

WIDER QUAKER FELLOWSHIP, AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

LETTER 158, December 2023

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Thinking about Christmas—

The high holy days of the Christian calendar exist among the holy days of many other religions these days in Aotearoa and in many other countries, but in England at the beginnings of Quakers there was only Christianity.

In the 17th century the Bible became widely available as it was printed, and it was in English. The availability of printed books led to many more people learning to read than in the previous century. So the priests and clergy no longer had a monopoly on learning and on reading and interpreting the Bible. Because of this the dissenters who arose during the religious turmoil of the mid 17th century were Christians striving for a better way to express their faith, Christianity.

Early Friends embraced Christianity but rejected the existing forms such as baptism and communion.

In the 1972 reprint of the British Faith and Practice, 209 Gerald K. Hibbert said, 'To Fox and the early Friends the whole of life seemed sacramental, and they refused to mark off any one particular practice or observance as more sacred than any others. They took the same stand with regard to Sunday, or First Day; it was not in itself more holy than Saturday or Monday; every weekday should be the Lord's Day. Their whole attitude was gloriously positive, not negative. They were 'alive unto God' and sensed him everywhere.' ...



Circle of Friends, Karr 2023

No one actually knows when Jesus was born. It doesn't matter. What is more important is that true or not people in mid-east started proclaiming, about 2000 years ago, that he was born, the son of god come to save all people. And sometime after that the stories were written down to become part of what we call the Christian bible.

Jesus wasn't a Christian . He was part of a people defined by lineage as well as a religion that we now call Judaism. When he started preaching in his early 30's he was talking to his fellow Jews. He wasn't trying to start a new religion. He wanted his people to be true to their own faith and to follow the truth of his bible, the Torah.

As his story became more widely known it appealed to both Jews and non-jews. The rest as they say is history.

So Christmas— we could consider it just another secular excuse for spending money, giving gifts, or we could consider the stories of Jesus and give thanks that we have that wisdom to enlighten our lives.

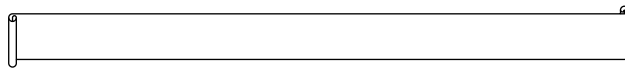
Not every Friend is a Christian. Many come to Friends having grown up in other faiths or none at all. You don't have to be a Christian to be a Friend. But we should remember and study our testimonies both spiritual and social, and consider where they originate.

And between his birth and death we should look at Jesus' life. Where would we be without him?

This We Can Say, Australian Quaker Life, Faith and Thought 1.74

In 1966 Shay Jones wrote, 'As a child I thought that Jesus was the Son of God and that he was always good and kind. In some way I gained the notion that because he was God's son it was easy for him to be perfect— much easier than for me, a very ordinary human being— and this grudging belief helped me to excuse many of my own shortcomings. But as I grew older I began to be aware that Jesus knew the trials of human existence— hunger, weariness, anger and bitterness, the need for prayer and rest, the need for friends, the need to be alone— and he knew the great temptation to use the special talents God had bestowed on him for his personal power and gain. Throughout these experiences he was confident of God's help and love and so able to live courageously and effectively, and this example helped me to accept his comfort when I knew the strain of being human. Thus I discovered that the way of life he offers is tried and true, and the realization that his life was not insulated by his divinity gave me a new respect for him. '...

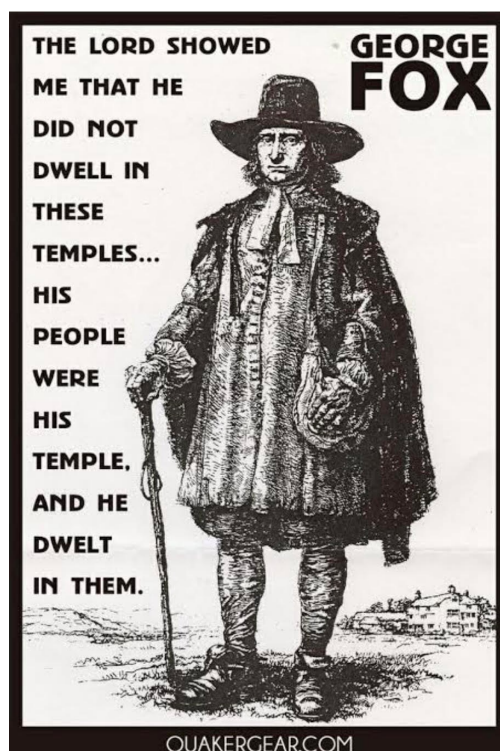
I confess that when young I also was defeated by the idea of following Jesus' example. How could I be like someone who is perfect? Eventually I worked out that for me it was Jesus' use of prayer and his dependence on god for guidance in life that was the example I was to follow, and I could do that, I didn't need to worry about being perfect. Humans aren't perfect.



Bearing in mind the ideas and ideals of early Friends I am a bit hesitant about mentioning another birthday, that of one of the founding Friends, George Fox. July 2024 marks 400 years since his birth. We will be celebrating.

Yours in Friendship

Carril Karr



The Wider Quaker Fellowship is an association of persons of diverse backgrounds who wish to have ties with the Religious Society of Friends without necessarily being in its membership, or who, through isolation, illness or some other circumstance are unable to attend Meeting for Worship. The purpose of the Fellowship is to reflect Quaker life and thought.

Any person who finds the Quaker testimonies and the Quaker way of life, with its emphasis on sincerity and simplicity, compatible with his , her or their philosophy of life is welcome to join the Fellowship.

If you wish to make a donation to the WQF—

To make a donation on line, the YM Kiwi bank account number is 38 9001 0669022 02

Be sure to put your name and that the donation is for Wider Quaker Fellowship in the reference spaces. If you want a tax donation certificate use the new email address for this: treasurer@ym.quakers.nz giving the amount and date of the donation and your name and address.

Kiwi bank has stopped accepting cheques if you don't do internet banking you will need to deposit any donation directly into the YM account at a Kiwibank branch.

SUMMER GATHERING is on from 29 December hosted by Dunedin MM.

YEARLY MEETING will be in Kirikiriroa/ Hamilton in 2024.