's right hand in heaven. Thus, God's justice is preserved. We can escape hell if we accept this.

Ask the class: How is this idea similar to ordinary ideas of crime and punishment?

(This idea pictures God as a judge and pictures human life as similar to a criminal case in a court of law. In real life, when a person has committed a crime, they have to pay the price, some kind of penalty. It is the judge's job to make sure that they do. Perhaps the judgment is that the criminal has to pay a big fine to pay for his crime. If the criminal doesn't have the money, sometimes a friend or relative who does have the money will pay for it. This is similar to the idea of substitutionary atonement. All humans have committed the crime of sinning against God (through original sin). We are sinful and therefore there is no way for us to pay God back, to make amends for our crime. However, Jesus voluntarily, out of love, has paid our penalty, which is death, for us, with his blood.)

Take a quick look at some Biblical passages that are cited in support of this view, e.g., Romans 3:25, Romans 5:9, 1 Cor 15:3, 1 John 1:7. The Letter to the Hebrews states

Quakerism

Fundamentalism

Light Within

Sinful Human Nature

Sequence: God makes the plants, then the animals, then humans.

Sequence: God makes Adam first, then the female, by two very different creative acts of God.

Humans are made "in the image of God."

Adam is made of dust into which God breathes the breath of life. Eve is made from Adam's rib.

Male and female are created equal

The male rules over the female (3:16).

The Fall.

**Discussion:**

Do these two accounts look like two stories or one? (We found them to be two very different accounts that could not be fully reconciled with each other.)

What are the two views of human nature that we see in these accounts? What is the meaning of humans being created "in the image of God"? (Does this imply that humans are like God in some important way? Certainly it implies that humans are basically good.)

What is implied about human nature by the Fall? Point out that "original sin," as such, is not mentioned. We will discuss in the next class that this is a later *interpretation* made by some influential Church fathers, but it is not in the story itself.

How do you believe life came into being? Solicit students' views and bring out any neglected points. (liberal Quakers' views on creation tend to be a combination of religious and scientific views. Most Friends feel that God is at the root of

the universe, that God is the source of life, sustains life and is immanent in us. On the other hand, few Quakers take either Biblical creation account as describing in any literal sense how creation unfolded, generally preferring scientific accounts on this subject. Metaphorically, though, Friends tend to feel more in harmony with the first creation account and the idea of humans being made “in the image of God,” an idea that seems harmonious with the idea of the inner Light. Quakers directly reject any notion of female subordination to males, as in the second account.)

How do you think fundamentalists understand creation and how do they reconcile the two Biblical accounts? (Fundamentalists do not believe that there are two creation accounts in the Bible. They tend to emphasize the 7 days of creation in the first account and the creation of humans and the Fall of humankind from the second account. Fundamentalists do not tend to emphasize that humankind is made “in the image of God.”)

To sum up, while there are two creation accounts, Quakers would feel more in harmony with one and fundamentalists with the other. The point to emphasize is that both groups emphasize those points in the Bible that seem to agree with their understanding, and interpret those points in the light of their understanding. Both groups de-emphasize or ignore the parts they disagree with. The difference is that Quakers will admit that they are doing this, while fundamentalists generally will not.

tend to see God as greater than Jesus, Jesus more as a man who was filled with the Spirit of God. Jesus is one whom we should follow and try to be like as much as possible. Fundamentalists see Jesus and God as the same being and tend to de-emphasize the humanity of Jesus. As a book edited by Jerry Falwell put it, “The deity of Christ is really the most essential fundamental of all.” [*Fundamentalist Phenomenon*, p. 8] They see Jesus more as one to be worshipped than Friends do.) What do we think about the idea of Jesus rising from the dead? Is believing in it necessary to be a Christian or to be “saved”?

Do Friends and fundamentalists have anything in common in their views of Jesus, or are there any ideas that are close enough that a bridge of understanding might be built between us? (Could there be any similarities in Quaker experience of the Light Within – also known as Christ Within – and fundamentalist experience of the loving presence of Jesus? Some Friends understand – and experience – Christ in both ways.)

#### PART TWO: Salvation

1. Salvation is the fundamentalists’ strong suit. It is the key to their religion. Ask the students how they understand fundamentalist doctrine on salvation. Fill in any important points that they omit. This is the second place in the curriculum where you are likely to need to lecture theology. It may help you to draw on the following explanation:

Fundamentalists embrace the idea of *substitutionary atonement*. This idea goes back to the Fall and original sin. Since all humans have original sin, we have the guilt of disobedience against God, our maker. God is seen as a judge. God is a judge who gives out perfect justice. Since we are all sinners, and everything we do is tainted with our

## DAY SIX: Jesus and Salvation

### PART ONE: Jesus

There are many different ideas of who and what Jesus was and is. Let's discuss some of these. How do you think fundamentalists see Jesus? How do Friends see Jesus? (We came up with the following ideas; the teacher may want to prompt some of these if they do not come from the students. Of course there are many other possibilities:)

#### Quakerism

The ultimate spiritual teacher.

Emphasis on following him and becoming like him.

A radical reformer of Judaism; a Rabbi.

A man filled to overflowing with the Spirit of God. In this sense, the ideal which we reach towards in our own lives.

#### Fundamentalism

Our salvation. By dying on the cross, and then rising from the dead, he atoned for our sins.

Emphasis on Jesus' superiority to us, Jesus as God.

Little mention of his Jewishness.

One who loves us deeply. A friend with whom we can and should have a personal relationship. (Many Friends accept this too.)

### Discussion:

What does it mean to say that Jesus was a man filled with the Spirit of God? (Recall Biblical passages seen before that show Jesus filled with the Spirit, e.g., Mark 1:9-13, and new passages such as Mt 12:22-28. Friends aspire to be filled with the Spirit of God, too. Jesus gives us an idea of what that is like when it is done to an ideal degree. We aspire to get as close to that ideal degree as possible.)

How would you summarize the differences in the views of Friends and fundamentalists on Jesus? (Many Friends

## DAY TWO: The Light Within and Human Sinfulness - I

Draw a fresh chart with the "Quakerism" and "fundamentalism" columns. Review the idea that the root of the difference between the two views is their greatly differing views of human nature: the Light Within for Quakers and human sinfulness for fundamentalism. Write these terms on the chart.

**EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE.** Invite the class to call to mind a particular baby in the Meeting, or one that they know from elsewhere. Discuss: Can you imagine that child as sinful? What would it do to that child to raise him or her with the message that she or he is sinful? What would be the result of raising the child with the message that she or he has the Inner Light? Can you recall an occasion in your childhood when you thought of yourself as having the Inner Light, or God, within? What did that mean to you?

**BIBLE STUDY.** Open the Bibles again to the account of the Fall in Genesis 3. Review the chapter, rereading any passages you like, including 3:22-24. Look again and notice that the idea of "original sin" is not in the story.

[Theological background. This is one of two abstract, theological points in the curriculum. It is also one of two points at which the instructor will need to "lecture," bringing information to the class that the youth generally do not have access to. This material is necessary to the curriculum, but you can give a shorter or longer version depending upon the youth in your class.]

What is "original sin"? "Original sin" is the idea that the sinfulness of Adam and Eve, their prideful disobedience of God, has been transmitted to us as their descendants. That is, before we actually do anything in life, we are born in a condition of sinfulness, a condition of estrangement or separation from God due to pride and disobedience. This is the human condition.

According to St. Augustine (d. 430), the Church father who originated this doctrine, prior to the Fall, human beings were able not to sin; after the Fall, we are unable not to sin. No matter what we do, we sin. However, this view was not accepted by all Church fathers or by the entire Church. A contemporary of St. Augustine, Pelagius (d. ca. 418) rejected the notion of original sin transmitted to us from Adam and Eve and argued that humans are able not to sin. The issue has been much debated over the centuries. The great theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-74) – the most important theologian for the Catholic Church – held that humans are able not to sin.

The Protestant Reformation returned to the pessimistic view of St. Augustine that all of our actions are sinful. Martin Luther (1483-1546) argued for the total depravity, the sinfulness, of human beings, as did John Calvin. Christian fundamentalism, which tends to be more Protestant than Catholic, derives its view of human nature from Augustine, Luther and Calvin.

THE KEY POINT is that Christian fundamentalism holds to a pessimistic view of human nature that it is not possible for human beings not to sin; we sin all the time, in everything we do. The “good news” is that people can be saved through Christ, which we’ll talk about in another lesson. Liberal Quakers hold to a more optimistic view of human nature, that we are not born sinful. It is possible for humans not to sin. Of course sometimes we sin or do wrong, but sometimes our actions are free of sin. Both of these views have a long history in Christian thought and have many adherents today. Both groups justify their views on the basis of their reading of the Bible.

DISCUSSION: Does the Quaker belief in the Light Within mean that people never sin, that we never do wrong? What do you think about these differing views of human

- What did Jesus look like?
- How did you feel about the “important” men?
- What was the crowd like when they challenged Jesus?
- What’s going on when Jesus is drawing in the dirt the first time? Why is he doing that?
- What’s the crowd doing while he’s drawing?
- When Jesus said, ‘the one without sin can be the first to stone her,’ and started drawing on the ground again, what was the reaction in the crowd?
- Why did Jesus draw on the ground the second time?
- How is the woman in this story feeling?
- How did you feel about the woman at the end?
- What happens to her after this? Where does this woman go? What does she do?

passage would work).

Before beginning reading, the teacher explains: This is an experiential reading. I want you to imagine yourself being in the scene that you will hear about; you are part of the audience listening to Jesus talk and watching what he does. Imagine yourself being there. What does it look like, feel like, smell like? What are you feeling as these things happen?

Then have everyone open their Bibles to the passage. The first time through, the teacher reads the passage aloud and the students all follow it in their Bibles.

Then invite the students to close their Bibles, close their eyes, and listen. The teacher retells the story in his/her own words, speaking slowly, with pauses between each statement, to give the student a chance to silently experience what is being described. The teacher says (words like):

Imagine we're in Jerusalem. It's a hot place in the Middle East.... The people around you are wearing robes and cloth headdresses..... You've heard about Jesus. You're curious and have come to see what he's like..... You stand in the crowd and look around. They didn't have showers..... You see Jesus; he's over there. Look at Jesus; look at what he looks like and sounds like..... There's some kind of commotion in the back of the crowd..... Men are pushing through the crowd..... They're dragging a woman!..... They confront Jesus..... (Go on through the whole scene, taking your time, embellishing it with as many sensory components as possible, leaving pauses for the students to experience the scene.)

When you're done, invite the students to open their eyes. Then begin the discussion. Here are some questions you could ask:

- What was it like?

nature? (In my experience this usually gets a lively discussion going.)

Bring out these points in the discussion: It is important to be clear that Quakers are not saying that people never sin, that we never do wrong. That would be a ridiculous view! For Quakers, people can and do sin, but it is also very possible for us not to sin, to live and act purely and well. For fundamentalism, it is inevitable that we sin in everything we do. That is, for fundamentalists, we cannot avoid the fact that all our actions are shaped by our selfishness and desires. Before the Fall, they say, we lived in a condition of unity and harmony with God. The Fall was the beginning of our separation from God and God's will. Now we are separate from God, and so act on the basis of our own will, not God's will. Fundamentalists believe that when you accept that Jesus died and was resurrected for you personally, then you have overcome the separation from God, and it becomes possible to overcome sin. For liberal Quakers, we are not separate from God. We have God within, or the Light Within. That is something that we can be more or less in touch with, more or less living in, as we go about our lives. That is why, for Quakers, it is very possible for us to act without sin, in a godly fashion: because we are not separate from God, God is in us and with us. For fundamentalism, humans are separate, alienated from God, so all our actions must come from self, not from God, and are therefore sinful. This might be summarized on the charts something like this:

<u>Quakerism</u>	<u>Fundamentalism</u>
Light Within	Sinful Human Nature
Creation story #1: made in the image of God	Creation story #2: the Fall.
God is inside me.	Adam is inside me.
Optimistic view of human nature.	Pessimistic view of human nature.
We <b>can</b> do something good and pure, free of sin (though we also do bad things).	All our actions are sinful, no matter what.

**BIBLE STUDY.** Fundamentalists do not have a monopoly on the Bible or its interpretation! Quakers get a great deal of inspiration and guidance from it, too, but we understand it in our own way (which is what all churches do!) What sources in the Bible support the Quaker idea of the Light Within? In the Bible, what Quakers call the Light Within is often called the Holy Spirit or Spirit. There are many passages in the Bible that talk about the Holy Spirit. Here are some passages to read and discuss: (There are many appropriate passages on this subject; please do as much or as little as time and class interest indicate.)

Mark 1:1-8 (esp. 1:8). What do Friends mean by being “baptized by the Holy Spirit”? How does this relate to what we do in Friends Meeting for Worship? (To be baptized by the Holy Spirit, for Friends, is to have an experience of the Light Within. This may happen in or out of Meeting for Worship, but we particularly open ourselves to such experience in worship.)

Mark 1:9-11. What kind of thing is the Spirit in this passage? Is there anything like this in Quaker religious life? (Here the language is of the Spirit coming from without. The Quaker idea of an opening to the Light might seem

The Bible is the record of others’ encounter with the divine, of the Spirit as it spoke through others. We need to be able to respond to George Fox’s challenge: “You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this; but what canst thou say?”

As the discussion proceeds, ask about further elements of both Friends’ and Fundamentalists’ views of the Bible, recording key points on your chart. Our chart looked like this at the end of the discussion:)

<u>Quakerism</u>	<u>Fundamentalism</u>
Aware that we have a variety of views and interpretations.	Believe they are reading it literally.
Quakers follow a lot of it, but not every word of it has to be done; it is a guide but not a law.	It is the Law.
Accept the findings of critical Biblical scholarship on human role in authorship, editing.	It is the Word of God. Reject critical Biblical scholarship.
Some Friends know the Bible well, others very little. Some regularly read and meditate on it.	Emphasize reading the Bible, knowing what it says, memorizing passages.
The Bible represents past experiences and insights. We are challenged with: "What canst thou say?"	The Bible is Revelation. No ongoing revelation.

**3. EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE.** If Friends are to read and study the Bible, it must be alive for us. One way to bring the Bible to life is to do an experiential reading like the following. We did an experiential reading of John 8:1-11, the story of Jesus and the adulteress (any lively narrative

## DAY FIVE: Bible

### 1. BIBLE STUDY

Read 2 Timothy 3:14-16. Ask the class to read 3:16 especially carefully. Discuss. What does this say? Point out that Fundamentalists often cite this passage as proof that all of the Bible must be inerrant or literally true because it is “inspired” or breathed out by God. Does it say this? (It says that all scripture is useful, not inerrant.)

#### 2. Discussion: How do Fundamentalists view the Bible?

Read this quotation from the Campus Crusade for Christ’s Statement of Faith: “The sole basis of our beliefs is the Bible, God’s infallible written Word, the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. We believe that it was uniquely, verbally and fully inspired by the Holy Spirit and that it was written without error (inerrant) in the original manuscripts. It is the supreme and final authority in all matters on which it speaks.” Ask the class to state in their own words what this quotation means and write key points on your chart. Note and discuss the authority of the Bible as well as its inerrancy.

#### How do Friends view the Bible?

(Let the class generate responses and list them on your chart. The teacher may want to bring out some of the following points in the discussion.)

For Quakers, the Bible is a declaration of the fountain, the Spirit, and not the fountain itself. Therefore it is not the principal ground of truth; direct experience of the Spirit is the principal ground. The Bible may give secondary guidance, but even to read it properly we need to read in the Light of the Spirit. George Fox said, “And I saw that none could read John’s words aright and with a true understanding of them, but in and with the same divine Spirit by which John spoke them.”

similar, though the language there is of something that comes from within.)

Mark 1:12-13. What is the Spirit doing here? Is there anything like this in Quakerism? (We might feel an inner push of the Spirit, at times, to step out of our ordinary lives in order to wrestle with spiritual issues that weigh heavily upon us.)

Mark 13:11. This seems rather different. What kind of thing is the Holy Spirit here? Is there anything like this among Friends? (The Holy Spirit is now within. It is a source of verbal witness. This is much like Quaker practice of verbal ministry in Meeting for Worship, as well as Quaker witness and testimonies in our society from George Fox to Lucretia Mott to John Woolman to Friends today. Instructors may want to bring examples of any of these Friends in their manner of speaking to their societies.)

Jeremiah 2:1-4, 2:9, Isaiah 29:22-30:1, Amos 1:2-3, 3:1-2. These are Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) prophets. Where do their words come from? Whose words are they speaking? (They believed they were speaking the words of the Lord God. This is what the Hebrew prophets were: those who speak the words of God as God gives those words to say.) How is this similar to Quaker understanding of speaking as moved by the Spirit?

Take out the hymnal, *Worship in Song: A Friends Hymnal*, and read the lyrics to some familiar songs we sing in our Meetings. “This Little Light of Mine” (#266): Why do the words say, “I’m gonna let it shine,” rather than, “I’m gonna make it shine”? (This language presupposes that the Light Within is there, shining away under its own volition, in a sense, and that what we need to do is remove any impediments to its shining, such as our own selfishness, fear, etc.). “Ubi Caritas” (#222): What do the lyrics imply about God? (When we “live in charity and steadfast love” that is the same as God “living in you.”) You may have other favorite songs you’d like to discuss in this way.

### DAY THREE: The Light Within and Human Sinfulness - II

Review with the class what was learned about the Holy Spirit/Spirit from the Biblical passages read last time.

**BIBLE STUDY.** Let's continue looking at Biblical passages that speak of the Holy Spirit.

Luke 11:9-13. From a Quaker point of view: What kinds of things are we asking and searching for? What does it mean to be given or to find these things? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in this? (Inner guidance from the Light Within is a great gift from God.) Why do you need to search if you have already got the Light Within? (To get in touch with it; to activate it.) A passage like this speaks so clearly to Friends of inner guidance from the Light Within. Now let's consider: what might a fundamentalist read in this passage? (Seeking and finding might mean that we need to ask Jesus to come into our lives.) Experientially, how might experiencing the Light Within and experiencing Jesus coming into your life be similar or different?

Acts 2:1-21, 32-33, 37-39. From a Quaker point of view: What is happening here? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in this? What kind of thing is the Holy Spirit shown to be here? What do you see in these passages that seems to justify some Quaker beliefs and practices? (As in Mark 13:11, the Holy Spirit descends upon people and causes them to speak. This might justify our notion of being moved to speak in Meeting by the Spirit, though we don't believe this happens in foreign tongues – or seems so out of control! We do believe that this Spirit is given to all. Receiving the Spirit experientially (again, not usually this dramatically) is what Quakers call “baptism” (2:38). Does this passage remind anyone of any other Christian sects, perhaps fundamentalist? (Pentecostalism is based on this event.) Does this mean that Quakers have some kind of kinship with Pentecostalism? (Maybe; discuss.)

Friends, that all views are okay among Friends. We are open, but there are limits.)

What else guides, or sets limits within which Friends can be creative? (Testimonies. The examples of famous Friends like George Fox, Lucretia Mott, etc. and the actions of well-known Quaker organizations like AFSC, etc.)

How would you summarize how religious education works among Friends? (There is a balance of inner and outer guidance. But we can *never* give up listening to our Inner Guide. Give that up and we have lost what is most essential.)

Tolerating a diversity of views may make us look weaker, but it is a kind of strength. What strengths can you think of? (Strengths to consider: it is a strength to learn from each other and not just one person; we are open to new leadings for a constantly changing world; recognizing that you don't possess all the truth can produce an appropriate modesty-the truth about God, etc. has to be greater than any of our ideas about it; openness to many ideas helps us to include others and avoid alienating people.)

I think one of the most wonderful things about Quakerism is that we believe that the Spirit can speak through anyone-new to Meeting or established Friend, young or old, etc. Adults think it is terrific when a child or youth speaks in Meeting. Have any of you ever spoken in Meeting? (If so, the teacher can invite him/her to talk about it if willing.) The rest of you, have you ever considered speaking in Meeting? What do you think about the idea of speaking in Meeting? (This occasioned a very honest discussion of hesitations and reluctances. The teacher could reaffirm that the Spirit can and does speak through anyone, regardless of age, and that adults sometimes struggle over speaking, too.)

How about Queries as part of religious education? (Teachers should prepare handouts with one or more queries from their own Faith and Practice for students to look at and discuss. We read and discussed Query #1 from Baltimore Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice: "Are meetings for worship held in expectant waiting for Divine guidance? Are Friends encouraged to share spiritual insights? Are special gifts of ministry recognized and encouraged?.....") Discuss: What kind of a thing is a Query? Is this just a neutral question? (It both guides and questions; it is not a neutral question. It encourages us to seek, but in a certain way. Clearly, it is not the case that anything goes among

Galatians 5:16-26. What opposition or conflict is being discussed here? (Flesh and Spirit.) Take another look – what is really meant by the term "flesh" here? (The Biblical use of the word "flesh" here doesn't seem to correspond to our modern word "flesh"; this Biblical passage is not an anti-body statement. "Flesh" seems to refer to self-centeredness, selfishness, and the immoral behavior that follows from it. This is especially clear when the list of behaviors associated with the flesh is contrasted with the list associated with the Spirit.) What behaviors are associated with the presence of the Spirit? How do these relate to virtues that Quakers emphasize?

John 14:15-17, 25-26. How does this justify Quaker beliefs? (It states that, the Advocate, the Holy Spirit is being left with us after Jesus is no longer present in the world. Note that "you know him, because he abides in you.") What does this Advocate do? (Teaches us.)

(Many other passages might be considered, including: John 1:1-9, 16:12-15; I Cor 2:10-16, 3:16, 12:4-11; II Cor 3:17-18; Gal 4:6-7.)

What is the take-home message you get from reading passages on the Spirit in the Bible? (Write on the board or paper as students or you voice ideas. Ours ideas were:)

- The Bible can be interpreted in many ways.
- The Spirit exists; it guides us, is in us.
- No one owns the Bible, neither fundamentalists nor Quakers. No one has exclusive rights over it, exclusive claim on it.
- Quakers can find as much justification for our beliefs in the Bible as any other group.

### DAY FOUR: Religious Education

**DISCUSSION:** What do you think are the implications for religious education of Quaker belief in the Light Within and fundamentalist belief in human sinfulness? In other words, if you believe in the Light Within, or in human sinfulness, how will you want to educate your children religiously? (Invite suggestions from your class. Here are some initial ideas that our class came up with; you could use them to shape leading questions to your class if they lack ideas):

<u>Quaker Religious Education</u>	<u>Fundamentalist Religious Education</u>
We are invited to explore everything: Bible, nature, science, your own thoughts and feelings.	You need to be taught especially about Jesus, and the Bible as interpreted from a fundamentalist viewpoint.
Trust the Light Within to guide you.	Because of human sinfulness, you can't really trust thoughts that come to you - unless they lead to Jesus.
You need to discover the Light Within before you can use it.	You need to have guidance from your church, the Bible as interpreted by your church, the church minister.
This points towards Meeting for Worship as a process by which the Light Within educates us.	In worship, you are given the words with which to pray and sing; you listen to what is read to you from the Bible and to the words of the minister

What about authority? Are we saying that fundamentalists have several sources of external authority (Bible, minister, etc.) and we Quakers have none? What is religious

authority among Friends? Is there one? Does anything go? (Again, invite responses from your class. Here are some ideas from our class:)

Authority is the Spirit within us and among us. It's in me but also in others.

Can we always trust everything that we think comes to us from the Spirit? (No, we could always be wrong in what we think we hear. There is the selfish "flesh" side of us that we could think is Spirit but might really be our own personal wishes.)

How do you discern what is truly of Spirit? (There is a balance between listening to the Inner Guide and listening to our Friends community. This is one function of the corporate dimension of worship in Meeting for Worship. This is also why we have Clearness Committees.) How does a Clearness Committee work? (Discuss)

What is our understanding of what goes on in Meeting for Worship? (Meeting for Worship teaches.) What is the role of verbal ministry in Meeting for Worship? (We learn also from listening to others speak as they are moved by the Light Within.) What about the variety of views that sometimes come out during Meeting for Worship? (Maybe they are all aspects of Truth. We all have limited "measures" of Truth, maybe we need further Light.)

Other than our belief in the Light Within, Friends avoid doctrinal formulations of our beliefs. We welcome a variety of ways of speaking Truth. Fundamentalists are just the opposite; they have creeds, clear doctrines, frequently quoted scripture passages. They seem to have a unity that we lack. Do you think Friends' avoidance of doctrine and our openness to the different ideas and leadings that come out in Meeting for Worship and elsewhere are a weakness or a strength? (Our youth felt our way is messier and also harder - there are always a lot of judgment calls to make.)