

**Philosophers on Quakerism:
reason's role in a particular religion**

by

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Abstract

Chapter 1 is an introduction. I will examine the writings about Quakers of More, Locke, Leibniz and Hume, whether or not the writings are themselves philosophy. I explain why, except for what I say about them in chapter 1, Anne Conway, Princess Elisabeth and Spinoza are not otherwise within the scope of the thesis.

Chapter 2 examines More's three criticisms of Quakers.

(1) Quaking is not a guide to divine inspiration or truth. He was right about this, but the objection became less important as Quakers stopped quaking.

(2) By ignoring reason and conscience, Quakers leave themselves open to supposed inspirations which are contrary to reason and good manners. Quakers behave badly, which is evidence that their supposed inspirations are not genuine. This is essentially the same objection as is made by Locke and Leibniz, whose writings we examine in chapter 2.

(3) The Quakers' emphasis on Christ within (the light within) leads them to deny Christ without, the external, historical man who died, was resurrected, and is now in heaven. They deny what More considers to be essential to Christian faith. More's interpretation of the early Quakers was correct, as his example of William Smith's Quaker primer for children proves. Keith sought to answer More's objection in an appendix to the second edition of his *Immediate Revelation*. As the Quakers' thinking developed and (in the case of Smith) was posthumously 'clarified' i.e. corrected, they and More came to agree on the necessity of both Christ within and Christ without. So this objection also became less important.

Chapter 3 examines the writings of Locke and Leibniz, including their correspondence, relating to Quakers. Did Quakers really believe that their inspirations should be accepted without any check or test involving reason or scripture? Yes, as Barclay's discussion of his second proposition in the *Apology* shows. Both Locke and Leibniz studied works by Barclay. Locke became very close friends with the Quaker, Benjamin Furly, but his consistent position was that Quakers were enthusiasts and, because of their refusal to test apparent inspirations using reason, vulnerable to delusions. Leibniz expressed the same position most clearly in a short piece on apologetic work drafted, perhaps, in 1685. Locke's views were most fully expressed in Book four, chapter 19 ('*Of Enthusiasm*') of the 1700 edition of his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, with which Leibniz agreed in this *New Essays*.

More, Locke and Leibniz were each Christians, and each was concerned to defend Christianity from Quaker enthusiasm. Chapter 4 examines Hume's writings about Quakers in his essay "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm", his *History* and a letter to the Quaker Elizabeth Shackleton. His portrait of early Quaker enthusiasm is very similar to that of his predecessors: the early Quakers were deluded enthusiasts whose pride led them to think they communicated directly with God. But his discussion serves quite a different purpose. Hume's criticism of early Quaker excesses implies that they were foolish to follow biblical precepts. His discussion of the Quakers also implies that in a religious body in which belief is no longer supported by either superstition and priests, or the fires of enthusiasm, only reason remains, and belief in Christianity will fall away, leaving only something like deism or Confucianism.

My mum surprised me when she asked me to organize a Quaker funeral
for her. My dad is still firmly with us. This is for them.

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Abbreviations

A	Series A of G. W. Leibniz, <i>Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe</i> ¹
Apology	Robert Barclay, <i>An Apology for the True Christian Divinity</i>
Correspondence	John Locke, <i>The Correspondence of John Locke</i>
Divine Dialogues	Henry More, <i>Divine Dialogues Containing sundry Disquisitions & Instructions Concerning the Attributes of God and his Providence in the World</i>
Early Draft	John Locke, <i>An Early Draft of Locke's Essay: Together with Excerpts from His Journals</i>
Enthusiasmus Triumphatus	Henry More, <i>Enthusiasmus Triumphatus, or, A Discourse of the Nature, Causes, Kinds, and Cure, of Enthusiasme</i>
Essay	John Locke, <i>An Essay concerning Human Understanding</i>
History	Volume 6 of Hume's <i>The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688</i>
Immediate Revelation	George Keith, <i>Immediate Revelation</i>
Letter	Hume's letter to Elizabeth Shackleton, the substantive parts of which are transcribed below.
Library	John Locke, <i>The Library of John Locke</i>
Life	Richard Ward, <i>The Life of Henry More</i>
Mastix	More's letter to a private friend under the nom de plume "Mastix", in <i>Enthusiasmus Triumphatus</i>
Grand Mystery of Godliness	Henry More, <i>An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness</i>
New Essays	G.W. Leibniz, <i>New Essays on Human Understanding</i>
On God and Religion	G.W. Leibniz, <i>Leibniz on God and Religion: A Reader</i>
Possibility and Necessity	Robert Barclay, <i>The Possibility and Necessity of the Inward Immediate Revelation of the Spirit of God</i>
Scholia	Henry More, <i>Scholia on the fifth Dialogue</i> , added to the <i>Divine Dialogues</i>
SE	David Hume, "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm", in <i>Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary: A Critical Edition</i> .

¹ Citations to A are by way of series and volume e.g. 'A II 3' means A, series II, volume 3.

The Conway Letters

Anne Conway, *The Conway Letters: The Correspondence of Anne, Viscountess Conway, Henry More, and Their Friends 1642-1684*

Writings on Religion

John Locke, *John Locke: Writings on Religion*

Chapter One: Introduction

My interest is in the writings of philosophers about Quakerism, including writing that is theological or historical rather than philosophical. What these philosophers say when they are not doing philosophy is interesting – and integrated with, rather than in a discrete silo from, their more philosophical work. My initial motivation was personal: having studied a lot of philosophy when I was younger, I later became a Quaker. But this is, of course, an academic text. One thing it shows is that the more intellectual Quakers who interacted with, or were read by, the philosophers whose work we examine had an approach which would not be shared by either philosophers or Quakers today.

Henry More – chapter 2

The Cambridge philosopher and theologian Henry More (1614-1687) wrote about Quakerism, which he viewed as being one instance of enthusiasm, on a number of occasions. He has three main criticisms of Quakers. The first is that quaking is not a guide to truth. His third is that the Quakers' focus on the light within – on Christ within – neglects Christ the man, the external, historical figure whose life is recorded in the Gospels and whose death (More thought) is essential to our salvation. But it is his second criticism that will be most important here. This is that by ignoring the light of reason and conscience, Quakers have no way to tell genuine inspirations apart from supposed inspirations which are not divinely inspired, and which may even have come from the devil. Part of More's reason for thinking that Quakers are not divinely inspired is that they behave so badly. More's second criticism flows through much of the thesis. Both Locke and Leibniz made the same criticism.

John Locke and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz – chapter 3

John Locke (1632-1704) added a chapter on enthusiasm to the fourth edition of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, which clearly has Quaker doctrines regarding the light within as its (main) target. We know from his early correspondence that he attended some of James Naylor's examination in Westminster Hall, and that he then thought of Quakers as liars and deceivers. He later became a particularly close friend of the Quaker Benjamin Furly. Anstey has argued persuasively that notes he made in December 1676 were a response to Barclay's *The Possibility and Necessity of the Inward Revelation of the Spirit of God*. But the substance of the views that he expressed about enthusiasm in Draft A of the *Essay* in 1671, and in his journal in 1682, did not change as a result of his contact with Friends or his study of their writings.

The chapter on enthusiasm which he added to the *Essay* is richer and more developed than More's writings. But it makes the same criticism of Quakers as More did. Unless we rely on reason to distinguish between those seeming immediate inspirations which are genuine and those which are not, we will take the ungrounded fancies of our brain or delusions from Satan to be immediate inspirations from God. Locke does not say in the *Essay* exactly what "odd Opinions and extravagant Actions" (IV.xix.8) the Quakers have been led to as a result of this failure to rely on reason. He is more tactful than More, who more than once lists their bad behaviour. But like More, he argues that the fruits of their supposed inspirations show that their inspirations are not genuinely from God.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646 – 1716) wrote about the Quakers. He made notes on Barclay's *Apology* and wrote a short piece in response to reading of Penn's account of his travels in Holland and Germany. In his *New Essays on Human Understanding* he agrees with Locke's chapter on enthusiasm in the *Essay*. From the perspective of this project, some brief preparatory remarks in relation to apologetic works, written perhaps in 1685, are his most

interesting text. Leibniz crisply expresses the view that it is only through reason that we can distinguish God's word from the word of a deceiver, and that this is why Quakers (among others) take whatever comes to mind to be a dictate of God's. It is clear from his other texts that he too thinks that one can tell from the fruits of the Quakers' supposed immediate inspirations - in their behaviour - that they are no such thing.

David Hume – chapter 4

David Hume (1711-1776) wrote an essay "Superstition and Enthusiasm" which has Quakerism as one of its main targets, and provides a history of the early Quakers in his *History*. Hume applies his account of enthusiasm to the past in his history of the Quakers. I examine these texts, and a letter he wrote to Elizabeth Shackleton in response to her criticisms about them. His treatment of the Quakers in the *History* is ironic and one reason to read it is that it is sometimes funny. It is also sympathetic: Hume is clear that the early Quakers were persecuted. He is also very clear that there is no such thing as the Quakers' supposed light within. But it is interesting that Hume, who was often been accused of being a deist himself, told Elizabeth Shackleton that "When I said that the Quakers may, in some respects, be regarded as Deists, I thought that I was doing them the greatest honour, by putting them on the same footing with Socrates, Plato, Cicero, Seneca, and the wisest men in all ages".

Philosophers Not Covered Below

Having introduced the topic of this thesis, I now say something about what the following chapters do not cover.

Anne Conway

Lady Anne Conway (1631-1679) was a close friend of More and corresponded with him. She might seem to be an obvious candidate for a chapter to herself. She was a philosopher: her *Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* was published posthumously. And she became a Quaker in 1677. However she did not write about Quakerism except in her correspondence. That correspondence has already been explored extensively. Her letters are extremely interesting, revealing much about her contacts with and attitudes towards individual Quakers. But they include little about her understanding of Quakerism and, to the extent that they do, this is in letters to More in which she registers her disagreement with his assessment of Quakerism. I do not refer to these letters, except to the extent that they are relevant to the chapter on More.

Princess Elisabeth

Princess Elisabeth might also seem to be a candidate for inclusion. She was a philosopher. A correspondent with Descartes, her objections to his dualism will continue to be taught to undergraduates for as long as they are taught about Cartesian dualism.¹ She also had extensive

¹ See Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes, *The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes*. There is a brief introduction to Princess Elisabeth and her correspondence with Descartes in Bernard Williams, *Descartes: the project of pure enquiry*, pp. 7-8.

contact with Quakers. Elisabeth corresponded with Quakers such as Stephen Crisp, George Fox, Benjamin Furly, William Penn and, especially, Robert Barclay.¹ Elisabeth was abbess at Herford, and she was visited at Herford abbey: in the spring of 1676 by Barclay and Furly; in August 1677 by Barclay, Penn, Keith and Furly; and in September 1677 by Penn, Keith and Furly.²

Shapiro says that though Barclay and Penn both attempted to gain Elisabeth as a convert, she appears not to have been interested in engaging them philosophically or theologically.³ That is not of course to say that she did not engage, and her letters manifest a deep and direct spiritual engagement. She said to Barclay in her letter of 21/31 July 1676 that “I confess myself still spiritually very poor and naked. All my happiness is that I do know that I am so”.⁴ In response to Barclay’s exhortations in his letter of 6 September 1676 she says, in her letter of 6 November 1676, that “silent waiting is no more in my power than flying”.⁵ Barclay’s letter of 24 December 1676 is full of spiritual direction rather than attempts to persuade her intellectually. Indeed Barclay is clear that the inward silence that she needs is “hard to the natural mind”, and is especially hard to those who have studied a “great variety of notions”

¹ Ebbersmeyer, “An Inventory of the Extant Correspondence of Elisabeth of Bohemia, Princess Palatine (1618–1680)”, p. 331.

Some of these letters are printed in the Appendix of Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes, *The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes*. As Ebbersmeyer points out (p. 332, footnote 17), some of the letters in this edition have been misdated. It is also worth noting, since it is not immediately obvious, that the relevant letters in *The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes* are not always in chronological order: e.g. Elisabeth’s letter of 1/11 March 1677 to Barclay (pp. 204–205) is only printed after her letter to Furly of 6/16 July 1677 (pp. 203–204).

One of the other relevant letters is in Gummere, “Letter from William Penn to Elizabeth, Princess Palatine, Abbess of the Protestant Convent of Hereford, 1677, with an Introduction”.

² Ebbersmeyer, “An Inventory of the Extant Correspondence of Elisabeth of Bohemia, Princess Palatine (1618–1680)”, pp. 395 and 397.

³ Lisa Shapiro, “Elisabeth, Princess of Bohemia”, see section 3.

⁴ Elisabeth to Barclay, 21/31 July 1676, *The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes*, p. 188.

⁵ Elisabeth to Barclay, 6 November 1676, *The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes*, p. 190.

and have worked to acquire “the wisdom and knowledge of this world”. Her “eminency” also makes the task harder.¹

In these letters Barclay views her learning as a hindrance to her spiritual development, rather than seeking to engage with her intellectually. Indeed, he says that understanding the necessity of self-denial will not help her, unless she also practices it.² Correspondingly, Elisabeth’s letter to Barclay of 1/11 March 1677 about why she cannot become a Quaker is not part of an intellectual exchange. She says that she could only follow Countess Conway if she had the same conviction, and that she does not believe anyone to be infallible: “I am not apt to believe anyone infallible though he be a true regenerated child of God. Only the Lord Jesus Christ had the spirit imparted without measure. Others have their measures and limits.”³ The point I take it is that she cannot become a Quaker merely because others have, or merely because of her high regard for Barclay himself.⁴ In her letter of 4/14 September 1677 to Penn, Elisabeth refers to Barclay’s *Apology*, but all she says is that “good old Dury, in whom I did not expect so much ingenuity” had “lately written a book, entitled *Le Veritable Chretien*, that does speak”.⁵ But she does not engage – either positively or in criticism – with the book’s substance.

Elisabeth did not write about the Quakers, and so – interesting as I hope this interlude has been - she does not fall within the scope of what follows.

¹ Barclay to Elisabeth, 24 December 1676, *The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes*, p. 193.

² Barclay to Elisabeth, 24 December 1676, *The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes*, p. 195.

³ Elisabeth to Barclay, 1/11 March 1677, p. 204.

⁴ The best and most comprehensive account of the contacts between Quakers and Princess Elisabeth I have found remains Elton Trueblood, *Robert Barclay*, pp. 85 – 89. More recently, Sarah Hutton’s “Princess Elisabeth and Anne Conway (1631–1679): the Interconnected Circles of Two Philosophical Women” contains a brief discussion of some of Elisabeth’s contacts with Quakers.

⁵ Elisabeth to Penn, 4/14 September 1677, p. 214.

Benedict De Spinoza

Benedict De Spinoza (1632—1677) might seem to be a candidate for inclusion. Scholars have speculated about the possibility that he had contact with Quakers, and there is a particularly helpful overview in Steven Nadler's *Spinoza: A Life*.¹

William Ames, the leader of the Quaker mission in Amsterdam, wrote to Margaret Fell in April 1657:

Theare is a Jew at amsterdam that by the Jews is Cast out (as he himself and others sayeth) because he owneth no other teacher but the light and he sent for me and I spoke toe him and he was pretty tender and doth owne all that is spoken; and he sayde tow read of moses and the prophets without was nothing tow him except he came toe know it within; and soe the name of Christ it is like he doth owne: I gave order that one of the duch Copyes of thy book should be given toe him and he sent me word he would Come toe oure meeting but in the mean time I was Imprisoned.²

As Popkin notes, Henry Cadbury suggested that the Jew who had been cast out was Spinoza (who had been issued a writ of *herem*, ban or excommunication in 1656). Popkin speculated that Spinoza had translated two of Fell's pamphlets into Hebrew, and that Spinoza's own views on the Bible in *Tractatus-Theologico-Politicus* may have been influenced in detail by the views of the Quaker Samuel Fisher.³ Whether or not these hypotheses are correct, Spinoza did not write about the Quakers. Popkin suggests Spinoza often uses Quaker terminology about spirit, light and inward knowledge.⁴ But the specific passage he refers to simply mentions the idea that God may be spirit or light among various other ideas:

¹ Pages 187 – 192. Also see Richard H. Popkin, *Spinoza*.

² Richard H. Popkin, "Spinoza's Relations with the Quakers in Amsterdam", p. 15.

³ Richard H. Popkin, "Spinoza's Relations with the Quakers in Amsterdam", *passim*.

⁴ Richard H. Popkin, "Spinoza's Relations with the Quakers in Amsterdam", pp. 26 – 28.

As to the question of what God, the exemplar of true life, really is, whether he is fire, or spirit, or light, or thought, or something else, this is irrelevant to faith.¹

Even if there is an allusion here to Quaker ideas, Spinoza's concern is not to discuss those ideas but to say that they are irrelevant to what matters. True piety is the simple message that one must love God, and love one's neighbour's as oneself. Speculative doctrines such as the ideas he lists can be held as a matter of individual conscience, without any detriment to true piety properly understood.² So even if there is a reference here to Quaker ideas, this passage is not a discussion of them.

Spinoza did not write about the Quakers, and so falls outside the scope of what follows.

¹ I should note that this is a more modern translation than the one Popkin referred to. It is in Steven Nadler, "Baruch Spinoza", at section 3.1.

² I draw here on Nadler's exposition of Spinoza's views in "Baruch Spinoza", at section 3.1.

Chapter Two: Henry More

Chronology

1614	More is born.
1656	<i>Enthusiasmus Triumphatus, or, A Discourse of the Nature, Causes, Kinds, and Cure, of Enthusiasme.</i> More's letter to a private friend under the nom de plume "Mastix" published.
1660	<i>An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness.</i>
1668	<i>Divine Dialogues Containing sundry Disquisitions & Instructions Concerning the Attributes of God and his Providence in the World.</i>
From 1674	More meets various Quakers including Barclay, Keith, Penn, Fox and Pennington.
1675	More's letter of 22 May to Penn.
1675	Second edition of Keith's <i>Immediate Revelation</i> , with an Appendix addressing various of More's objections.
1677	Anne Conway becomes a Quaker.
23 February 1679	Anne Conway dies.
1679	Scholia added to the <i>Divine Dialogues</i> .
1 September 1687	More dies.

Henry More (1614-1687) was a theologian and philosopher. He was both elected Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge and ordained in 1641.

In this chapter I aim to do something which has not been done before: outline his writing about Quakerism, and offer an assessment of his arguments. More often criticised Quakerism in his writings, starting with *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus, or, A Discourse of the Nature,*

Causes, Kinds, and Cure, of Enthusiasme (published in 1656). More's letter to a private friend under the nom de plume "Mastix" (meaning scourge) contained criticisms of the Quakers (also published in 1656, in the second edition of *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*). He returned to the topic in *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness* (published in 1660) and there are brief comments on the Quakers in the fifth dialogue of *Divine Dialogues Containing sundry Disquisitions & Instructions Concerning the Attributes of God and his Providence in the World* (first published in 1668).

All of these writings predate the personal contact with Quakers that he had, starting in 1674, as a result of the persuasion of Anne Conway. Conway was originally More's pupil. As a woman, she was unable to attend a university, and he instructed her by letter. Their correspondence began in 1650, and they remained friends until Conway's death in 1679.

Conway was a philosopher: her *Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* was published posthumously. She was visited by George Fox, George Keith, William Penn, Isaac Pennington and Robert Barclay in the period from 1675 until her death.¹ She became a Quaker in 1677. Prior to this, she had encouraged More to have personal contact with Quakers. As a result he had extensive contact with them - meeting Robert Barclay, George Keith, William Penn, George Whitehead, John Whitehead, and George Fox - beginning in 1674.² He read Quaker texts, by Penn and Isaac Pennington, Keith's *Immediate Revelation* and Barclay's *Apology*. He wrote a long letter to William Penn, from Anne Conway's home, Ragley, in 1675 and sent objections to Keith's *Immediate Revelation*, to which Keith responded in the second edition of that text published in 1676.

His criticisms of Quakerism softened after his contact with Quakers, their attempts to address his concerns, and Conway's attempts to show him that he had misunderstood them. The long

¹ Sarah Hutton, *Anne Conway: A Woman Philosopher*, p. 178.

² *The Conway Letters*, pp. 391, 404, 413, 414, and 436.

note, *Scholia on the fifth Dialogue*, which he added to the Latin edition of *Divine Dialogues* in 1679 contains his most mature and considered assessment of Quakerism.

More's assessment from 1656 (*Mastix*) to 1678 (*Scholia*) was that Quakerism was a mixture of good and bad. Included in the good was "the close keeping to the light within, and the not offending in the least manner the dictates of our consciences, but to walk evenly and sincerely before God and man".¹ Indeed the good things in Quakerism were very good. Quakers insisted that everyone needs to "put on the new man which is created in righteousness and true holiness, ... that God will enable us to do all this if we but cordially set ourselves to it, and that unless we do this, all the rest of our Religion profits us nothing" – which things, More says, "are most true and precious".² However it is also notable that, as early as 1656, More considered that the abominable and dangerous aspect of Quakerism was "the slighting of the history of Christ and making a mere Allegory of it, thereby voiding all that wisdom of God that is contained in the mystery of Christianity, as it refers to the very person of Christ".³ As we shall see, although More changed his view of Quakerism over the years, he remained steadfast in his view that the early Quakers had been Familists.

Objection 1 - Quaking

As various scholars have emphasised, the early Quakers quaked. Their name 'Quaker' derived from their behavior – trembling and shaking during their worship. Indeed, they considered that "Quaking was an outward manifestation of the inward workings of the power of God".⁴ Over time, their worship quieted down, and quaking largely ceased.⁵ But observing a meeting

¹ *Mastix*, section 16.

² *Mastix*, section 17. I have modernised More's spelling.

³ *Mastix*, section 16. Again, I have modernised More's spelling.

⁴ Barry Reay, *The Quakers and the English Revolution*, p. 35.

⁵ Richard C. Allen and Rosemary Anne Moore, *The Quakers, 1656-1723: The Evolution of an Alternative Community*, pp. 149-150.

in 1654, Parliamentarians were astonished by the way Quakers shook, making their chairs and stools tremble.¹

More's first criticism of Quakerism, made as early as 1656 in *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*, is that quaking is not a guide to divine inspiration or truth. He argued that although deluded souls take quaking to be an infallible sign that they are actuated by the spirit of God, it may in reality only be an effect of their melancholy. For the melancholic have strong passions, and trembling is caused by extreme fear, love, and veneration (which is, he says, a mixture of fear and love).² The enthusiast may intensify his melancholic intoxications "by solemn silence and intense and earnest meditation"³, imagining that his tremblings are "extraordinary visits of the Deity, and illapses of the holy Ghost into his Soul".⁴ He made the same criticism in the *Grand Mystery of Godliness*: quaking is not a certain sign of the Spirit of God.⁵

My assessment of this point is that it is clearly correct. Quaking or trembling may have many causes, including psychological or physiological causes, and so cannot be regarded as a sure sign of divine inspiration.

Objection 2 – The Light Within

One objection made by More against Quakers, which is developed in detail in the *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, centres on the notion of the light within. More is clear that there is a light within us, and that properly understood the light within means the light of reason and conscience. By ignoring the light of reason and conscience, Quakers leave themselves open to

¹ Larry Ingle, *First among Friends: George Fox and the Creation of Quakerism*, p 119.

² *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*, section 25.

³ *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*, section 29.

⁴ *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*, section 25.

⁵ *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, Book X, chapter xiii, section 3. In the fifth of the *Divine Dialogues* he mentions falling into trances and quakings as sources of deceit (p. 413).

supposed inspirations which are contrary to reason and good manners. These supposed inspirations are delusions: no genuine revelation can be contrary to reason. They are not divine but diabolical in origin. This is made clear, More argues, by the misconduct and bad behaviour they lead Quakers to engage in.

In Book III, chapter ix, More speaks of the Lamp of God within us as being the dictates of reason and humanity. By ignoring the dictates of reason and humanity, the Quakers make themselves vulnerable to delusive spirits and to the devil.¹ As a result, they “act merely upon *blind impulses*” instead of the “*tender touches of Spirit ... warrantable suggestions of Reason and Natural Conscience, or the laudable customs of ... [their] education*”.² Some Quakers are driven by these impulses to act in ways that are vile, sordid, uncivil, ridiculous and indeed wicked and impious.³

Book VIII, chapter xii, is entitled “Of the Light within us and of the Operations of the Spirit”. More is clear that those Spiritualists who talk of the Light within us can in reality only mean the Light of Reason and Conscience.⁴ In section 2 he says that those who talk of ‘the Light within them’ must understand by that “an accountable and rational Conscience within them”.⁵

More argues against those who talk of the light within and boast that they need nothing external to them to guide and support them⁶, with what we might call an externalist understanding of the rational conscience within us, emphasising that it takes “information” from what is “external” to us.⁷ It is obvious, he says, that this Lamp of God that burns in us is fed and nourished by external objects - both the outward Book of Nature and external books,

¹ *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, Book III, chapter ix, section 5.

² *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, Book III, chapter ix, section 6.

³ *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, Book III, chapter ix, section 5.

⁴ *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, Book VIII, chapter xii, sections 1 and 5.

⁵ *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, Book VIII, chapter xii, section 2.

⁶ *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, Book VIII, chapter xii, section 1.

⁷ *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, Book VIII, chapter xii, section 2.

especially Holy Scriptures.¹ More argues that the practice of those who emphasise the light within shows that they accept that it may be informed by something which is external to us, since they quote the Bible, write pamphlets and attend assemblies to listen to others.² All of these are good points, points which would lead a more sympathetic author to suspect that he had misunderstood those he was criticising when attributing to them the view that “they want nothing without to be their Guide and Support”.³ Indeed, that would mean that they thought that they had no need of God, except to the extent that they considered that God is within.

Book X, chapter xiii, is a sustained discussion of the Quakers, in the form of a plea to the better minded among them to mend their ways. (The following summary of the chapter deliberately leaves out More’s discussion of what he considers to be the Quakers’ failure to believe in the historical truth of the Gospel, as I deal with More’s arguments on this point in the next section.) More makes clear that in his view, the Quakers have fallen into apostasy.⁴ They have abandoned their reason and good manners, and their conduct is not the fruit of the Spirit of God.⁵ They disrespect their betters, contest with magistrates, say *Thou* instead of *you* and keep their hats on when others politely take them off.⁶ They revile Ministers while they are in the pulpit, disturbing public worship.⁷ They have fallen into spiritual pride, taking egotistical pleasure in being “separate and peculiar” and in thinking themselves wiser and

¹ *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, Book VIII, chapter xii, sections 2 and 3.

² *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, Book VIII, chapter xii, section 4.

³ *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, Book VIII, chapter xii, section 1.

⁴ *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, Book X, chapter xiii, section 2.

⁵ *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, Book X, chapter xiii, section 2.

⁶ *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, Book X, chapter xiii, section 2. In the same section, More compares the Quakers with Diogenes, saying they have chosen to be “proud Cynics” rather than “civil Christians”. The point of the comparison is, perhaps, that that Diogenes was willing to act against convention, in ways that his contemporaries considered shameful (eating in the marketplace), and in ways that would still be considered shameful (masturbating in the marketplace), and to attempt to justify his outrageous misbehaviour. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Book 6, Chapter 69.

⁷ *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, Book X, chapter xiii, section 6.

holier than other men.¹ Their “pretended inspirations are not divine but diabolical”.² More is again clear that there is such a thing as “the Light within me”, but is also again clear that it is “my Reason and Conscience”.³ If, as More hopes, Quakers are to return to Christ, they need to be wary of (among other things) “thinking that the gift of the Spirit can be any Revelation that is contrary to Reason or the acknowledged History of Christ”.⁴

More had similarly said that the Holy Spirit never suggests anything to anyone that is inconsistent with Reason in *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*, in a passage in which he also explains what he means by Reason. The passage occurs in the context of More’s discussion of the cure for enthusiasm. The best medicine is a combination of temperance, humility and reason.⁵ More writes:

By *Reason* I understand so settled and cautious a Composure of mind, as will suspect every high flown and forward fancy that endeavours to carry away the assent before deliberate examination; she not enduring to be gulled by the vigour or garishness of the representation, nor at all to be born down by the weight or strength of it; but patiently to try it by the known Faculties of the Soul, which are either the *Common notions* that all men in their wits agree upon, or the *Evidence of outward Sense*, or else a *clear and distinct Deduction from these*. Whatever is not agreeable to these three is *Fancy*, which testifies nothing of the Truth or Existence of any thing, and therefore ought not, nor cannot be assented to by any but mad men or fools. . . . Nor is there any thing the holy Spirit did ever suggest to any man but it was agreeable to, if not demonstrable from, what we call *Reason*.⁶

¹ *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, Book X, chapter xiii, section 2. Also see sections 5 and 10.

² *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, Book X, chapter xiii, section 4.

³ *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, Book X, chapter xiii, section 7.

⁴ *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, Book X, chapter xiii, section 10.

⁵ *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*, section 51.

⁶ *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*, section 54. I have modernised the spelling.

I turn now from exposition of More's criticism to assessment.

First, if Quaker doctrine or practice was to simply accept the thoughts that occurred to them in Meeting for Worship without filter or assessment, then the plain risk is that random, false or non-sensical thoughts would be counted as divine inspirations. In the passage just quoted, More is clear that one should not simply accept every fancy that occurs in one's mind because of its vigour or garishness, or because of its weight or strength. The point might be put as follows: if one assents to propositions merely on the basis of the force and vivacity of mental representations, there is a clear risk that we will be led into error. Mental images may be forceful and vivacious for reasons that are unrelated to their accuracy – if they are the result of a disturbed mental state, the use of illicit drugs, a chemical imbalance in the brain or (as More would put it) induced by the devil. More's point is I think correct and can be made, as indeed I made it above, even if we move away from his imagist conception of mental representations: if Quaker doctrine or practice was to simply accept the thoughts that occurred to them in Meeting for Worship without filter or assessment, then the plain risk is that random, false or non-sensical thoughts would be counted as divine inspirations. So apparent inspirations need to be tested in some way, and carefully considered, rather than simply accepted on the basis of their forcefulness. Surprising thoughts, thoughts that do not fit with one's preconceptions, may pass this test. One may be brought to see things that one would not previously have accepted (e.g. about one's own behaviour) as a result of promptings in Meeting for Worship. But those thoughts or promptings do need to be tested in some way, rather than simply accepted because of the force with which they intrude. On the face of it, that testing should involve our reason and conscience (even if we do not understand these in the same way as More), as well as the method of collective discernment discussed in the next paragraph. One might have thought that the Quakers of More's day would have agreed with him that one's

reason and conscience are God given talents¹ and indeed that we should not simply disregard them when faced with apparent inspirations.² Quakers today are likely to say that we do not, and should not, leave our critical faculties at the door when entering Meeting for Worship. In any event, apparent inspirations - the apparent promptings of love and truth³ – need to be tested.

Since 1656, when Fox extended the system of monthly meetings to the entire country, that testing has been partly collective rather than merely an individual check against one's own reason and conscience. Ingle says that Fox extended the system of monthly meetings following the Naylor affair in order to address the problem of detecting when a person spoke falsely. There was a need to tell authentic promptings from fraudulent illusions, although as presented by Ingle it is notable that the driver for the change was not a worry about how one can tell in one's own case whether one's apparent promptings are authentic rather than illusory. That does not seem to have been Fox's worry, at least in his own case. Rather his concern was how Quakers could tell if fluent speakers (those of "fair or excellent speech"⁴) were led by the promptings of the inward Christ or the power of the devil.⁵ But even if that is an accurate assessment of the origins of collective discernment, what has evolved is a practice by which an individual who considers that their promptings may be genuine is able to check – by submitting to the authority of collective discernment – whether or not they are misled.⁶

¹ *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, Book III, chapter ix, section 5.

² One might have thought the Quakers of More's day would have agreed that we should not put reason to one side when faced with an apparent inspiration. However, as we will see, Barclay, in the second proposition of his *Apology* denied that apparent inspirations need to be, or should be, tested using reason.

³ *Advices and Queries*, 1.02, paragraph 1. Library of the Society of Friends, *Quaker Faith & Practice*.

⁴ Fox, *Works*, 7:120-29. Quoted by H. Larry Ingle, *First Among Friends*, p. 151.

⁵ Ingle, *First Among Friends*, pp. 150-152. Clause four of the Epistle from the Elders of Balby (1656) is that anything spoken "out of the light" should be dealt with in private: Rosemary Moore, *The Light in Their Consciences*, p. 13. This is similarly directed at what was spoken by others.

⁶ Library of the Society of Friends, *Quaker Faith & Practice*, 19.49 speaks of "meetings for church affairs where individual insight [is] tested against the insight of the gathered group".

Although the obvious point is that, effective as this check may be in many cases, it is not foolproof i.e. is not infallible. Groups can go wrong, just as individuals can.

Second, even if Quakers do consider that apparent inspirations need to be tested and that this testing will involve one's reason and conscience, they are unlikely to accept More's view that the light within is to be *identified* with one's reason and conscience. The early Quakers and – I take it – Quakers today would not accept that all that is needed is the proper use and cultivation of one's reason and conscience. Friends should also take heed of the promptings of love and truth in their hearts. Those of us who are Quakers, then, will think that More's identification of the light within with reason and conscience is mistaken.

Third, there is something to the thought that no genuine inspiration can be contrary to reason. Divine inspirations could not lead us to think that 2 plus 2 equals something other than 4, or that a formal contradiction is true. So if these thoughts occur to one within Meeting for Worship, those thoughts are not divine promptings.

However that leads to our fourth point, concerning what More means by reason and his socially conservative assumption that the social conventions which are generally accepted are dictated by reason and that (therefore) no genuine inspiration could prompt one to act contrary to those conventions. More considers that the Quakers of his time are not divinely inspired because the behaviour to which they are led by their supposed inspirations is uncivil and contrary to good manners. Their behaviour is contrary to reason in More's sense as it is contrary to the "*Common notions* that all men in their wits agree upon". It is implicit that Quakers are not in their wits (have taken leave of their senses, common humanity and the dictates of reason) when they refuse to doff their hats to their betters or disrupt the public worship of the established church. No Quaker – either in More's time, or our own – would agree with More's understanding of reason here, or the socially conservative use that he puts it to.

Objection 3 – Familism

More was remarkably consistent over the years, in various of his writings, in his next criticism of Quakerism. This is that Quakerism is Familism. In the *Scholia on the fifth Dialogue* he is clear that what he considers to be the core Quaker opinion, of excluding the external Christ from religion, and admitting only the internal Christ, is Familism.¹ The Familists do not believe in the future life and history of our Saviour.² More did not consider the similarities he detected between Quakerism and Familism to be an accident: rather, he considered that Quakerism was descended from Familism.³ More's aim in *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness* was to show "the Reasonableness and important Usefulness of Christian Religion in the Historical sense thereof, and in reference to the very Person of Christ our Saviour".⁴ More's central complaint against both the Familists and the Quakers is what he considers to be their total rejection "of the Person of Christ as to his Human nature, with all his Offices assigned to him by his Father".⁵ As we have seen, as early as 1656, in *Mastix*, More said that the abominable and dangerous aspect of Quakerism was the slighting of the history of Christ and the making of a mere allegory of it, thereby emptying Christianity of all truth in so far as it refers to the person of Christ.⁶

My primary interest is what More meant when he said the Quakers were Familists, who were also known as the Family of Love, rather than the Familists themselves. But understanding something of the Familists, the followers of Hendrick Niclaes, will place More's writings about them in context and help us understand them. (Niclaes identified himself in his written

¹ *Scholia*, p. 565.

² *Scholia*, p. 572.

³ He says in the Fifth Dialogue that the Quakers were the offspring of the Familists. *Divine Dialogues*, p. 459.

⁴ *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, To the Reader, section 6. I have modernised the spelling.

⁵ *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, To the Reader, section 12. More develops this theme in his chapter on the Quakers: Book X, chapter xiii, sections 5, 6 and 7.

⁶ *Mastix*, section 16, in *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*.

works only as 'H.N.'. More refers to him on one occasion as "that blind Guide *H. Nicolas*".¹) Marsh describes Niclaes' theology as being profoundly inward, and says that he emphasised a process of *spiritual* transformation within the godly individual. This process was characterised by Niclaes as a "pass-over" from the flesh to the spirit, and also as a process of *illumination*.² (The former explains More's reference to Niclaes' "abhorred Passover".³) The inward transformation begins when the "good-willing one" humbly realises the terrible nature of their sin⁴, and those new to the fellowship were exhorted to admit and contemplate their shortcomings.⁵ The believer must empathise with Christ and, through suffering with Christ and sharing in His resurrection, God, Jesus and the Holy Ghost will inhabit them and walk in them.⁶ In the final stages of illumination, darkness has left and "the light hath lightened us in the light".⁷ At this ultimate, illuminated stage, the Familist attained "perfection".⁸

Marsh says that

The allegorical or mystical interpretation of Scriptural events and prophecies was fundamental to Niclaes' thought. Christ's death, burial and resurrection were not described as matters of literal truth, and it is actually impossible to determine whether H.N. accepted their historical reality. This was not a question that interested him. In part, he may have avoided explicit statements because he knew that his ideas would be considered deeply heretical. More significantly, he frequently ignored the question

¹ *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, Book X, chapter xiii, section 6. I have modernised More's spelling.

² Christopher W. Marsh, *The Family of Love in English Society, 1550-1630*, p. 20.

³ *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, Book X, chapter xiii, section 6. Again, I have modernised More's spelling.

⁴ Marsh, op. cit., p. 20.

⁵ Marsh, op. cit., p. 21.

⁶ Marsh, op. cit., p. 21.

⁷ Marsh, op. cit., p. 21.

⁸ Marsh, op. cit., p. 21.

because he considered it completely irrelevant to those who had attained inward perfection.¹

My own view is that there are very strong reasons to think that Niclaes understood Christ's death and resurrection metaphorically, and considered that the New Testament should *not* be understood literally, as history. In the *Glasse of Righteousnesse* he is clear that the Kingdom of God is "inwardly within us".² It can only be found inwardly, and those who do not seek it inwardly will not find it.³ One should rely on and follow the counsel of scripture,⁴ although not necessarily as it is understood by the learned.⁵ One must receive the "word of the Lord, the true Christ after the flesh in our hearts".⁶ Niclaes seems here to equate Christ in the flesh, properly understood, with the word of the Lord, rather than a flesh and blood human who lived in Palestine. One is renewed into righteousness when one is "baptized in the death or Christ, (that is, in his patience) and with his like death or patience be ye planted into him", overcoming sin and death "with the like crosse or patience of Christ".⁷ This is what scripture teaches, when it is properly understood.⁸ So Niclaes' view can be summarised by saying that one is renewed when one has passed through the death and resurrection of Christ⁹ – not by the literal death and resurrection of one's body – but by seeking to adopt Christ like patience. This is the correct way to understand scripture. And since Niclaes seems to equate Christ in the flesh, properly understood, with the word of the Lord and not a flesh and blood human being, this is strong evidence that his view was that the account in the New Testament of

¹ Marsh, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23.

² Section 5. My quotations are from the extract from *Glasse of Righteousnesse* in Andrew Bradstock and Christopher Rowland, *Radical Christian Writings: A Reader*.

³ Sections 9 and 13.

⁴ Section 11.

⁵ Section 3.

⁶ Section 17.

⁷ Section 18.

⁸ Section 18.

⁹ Section 19.

Christ's death and resurrection was not to be understood literally, as history, and that More's interpretation of him was therefore correct.

Whether More was right that the Quakers were Familists is another matter, and I now assess More's interpretation and criticism of the Quakers by considering a number of Quakers:

William Penn; George Keith, George Whitehead and William Barclay; and William Smith.

William Penn

More's letter from Ragley (the home of Anne Conway) dated 22 May 1675 to William Penn is long and dense.¹ It is clear from the letter that More had read Penn's *A Just Rebuke to the One & Twenty Learned and Reverend Divines* (1674) and another of Penn's works against John Faldo (perhaps *Quakerism, a new Nickname for Old Christianity* (1673)).² The letter is the work of one educated religious thinker to another, rather than being intended for a wider audience.³ Since More did not need to, and so did not, set out for Penn the ideas of Penn's to which he was responding, it is best read alongside at least some of the works of Penn's to which More was responding.

More says that having now read Penn's works

I exceedingly rejoice, that the *Quakers* have emerged above the Low Beginning of an Heartless and Hopeless *Familism*, that quitting the Expectation of a *Glorious Immortality* after this Life, quitted also all *Dependance* or *Relation* to our Saviour's Person as *Man*; believing *his Soul* as Mortal as they do the rest, and that there is

¹ The letter is in Mary Maples Dunn (and others), *The Papers of William Penn, Volume 1: 1644-1679*, at p. 304 ff.. It is also in *Life*, at p. 180 ff.. There are very useful editorial notes, not always consistent, in each.

The version in *Life* is not dated, however the original letter is dated Ragley, May 22, 1675. See Henry More, "Letter from Henry More to William Penn". The editors of *The Papers of William Penn, Volume 1: 1644-1679* say that this date is in More's hand (note 94, p. 326).

² *Life*, p. 180, p. 181. Later on in the letter, it is clear that More had also read Penn's *No Cross, No Crown*: see *Life*, p. 194.

³ It was first published after More's death, with *Two Letters Concerning Self-Love*, in 1708.

nothing surviving of him, but that *Light* that was ever, and is Common to all Men, *the Eternal Word* that *lightens every Man that comes into the World*.¹

More was also pleased to find that Penn expressed a belief in the history of the Gospel in the literal sense throughout his two books.²

Much of More's letter is a response to and criticism of Penn's views concerning Baptism and the Lord's Supper, on the basis of More's detailed and densely presented readings of the Bible. More also criticises Quakers' practice with respect to *you* and *thee*, and their refusal to doff their hats and use titles as expressions of respect. His central criticism is that we are to love our neighbours as ourselves, and one aspect of loving our neighbours is not to cause them unnecessary offence. No divine or human law prohibits the use of *you* to a single person, doffing one's hat or using titles as a mark or respect. So in each case the Quakers are causing unnecessary offence to their neighbour.³ (The Quakers who behaved in the ways More disapproves of would doubtless have responded that their actions were done for good reasons and, in the relevant sense, were necessary.)

I turn now to the large part of More's letter which he devotes to his reading of John 1:9: "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world".⁴ As More correctly notes, great stress was laid upon this passage by Quakers.⁵ His discussion is difficult and technical, but as he himself highlights the central point that he is driving at is that the true light mentioned in John 1:9 is the soul of the Messiah united with the Logos, become incarnate or appearing in the flesh.⁶ More says that this is indeed the universal light intended for all the world, both Jews and gentiles, who can only be a light in this sense by virtue of the

¹ *Life*, p. 181.

² *Life*, p. 181.

³ *Life*, see especially pp. 194-196.

⁴ KJV. More had previously referred to the Quakers' allusion to the Gospel of John when discussing the light within in *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, Book VIII, chapter xii, section 4.

⁵ *Life*, p. 189.

⁶ *Life*, p. 192.

records and history of his life and doctrine, and of the lives and doctrine of the apostles.¹ This passage is clearly important, representing as it does More's direct response to and rejection of the Quakers' emphasis on John 1:9 as justifying their view of Christ as a light internal to everyone. Rather, More thinks, John 1:9 concerns the embodied Christ (the soul of the Messiah united with the Logos, become incarnate) who lightens everyone by way of the record and history of him, his apostles, and their teachings - in the New Testament.

Later the same year, in his letter to her of 20 October 1675, Penn told Anne Conway that he had met More, who was now "better acquainted with us than formerly".² (Penn seems not to have sent More a written reply to his letter, and one can't but think of those occasions when, faced with a long and detailed email from a colleague, one thinks that a meeting might be the best way forward.) It seems to me that Penn's letter to Conway can be read as, in effect, a reply to More's central criticisms of Quakerism, and of the Quakers' supposed denial of the external Christ as a result of their emphasis on Christ within, criticisms Conway was plainly familiar with.

Penn's letter to Conway is spiritual exhortation rather than abstract theology or metaphysics. Penn writes to Conway thus: "My friend, turn into your heart and hear his voice, Salvation is coming to your house, let him have the dominion".³ Penn deprecates outward, fleshy religion which only has the form of religion without eternal life and power.⁴ The Quaker testimony is that everyone should turn their minds to the light and spirit of Jesus within them, and obey it.⁵ It is attending the light of Jesus that redeems the soul from evil and strengthens it from

¹ *Life*, pp. 192 – 193.

² See Letter 250, William Penn to Lady Conway, in *The Conway Letters*. The letter is dated 20th 8 mo 1675 i.e. 20 October 1675. The reference to More is at p. 404. The letter is also in Mary Maples Dunn (and others), *The Papers of William Penn, Volume 1: 1644-1679*, p. 355 ff.. I suspect that Dunn is right to have Penn write of "the leadings of his eternal spirit" (p. 357), where *The Conway Letters* has "lendings" (p. 403).

³ *The Conway Letters*, p. 402. I have modernised the spelling.

⁴ *The Conway Letters*, p. 402.

⁵ *The Conway Letters*, p. 402.

temptation.¹ This “inwardly slays and mortifies and brings into the fellowship of the mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ and his ascension too”.² On the face of it, Penn does not emphasise the importance of “the light of Christ in the conscience”³ in order to detract from his death, resurrection and ascension. Rather, the light within is the route by which we avoid “dead religions”⁴ and are brought into the community or fellowship of “the children of the resurrection” and eternal life.

Penn’s position can be summarised as follows. Without the inward light of Christ, there is only formal, dead religion i.e. the inward light is necessary for a living religion and eternal life. That is not to say that the inward light of Christ is sufficient for religion: Penn also believes in the history of the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. But the light within is the only route to living religion and eternal life.

Thus understood, Penn’s position is close to More’s own. In the *Grand Mystery of Godliness* More is clear that we must not neglect the Divine Life, the “Mystical Christ within us”, by focusing entirely on the external person of Christ. However he is also clear that we must not ignore the history of Christ or his person by looking on “the Mystery of Christianity as a thing wholly *within us*”. He emphasises the necessity of “both *Christ within* and *Christ without*”.⁵ Much later, in the *Scholia*, it is clear that More considers that the vital seed of the heart is necessary for a living religion. Without this vital seed religion will be inanimate and exercised only in external ceremonies.⁶ In these respects, it seems to me, More and Penn are in agreement.

¹ *The Conway Letters*, p. 403.

² *The Conway Letters*, p. 403. I have modernised the spelling.

³ *The Conway Letters*, p. 402

⁴ *The Conway Letters*, p. 403

⁵ *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, To the Reader, Section 9, p. ix.

⁶ *Scholia*, p. 572.

Keith, Whitehead and Barclay

Keith not only engaged with More's criticism of Quakerism as Familism, but responded to it in print.

Prior to reading anything by Penn, More considered Keith's *Immediate Revelation* to be the best book he had come across among the writings of Quakers.¹ More enclosed his Remarks on the first part of *Immediate Revelation* with his letter to Penn, so that Penn could get them safely to Keith.² The second edition of *Immediate Revelation*, published in 1675, has an appendix which addresses five objections.³ Keith says in a letter to More that these were five of "the greatest" of More's objections, although Keith did not name More in the published appendix.⁴ So we know that the objections which Keith sets out and addresses in the Appendix were More's.

I deal here with the three objections which relate to More's criticism of Quakersism that it is Familism. The first objection is that the doctrine of Christ within extinguishes all dependence on that Christ that died at Jerusalem.⁵ The second is that Keith leaves out the history of the birth, life, miracles, death, resurrection and accession of Christ, thereby committing the error of Familism.⁶ The fourth is that Keith has fallen into Familism, which made an unnatural distinction between internal and external Christianity.⁷ Christ died on the cross for our sins,

¹ More says this in his letter to Penn. *Life*, p. 180.

² *Life*, p. 180.

³ George Keith, *Immediate Revelation, (or, Jesus Christ the Eternal Son of God, Revealed in Man, Revealing the Knowledge of God, and the Things of His Kingdom, Immediately) Not Ceased, but Remaining a standing and perpetual Ordinance in the Church of Christ, and being of indispensable necessity, as to the whole body in general, so to every member thereof, every true Believer in particular, asserted and demonstrated. And the Objections that have any seeming weight against it answered.* The Second Edition: with an Appendix, containing an Answer to some farther Objections.

⁴ See George Keith and Henry J. Cadbury, "George Keith to Henry More", p. 63. The letter is dated 12 of 12th mo. 1675/6, which I take to be 12 February 1676. The first print of the second edition had in fact been in 1675.

⁵ *Immediate Revelation*, p. 225.

⁶ *Immediate Revelation*, p. 228.

⁷ *Immediate Revelation*, p. 241.

and this is a central and important part of the doctrine of the Gospel which the Apostles preached.¹

Keith responds that Quakers do in fact testify to Christ without us, the Christ who died at Jerusalem. He argues however that true religion can exist without express knowledge and belief of Christ's history.² This is clear from the fact that some who were truly religious did not have knowledge or belief in the history of Christ e.g. Cornelius, who was truly religious before he knew the history of Christ, which he only learned when it was preached to him by Peter.³ Those who do not have the scriptures can be taught, by the light of Christ, those parts of religion which are absolutely necessary for salvation. Whereas those who do have the scriptures will concur immediately with the history within outlined them, due to the "felt and sensible influence and motion of the spirit of God upon our hearts".⁴ Heathens have the light within as truly as we do, but cannot know the history of Christ since they do not have the scriptures.⁵

Keith does not put the point this way, but his position seems to be that it is only because Christ *in fact* died for our sins that we can be saved, but knowledge of or belief in Christ's life and death is not necessary for salvation (which is why those who have no knowledge of the scriptures can nevertheless be saved). Christ's life and death are as it were a necessary part of

¹ The third objection addressed in the Appendix is that Keith says that only the appearance and revelation of God in his own seed and birth gives man immediate and genuine knowledge of God. He should then have explained how to distinguish the appearance and revelation of God from false pretenders to such a thing (*Immediate Revelation*, p. 234). The fifth objection is that Keith seems to hold that the birth of God or the divine birth in us is something distinct from our souls and which has a sense and discerning in itself. That is a mistake because it is our soul that has sense and perception, not the birth of God or the divine birth in us (*Immediate Revelation*, p. 248).

Unfortunately Keith did not set out all of More's objections, so we do not know what they all were.

² *Immediate Revelation*, p. 229.

³ *Immediate Revelation*, p. 230.

⁴ *Immediate Revelation*, p. 232.

⁵ *Immediate Revelation*, p. 233.

the metaphysics or reality of salvation, but are not part of what a human (who has never been exposed to the scriptures) must believe in order to be saved. This is the point made by Keith and George Whitehead in 1670 in their *The Light of Truth Triumphant*. Arguing against Robert Gordon, they say that Christ's having taken the form of man and having died outwardly is necessary for salvation, but knowing and believing that he took on the form of man and died outwardly is not. One can benefit from the fact of Christ's humanity and death even if one does not know about it, just as a person suffering from a disease can benefit from a cure applied to them, even if they do not know its name or the way in which it was prepared.¹

Interestingly, More would later, in the *Scholia*, approve of various passages in Barclay's *Apology* which express a similar position. More approves of Barclay's discussion of the history of Christ, in which Barclay says that Quakers believe all the things that are set down in scripture concerning the conception, birth, life, miracles, passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ to have actually taken place. Barclay is clear that although God does not reveal to everyone the external knowledge of these truths, the divine seed does always incline us to believe them when they are declared. More says that these are golden words indeed.² More seems to have been satisfied by Keith's arguments, or at least some of them. His mature assessment in the *Scolia* is that the Quakers, as they "now" stand in the world, if they share the faith of Barclay, Penn and Keith retain only some appendages of Familism, and not the

¹ George Keith and George Whitehead, *The Light of Truth Triumphant over Darkness and Ignorance, Error and Envy. Manifested in Robert Gordons Late Pretended Testimony to the True Saviour. Wherein Every One Whose Eye Is Open May See His Seat; and Who Have Salt in Themselves May Savour His Words, Work and Spirit and Discern His Deceitful Dealing by Smitting the Innocent in Secret, Yet Not with That Subtilty Which Is Able to Cover in This Day Wherein Light Is Manifesting the Works of Darkness. So, the Devil Was Here Deficient but Envy Slays the Foolish Man. Given Forth in the 2 Moneth 1670*, p. 6.

² *Scholia*, p. 573.

thing itself. He was also clear, however, that he had been right to say that the Quakers, or at least some of them, had been Familists.¹

William Smith

More continued to insist in the *Scholia* that although some Quakers had shaken off Familism itself, he had been right that the Quakers had been Familists.

In the *Scholia* More gives what he says is a demonstration of the Quakers having been the offspring of the Familists. This is the Familist opinion of excluding the external Christ from the business of religion and only admitting the internal Christ. This the Quakers teach in their “first Elements of Religion”, as we can see in “William Smithy”, who distinguishes between false teachers, who oblige people to believe in the Christ that sits in Heaven, and true teachers, who oblige people to believe in the internal Christ. “Smithy”, More says, makes the preaching of the outward Christ the characteristic of a false teacher and “in the same place” – i.e. in the same text – adds that the preaching up of the external Christ and the preaching up of the internal Christ make a vast difference, and that they have no more to do with one another than the East with the West. This, More says, shows that “Smithy” has thrown off all belief in the inward Christ.²

More is referring, I take it, to William Smith’s *A Nevv Primmer: Wherein Is Demonstrated the New and Living Way, Held Forth by Way of Question and Answer, as from a Child's Enquiry after Truth, to Be Informed by the Father*. This was first published in 1662. In this, a Child (‘C’) asks their Father (‘F’) a series of questions. F says that the Light of Christ is

¹ *Scholia*, p. 572. More in fact refers to “R.B. G.P. and G.K” in this passage. But he also refers to G.P.’s book *No Cross, No Crown*. So it is clear that he intends to refer to Barclay, William Penn and Keith.

² *Scholia*, pp. 565 – 566.

within the child.¹ C asks how one can tell true Ministers from false. Their Father replies as follows:

F ... they that are false, Preach Christ without, and bid People believe in him, as he is in Heaven above; but they that are true Ministers they Preach Christ within, and direct People to wait to feel him in themselves, and so believe in him, as he makes himself manifest in them ...

C. *This is a great difference in their Doctrine, for one to Preach Christ without, and another to Preach him within.*

F. Yes. It doth make a great difference, and hath no more fellowship together, than the East hath with the West.²

This is clearly the text by “William Smithy” that More has in mind. The passage I have quoted ends with the claim that preaching Christ without and Christ within have no more fellowship than the East with the West. And the passage confirms what More says. Smith could not have been clearer that false Ministers teach Christ without, whereas true teachers teach Christ within. Whether or not the Familists were the origin of Smith’s view, More is clearly right that this early Quaker was – in a pamphlet intended to teach children the essentials of Quakerism – a Familist in his sense. The text I have just quoted also occurred in subsequent reprints of *A Nevv Primmer* in 1663 and 1668.³

However it is interesting that this text subsequently changed in just such a way as to address More’s objection. Smith died in 1673. Smith’s *Balm from Gilead* was published in 1675. It contains "An Epistle to Friends and other Readers" by John Whitehead, “Several Testimonies

¹ William Smith, *A Nevv Primmer*, 1662, p. 2.

² William Smith, *A Nevv Primmer*, 1662, pp. 8-9.

³ *A Nevv Primmer* was in George Fox’s library. See Nickalls, John L. "George Fox's Library", item 93, p. 8.

concerning William Smith”, and Smith’s works arranged in chronological order. For the year 1663 it contains a work that does not have “A Nevv Primmer” in its title, but is entitled *A Demonstration of the New and Living Way; Held Forth by Way of Question and Answer, as from a Child's Enquiry after Truth, to Be Informed by the Father*. I quote the relevant part, with the important changes in bold:

F ... they that are false, Preach Christ without **only**, and bid People believe in him, as he is in Heaven above (**in opposition to his being within**) but they that are true Ministers they Preach Christ within, and direct people to wait to feel him in themselves, and so to believe in him, as he makes himself manifest in them, (**whereby they truly confess his being without also**) ...

C. *This is a great difference in their Doctrine, for one to preach Christ without, and another to preach him within.*

F. Yes, it doth make a great difference, and hath no more fellowship together, than the East with the West.¹

With these changes, the position has moved from being the one that More criticised to being More’s own. What is now said is that false Ministers preach Christ without *only*, whereas true Ministers preach Christ within, directing people to feel him within, so that they believe in him as he makes himself manifest within them, as a result of which they *truly* confess his being without *also*. That is, the truth is that Christ is within *and* without. The position has thus moved to the position that More himself espouses in the *Scholia* in the very passage in which he criticises Smith. More distances himself from any teacher who obliges people to believe in the Christ that sits in heaven, without sending his Spirit on the true believers. He adds that those who preach the truth “preach up the inward Spirit of Christ jointly sanctifying with the

¹ William Smith, *Balm from Gilead*, 1675, p. 55 for Smith’s works from the year 1663.

outward Christ” i.e. that the true position emphasises both the inward and the outward Christ.¹ As I have already noted, in the *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, More had already emphasised the necessity of “both *Christ within* and *Christ without*”.²

Who changed *A Nevv Primmer* in just such a way that More’s criticisms were circumvented? On the face of it, history was being rewritten after Smith’s death by someone who was not only keen to preserve Smith’s memory, but wanted to ensure that Quakers were not vulnerable to criticisms such as More’s. John Whitehead was clearly involved in the publication of *Balm from Gilead* in 1675. We know that he met More in 1675 and gave him a book of his own writing. More’s assessment after this visit was that “John Whitehead looked like a more sensible tender person [than George Whitehead, who had also visited More] and indeed his book seemd to have a good spirit in it”.³ It is very likely that John Whitehead would have been familiar with More’s objection to Quakerism concerning Familism. The suspicion must be that John Whitehead was helping rewrite history so as to ensure early Quakers such as Smith were not vulnerable to More’s criticism regarding Familism.

Be that as it may, the fundamental point is that More was right. The early Quakers, or at least some of them, had indeed not only emphasised Christ within, but had described those who taught Christ without as false teachers. The ‘clarified’ Quaker position was in fact a change of position from that very clearly expressed in *A Nevv Primmer*.

The ‘clarified’ Quaker position

The text we have examined in a *Balm for Gilead* emphasises the importance of both Christ within and Christ without. Indeed, it emphasises that it is through the internal Christ that we

¹ *Scholia*, p. 565.

² *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, To the Reader, Section 9, p. ix.

³ More’s letter to Anne Conway, 9 November 1675, *The Conway Letters*. Letter 251, p. 404.

are led to the external Christ. This seems to me to be the shared position of Keith, Penn and the ‘clarified’ Smith. They do not deny the importance of the external Christ but each says that it is reliance on Christ within that leads to belief in the external Christ. The three Quaker texts we have examined are very different: the 1675 letter from Penn to Conway, which is spiritual exhortation; the appendix Keith added in 1675 to his abstract work of theology, *Immediate Revelation*; Smith’s text as ‘clarified’ in 1675, in which he explains Quakerism in a manner intended to be appropriate to a child. There is I think a common theme with respect to the relationship between the light within, or Christ within, on the one hand, and the external Christ, or Christ without, on the other. Far from denying Christ without, the common theme is that the route to Christ without is via the light within. In Penn, the light is the route by which we may be brought into the community or fellowship of those who believe in Christ’s death, resurrection and ascension. In Keith, those who have the scriptures will immediately concur with the history outlined within them due to the felt influence of the spirit of God in their hearts. In Smith’s ‘clarified’ text, the true Ministers direct people to wait and feel Christ in themselves, by which means they also confess – and confess truly – Christ’s being without. As I have said, this was essentially More’s own position. He had won this particular argument.

Scholia – personalities and bad behaviour

In the *Scholia* More is more favourably inclined towards the Quakers than he had been earlier. As we have seen, he thinks highly of Barclay, Penn and Keith. He remained far less well disposed to other Quakers, however, and we have discussed his view of William Smith. More says that James Naylor assumed to himself divine honour, as if he were Christ himself.¹ Nor did More think highly of Fox. When conversing with Fox, More felt himself, as it were,

¹ *Scholia*, p. 567.

turned to brass.¹ The only reference to Fox in the *Scholia* is a convoluted and inane joke about the followers of Fox imagining that they are followers of “the *Lamb*”, when in reality “the *Fox*” lays in wait to steal lambs from the sheep pen.² It may be that More found it easier to get on with educated people such as Barclay, Penn and Keith, people of higher social standing than Fox. It may also be that Fox – who thought that “to be bred at Oxford or Cambridge was not enough to make a man fit to be a minister of Christ”³ - was too blunt and insufficiently deferential in expressing his views for More.

It is also notable that More had not modified his views of Quaker misbehaviour over the years. As we saw above, in *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, he said that Quakers disrespect their betters, contest with magistrates, revile Ministers while they are in the pulpit, disturbing public worship, say *Thou* instead of *you* and keep their hats on when others politely take them off.⁴ Nineteen years later in the *Scholia*, More took much the same view, complaining of the Quakers’ irreverence to magistrates, sourness of temper against Ministers of the Gospel i.e. clergymen, use of *Thou* to persons of all degrees and conditions, and their refusal to doff their hat or bow.⁵

Closing Remarks

In this chapter, we have considered the three objections More made to Quakerism. The first concerned quaking and, as the Quakers stopped quaking, this will have become far less pressing. The third concerned Familism. Having won this argument, More’s third criticism also became far less pressing.

¹ *Life*, p. 120

² *Scholia*, p. 570.

³ George Fox and John L. Nickalls. *The Journal of George Fox*, p. 7.

⁴ *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, Book X, chapter xiii, sections 2 and 6.

⁵ *Scholia*, p. 568-9.

The second criticism, however, had lost none of its relevance. This is the criticism, developed in detail in *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, that by ignoring reason the Quakers leave themselves open to supposed inspirations that are not divine in origin, and which lead to them to behave badly. This criticism was central to the thinking of both Locke and Leibniz about the Quakers which we will consider in the next chapter.

It is notable that Locke's personal library contained More's *Grand Mystery of Godliness* (1660).¹ It also included other works that we have discussed in this chapter. Locke owned More's *Collection of Several Philosophical Writings* (second edition, 1662), which as Anstey points out included a revised version of *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*.² He also owned the second edition of Keith's *Immediate Revelation* (1675).³ That is, he owned the edition we have discussed in this chapter, which contained some of More's objections and Keith's replies. So Locke was familiar with much of the material explored in this chapter. But for the purposes of what is to come, the most important point is that Locke owned More's *Grand Mystery of Godliness*, the work in which More developed his second objection.

¹ *Library*, item 2044, p. 192.

² *Library*, item 2046, p. 192. Peter Anstey, "Locke, the Quakers and enthusiasm", p. 15, note 12.

³ *Library*, item 1614, p. 165.

Chapter Three: John Locke and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz

Chronology

1632	Locke is born.
1646	Leibniz is born.
1656	Locke attends part of Naylor's examination.
1671	Draft A of the <i>Essay</i> . Discusses those who believe that the propositions they have received about religion as children are set up in their minds immediately by God.
1675	Second edition of Keith's <i>Immediate Revelation</i> , including his replies to More. Locke owns a copy.
1676	Barclay's <i>Apology</i> published in Latin: Divine inward revelations cannot contradict either the scriptures or sound reason, but are not to be subjected to the test of either scripture or reason.
Between 1677 and 1680	Leibniz's notes on the <i>Apology</i> .
1678	Barclay's <i>Apology</i> published in English. Locke owns a copy.
1682	Locke's journal entries regarding enthusiasm.
1685(?)	Leibniz's brief preparatory remarks in relation to apologetic works: It is only through reason that we can distinguish God's word from the word of a deceiver. So Quakers cannot tell these apart.
1686	Barclay's <i>The Possibility and Necessity of the Inward Revelation of the Spirit of God</i> published in English.
1687- 1689	Locke is living in Furlly's home in Rotterdam.
1687	Locke's notes on Barclay's <i>The Possibility and Necessity of the Inward Revelation of the Spirit of God</i> .
1689	First edition of the <i>Essay</i> .
1696	Leibniz's remarks on Penn.
1700	Fourth edition of the <i>Essay</i> , includes chapter on enthusiasm.
1703 - 1705	Leibniz writes the <i>New Essays on Human Understanding</i> , agreeing with Locke on enthusiasm.
1704	Locke dies.
1716	Leibniz dies.

John Locke (1632 – 1704) remains one of the world’s greatest philosophers. He is best known for *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, but a number of his other works are also of enduring importance.

Locke added the chapter *Of Enthusiasm* to the fourth edition of the *Essay*, published in 1700. It is clear that his target, or at least one of them, is those enthusiasts who rely on a supposed “internal Light” (IV.xix.10 and 15) or “*Light within*” (IV.xix.14), and who consider themselves to be God’s “peculiar People” (IV.ix.5). As Roger Woolhouse observes, although Quakers are not mentioned by name, this chapter was directed at the Quakers.¹ Peter Anstey argues that while Locke acknowledged that the Quakers were not the only enthusiasts, it was the Quakers that he had in mind when he formulated his critique of enthusiasm.² Michael Ayers suggests that Locke’s target in the chapters *Of Faith and Reason* and *Of Enthusiasm* is probably diffuse, but that somewhere near the centre must stand not only Quakers but also those Puritan philosophers, such as Joseph Mede and Samuel Hartlib, who relied on supposedly inspired interpretations of scripture.³ Locke’s *Of Enthusiasm* is targeted at Quakers and they are perhaps its main target. But it is also clear that Locke would also have had others in mind.

Early Letters

It is clear from Locke’s early letters that he did not think highly of Quakers. In one letter, perhaps written early in 1654, he described Quakers as being liars and deceivers.⁴ He wrote to his father in October 1656 about a Quaker who refused to take off his hat, despite coming to

¹ Roger Woolhouse, *Locke: A Biography*, p. 418. For Woolhouse’s discussion of the chapter *Of Enthusiasm* and the Quakers, see pp. 418-419 and p. 501, footnote 155.

² Peter Anstey, “Locke, the Quakers and enthusiasm”. This is an important article. My research on Quakers and philosophers started to take shape when I found it.

³ Michael Ayers, *Locke: Epistemology and Ontology*, vol. I, p. 122.

⁴ *Correspondence*, vol. 1. Locke to AM, letter 13.

the court of Chancery sitting in Westminster Hall to give testimony. Locke describes the Quakers as “mad folks”.¹

Having taken lodgings near his old school at Westminster, Locke passed some time in Westminster Hall attending the questioning of James Naylor and his followers by a committee of members of Parliament on 15 November 1656.² We know from his letter to his father, written on the same day, that Locke considered Naylor to have been evasive and uncouth. Naylor and his disciples used “canting language”, but Locke understood Naylor as having said “That Christ being the same today and for ever what honour was given to him at Jerusalem might be given to him where and in whomsoever he is manifested from god”. Locke was clearly disgusted by Naylor’s “owning of the name of Jesus” and his disciples’ attributing to Naylor having God as his father. Locke was no more impressed by the Quaker meeting he then witnessed. The committee ordered the Quakers to retire to another room and Locke came across them there. He found Naylor, another man and three or four Quaker women. The women wore white gloves and “white baggs” on their heads. Locke found their carriage strange: one of the women made a continual humming noise apparently without breathing; another woman then sang “holy, holy, holy”; after which the third woman “gave some of their ordinary exhortacon with their common mixture of judgment and threatening”. After a short pause they went through the same round again. Locke’s assessment was that the committee’s questions were either not answered, or were answered with a great deal of subtlety, in addition to the cover and cunning of their language, which others and indeed they themselves scarcely understand.³ This letter is an important document, providing important evidence of the examination of Naylor and his friends, and of Locke’s clearly disdainful reaction.

¹ *Correspondence*, vol. 1. Letter 29.

² Roger Woolhouse, *Locke: A Biography*, p. 21.

³ *Correspondence*, vol. 1. Letter 30.

In another letter to his father, written in June 1659, Locke says that the Quakers in their carriage and raptures can only be thought of as mad or “jugglers”.¹ By ‘jugglers’ he may have meant either buffoons or tricksters, both of which are meanings given for ‘juggler’ by the O.E.D. In Letter 68 he says that the quakers are “clowns”.²

It is clear from these letters that Locke was aware of the Quakers’ view that there is a ‘light within’. Also in Letter 68, Locke writes of “the quakers, the people of Goshen ... with light in their breast and smoake in their mouth”.³ The O.E.D. says that ‘goshen’ was used allusively for a place of plenty or light. Locke’s view seems to be that despite their claim to internal illumination, their words are obscure and deceptive, lacking any real substance. In a letter to Tom, written in October 1659, Locke speaks of imagination as being the great commander of the world and fantasy as ruling under the name of reason. Everyone thinks that he alone embraces reason, and that others grasp at nothing but clouds. In this respect everyone has sunk to the level of the Quakers: “there is not a man but thinks that he alone hath this light within and all besids stumble in the darke”.⁴

Letter 96 seems to have been written in 1660 to Alexander Popham. Locke was able to attend Westminster school due to Popham’s patronage.⁵ His letter expresses his gratitude to Popham, saying that it is through his efforts that Locke first came to Oxford. Locke would not want it to be thought that “all the light I have gaind from philosophie hath beene noe other then that of the Quakers which leads men from the sense of curtesy and gratitude”.⁶ Again, Locke is clearly aware of the Quaker view that there is a light within. He contrasts the genuine light he has gained from the study of philosophy with the supposed light of the Quakers, which is not

¹ *Correspondence*, vol. 1. Letter 59.

² *Correspondence*, vol. 1. Letter 68.

³ *Correspondence*, vol. 1. Letter 68.

⁴ *Correspondence*, vol. 1. Letter 81, p. 123.

⁵ Roger Woolhouse, *Locke: A Biography*, p. 15.

⁶ *Correspondence*, vol. 1. Letter 96, to PA, which the editors assess as being to Alexander Popham in about April 1660, p. 145.

genuine, and leads men from courtesy. Locke presumably has in mind the Quakers' refusal to show respect to others by e.g. doffing their hats.

The picture that emerges from these early letters is that Locke was aware of, and unimpressed by, the Quaker view that there is a light within. Despite their claim to the truth, Quakers are deceivers. They are liars and use “cunning” language, misleading others. His remarks on Naylor and his associates suggest that they themselves hardly understand the language that they use. They have bad manners and lack courtesy e.g. refusing to remove their hat when they should do so as a mark of respect. And they are led to this bad behaviour by their supposed light within.

Draft A of the Essay

Draft A of the Essay was written in the summer of 1671.¹ Section 42 states that a man does not always assent to or believe that side which is made out by the most probable proofs.

Children receive into their minds propositions, especially about religious matters, from their parents, nurses, or those about them, which become so firm that when they are grown up they are apt to regard them as “the Urim and Thummin set up in their minds immediately by god him self”.² Men will disbelieve the evidence of their own senses rather than admit anything disagreeing with these sacred oracles. An “intelligent Romanist” will believe that to be flesh which he sees to be bread.³ Locke then says, “let a Quaker believe his teacher to be inspired, and you in vaine bring probable reasons against his doctrines”.⁴ Both of these, Locke thinks, are examples of the fact that people are not moved by the most convincing probabilities to

¹ *Early Draft*, p. xiii.

² *Early Draft*, p. 63.

³ *Early Draft*, p. 64.

⁴ *Early Draft*, p. 64.

believe things inconsistent with wrong principles that they have imbibed, until and unless they candidly examine those very principles (something many people never do).¹

We know that following a suggestion from Damaris Cudworth, Locke bought and read John Smith's *Selected Discourses* in 1682² – much later than when Draft A was composed. But the Cambridge Platonist's book had first been published in 1660. Smith discusses what he calls “Divine inspiration” and its different degrees. He says that “whenever we look upon our own Soul in a right manner, we shall find an *Urim* and *Thummim* there, by which we may ask counsel of God himself”.³ So it appears that Locke had already read Smith's *Selected Discourses* when working on Draft A, and that Smith was one of his targets. Be that as it may, it is notable that at this early stage one (but only one) of Locke's targets was the Quakers.

Barclay's Apology

We know that Locke owned Barclay's *Apology* (London, 1678).⁴ Barclay's second proposition concerns immediate revelation. Barclay is clear that divine inward revelations are absolutely necessary for true faith. They

neither do nor can ever contradict the outward testimony of the Scriptures, or right and sound reason; Yet from hence it will not follow, that these divine revelations are to be subjected to the examination, either of the outward testimony of the Scriptures, or of the natural reason of man, as to a more noble, or certain rule and touch-stone; for this divine revelation and inward illumination is that, which is evident and clear of itself, forcing by its own evidence and clearness the wel-disposed understanding to assent,

¹ *Early Draft*, p. 64.

² Roger Woolhouse, *Locke: A Biography*, pp. 175-177.

³ John Smith, *Select Discourses*, p 124, see also p. 235.

⁴ *Library*, item 201, p 79.

irresistibly moving the same thereunto even as the common Principles of natural Truths move and incline the mind to a natural assent. Such as are these, (*that the whole is greater than the part; that two contradictory sayings cannot both be true, or false*) ...¹

So Barclay is clear that divine inward revelations cannot contradict reason (something both More and Locke would agree with). He is equally clear that they should not be tested either against scripture or by reason. His view is that they should simply be accepted, since they are their own irresistible evidence. The mind will be compelled to accept them, just as it is compelled to accept that contradictories cannot both be true.

I said in the last chapter, on More, that no Quaker today would advocate accepting apparent leadings without testing them, and that that includes testing them using our critical faculties. Even if I am right about Quakers today, this was clearly not Barclay's view. Reading More's second criticism of the Quakers, and Locke's criticisms below, one might wonder if the Quakers did in fact advocate accepting apparent inspirations without check or test. One might wonder if the Quaker at which these arguments are directed is a straw man. But Barclay gives very clear expression to the view that since divine inspirations cannot err, they need no testing and should not be tested. In particular, he thinks, they should not be tested by reason. And his answer to the question how we can tell apparent inspirations apart from genuine ones appears to be that genuine inspirations are their own evidence whereas, presumably, he thinks that merely apparent ones are not.

¹ *Apology*, pp. 3-4.

Journal entries of 1681 and 1682

Locke made a number of relevant entries in his journal in 1681 and 1682. On 3 April 1681 he says that an inspiration is an opinion or persuasion of which a man does not know the reason, but accepts as a truth coming from a supernatural cause. He expresses the central thought that “where reason is not judge it is impossible for a man himself to distinguish betwixt inspiration and phansy: truth, and error”.¹ On 19 February 1682 he discusses enthusiasm. He says that Christians, Muslims, Hindus and – he has been told – the Chinese all pretend to receiving truths in the mind from god himself. But contradictions and falsehoods cannot come from god, “nor can any one that is of the true Religion be assured of any thing by a way whereby those of a false religion may be and are equally confirmed in theirs”.² A further reason for suspecting these supposed illuminations is that the ways used to prepare the mind to receive such illuminations tend to interfere with reason and stimulate fantasy. These methods include fasting, solitude, intense and long meditation focused on a single thing, opium drinks and “vehement turning round”.³ (The latter appears to be a reference to dervish whirling rather than to quaking. Earlier in the same journal entry, Locke refers to “the Turkish Dervises”.⁴) It is clear from these entries that Locke’s criticisms of enthusiasm are directed at a range of targets – not all of them Christian.⁵

Benjamin Furly

Despite Locke’s early antipathy to the Quakers, and his rejection of enthusiasm, Locke lived in the household of the Quaker, Benjamin Furly, in Rotterdam from early in 1687 to early in

¹ *Early Draft*, p. 114.

² *Early Draft*, p. 119.

³ *Early Draft*, p. 120. He also discussed enthusiasm on 21 February 1682, p. 123 ff..

⁴ *Early Draft*, p. 119.

⁵ Peter Anstey, “Locke, the Quakers and enthusiasm”, p. 7.

1689.¹ Locke became a close friend of Furly and the letters between them stretch over seven years, until shortly before Locke's death.² Their letters make clear that Locke was a close *spiritual* confidant and adviser to Furly.³ Locke would have learnt a lot about Quakers from Furly, although he would also have learnt a lot about why Furly was coming into conflict with, and moving away from, Quakers.

Locke's first mention of Furly was in his journal on 8 October 1686, where he says Furly provided information about the Quakers:⁴

Concerning the begining of the Quakers all I can learne from B. F. is that John Saltmarsh who had been Fairfax's Chaplain & a minister of the Church of England was the first that began to be scrupulous of the hat & useing common language in the year 1649. In the yeare 50 George Fox a shoemaker & James Naylor a Serjeant of the army in the North began to publish the doctrine of the light etc.⁵

This is interesting for a number of reasons. The issue that Locke (and perhaps his source, Furly) starts his summary with is Quaker behaviour regarding hats and their rejection of common language (presumably regarding the use of *thee* and *thou*). Only then does the summary move on to the doctrine of the light. Further, this journal entry is the only mention of Fox that I have found in Locke's writings. Both Locke and Furly considered his origin as a shoemaker worthy of note.

Furly would later write to Locke, in November 1692, that he knew of nothing that gives a man the name Quaker "amongst men generally ... more than not doffing the hat in a way of

¹ *Library*, p. 4; and Luisa Simonutti, "English guests at 'De Lantaarn': Sidney, Penn, Locke, Toland and Shaftesbury", p. 34.

² The first letter between them in *Correspondence* is from Locke to Furly in July 1687 (Letter 947) and the last is from Furly to Locke in July/August 1704 (Letter 3597).

³ See especially Letters 993, 1562, 1702.

⁴ *Correspondence*, vol. 3, p. 40.

⁵ Bodleian Library, MS Locke f. 9 (1686), pp. 27-28. Quoted by Peter Anstey, "Locke, the Quakers and enthusiasm", p. 5.

honour to men”.¹ Furly had by this time grown frustrated with the Quaker emphasis on such singularities (or peculiarities). In a letter to Locke, in February 1691, Furly mentioned some dialogues that he had written: “a few dialogues exhorting to unity, in those things that are indisputably true and evident, and not to keep up divisions about smaller matters much less about singularities”.²

However Locke would also have learnt what Furly had valued, and continued to value, about the Quakers. Furly said that he had never been joined to any society, and had not been joined to the society of Quakers

but by a voluntary conversation with them, as a people whose retired conversation and company I had more liking to then any other: and because I found them to require no bundle of Articles to be subscribed, nor any listing of names; as among other sects, nor the use of the things called sacraments. So they have nothing they admit a man to, nor seclude him from. their meetings are open and free for all comers and goers. A man may so converse with them, as long as he please, and abstain when he please.³

Furly continues that he does not fully understand the knack of member-making, and does not think it necessary for the public worship of God.⁴

Furly wrote to Locke in March 1692 that “the True Religion has never been but one, nor can ever be more, and that that is this, To love god above all, and our neighbour as ourselves.”⁵

For our purposes, one notable passage in Furly’s letters to Locke is this:

¹ *Correspondence*, vol. 4. Letter 1562, p. 575.

² *Correspondence*, vol. 4. Letter 1364, p. 208.

³ *Correspondence*, vol. 4. Letter 1585, December 1692/January 1693, p. 613.

⁴ *Correspondence*, vol. 4. Letter 1585, p. 613.

⁵ *Correspondence*, vol. 4. Letter 1480, 416.

We have in our bibles, besides the defect of the Transcribers, the varios lections, and translation, a great deal more humane Artifice, than men are aware of, so that there will want to render it al infallible divine Truth, infallible inspiration to discern the true reading, and to distinguish the true Apostolicall sense from the fallible conceptions of the first punctators.¹

Locke was close to Furly. He could only have thought that Furly was a man who was serious about his religious beliefs and practices. Yet it would have been clear to him that Furly believed in divine inspirations. Like Barclay (and indeed Locke) Furly seems to have thought that a divine inspiration could not be false. An inspiration regarding, for example, the interpretation of the Bible would therefore be infallible. Locke did not change his consistent view – that the Quakers were enthusiasts, and that accepting apparent inspirations led to error – as a result of his friendship with Furly.² But the evident sincerity and seriousness of the Quakers he met may have been part of the reason he ultimately added a chapter on enthusiasm to the *Essay*.

Barclay's The Possibility and Necessity of the Inward Revelation of the Spirit of God

Peter Anstey has argued persuasively that the notes Locke made in December 1687 on immediate inspiration were a response to Robert Barclay's *The Possibility and Necessity of the inward Revelation of the Spirit of God*.³

Barclay's *Possibility and Necessity* was written in 1676. It is a letter written in Latin to Heer Paets, after he had returned from Spain, where he had been ambassador from the Netherlands. Furly wrote an endnote dated 28 March 1678, explaining that since the ambassador had

¹ *Correspondence*, vol. 4. Letter 1533, 31 August/10 September 1692, pp. 511-512.

² Roger Woolhouse, *Locke: A Biography*, p. 418.

³ Peter Anstey, "Locke, the Quakers and enthusiasm", pp. 5-6.

promised to reply in writing, but had not done so, it was being published. It was first published in Latin in 1679, and later published in English in 1686. In the advertisement dated 9 October 1686, Barclay explained that since the topic – what is the ground and foundation of faith? – is an important one, he had decided to publish it in a language more accessible to his countrymen. He says that the Church of Rome is not wrong to assert infallibility in the church of Christ, as the true church cannot be without infallibility, although he is clear that the Church of Rome is wrong to claim that it is itself infallible. He ends by claiming “true Certainty of Faith”.¹ So this is a Quaker assertion of infallibility.

Heer Paets had argued that the substance of Christianity consists in knowledge and faith concerning the birth, life, death, resurrection and accession of Christ. However these are contingent matters of fact, and matters of fact can only be known by the testimony of another or by perception of the outward senses.² There can therefore “be no Immediate Revelation by the simple Operation of the Spirit in the Mind”.³ There can, in other words, be no inward revelation.

Barclay states that although historical knowledge of, and faith in, the birth, death, life, resurrection and accession of Christ is part of the Christian religion, it is not an essential part. It is an integral part of Christianity, but is not essential, just as a man’s hands are integral parts of him, but not essential since a man can exist without hands.⁴ However he is also clear that in his view, God *can* make manifest to our minds the historical truths relating to Christ, even without scripture or any outward means.⁵

The Quakers are often described, and often described themselves, as believing in a light within. However it is clear from *Possibility and Necessity* that Barclay did not consider the

¹ *Possibility and Necessity*, p. 562.

² *Possibility and Necessity*, p. 565.

³ *Possibility and Necessity*, p. 566.

⁴ *Possibility and Necessity*, p. 566.

⁵ *Possibility and Necessity*, p. 567.

inward supernatural sense to be confined to the visual or to the light within. He writes of “God speaking as to the Ear of the Heart of the Inward Man, or as by his Finger writing ... therein”.¹ He thinks we hear and read God within. Examples of the inward supernatural sense include when the heart or soul of a pious man feels in itself a most sweet savour or taste, or a heavenly and divine warmth, or (so to speak) a melting of the soul in the love of God.² These are all what we would call phenomenal experiences i.e. experiences which feel a certain way, but the ones I have just listed are not visual experiences. Barclay speaks of various spiritual senses. These include spiritual seeing, but also spiritual hearing, tasting, smelling and touching.³ So Barclay’s doctrine of inward and immediate revelation explicitly goes further than the claim that there is a *light* within.

Barclay distinguishes between natural and supernatural *beings*, and natural and supernatural *ideas*. When a supernatural idea is caused in us, we clearly know that of which it is an idea.

Barclay writes:

The Voice of GOD Speaking to the Mind of Man, is a Supernatural Being, and stirreth up in us a Supernatural Idea, by which we clearly know that Inward Voice to be the Voice of *God*, and not the Voice or Operation of another, or of any Evil Spirit, or Angel, because none of these have a Supernatural Idea, as the *Voice* of GOD, and his divine Operation hath: For it is full of Vigour, Virtue, and Divine Glory ... and we also in our Measures are Witnesses thereof, for the Voice of *God* is known to be his by its Divine Virtue.⁴

There seem to be three arguments here.

¹ *Possibility and Necessity*, p. 568.

² *Possibility and Necessity*, p. 569.

³ *Possibility and Necessity*, p. 574.

⁴ *Possibility and Necessity*, p. 569.

First, only supernatural beings cause supernatural ideas, so we can know from a supernatural idea that it was caused by a supernatural being. The obvious question is why we should accept the premise.

Second, we can tell God's voice apart from the devil's by its vigour and glory. The obvious question here is why we should think that the devil cannot mimic God's voice in its full vigour and glory. A further question is on what basis would we be able to recognise that the voice we were hearing was full of vigour and glory. Barclay's position must be that we already know what vigour and glory is and that we can – infallibly – recognise it when we hear it within.

Third, since we already know what virtue is, we can tell a virtuous voice apart from other voices. But again that presupposes that we *already* know what virtue is, so we can recognise it when we hear it. What is meant by *immediate* revelation is that God causes a mental state in us immediately i.e. without any intervening causal mechanism. So it is not in itself an objection to an account of immediate revelation in this sense, that it presupposes that we can recognise virtue. But an account of immediate revelation which depends on our recognising virtue in God's voice within is going to struggle to explain how God's voice may lead us to change our initial view of what is virtuous. The Quakers were led to challenge conventional morality on the basis of their leadings, and were led to change their view of what was right and wrong. It is hard to reconcile that with an account of immediate revelation which says that we recognise God's voice from the devil's because we recognise which voice is trying to lead us away from what we already know to be right, and which voice is advocating what we already know to be right. In conclusion, these three arguments are hopeless.

Before turning to Locke's manuscript of December 1687, which Anstey identifies as being a response to Barclay's *Possibility and Necessity*, we should note that Barclay argues that unless our faith in scripture rests on the inspiration of the divine spirit "that Faith, by which

we believe the Scripture, would not be *Divine*, but meerly *Humane*”.¹ It will also be relevant to note that Barclay states that *all* ideas - whether of natural or supernatural things, and including ideas of outward objects which are perceived by the senses - are divinely implanted in our souls. He says that this agrees with both Boethius and Cartesian philosophy.² Any easy assumption that since the early Quakers emphasised the role of experience in religious knowledge, their intellectual members would favour an empiricist account of the origin of ideas, rather holding them all to be innate, would clearly be mistaken.

Locke’s manuscript of December 1687

Locke’s manuscript dated December 1687 is addressed to the idea of “An inward inspiration or revelation”.³ Locke accepts that God, being omnipotent, could cause an “inward immediate inspiration” in the mind.⁴ But he insists that internal supernatural perceptions are not necessary for saving faith.⁵ Further, any “impulse to assent” is all that a man can feel, and what cannot be felt is whether the impulse comes from God “since such firm assent may be from impulse from ye evill one or naturall temper”.⁶ That is, a strong impulse to assent may be caused by the devil or by one’s natural state of mind. Unless there is a rule – a rule known either by reason or by revelation - for distinguishing which emotions of the mind proceed from which cause, “the most extravagant boundlesse enthusiasme must passe for revelation”.⁷ These inward inspirations can, therefore, be of no use for either direction or counsel, since they cannot be distinguished from illusions.⁸

¹ *Possibility and Necessity*, p. 581.

² *Possibility and Necessity*, pp. 575-576.

³ *Writings on Religion*, pp. 37 – 41, and the editor’s introduction pp. xxxiii-xxxv.

⁴ *Writings on Religion*, p. 39.

⁵ *Writings on Religion*, p. 39.

⁶ *Writings on Religion*, p. 40.

⁷ *Writings on Religion*, p. 40.

⁸ *Writings on Religion*, p. 36.

There is I think very good reason to think that Anstey is right that this manuscript is a response to Barclay's *Possibility and Necessity*. Locke's target speaks of "an internal supernatural perception".¹ His target is a Quaker. One of Locke's arguments is that even if there is such an internal perception, since it cannot be known by anyone other than the person who has and feels it, even "if you have had & felt such an influence upon your owne minde tis impossible you should know whether any other Quaker ever had such".² Locke says to the author he is responding to "You suppose them [i.e. inward inspirations or revelations] necessary to divine faith which distinction of faith into divine & humane being noe where that I know made use of in scripture ...".³ As noted above, Barclay draws a distinction between divine faith and faith that is merely human. It is also worth noting that, as Nuovo observes, the author Locke is discussing is an innatist.⁴ There are good reasons, internal to the two texts, to think that Locke's remarks are directed at Barclay's *Possibility and Necessity*.

Trueblood describes Barclay's *Possibility and Necessity* as his most strictly, and most meticulous, philosophical work.⁵ He suggests, correctly, that Barclay's aim seems to be to provide for infallibility in religious matters, by seeking to ground religious belief on an infallible foundation, inward immediate inspiration, seemingly on the model of Descartes' attempt to ground certainty on the *cogito*.⁶ This assessment makes it all the more interesting that Locke's manuscript is such a sustained engagement with the text, and is such an effective criticism of it. From today's perspective – both philosophical and Quakerly – that failure may be no surprise. The search for certainty and infallible foundations has not proved a success in

¹ *Writings on Religion*, p. 38.

² *Writings on Religion*, p. 39.

³ *Writings on Religion*, p. 37.

⁴ *Writings on Religion*, p. xxxiv, see p. 40.

⁵ Elton Trueblood, *Robert Barclay*, p. 133 and 147.

⁶ Elton Trueblood, *Robert Barclay*, pp. 53, 68-69, 133-134, 147-148, and 254.

philosophy generally, let alone in the religious context. And today's Quaker is likely to take "Think it possible that you may be mistaken" as sound advice.¹

An Essay concerning Human Understanding

Locke added the chapter *Of Enthusiasm* to the fourth edition of *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, published in 1700. As I have noted, Quakers are not explicitly mentioned. Anstey suggests that this is out of politeness to his Quaker friends and acquaintances.² But his clear target is those enthusiasts who rely on a supposed "internal Light" (IV.xix.10 and 15) or "Light within" (IV.xix.14), and who consider themselves to be God's "peculiar People" (IV.xix.5).

The discussion is located in Book IV of the *Essay*, which concerns knowledge and opinion. Chapter xvii concerns the faculty of man known as reason (IV.xvii.1). Chapter xviii concerns faith and reason, and the boundaries between them (IV.xviii.1). Locke says that he takes reason to be "the discovery of the Certainty or Probability of such Propositions or Truths, which the Mind arrives at by Deductions made from such *Ideas*, which it has got by the use of its natural Faculties, *viz.* by Sensation, or Reflection". Faith "is the Assent to any Proposition, not thus made out by the Deductions of Reason; but upon the Credit of the Proposer, as coming from GOD, in some extraordinary way of Communication. This way of discovering Truths to Men we call *Revelation*" (IV.xviii.2). So he is clear that God does communicate to us truths which are not shown to be true by reason.

Locke distinguishes original revelation from traditional revelation. Original revelation is "that first Impression, which is made immediately by GOD, on the Mind of any Man, to which we

¹ *Advices and Queries*, 1.02, paragraph 17. Library of the Society of Friends, *Quaker Faith & Practice*.

² Peter Anstey, "Locke, the Quakers and enthusiasm", p. 13.

cannot set any Bounds". God is able to communicate directly with us, making impressions in our minds immediately. Being omnipotent, there are no limits on his ability to do this. Traditional revelation occurs when the impressions made immediately by God on the mind of one man are "delivered over to others in Words, and the ordinary ways of conveying our Conceptions one to another" (IV.xviii.3). Traditional revelation occurs when an original revelation received by one man is communicated, using words, to another.

Locke is clear in the chapter on faith and reason that an apparent revelation cannot be accepted as such if it conflicts with the clear evidence of reason: "*no Proposition can be received for Divine Revelation, or obtain the Assent due to all such, if it be contradictory to our clear intuitive Knowledge*" (IV.xviii.5). In the previous chapter, on reason, Locke had said that not all propositions which are "above" reason are contrary to reason: e.g. the resurrection of the dead is above reason but not contrary to it, whereas he thinks that the existence of more than one God is contrary to reason (IV.xvii.23). Locke now says that things which are above reason are, when revealed, the proper matter of faith. One of his examples is that the dead shall rise and live again (IV.xviii.7).

Faith is founded on the testimony of God, who cannot lie, revealing a proposition to us. But "where the Proposition supposedly revealed contradicts our Knowledge or Reason" we cannot be assured that it is a divine revelation from God (IV.xviii.5). Whatever God reveals to us is "certainly true" and so cannot be doubted. Locke agrees with Barclay about that. "But whether it be a divine Revelation, or no, *Reason* must judge" (IV.xviii.10).

It is against this background that Locke says that enthusiasm is the laying down of reason, and the attempt to rely on revelation *without* reason. In so doing it amounts to no more than taking "the ungrounded Fancies of a Man's own Brain" as a foundation of both belief and action (IV.xix.3). Locke emphasises the importance of reason to genuine revelation. "*Revelation* is natural *Reason* enlarged by a new set of Discoveries communicated by GOD immediately,

which *Reason* vouches the Truth of, by the Testimony and Proofs it gives, that they come from GOD” (IV.xix.4). Revelation thus depends on reason to establish which seeming revelations do, and do not, come from God. So revelation without reason is useless.

He says that immediate revelation dispenses with reason, and is “a much easier way for Men to establish their Opinions and regulate their Conduct” than the labour of reasoning (IV.xix.5). In all ages, “Men, in whom Melancholy has mixed with Devotion, or whose conceit of themselves has raised them into an Opinion of a greater familiarity with GOD, and a nearer admittance to his Favour than is afforded to others, have often flatter’d themselves with a perswasion of an immediate intercourse with the Deity ...” (IV.xix.5). Locke follows More in associating enthusiasm with melancholy, and with spiritual pride.

Locke says that enthusiasm has led men into “odd Opinions and extravagant Actions”, which should have warned them against it (IV.xix.8). Locke agrees with More that one can tell, from their fruits, that the enthusiasts’ supposed revelations are not genuine.

Interestingly Locke is clear that enthusiasts have not confined themselves to speaking of a light within. They claim to “feel the Hand of God moving them within” (IV.xix.8), and speak of feeling as well as seeing (IV.xix.9). As we have seen, this was indeed Barclay’s view. In *Possibility and Necessity* Barclay spoke of various spiritual senses, including spiritual touching.

Locke distinguishes between a strong persuasion that a proposition is true and a perception that it is from God (IV.xix.10): one can feel strongly that something is true without perceiving that that feeling comes from God. However strongly I feel assurance that a proposition is true, unless I can know that God is the revealer of it then “it is groundless; whatever Light I pretend to, it is but *Enthusiasm*”. Without *grounds* for the assumption that it is God who has revealed it, a supposed revelation may be an illusion caused either by some other Spirit or by my own imagination (IV.xix.10).

As Locke pithily puts it “The strength of our Perswasions are no Evidence at all of their own rectitude” (IV.xix.11). If “the Light” is “nothing but the strength of his own Perswasion ... contrary Opinions may have the same title to be inspirations” (IV.xix.11). Further, “if strength of Perswasion be the Light ... how shall any one distinguish between the delusions of Satan, and the inspiration of the Holy Ghost?” (IV.xix.13). Someone who wants to avoid delusion and error must test the supposed guidance of the light within, and must test it using reason. He must “bring this Guide of his *Light within* to the Tryal”. God does not remove our natural faculties - our reason - when he “illuminates the Mind with supernatural Light”, and we must test our apparent inspirations using reason (IV.xix.14). “*Reason* must be our last Judge and Guide in every Thing” (IV.xix.14). Locke is clear about what we need to test using reason, namely whether or not the apparent revelation is in fact from God. We must consult reason “and by it examine, whether it be a *Revelation* from God or no: And if *Reason* finds it to be revealed from GOD, *Reason* then declares for it” (IV.xix.14). Barclay is wrong in the *Apology*: it is not the case that inward immediate inspirations are their own evidence, so as to exclude the possibility that they are not from God; so apparent inspirations do need to be tested, and need to be tested using reason.

Locke does not deny that God can or indeed does sometimes enlighten men’s minds “by the immediate influence and assistance of the Holy Spirt”, without external signs (such as seeing a bush burning without being consumed, and hearing a voice out of it). But in such cases, he says, we have reason and scripture, which are “unerring Rules to know whether it be from GOD or no”. Where the proposition towards which we seem to be guided conforms to scripture, or the action to which we seem to be guided conforms to “the dictates of right Reason or Holy Writ”, we run no risk in believing the proposition or performing the action. Although, Locke says, there remains the possibility that it is not in fact “an immediate Revelation from GOD, extraordinarily operating on our Minds”, it is warranted by the revelation that God has given us of its truth (IV.xix.16). So Locke’s view is that even when

God does in fact act immediately upon our minds, we cannot exclude the possibility that he has not done so. But if the apparent immediate revelation conforms to either reason or scripture, we cannot go wrong by adopting the relevant belief or performing the relevant action.

This is a philosophically rich critique of the notion of the light within as understood by at least some of his Quaker contemporaries. Read in context it is clear that Locke agreed with, and seems to have been drawing on, aspects of More's earlier objections to Quakerism. Read in context it is also clear that he was familiar with and addressing Barclay's views. Barclay's views would not be accepted by Quakers today. *Advices and Queries* starts with this: "Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Trust them as the leadings of God whose Light shows us our darkness and brings us to new life".¹ Quakers today would not recognise the suggestion that they have immediate inward revelations which are their own evidence, and which, indeed, render Quakers infallible on religious matters. Quakers today do not consider that our critical faculties should be left at the door of Meeting for Worship. But however surprising Barclay's views would be to Quakers today, Locke was familiar with them. His arguments not only address them in detail. They refute them.

Leibniz

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646 – 1716) engaged with Quakerism in writing. It was his practice to make notes when he read², and two of the relevant texts were written when he was

¹ Library of the Society of Friends. *Quaker Faith & Practice*, 1.02, paragraph 1.

² Nicholas Rescher, "Leibniz and the Quakers", p. 100.

reading Quaker texts. However before examining the relevant texts in chronological order, I start with something closer to gossip.

Personalities

Leibniz did not meet any of the canonical Quakers (such as Fox, Penn and Barclay) or even the non-canonical Keith, but he thought highly of and did meet the sometime Quaker Francis Mercury van Helmont.¹ Van Helmont became a Quaker in 1676, at about the same time as Anne Conway, but broke with them sometime after 1684.²

In 1681, during the period in which van Helmont was a Quaker, Leibniz wrote to Landgraf Ernst van Hessen-Reinfels and said this:

As for M. Helmont, I am told that he is entirely Quakerized, and that he does not bare his head when he speaks to princes. I have a hard time believing this because when I used to speak to him fairly often and familiarly eight years ago, he seemed to me entirely reasonable and since then I have esteemed him highly.³

Leibniz seems to have accepted van Helmont's assessment of the Quakers he had met, even after his break with them. In 1696, in a letter to Thomas Burnett, Leibniz mentions one of

¹ Leibniz urged van Helmont to publish the many fine thoughts that he had in metaphysics, physics, mechanics and ethics: Leibniz's letter to van Helmont (18/28 October 1698), A II 3, p. 207. I rely on Lloyd Strickland's translation into English © Lloyd Strickland 2018, available via his website *Leibniz Translations.com*, at <http://www.leibniz-translations.com/index2.php>.

Leibniz later praised van Helmont in his remarks on three volumes by Shaftesbury, saying that "his conduct was without reproach, his actions full of charity and disinterestedness": G.W Leibniz and Leroy E. Loemker, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, p. 632.

² Allison Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century: The Life and Thought of Francis Mercury Van Helmont (1614-1698)*, pp. 212, 241 and 269.

³ A I 2, document 260, p. 233. The translation quoted above is from Allison Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, p. 36.

Penn's "colleagues Monsieur Keith, who, Monsieur van Helmont says, is clever".¹ In 1699, in a letter to Andre Morell, Leibniz says that one should attack vices without displaying animosity towards people, unlike sectarians who unleash their fury on abuses. He fears that the sectarians would be worse if they were in positions of power "just as William Penn, leader of the Quakers in England, made a small faction in Pennsylvania, according to what Mr Helmont told me, who suspected him of a little artificiality".² (Interestingly, Furly had already reached a similar view. In a letter to Locke in which he made clear that he did not yet know any better, freer and less overladen with superstition than the Quakers, he also says that a narrow spirit is growing upon them at speed. Nowhere is that narrow spirit more visible "than where it has power to domineer, and accordingly in Pennsylvania, where they have jurisdiction, they are as stingy, as peevish, as persecuting, and arbitrary in their proceedings against their own non-conformists" as the Church of England is to hers. This is shown by their proceedings against Keith and others.³)

There are two themes here which recur in some of the texts to which we now turn. The Quakers do not behave well, as evidenced by their refusal to doff their hats to their betters. And the Quakers are sectarian, lacking charity in their attacks on others.

Notes on the Apology

Leibniz read Barclay's *Apology*, and made notes. The *Apology* was first published in Latin in 1676, and contained an explanation and defence of fifteen theological theses Barclay had

¹ Leibniz's letter to Thomas Burnett (17/27 July), 1696. The translation quoted above is from Allison Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century: The Life and Thought of Francis Mercury Van Helmont (1614-1698)*, p. 269-270.

² Leibniz's letter to Andre Morell of 1/11 September 1699. A I 17, p. 473. This is Lloyd Strickland's translation into English © Lloyd Strickland 2007, which is available via his website *Leibniz Translations.com*, op. cit..

³ *Correspondence*, vol. 5, Letter 1702, 30 January/9 February 1694, p. 2.

previously published. Leibniz's notes are also in Latin. In the first set he notes only the first six theses and their explanations.¹ In the second set he sets out forty-two numbered and concise principles, each extracted from the *Apology*.² These notes seem to have been written sometime between 1677 and 1680.³

Leibniz's Brief Remarks, containing the lack of rationality criticism of Quakers

So Leibniz was familiar with the detail of Barclay's expression of, and formulation of, Quakerism. He was not however impressed with Quakers. He wrote some brief preparatory remarks in relation to apologetic works, perhaps in 1685.⁴ He says that the obligation to believe only arises because God, speaking in us through reason, has provided signs by which God's word can be distinguished from the word of an imposter. It is in this context that he says that "Anabaptists and Quakers and others of their ilk introduced that dreadful confusion in which anything that comes to anyone's mind is considered right to say and do, as if it were a dictate of the divine spirit".⁵ There are four claims here. Belief in God is properly grounded on reason. It is only through reason that we can distinguish God's word from the word of a deceiver. Quakers (among others) take whatever comes to mind to be a dictate of God's. They are therefore unable to distinguish between God's word and the words of a deceiver. These brief remarks are important, constituting a fundamental critical assessment of what Leibniz

¹ A VI 4, document 434₁, pp. 2541-2544.

² A VI 4, document 434₂, pp. 2544-2548.

³ The editors of A suggest that the notes may have been written between the winter of 1677/78 and the summer of 1680: A VI 4, p. 2540.

Barclay wrote to the ambassadors at the peace conference at Mijmegen, and his letter and copies of the Latin edition of his *Apology* were delivered to them in February 1678 (Elton Trueblood, *Robert Barclay*, p. 90). Leibniz followed developments at the peace conference on behalf of the court of Hannover. This may be how he became acquainted with Barclay's book: Nicholas Rescher, "Leibniz and the Quakers", p. 101.

⁴ A VI 4, p. 2298.

⁵ I rely on and quote Lloyd Strickland's translation into English © Lloyd Strickland 2019, revised 2022. This is available via his website *Leibniz Translations.com*, op. cit..

takes to be Quaker doctrine, an assessment written after he had read Barclay's *Apology*. They make clear that Leibniz subscribed to the criticism of Quakers developed first by More, which Locke had already expressed in his journal in 1682, and which Locke would later develop further and include in the *Essay*.

Notes and reaction to Penn's Travels

Leibniz later read William Penn's account of his travels in Holland and Germany. Leibniz reported, in his letter to Wilke of Bodenhausen of early 1696, that he had recently received an English book from the well-known William Penn, containing letters with Princess Elisabeth and others.¹ This is Penn's *An Account of W. Penn's Travails in Holland and Germany*.

Leibniz wrote a large number of pages of notes from the book in French, which jump over a great deal of material which did not interest him, and focus on what does. The notes are not really extracts, however: he does not extract passages from Penn and then translate them.

Leibniz also had two other texts by Penn: *A call to christendom, in an earnest expostulation with her to prepare for the great and notable day of the Lord*; and *Tender counsel and advice, by way of epistle to all those who are sensible of their day of visitation and who have received the call of the Lord*. However he only wrote notes from Penn's *Account*.²

In addition to his notes, Leibniz produced two versions of remarks on William Penn and the Quakers. The first version is at the end of his notes on Penn's *Account*. Both versions have been translated into English.³

¹ Leibniz's letter of 21 February (2 March) 1696 is at A I 12, document 292, pp. 444 - 446.

² The extracts Leibniz produced were extensive. See A IV 6, document 51, pp. 339 - 360. For the references to *A call to christendom* and *Tender counsel and advice* see p. 341 and the editorial remarks on p. 399.

³ So the first is part of A IV 6, document 51, at pp. 358 - 360. The second is at A IV 6, document 52, pp. 360 - 365. There is a translation of both in *On God and Religion*. The second, longer version had earlier been translated into English by Nicholas Rescher in

Leibniz is not entirely critical. He says in the first version of his remarks that since arguments alone are often not enough to lead people to the truth, “something is needed which stirs passions and ravishes souls, as does music and poetry”. The problem is that it is not enough for a preacher with a vivid and contagious imagination to stir the passions of others. Insight – the knowledge of great truths - is necessary for a true love of God, since one can’t love something without knowing it. But Penn may lack this insight, and it is not in evidence in his writings: “There are many magnificent words which scarcely explain anything”.¹ Leibniz’s fundamental point is that it is good to be led from the vanity of the world in the direction of the good, even if only by emotion and imagination. But that first start must be followed by a genuine attempt to acquire knowledge.

This theme is developed in the second version of his remarks:

... everything written by William Penn seems to me to be written with a great deal of artifice and reservation, in terms which are affected and mysterious and which smack a little too much of cliquishness and the intention to control others, without one finding in it enough of a useful doctrine by which to profit. ... I am afraid that the whole thing is only a skilful way of attempting to arouse the passions through extraordinary ways of acting and speaking, and so to speak a game of an excited and contagious imagination, somewhat as there are preachers who know how to bring their audience to tears, or as there are certain arias which are moving.²

It is notable that, critical as Leibniz is, he does not produce a critical assessment of any doctrine or substantive claims he finds in Penn’s writing. This doubtless reflects his view that

"Leibniz and the Quakers", from the text in G. W. Leibniz and Gaston Grua, *Textes Inédits D'après Les Manuscrits De La Bibliothèque Provinciale De Hanovre*. Rescher’s translation is the more satisfying read, but omits Leibniz’s remark about van Helmont, More and others which Strickland includes: *On God and Religion*, p. 151.

¹ *On God and Religion*, p. 149.

² *On God and Religion*, p. 150.

Penn's writing is all affectation and no substance. There is no more in his writing to argue against than there is in a moving aria.

Leibniz is clear that "religion and piety do not depend upon the profound sciences, since they must be within the grasp of the simplest people". But he criticises the Quakers for what he says is their distaste for the study of nature. The more one studies nature, the more one is capable of truly loving God. For true love is based on knowledge of the beauty of the object loved, and God's beauty is apparent in the wonders of nature.¹

I have so far relied on Strickland's translation of Leibniz's second version of his remarks on William Penn and the Quakers. But there is one respect in which I think Rescher's translation is clearly preferable. Strickland's translation speaks of insight rather than illumination or light. Strickland has Leibniz say that those who try to distance men from the study of nature "on the pretext of certain insights which they boast about ... make us abandon what is solid in favour of chimeras".² In contrast Rescher's translation refers explicitly to the Quaker notion of light:

Those who seek to discourage men from [the study of nature] upon the pretext of some vaunted "light", which consists only in heated imagination, leave solid ground for the sake of chimeras and indulge our indolence.³

It is notable that in the original French, Leibniz repeatedly uses "lumiere", and he contrasts the light which these people attribute to themselves ("cette lumiere qu'ils s'attribuent") with the true light ("lumiere veritable"). Unsurprisingly, he used the same word when translating Penn. For example Leibniz's notes cover the passage in Penn where Penn speaks of having declared "the testimony of

¹ *On God and Religion*, p. 151.

² *On God and Religion*, p. 152.

³ Nicholas Rescher, "Leibniz and the Quakers", p. 106.

Leibniz's French says this: "Et ceux qui tachent d'en éloigner les hommes sous prétexte de certaines lumières dont ils se vantent, et qui ne consistent que dans l'imagination émue, font quitter le solide pour des chimères et flattent notre négligence", p. 364.

the light” and the difference between an outside and an inside religion, using the word “lumiere”.¹

His notes also cover the passage where Penn speaks of “the blessed Principle of Light and Truth and Grace, which God had shed abroad in our hearts”, again using the word “lumiere”.²

Returning to the second version of Leibniz’s remarks on Penn, Leibniz’s implication is I think clear (and best captured by Rescher’s translation). While the Quakers speak of a supposed light within, what is needed is the true light of reason or understanding. The light within, in the sense of the Quakers’, is illusory and does not exist.

Focusing only on those aspects of Leibniz’s second version of his remarks which relate directly to the Quakers would be to miss much of this document’s importance. As we have seen, Leibniz makes clear that in his view the study of the natural world is not a distraction from religion or God. Rather, the more one studies nature, the more one will be capable of loving God. The piece is in this respect a short manifesto, not for the compatibility of science and religion, but for science as one path to loving God. The piece also contains a short summary of what Leibniz considers to be Christ’s central teachings e.g. that the slightest good will be rewarded, down to a glass of water given to a thirsty man; and to love God above all things, and to love our neighbour as ourselves.³ In explaining how the wise live, Leibniz draws on his philosophical views e.g. that we live in the best of all possible worlds. The wise are not in any way dissatisfied with the past, since they know that it cannot fail to be the best. Rather they will strive to make the future as good as possible, to the extent that it depends on

¹ Penn describes having “declared the Testimony of the Light” to Howbeit, the woman with whom he and his companions lodged in Paderborn: William Penn, *An Account of W. Penn's Travails in Holland and Germany*, p. 52. Leibniz’s translation is at A IV 6, p. 346, lines 2 - 3.

² Penn describes directing Mr and Mrs Sonnemans to “the blessed Principle of Light and Truth and Grace, which God had shed abroad in their Hearts”: William Penn, *An Account of W. Penn's Travails in Holland and Germany*, p. 245. Leibniz’s translation is at A IV 6, p. 356, lines 22 - 23.

³ *On God and Religion*, pp. 150-151.

them.¹ In explaining where the Quakers take the wrong path, Leibniz sets out simply, but in some detail, what he takes the right path to be.

Returning to our topic, Leibniz is clear that the Quakers behave badly, “refusing the honours and expressions received among honourable people”. Their refusal to doff hats and say ‘you’ to their social superiors appears to be mere affectation, adopted to make them seem special: “affectations which they only seem to adopt to distinguish themselves by a singular character”.² Leibniz says that “The true sign of the spirit and grace of God is to enlighten and to make better”.³ It is clear that in his view, the Quakers lack genuine illumination, as is evidenced by their bad behaviour.

Leibniz is also clear that the Quakers are sectarian⁴ and lack charity.⁵ He expanded on this theme in a letter to Morell written in 1696, in which he says that those of a sectarian or schismatic temperament, who seek to put distance between themselves and those who they consider not to act rightly (but who are full of good intention), cannot have charity or true illumination. Leibniz says that, among others, “William Penn, with his brethren, had that fault of being sectarian and condemnatory”.⁶

¹ *On God and Religion*, p. 152.

² *On God and Religion*, p. 153.

³ *On God and Religion*, p. 152.

⁴ *On God and Religion*, p. 153.

⁵ *On God and Religion*, p. 150.

⁶ Leibniz’s letter to Andre Morell, 10/20 December 1696. A I 13, pp. 397 - 400. I have quoted the translation in *On God and Religion*, p. 156.

New Essays on Human Understanding

Leibniz wrote the *New Essays on Human Understanding* between 1703 and 1705 as a comprehensive commentary on the philosophy of Locke.¹ However the *New Essays* were not published until 1765, nearly fifty years after Leibniz's death.²

Leibniz's spokesman is named 'Theophilus' (meaning lover of God). Locke's is 'Philalethes' (meaning lover of truth).³ Philalethes summarises Locke's account of enthusiasm in Book IV chapter xix of the *Essay*. Theophilus' discussion is longer than the summary, but (perhaps unsurprisingly, in the light of our discussion above) Theophilus does not criticise Philalethes's position.

Theophilus discusses a number of visionaries and enthusiasts, for example the Labadists, followers of Jean de Labadie, who taught that the Bible can only be understood by means of direct spiritual inspiration.⁴ Among a number of other figures, Theophilus mentions Barclay and his claim that the Quakers "find within themselves a certain light which itself announces what it is".⁵ That is I think an accurate summary of Barclay's views. He also mentions Penn and his (account of his) travels.⁶ What is clear from this discussion is that Leibniz agreed with Locke's views regarding enthusiasm, and considered that Locke's discussion applied to the Quakers and to a wide range of other visionaries and enthusiasts.

¹ Nicholas Jolley, *Leibniz and Locke*, p. 5.

² Nicholas Jolley, *Leibniz and Locke*, p. 5.

³ Nicholas Jolley, *Leibniz and Locke*, p. 8.

⁴ *New Essays*, pp. 507 and lxxii.

⁵ *New Essays*, p. 505.

⁶ *New Essays*, p. 507.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, Locke and Leibniz both agreed with More's criticism of the Quakers that by ignoring reason they leave themselves open to supposed inspirations that are not divine in origin, and which lead to them to behave badly. All three philosophers were of course Christian, and their criticism of the Quakers is intended to defend what they each regard as genuine Christianity. Hume's discussion of the Quakers in many respects follows their earlier discussions: the early Quakers were deluded enthusiasts whose pride led them to think they communicated directly with God. But his aims in discussing them were rather different. By criticising the Quakers, Hume was able to imply claims about Christianity which he was unwilling to state explicitly.

Annex: 'Fake Locke' within the Society of Friends

There is no good evidence that Locke ever attended a Quaker meeting, although as we have seen he observed one taking place in the margins of the examination of Naylor.

A copy of a letter purporting to be from Locke dated 21 November 1699 was given to the Library of the Society of Friends in 1950.

It had already been printed in 1853, where the date was said to be 21 November 1696, and it was said to be a letter from Locke to Rebecca Collier, a minster of the Society of Friends, after a meeting for worship held in London which Locke and King William III attended, the latter incognito. The letter says "I now see acquaintance by sight cannot reach the height of enjoyment which acquaintance by knowledge arrives unto. Outward hearing may misguide, but internal knowledge cannot err". The editor also says that the meeting was so agreeable to Locke that it removed his objections to female ministry. The letter says "Women, indeed, had the honour first to publish the resurrection of the Lord of Love – and why not again the resurrection of the Spirit of Love?". The editor says that the letter was transcribed from a copy lent to her by Joseph John Gurney, Norwich, 4 September 1831.¹

Joseph John Gurney (1788-1847) lived in Earlham Hall near Norwich. He was the first systematic Quaker theologian since Barclay.²

¹ F. Thistlethwayte, *Memoirs and correspondence of Dr. Henry Bathurst, Bishop of Norwich*. London: Richard Bentley, 1853. The letter is at pp. 537 - 538. The letter had previously been published in *A copy of a letter from a clergyman in England to Patience Brayton: to which is added a letter from the celebrated John Locke to Rebecca Collier and Rachael Brecken; and also reflections on death*. Chester: printed by T. Griffith, Bridge-Street, 1823.

² Pink Dandelion, *An Introduction to Quakerism*, pp. 95 - 99.

The letter was reproduced in *The Journal of the Friends' Historical Society* in 1914.¹ The letter is assessed by De Beer as being spurious. He rightly notes that its matter and style are unlike Locke's.² The idea expressed in the letter that internal knowledge cannot err is inconsistent with those he expressed and explained in the *Essay*. Locke is clear that although what a man feels or seems to see cannot be denied, what can be questioned is whether such feelings or apparent perceptions are genuinely revelations from God or merely inclinations or fancies: *Essay*, IV.xix.10.³

It is beyond the scope of this work, but someone faked this letter. The only obvious motive for doing so was to influence then contemporary debates about the light within and women's ministry. There is no reason to think that that person was Gurney himself. But the fact that this letter was in the possession of Gurney emphasises the significance that it would have been thought to have. It also suggests that Quaker participants in such debates were, on occasion, dishonest to the extent of being willing to engage in forgery.

¹ Charles R. Simpson, "Quakers: Benjamin Furly, Quaker Merchant, and his Statesmen Friends". *The Journal of the Friends' Historical Society*. Vol 11 (1914), pp. 67-8, and see footnote 7 on p. 67.

² *Correspondence*, vol 5, p. 718.

³ Locke in fact speaks of what a man sees, rather than of what a man *seems to see*. But my intention is to summarise one of his key points. Even if we are infallible about our feelings and seemings to see, and even if we take them to be immediate revelations from God, there remains genuine doubt as to whether these feelings and seemings are really revelations from God. Even if we grant that we are infallible about our internal mental states, that cannot show that we are infallible about whether those states are revelations from God.

Chapter Four: David Hume

Chronology

- 1711 Hume is born.
- 1739 *A Treatise of Human Nature* Books 1 and 2 published.
- 1740 *A Treatise of Human Nature* Book 3 published.
- 1741 First volume of *Essays, Moral and Political* published. Includes “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm”, which has a section on the Quakers.
- 1748 *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* published (originally under the title *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding*).
- About 1750¹ *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* written.
- 1754 The first volume of *The History of England* published.
- 1755 “Of Suicide” and “Of the Immortality of the Soul” sent to publishers.²
- 1756 Drafted an unused preface to the second volume of *The History of England* regarding history’s recording of the abuses of religion.³
- 1757 The second volume of *The History of England* published. Contains a history of the early Quakers.
- 1757 *Four Dissertations* including *The Natural History of Religion* published.
- 1770 Letter from Elizabeth Shackleton to Hume objecting to his representation of the Quakers in “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm” and his *History*. Hume replied the same year.
- 1776 Hume dies.
- 1777 “Of Suicide” and “Of the Immortality of the Soul” published posthumously.⁴
- 1779 *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* published posthumously.

¹ See Gaskin’s introduction to Hume, *Principal Writings on Religion, including Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and The Natural History of Religion*, p. xviii.

² See Miller’s notes in Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, pp. 577-579.

³ Printed in Ernest Campbell Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, pp. 306 - 307.

⁴ See Miller’s foreword in Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, p. xv.

My interest is in the writings of philosophers about Quakers. David Hume is often said to be the greatest philosopher to have written in English. He wrote about the Quakers in three texts:

1. his Essay “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm”, first published in 1741, in which he makes clear his view that the Quakers are the worst of the enthusiasts, and that their belief in an inner light is sheer delusion;
2. the second volume of *The History of England*, first published in 1757, which contains a history of the early Quakers, starting with George Fox, then giving an account of Quaker beliefs and practices, and ending with James Naylor; and
3. his letter of 1770 to Elizabeth Shackleton, a Quaker who had written to him complaining of what she regarded as his misrepresentation of the Quakers in “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm” and his *History*. Hume’s letter is not included among those published in any of the scholarly collections of his letters.¹ It is interesting not only for illuminating his views about Quakers, but also because it contains remarks which are relevant to his attitude towards deism.²

Hume’s views in these three texts are consistent and form a coherent package, although he is notably more positive about the Quakers in his letter to Elizabeth Shackleton than in the other two texts.

Hume is clear throughout that he thinks that there is no such thing as a light within, no “inward converse” with “the Divinity” (SE, p. 79) or “inward light” (*History*, p. 143). He is

¹ That is to say, this letter is not included in Hume’s *The Letters of David Hume* (edited by J. Y. T. Greig), *New Letters of David Hume* (edited by Raymond Klibansky, and Ernest C. Mossner), or *Further Letters of David Hume* (edited by Felix Waldmann).

² In addition to these three texts, there is a brief reference to Quakers in the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*. Hume has Philo say that “a Quaker’s asseveration is with us justly put upon the same footing with the oath of any other person”. Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion and Other Writings*, pp. 98-99.

ironic when describing Fox and his delusions. However his treatment is also sympathetic – more sympathetic than Elizabeth Shackleton realised. He says that Quakers were sometimes thrown into “mad-houses”, sometimes into prisons. They were sometimes whipped, sometimes pilloried i.e. set in a pillory. “The patience and fortitude, with which they suffered, begat compassion, admiration, esteem” (*History*, p. 144). He says it is remarkable Parliament thought James Naylor’s entering Bristol worthy of its attention, and that it was Naylor’s having been cut off from other enthusiasts – and not the torture to which he was subjected – that had been effective in dissipating his “madness”. In both the *History* (p. 145) and the Letter Hume makes clear that the Quakers were subject to “persecution”. Overall, Hume’s views seems to be that although Fox was ridiculous and Naylor mad, and although the core Quaker belief regarding the light within was mere delusion, the Quakers deserve our sympathy for the persecution to which they were subjected.¹

Further Hume, while regarding the belief in a light within as delusional, seems to have had some sympathy with Quaker sensibilities regarding silent worship – which is not, of course, to say that he shared them.

Hume is consistent in saying that the Quakers have calmed down, the initial fire of enthusiasm having been spent (SE, p. 79; Letter). In his view, this is related to the fact that they do not have priests, men of authority in whose interest it is to maintain the religious spirit (SE, p. 79). Hume of course took a dim view of clergymen, who he considered to be drawn from the common mass of mankind, as people are to other employment, by the prospect of

¹ John Valdimir. Price, in “Hume's Concept of Liberty and *The History of England*”, similarly reads Hume’s discussion of the Quakers in the *History* as both ironic and sympathetic. He attributes to Hume the view that “foolish and fantastic though some of the customs of the Quakers may be, they deserve our sympathy and good-natured understanding when we realise the difficulties they experienced in exercising their right to worship as they wished”, and notes that Hume speaks “admiringly of the fortitude of the Quakers” (p. 144). He suggests that Hume, having been attacked by the clergy for what they took to be his views on religion, could “empathize with others whose unconventional beliefs and behaviour subjected them to verbal attacks, social obloquy, and persecution” (p. 145).

making a profit.¹ He says that the Quakers never had priests (SE, p. 78) and so are not subject to the dominion of the great corrupters of religion (Letter). So when not irritated by persecution, they are led to “confine themselves to natural theology” (Letter). His view is that, there being no light within, once the Quakers have calmed down and in the absence of priests to maintain the religious spirit, they are left with reason. He similarly says in a footnote in the *History of Great Britain* that sects noted for fanaticism during one period become moderate and reasonable in the next. Submission to priestly power having been abolished in the sects “it follows, that as soon as the first ferment is abated, men are naturally in such sects left to the free use of their reason, and shake off the fetters of custom and authority”.²

It is against this background, of the sectaries “who were formerly such dangerous bigots” but are “now become very free reasoners”, that he compares the Quakers to deists (SE, p. 79). As we shall see, he makes clear to Elizabeth Shackleton that he considered this to have been a compliment, and not the criticism that she took it to be.

Hume, of course, did not simply speculate a priori about a supposedly unitary thing called ‘religion’. He was alert to the differences between religious practices. Hume was aware that Quaker meetings were sometimes totally silent, although sometimes a great many preachers had been moved to speak at once (*History*, p. 145). He suggested at one point that “The Idea of an Infinite Mind, the Author of the Universe seems at first Sight to require a Worship absolutely pure, simple, unadorned; without Rites, Institutions, Ceremonies; even without

¹ Hume, “Of National Characters”, first published in 1748, in Hume *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary: A Critical Edition*, p. 162, footnote 2.

This footnote does not draw the distinction originally drawn by Hume in a footnote to SE between priests (who he characterised as pretenders to power, and to a superior sanctity of character) and clergymen (of whom he said that there is no a rank of men more worthy of respect). This footnote was omitted after the 1764 edition of *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjection*: see the editor’s footnote to SE, 78.19.

² Hume, *The History of Great Britain. Vol. II. Containing the Commonwealth, and the reigns of Charles II and James II*, first edition, 1757, p. 450. This footnote is not reproduced in *History*.

Temples, Priests, or verbal Prayer & Supplication”¹, although he also cautioned in the same passage that this species of devotion had often degenerated into fanaticism. However the thought that adoration should be silent survives in the *Dialogues*. Hume has Demea say that “we ought to humble ourselves in his august presence, and, conscious of our frailties, adore in silence his infinite perfections”.² What Demea says in the *Dialogues* is, plainly, not necessarily what Hume himself thought. But what these passages together suggest is that Hume understood the attraction – if only “at first Sight” - of silent worship.

Of Superstition and Enthusiasm

Hume’s essay “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm” starts by implying that true religion is one of the best things, but then focuses entirely on superstition and enthusiasm, which he says are the corruptions of true religion (SE, p. 77).³

Each is given a psychological explanation. Superstition is explained primarily in terms of fear – the objects of which may be real or imaginary: “infinite unknown evils are dreaded from unknown agents” and the practices adopted to overcome these fears include ceremonies, observances, mortifications, sacrifices and presents (SE, p. 77). Enthusiasm is explained primarily in terms of presumption, pride and imagination which give rise to raptures and

¹ This is from the preface drafted in 1756 for the second volume of *The History of England* regarding history’s recording of the abuses of religion, which Hume did not use. The quotation is from Ernest Campbell Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, p 307.

² Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion and Other Writings*, p. 17.

³ For Hume, true religion is difficult to find. Hume says that superstition is a considerable ingredient in almost all religions, and that enthusiasm and superstition are two species of “false religion” (SE, p. 78). He is thus distinguishing true from false religion, and is expressing the view that although false religion is more prevalent than true religion, not all religion is false.

One might wonder if the distinction is between religion which is and is not in accordance with the facts or with reality, or if it might instead be between esteemable and unesteemable religion, regardless of truth claims. One meaning of “true” has been honest, as in “good men and true”. It is notable that Hume also speaks of “true piety”: *The History of Great Britain. Vol. II. Containing the Commonwealth, and the reigns of Charles II and James II*, first edition, 1757, p. 450. What makes piety (or indeed friendship) true, rather than a sham, may be sincerity rather than true beliefs.

flight of fancy which are “attributed to the immediate inspiration of that Divine Being, who is the object of devotion” (SE, p. 77). In each case, Hume’s explanation does not involve a human response to a divine reality: rather, human psychology combined with ignorance leads to error and falsehood.

Superstition gives rise to the power of priests, and the origin of priests is to be found in fear, combined with a sense of being unworthy to approach the divine presence other than through the mediation of another (SE, p. 78). In contrast enthusiasm goes against priestly power, to a greater extent than is justified by reason: “*superstition is favorable to priestly power, and enthusiasm not less or rather more contrary to it, than sound reason and philosophy*” (SE, p. 78).

The Quakers are the worst although also the most innocent enthusiasts, and have never admitted priests among themselves (SE, p. 78). There is a spectrum of enthusiasm: the Quakers being the most fanatical and the freest from priests; the Independents are closest to them in both respects; and the Presbyterians come next on the spectrum, at an equal distance, in the same two respects (SE, p. 78). Enthusiasts, Quakers among them, imagine themselves to approach God without any human mediator, focusing on the inner rather than the outer as the realm in which this imagined communication with the divine takes place.¹ Hume writes:

as enthusiasm arises from a presumptuous pride and confidence, it thinks itself sufficiently qualified to *approach* the Divinity, without any human mediator. Its rapturous devotions are so fervent, that it even imagines itself *actually* to *approach* him by way of contemplation and inward converse; which makes it neglect ... outward ceremonies and observances ... (SE, p. 78-9).

¹ Hume’s view that superstition emphasises “external forms and ceremonies” whereas enthusiasm emphasises “passionate devotion” and “the inward life” is also reflected in his discussion of the Molinists and Jansenists (SE, p. 80).

Hume is not complimentary about the enthusiast's prideful and egotistical delusions: "The fanatic consecrates himself, and bestows on his own person a sacred character" (SE, p. 79). Plainly, for Hume, the notion of receiving guidance from God directly, within oneself, is a self-regarding attempt to elevate oneself to the realm of the divine.

George Fox spoke of "that of God in every one". For example, he exhorted Friends in the ministry to "be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come; that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them. Then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one".¹ Hume would, I am confident, have regarded this as a presumptuous attempt to elevate men and women to the level of God.

Hume says that religions which are characterised by enthusiasm are, when they first arise, more furious and violent than those which are characterised by superstition, but they soon become gentler and more moderate (SE, p. 79). It is in this context that Hume says that enthusiasm at its height inspires the fanatic's delusional "opinion of divine illuminations", and a contempt for the common rules of reason, morality and prudence (SE, p. 79). But the first fire of enthusiasm is soon spent, and members of the sects who were formerly "dangerous bigots" calm down and are now "very free reasoners", whereas superstition is maintained by priests (in whose interest it is to support the religious spirit), rites, ceremonies and holy observances (SE, p. 79). Even the Quakers have calmed down:

the *quakers* seem to approach nearly the only regular body of *deists* in the universe, the *literati*, or the disciples of CONFUCIUS in CHINA (SE, p. 79).

¹ George Fox, *The Journal of George Fox*, p. 263.

So Hume says that the Quakers, now they have calmed down, think freely and are very similar to the Chinese literati, the only organised body of deists that there is. He adds in a footnote that the literati have no priests or ecclesiastical establishment (SE, p. 79).

History of England

The second volume of *The History of England* to be produced - *The History of Great Britain. Vol. II. Containing the Commonwealth, and the reigns of Charles II and James II.* – is the one containing material on the Quakers, including George Fox and James Naylor. It was first published in 1757.¹

Hume's discussion of the Quakers in his *History*, at one level, outlines a number of familiar facts about the Quakers: they renounced the use of arms, would not bow or doff their hats to others, and used *thou* and *thee*, for example. But applying his account of enthusiasm and its psychological causes, he also makes clear that in his view the early Quakers were deluded fanatics. This is history as theory, and indeed psychology, applied to the past.

Hume prefaces his discussion of the Quakers by saying that it would not be possible to enumerate all of the sects that prevailed in England. However, he says, the Quakers are so considerable, or at least so singular, as to merit some attention. Further, since they did not use

¹ The first volume of *The History of England* to be produced - *The History of Great Britain. Vol. I. Containing the Reigns of James I and Charles I.* - was first published in 1754. The second volume to be produced was, as noted above, first published in 1757. Hume then worked back in time, producing two volumes on the Tudors, and then two volumes which go back to the Romans in Britain. So the first two volumes to be produced are now volumes V and VI. The material on the Quakers, originally in Chapter III of Volume II, is now in chapter LXII of Volume VI.

When first published, the first volume of *The History of England* to be produced contained a passage regarding the enthusiasm of the early Protestant reformers and a passage regarding the superstition of Roman Catholicism. Both passages are printed in the editor's foreword to volume 1 of the Liberty Fund edition of *The History of England* (p. xiv – xviii). Hume removed both passages, which had proved controversial, when preparing the second edition of volume I in 1759: Ernest Campbell Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, p. 306. The Liberty Fund edition of *The History of England* is based on the edition of 1778, the last to contain corrections by Hume.

arms because of their principles, they did not make such a figure in public transactions as to enter into Hume's narrative (*History*, p.142). Hume is clear that the Quakers were persecuted: "Admidst the great toleration, which was then granted to all sects, and even encouragement given to all innovations, this sect alone suffered persecution".¹ He is also clear that the Quakers disapproved of – indeed hated – "positive institutions" (*History*, p.144).

Hume states that the religion of the Quakers, like most others, began with the lowest common people, but came at last to include people of better quality and fashion (*History*, p.142).

George Fox was the founder of the sect, an apprentice to a shoe-maker and the son of a weaver. However he broke off all connections with his friends and family so that "he might wean himself from sublunary objects", and moved from one place to another in order to avoid making new connections which would "depress the sublimity of his aerial meditations". He went about the country dressed in a leather doublet, a dress which he affected for its "singularity" as well as its cheapness. He was not well read. He spent whole days in hollow trees, with only the Bible², and

Having reached that pitch of perfection as to need no other book, he soon advanced to another state of spiritual progress, and began to pay less regard even to that divine composition itself. His own breast, he imagined, was full of the same inspiration,

¹ *History*, p.144. Hume uses the word "persecution" again in the next paragraph, p. 144, and also on p. 145.

² This is familiar from George Fox, *The Journal of George Fox*, p. 9. But there is no evidence that Hume read Fox's *Journal* and he himself said that he had read Sewel's *The History of the Rise, Increase, and Progress of the Christian People Called Quakers*. Sewel introduces Fox early in his *History* and says that his father was a weaver (p. 6). He also says this: "But his Troubles and Temptations still continued; and he fasted much, and walked often abroad in solitary Places, taking his Bible with him; and then sat in hollow Trees, and lonesome Places till Night came on; and frequently in the Night he walked mournfully about, being surrounded with many Sorrows in the Times of these first Workings of the Lord in him" (p. 12). The Faculty of Advocates had a copy of the 1722 edition of William Sewel's *History*. See the *Catalogue of the printed books in the Library of the Faculty of Advocates*, printed by William Blackwood and issued between 1867 and 1878. Accessed at <https://digital.nls.uk/104350712> on 3 November 2022. My references are to the 1722 edition of Sewel.

which had guided the prophets and apostles themselves; and by this inward light must every spiritual obscurity be cleared, by this living spirit must the dead letter be animated (*History*, p. 143).

The implication is clear: this inward light was imagined, not real. Further

When he had been sufficiently consecrated in his own imagination, he felt that the fumes of self-applause soon dissipate, if not continually supplied by the admiration of others; and he began to seek proselytes (*History*, p. 143).

That is, he imagined himself holy, which is best explained by his self-regard or egoism. But soon that was not enough, and he sought converts in order to bolster his inflated sense of his own worth. Further

All the forms of ceremony, invented by pride and ostentation, Fox and his disciples, from a superior pride and ostentation, carefully rejected (*History*, p. 143).

The violent enthusiasm of the sect threw the preachers into convulsions and shakings, which is why they were named ‘Quakers’ (*History*, pp. 143-144). They broke into churches, disturbed public worship, and harassed the minister and congregation. They did not treat magistrates with the deference they were due, but treated them as if they were equals (*History*, p. 144).

Hume criticises the Quakers for carrying, or affecting to carry, their morals “to the same degree of extravagance as religion”:

Give a quaker a blow on one cheek, he held up the other: Ask his cloke, he gave you his coat also: The greatest interest could not engage him, in any court of judicature, to swear even to the truth (*History*, p. 144).

What is notable here is that it would have been obvious to Hume that his readers would have understood him to be criticising Quakers for following – or affecting to follow – biblical

precepts.¹ That is, under the guise of criticising Quakers for their absurd behaviour, he was suggesting that those biblical precepts should not be followed.

As we have just seen, Hume referred to the Bible as a “divine composition” (*History*, p. 143). However it is clear that he considered the Bible to be subject to reason. In “On Suicide”, which was only published in English after his death, he says that the precept *thou shalt not kill* “like most of the scripture precepts, must be modified by reason and common sense”.² He is not so explicit, in the passage from the *History* just quoted, that biblical precepts should not always be followed. But the implication would have been clear that the biblical injunction to turn the other cheek should not be followed, and Hume seems to have felt safe criticising Quakers for following these precepts, precepts that the majority of his readers presumably did not follow themselves.

Hume gives an accurate summary of the Quakers’ central doctrine:

No priests were admitted in their sect: Every one had received from immediate illumination a character much superior to the sacerdotal. When they met for divine worship, each rose up in his place, and delivered the extemporary inspirations of the Holy Ghost: Women also were ... considered as proper vehicles to convey the dictates of the spirit. Sometimes a great many preachers were moved to speak at once: Sometimes a total silence prevailed in their congregations (*History*, p. 145).

Hume makes clear that the enthusiasm of the early Quakers led them to act in extreme ways. He says that some tried to fast forty days in imitation of Christ, one of them “bravely” dying

¹ “And unto him that smiteth thee on the *one* cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not *to take thy* coat also”: Luke, 6:29, KJV.

“But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and *your* nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation”: James, 5:12, KJV.

² David Hume and Eugene F. Miller; *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, p. 588, footnote 6.

in the attempt. He adds that a female Quaker “came naked into the church where the protector sate; being moved by the spirit, as she said, to appear *as a sign* to the people” (*History*, p. 145).

His history of the Quakers then turns to, and ends, with James Naylor (*History*, p. 145-146).

Hume says that he was a Quaker “noted for blasphemy, or rather madness, in the time of the protectorship”. He “fancied” himself transformed into Christ and in consequence of this “frenzy” he attempted to imitate actions of the Messiah related in the evangelists. Hume says that he “raised a person from the dead”. He entered Bristol on a horse, “I suppose, from the difficulty in that place of finding an ass”, and his disciples cried “Hosanna to the highest; holy, holy is the Lord God of Sabbaoth”. Hume says that it is “remarkable” that parliament thought the matter deserving of their attention, and reports that they spent nearly ten days in enquiries and debates about him. He was condemned to be pilloried, branded and have his tongue bored through with a red hot iron. Hume says that he bore all these “severities” with “patience” and was supported, this far, by his “delusion”. However he was then sent to Bridewell prison, confined to hard labour, and prevented from seeing his disciples. “His illusion dissipated; and after some time, he was contented to come out an ordinary man, and return to his usual occupations” (*History*, p. 146).¹ In summary, Hume considers him to have

¹ Sewel, *op. cit.*, gives a history of Naylor (pp. 137-160). Sewel’s discussion makes clear that his assessment is that although Naylor suffered from a clouded understanding, he had not actually been blasphemous. As we have seen, this is also Hume’s assessment. Sewel uses the word “severity” when describing Naylor’s treatment (p. 139) and says that Naylor bore his treatment with “patience” (p. 141). As we have seen, Hume speaks of Naylor bearing with “patience” the “severities” inflicted upon him (*History*, p. 146). Sewel says that part of Naylor’s treatment was to be sent to Bridewell and “there restrained from the society of all people” (p. 140). Hume spells this out, noting that in Bridewell, Naylor was “debarred from all his disciples, male and female” (*History*, p. 146). Hume’s explicit reference to women being excluded from seeing Naylor in Bridewell is interesting. Sewel says that it was as a result of the “passionate lamenting Manner” and “Moaning or Weeping, and bitterly crying out” of a woman called Martha that Naylor’s understanding became clouded (p. 138). Sewel also says that Hannah Stranger “a woman of High Imaginations” sent him a number of very extravagant letters (pp. 138-139). One aspect of Sewel’s defence of Naylor, echoed I think in Hume’s treatment in his *History*, is to blame over-emotional women.

been mad, and to have behaved as if he himself was Christ in consequence of his frenzied enthusiasm. The impression we are left with is that Hume considers his deluded behaviour to have prompted an overreaction and official persecution. And it is notable, Hume thinks, that once he was cut off from other enthusiasts, his passions abated, his delusions left him, and he returned to live as an ordinary man. It was being cut off from other enthusiasts – and not the torture to which he was subjected – which Hume regarded as having been effective in dissipating his enthusiasm.^{1 2}

¹ Hume gives three sources for his account of the Quakers in his footnotes: “Whitlocke”; “the Harleian Miscellany”; and “Thurloe”.

The first is a reference to Bulstrode Whitlocke, *Memorials of the English affairs*, London, 1682. Hume cites Whitlocke in the context of a story about some Quakers being attacked at Hassington, but their patience and fortitude leading to esteem (*History*, p. 144) and also when reporting that one Quaker died bravely attempting to fast forty days in imitation of Christ (*History*, p. 145). Whitlocke’s *Memorials of the English affairs* deals with both these events at p. 599 and p. 624 respectively.

The second is a reference to *The Harleian Miscellany*, an eight volume collection of pamphlets and tracts found in the library of Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, London, 1744-46. Hume cites the “Harleian Miscellany” as his source for saying that one Dorcas Earberry made an oath before a magistrate that she was dead for two days and that James Naylor had brought her back to life. For the examination of Dorcas Erbury, and her claim that Naylor raised her from the dead, see William Oldys and Edward Harley Oxford, *The Harleian Miscellany*, Volume VI, London, 1744, p. 399.

The third is a reference to John Thurloe’s seven volume *A collection of the state papers of John Thurloe*, London, 1742. Hume cites Thurloe to support his claim that Parliament spent nearly ten days in enquiries and debates about Naylor. A letter from Thurloe to Cromwell dated 16 December 1656, in which Thurloe says that Parliament had done nothing for ten days but dispute whether Naylor should be put to death for blasphemy, before deciding that he should have his tongue bored, be branded on his forehead, pilloried, whipped and imprisoned for life, is in John Thurloe, *A collection of the state papers of John Thurloe*, volume 5, p. 708. All three of these texts were available to Hume in the library of the Faculty of Advocates: *Catalogue of the printed books in the Library of the Faculty of Advocates*, printed by William Blackwood and issued between 1860 and 1879. Accessed at <https://digital.nls.uk/104350712> on 3 November 2022.

² The Quakers are also mentioned briefly in what is now chapter LXX. Addresses to James II came from all quarters on his accession and, Hume says, the Quakers’ address was “esteemed somewhat singular for its plainness and simplicity” (*History*, p.450).

Elizabeth Shackleton wrote to Hume, and he replied, in 1770.¹

These letters were first published in 1823, in the second edition of *Memoirs and Letters of Richard and Elizabeth Shackleton, late of Ballitore, Ireland; Compiled by their daughter, Mary Leadbeater*.² Hume's reply to Elizabeth Shackleton (but not her initial letter to him) was also published in the *Journal of the Friends Historical Society* in 1930, having been copied from an original then in the possession of Edward B. Ffennell.³

¹ There is a brief discussion of this exchange of letters in Pullin, *Female Friends and the Making of Transatlantic Quakerism, 1650-1750*.

² Richard Shackleton, Elizabeth Shackleton and Mary Leadbeater, *Memoirs and Letters of Richard and Elizabeth Shackleton, late of Ballitore, Ireland; Compiled by their daughter, Mary Leadbeater*, second edition, 1823. My page references are to this. The letters are at pp. 76 – 80.

A.W. was a pupil of Richard Shackleton and various of his letters are also printed in this edition. His letter of 10 August 1770 to Richard Shackleton refers to “Davy Hume’s” letter to “the mistress” and comments on their relative merits. He prefers Elizabeth Shackleton’s: “The mistress’s letter is much the best of the two: his is entirely complimentary and evasive, and not even an indirect answer to the questions in hand” (p. 46). That assessment seems to me unfair.

³ See David Hume, Richard Shackleton and Thomas Leland, “Historians criticised”. This contains the letter from Hume to Elizabeth Shackleton, and letters between Richard Shackleton and Thomas Leland, author of *The History of Ireland from the Invasion of Henry II*, which was first published in 1773. It states that “The ... letters were copied in 1921 from the originals then in possession of Edward B. Ffennell, M.D., of Southbourne on Sea, Hants.” (p. 39).

The *Journal of the Friends Historical Society* also published a letter from Sir Walter Scott to Mary Leadbetter in the same volume: Walter Scott, “Sir Walter Scott to Mary Leadbetter, 1811”. That too was “Copied from the original in the possession of Edward B. Ffennell, M.D., of Southbourne on Sea, Hants, 1921” (p. 58).

Mary Leadbetter was the daughter of Richard and Elizabeth Shackleton. So in 1921 Dr Ffennell possessed original letters between three members of the Shackleton family and three well known authors.

Richard Shackleton and Leland corresponded in 1773 i.e. after Elizabeth Shackleton’s correspondence with Hume. It appears that Shackleton objected to Leland’s having said “but those called protestant were chosen from quakers, or other enthusiasts, from the poor, the profligate and contemptible”: Thomas Leland, *The History of Ireland from the Invasion of Henry II*, vol. 3, p. 504. Shackleton is polite, saying that he thinks both Hume and Leland ornaments of their age, notwithstanding Hume’s calling Quakers deists and Dr Leland calling them enthusiasts (p. 43). In response, Leland is also polite. He says that “If it be Quakerism to enforce the momentous distinction between the vital influencing spirit of Christianity and the nominal and formal profession of Religion, I have ever been preaching Quakerism, & God

Elizabeth Shackleton wrote to Hume from Ballitore in the 5th month of 1770 (p. 78). She is polite – saying that he is a man of great understanding and an ingenious historian. However, she says that he has misrepresented Quakers in both his *History of England* and in his essay “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm” (p. 76).

She suggests that he may have taken his account of the Quakers from the writings of some of their adversaries (p. 76). In a short coda which follows her signature she says that she hopes that he will investigate in more detail the religious principles of the Quakers from their own writings, and especially from Robert Barclay’s *Apology* (p.78).

She objects that his characterisation of Quakers as deists is unjust, arguing that it cannot be correct as Quakers believe that Christ died on the cross in order to redeem mankind from their sins (p.77). She also says that Quakers believe that Christ is come a second time, and is fulfilling his promise of the Spirit of truth who dwells within.¹ A measure of “holy Spirit, grace, or truth” is given to every man.²

Hume’s reply of 5 July 1770 is polite. He says that

When I said that the Quakers may, in some respects, be regarded as Deists, I thought that I was doing them the greatest honour, by putting them on the same footing with Socrates, Plato, Cicero, Seneca, and the wisest men in all ages. As that sect has shaken

grant I may live & die a Quaker!”, before saying that he will correct his history at the first opportunity (p. 45).

Leland died in 1785. When *The History of Ireland from the Invasion of Henry II* was reprinted in 1814, the text to which Richard Shackleton had objected was unchanged. The same letters between Richard Shackleton and Thomas Leland are also in Richard Shackleton, Elizabeth Shackleton and Mary Leadbeater, *Memoirs and Letters of Richard and Elizabeth Shackleton*, pp.102-109 (although Shackleton’s reference to Hume’s calling Quakers deists is missing, there being ellipsis marks instead: p. 106).

¹ She quotes John 14: 16-17. “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; *Even* the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you”, KJV.

² She also quotes from 1 Corinthians 12:7: “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal”, KJV.

off the dominion of priests, who are the great corrupters of religion, and neglect all positive institutions, they are led, almost necessarily, to confine themselves to natural theology, at least where they are not irritated by persecution. Morality and a reverence for the Supreme Being become the basis of their principles, and scarcely admit of any superstructure. As to my historical account of the origin of the Quakers, I drew chiefly from Sewel, who was of the sect. I have, indeed, a great regard for that body of men, especially for the present members. And I acknowledge that, even in the last century, when all the different sects were worrying one another, and throwing the state into convulsions, they were always peaceable, charitable, and exemplary; and have, in every shape, deserved well of the public.¹

This letter is the authentic voice of Hume. He did indeed think that the Quakers had shaken off priests (e.g. SE, p. 78) and had avoided all positive institutions (*History*, p.144). In response to Shackleton's view that every man is given a measure of the dictates of the Holy Spirit, grace or truth, and her biblical support for it, he does not answer directly but suggests that Quakers are now confining themselves to natural theology (when not irritated by persecution). This is perhaps a polite way of denying the existence of any inward light other than reason. (As we have seen, it is clear from Hume's writings that he thought the Quaker belief in a light within to be mere delusion.) The O.E.D. defines 'superstructure' as "A thing built on a distinct foundation; a structure raised on or over something". Hume's suggestion that once religious principles are pared back to morality and a reverence for "the Supreme Being", those principles do not support a structure raised upon them chimes, it seems to me, with the view he had earlier expressed in the unused preface to the second volume of *The History of England* quoted above.

¹ pp. 79-80.

It is interesting to learn that the chief source of his account of the Quakers in his *History* was Sewel, and that is confirmed by a comparison of Hume's text with Sewel's: see especially footnote 1 on p. 80 above, but also footnote 2 on p. 77 above. It is also notable that he does not say, in response to Shackleton's suggestion that he read Barclay's *Apology*, that he was familiar with the work.

His flattering assertion that even in the last century, when all the different sects were throwing the state into convulsions, the Quakers were always peaceable chimes with what he had said in the *History*, that since the Quakers renounced the use of arms, they did not impact upon public affairs to the same extent as other sects (*History*, p.142).

It is unsurprising that Elizabeth Shackleton had taken Hume's comparison of the Quakers with deists to be a criticism, since the comparison was used by others as a criticism. The criticism that Quakers were deists was, for example, made by Keith, once he had broken from the Quakers. In 1699 he had published *The Deism of W. Penn, and his brethren, destructive to the Christian Religion*.

However Hume had himself been accused of being a deist, and may well have used the comparison for very different purposes. He had been accused of deism (as well as heresy, scepticism and atheism) when he was, unsuccessfully, a candidate for the Chair at Edinburgh.

When he was candidate to be Keeper of the Advocates Library he was again faced with allegations of deism (atheism and scepticism). In this context, he wrote to his friend John Clephane on 4 February 1752, that it was "vulgarly given out, that the contest was betwixt Deists and Christians", suggesting that it was surprising he had been successful,

"notwithstanding this imputation, which my friends could not deny to be well founded".¹

Despite accepting to his friend that the allegation of deism was well-founded (not necessarily true, but well-founded), Hume took steps to avoid being known as such. The 1755 edition of

¹ David Hume and J. Y. T. Greig, *The Letters of David Hume*, Letter 77, p. 166.

John Leland's *A View of the Principal Deistical Writers of the Last and Present Century* considered Hume extensively.¹ Hume was aware of the work, writing on 29 September 1757 to his friend Captain James Edmonstone, and asking him to tell Dr Leland that he had certainly mistaken Hume's character.² Lord Charlemont records that Mrs Mallet, who did not know Hume, accosted Hume at an assembly, saying "Mr Hume, Give me leave to introduce myself to you. We deists ought to know each other". Hume is said to have replied "I am no Deist. I do not style myself so, neither do I desire to be known by that Appellation".³ It is interesting that Hume did not simply deny being a deist. He also made clear that he had no desire to be known as such, confirming that he considered that, on this issue, reputation mattered. Hume may of course have considered that his personal interests would be best served by insisting in public that he was not a deist, and that this was merely an "innocent simulation" on a religious matter, of the sort that he thought was necessary if one was to pass through the world.⁴

In this context one might wonder what light Hume's assertion to Elizabeth Shackleton, that he had thought his comparison of Quakers with deists to be a great compliment, might add to the scholarly debate about whether Hume was himself, in some sense, a deist. (Although one can of course compliment others for traits that one does not oneself possess, Hume seems to be complimenting Quakers because they, like deists, confine themselves to natural theology. And it would be odd for Hume to compliment Quakers and deists for the way they reach their religious beliefs, unless he thought that that was the right way to reach them.) But the more important point is that Hume's comparison of the Quakers with deists may well not have been

¹ David Hume and Tom L. Beauchamp, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding: A Critical Edition*, pp. lxxx – lxxxii.

² David Hume, Raymond Klibansky and Ernest C. Mossner, *New Letters of David Hume*, Letter 25, p. 43.

³ J. C. A. Gaskin, "Hume's Attenuated Deism", p. 168; and J. C. A. Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, p. 245.

⁴ David Hume, Raymond Klibansky and Ernest C. Mossner, *New Letters of David Hume*, Letter 41, to Colonel James Edmonstone, April 1764, p. 83.

intended as a criticism. Indeed, returning to “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm”, it is notable that Hume’s point is as much about human institutions or bodies as it is about doctrine: “the *quakers* seem to approach nearly the only regular body of *deists* in the universe, the *literati*, or the disciples of CONFUCIUS in CHINA” (SE, p. 79). In a religious body where superstition is not maintained by priests, rites and ceremonies, and whose members are no longer “irritated by persecution” (Letter) or “animated by opposition” (SE, p. 79), religious belief contracts to something like deism. The Quakers are still a religious body, but without superstition or enthusiasm, extraneous religious beliefs fall away and the scope of the remaining religious beliefs are much more limited. The point Hume is making at the end of “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm” is not only about the Quakers. It is about what happens to a religious body, in the absence of superstition and enthusiasm: the scope of their members’ religious beliefs will become much more limited. And what the reference to the Chinese *literati* suggests is that Christian doctrine will fall away. That that suggestion is intended is confirmed, it seems to me, by his reference to Socrates, Plato, Cicero and Seneca in Hume’s Letter. In Hume’s view, there is nothing distinctively Christian about the beliefs that will survive in a religious body that manages to avoid both superstition and enthusiasm.

It is understandable that Elizabeth Shackleton viewed Hume’s comparison of Quakers with deists as criticism. But Hume is not merely being polite when he says that he views it as a compliment. Rather, it seems to me that, just as in the *History* Hume’s discussion of the Quakers could be used to imply a point about the absurdity of following certain biblical precepts, a point he was not willing to state explicitly, so the comparison of Quakers with deists at the end of “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm” implies a point about Christian doctrine that Hume was not willing to state explicitly. Christian doctrine, he thinks, is sustained by superstition and enthusiasm and, in the absence of both, would wither away. So the true religion, the religion which is one of the best things (SE, p. 77), and which would survive without either superstition or enthusiasm, is not Christian.

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