

CANDLESTICK MYSTERIES*

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ABSTRACT

The Light upon the Candlestick (1662) was written by a Dutch Collegiant, but was taken by the Quakers to be a good account of their own theory of knowledge. Yet a contemporary scholar of Dutch Collegiant thought interprets this same essay as showing the beginning of the Collegiants' moving away from a spiritualist interpretation of the Light Within and towards a rationalist interpretation, influenced by the philosopher Spinoza. While the title page of this essay indicates the influence of a Quaker, it seems that, until now, no one has examined this connection in detail. A recent translation of William Ames' *Mysteries of the Kingdom of God* (1661) has now made this comparison possible. The comparison shows that the Quaker influence is substantial, and that *The Light upon the Candlestick* is better interpreted as a point of convergence between Quaker and Collegiant thought than as a rationalist turn in Collegiant thought.

KEYWORDS

Dutch Collegiants, The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), epistemology, William Ames, Pieter Balling, Spinoza.

INTRODUCTION: WHY SO MUCH INTEREST IN *THE LIGHT UPON THE CANDLESTICK?*

The Light upon the Candlestick, written in 1662 by Pieter Balling, is said by Collegiant scholar Andrew Fix to be the most discussed document written by a Dutch Collegiant author (Fix 1991: 204). Not only is it of interest as a statement of Collegiant thought, it has also long been of interest to Quakers as well. In 1663 it was translated into English by Benjamin Furly, an English Quaker merchant living in Rotterdam. It was subsequently circulated among Quakers. The pamphlet was included in its entirety as an appendix to William Sewel's 1722 history of Quakers. It is listed under the Quaker William Ames' name in Joseph Smith's *A Descriptive Catalogue of Friends Books*, 1867, although Smith mentions that it was probably not authored by Ames, and cites Sewel in explaining why. It was discussed again in 1914 by the Quaker Rufus Jones, and in 1992 by contemporary Quaker Universalists.¹

As William Hull noted, *The Light upon the Candlestick* can be said to be a work that has been ‘claimed’ by both Quakers and Collegiants (Hull 1938: 215 n. 444), although its significance within each of these movements is interpreted differently. The Dutch Collegiants and Quakers who were connected to this document at the time of its writing were also in close contact with the philosopher Baruch Spinoza, and several scholars have concluded that it shows traces of a connection with Spinoza. Its importance, then, is that of determining the nature of influences among the Dutch Collegiants, the Quakers, and Spinoza.

The Light upon the Candlestick presents a theory of knowledge centered on the concept of the Light Within. The debate about this document is whether the concept of the Light in this work is spiritualist² or rationalist. If spiritualist, it would represent an early phase in Collegiant thought, akin to the Quaker understanding of the Light. If rationalist, it would suggest Spinoza’s influence, thus representing a shift to the later Collegiant view of the Light, when the Collegiant interpretation diverged notably from the Quaker interpretation. Collegiant scholar Andrew Fix argues for the latter. This article argues for the former based on comparing *The Light upon the Candlestick*, with William Ames’ *Mysteries of the Kingdom of God*.

WRITTEN BY A DUTCH COLLEGIANT, BUT ‘CLAIMED’ BY QUAKERS TOO?

Richard Popkin noted that *The Light upon the Candlestick* was ‘taken up immediately by the Quakers as a statement of their theory of knowledge’ (Popkin 1985: 232). Earlier, Rufus Jones regarded this work as important for similar reasons. Jones wrote that this work

was very quickly discovered by the Quakers, who immediately recognized it as ‘bone of their bone’, and circulated it as a Quaker Tract. It was translated into English in 1663 by B. F. (Benjamin Furley, a Quaker merchant of Colchester, then living in Rotterdam), who published it with the curious title page: *The Light upon the Candlestick. Serving for Observation of the Principal things in the Book called, The Mystery [sic] of the Kingdom of God, &c. Against several Professors, Treated of, and written by Will Ames. Printed in Low Dutch for the Author, 1662, and translated into English by B. F. (Jones 1914: 128).*

William Hull notes that both the content and the title page even led some to believe that *The Light upon the Candlestick* was itself authored by William Ames because of the prominence of Ames’ name in the layout of the original title page and the absence of reference to any other author (Hull 1938: 214–15). But a close reading of the title page suggests that the anonymous author only claimed to have been influenced by a separate work written by William Ames: *The Mysteries of the Kingdom of God*. William Sewel, who had known Ames,³ discussed how others had misread the title page, but himself noted

That he [Ames] approved the Contents of the Book I know; but I know also that it never proceeded from his Pen. And many Years afterwards it was published under the Name of one Peter Balling, as the Author of it, tho’ there were those who

father'd it upon Adam Boreel, because it is found printed in Latin among his Scripta Posthuma... Besides he and some other of the Collegians, and among these also Dr. Galenus Abrahamson, were so effectually convinced of the Doctrine preached by William Ames, when he first came to Amsterdam, that they approved of it; tho' afterwards from a Misapprehension they opposed it... (Sewel 1722: Preface).

Richard Popkin and Andrew Fix think that Pieter Balling wrote *The Light upon the Candlestick*, and that Adam Boreel translated it into Latin (Popkin 1985: 232; Fix 1991: 199 n. 34). According to Popkin, it was probably written by Balling 'right after he visited Spinoza in late 1661, when the latter had just completed what exists as *The Treatise on the Emendation of the Understanding*'. Popkin further explains: '*Light on the Candlestick* is an epistemological rationale for mysticism based on Spinozistic terms and ideas. It could only be written by someone who had access to Spinoza's unpublished *Emendation*', and also notes 'Spinoza's theory as formulated in *Emendation* was still close enough to Quaker ideas to be taken up by them' (Popkin 1985: 232).

Sally Rickerman and Kingdon Swayne summarize some of the scholarship by Richard Popkin, Michael Signer, and Rufus Jones on *The Light upon the Candlestick*, ending with these words: 'We may hope that some future scholar will solve the major remaining puzzle presented by *The Light upon the Candlestick*: who decided to put William Ames' name to Peter Balling's work, and why?' (Rickerman and Swayne 1992: 27). The answer to this question is now clear: it is not that someone decided to put Ames' name to Balling's work; rather, the title page describes and acknowledges the influence of William Ames' work, *Mysteries of the Kingdom of God on The Light upon the Candlestick*. This influence is substantial, as will be seen below.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE DUTCH COLLEGIANTS, THE QUAKERS IN HOLLAND, AND SPINOZA

The Dutch Collegiant movement and Quakerism were both parts of the radical branch of the second reformation. The Dutch Collegiant movement started around 1620 in Holland, arising out of the Arminian controversy. Jacob Arminius (1560–1609) did not agree with predestination. After his death, his supporters formally requested toleration for their views in Holland, and were thus called 'Remonstrants'. When the Reformed Church suspended all Remonstrant preachers, a congregation in Warmond, near Leiden, decided, under the advice of former elder Gijsbert van der Kodde, to continue to meet even without a preacher in a 'college' (informal gathering for religious education), to pray, read the Bible, and freely discuss religious matters (Fix 1991: 37). This was the start of the Dutch Collegiant movement. The Collegiants did not formally establish themselves as a Church, and so were not a separate new denomination, as such, but formed as groups of seekers from various religious traditions meeting separately from their churches to discuss ideas. Collegiants typically maintained their memberships in their churches even as they also participated in the colleges. Major colleges were

established in Rijnsburg, Amsterdam, and Rotterdam. The Collegiants had no hired clergy. They advocated 'free prophecy', holding meetings in which any man⁴ was free to speak. They believed in the Light Within although how they interpreted this Light changed over time, as will be discussed later.

It is clear from this description why the Quakers would have been drawn to make contact with the Dutch Collegiants. After Quakerism started around 1652 in England, some Friends soon went to Holland both because Holland was more tolerant of religious freedom than England was (although the Quakers still faced persecution there), and because the Quakers found people receptive to their message. The relative tolerance of diversity in religious thought created a seeking culture that the Quakers regarded as ripe for converting seekers to Quakerism and founding more Quaker Meetings. They were also trying to convert Jews to Christianity in anticipation of what they thought to be the coming Millennium. While unsuccessful in converting Jews (Popkin 1987: 11-12), they did make important connections with Mennonites and Collegiants.

In 1653 the first Quaker missionaries, William Caton and John Stubbs, arrived in Holland, visiting Middelburg and Vlissingen. A few years later, in 1656, William Ames arrived in Amsterdam and soon became recognised as an important Quaker leader. William Ames was deeply involved in discussions and debates with important Dutch Collegiant writers, and he also met Spinoza.

The Dutch Collegiants who are especially important to our story include Adam Boreel (who, along with Daniel De Breen, co-founded the Amsterdam College in 1646), Galenus Abrahamsz (a Mennonite pastor who was inspired by Adam Boreel and joined the Amsterdam College in 1650, himself then becoming an important Collegiant leader), and Pieter Balling (who was himself influenced by Galenus). *Mysteries of the Kingdom of God* was written by William Ames as a response to earlier work by Galenus Abrahamsz.

The philosopher Baruch Spinoza was very much influenced by the rationalist philosophy of René Descartes. Spinoza was Jewish, but was excommunicated from his synagogue for his radical views in 1656. Boreel and Balling were close to Spinoza, even before Spinoza was excommunicated. After Spinoza's excommunication, he spent a lot of time in close contact with his Dutch Collegiant friends (Fix 1991: 200). Balling translated Spinoza's *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy* into Dutch (1991: 193). In 1657 Spinoza met William Ames, and their meeting was a good one. There are indications that Spinoza was planning to attend a Quaker Meeting with Ames, but Ames unfortunately was arrested and imprisoned and then temporarily exiled from Amsterdam before they were able to attend Meeting together (Hull 1938: 205; Popkin 1987: 5). Meanwhile, Spinoza seems to have been in contact with the Quaker Samuel Fisher. Margaret Fell had wanted Fisher to translate into Hebrew two works that she had written to the Jewish people in 1658, but it was very likely Spinoza who actually translated Fell's writings (Popkin 1987). Another indication of Spinoza's contact with Fisher was that Spinoza's *Tractatus-Theologico-Politicus* (1670) echoes many of the arguments of Fisher's 1660 *Rusticus Ad Academicos* (1660) (Popkin 1985). Thus we see that the time of the

writing of *The Light upon the Candlestick* was a time in which Spinoza, the Quakers, and the Dutch Collegiants were in significant contact with each other.

Galenus, Balling, and Pieter Serrarius were initially attracted to Quakerism,⁵ but theological differences and controversial events created tensions between the two groups. For example, in England in 1656 James Nayler's messianic entry into Bristol caused Quakers to rethink the discernment of divine inspiration (Hull 1938: 237; Dandelion 2007: 38–43). In Amsterdam interest in Quakerism, both positive and negative, was due in part to the wide publicity this event received (Hull 1938: 221). One of Nayler's followers, Ann Cargill, went to Amsterdam and created considerable controversy within the Quaker communities there (1938: 273). Galenus himself was the target of strange and unsettling Quaker behavior when the Quaker Issac Furnier in 1656 scratched off 'Dr' from the nameplate on Galenus' door. When Galenus confronted him on this, Furnier said he had been divinely led. Galenus asked if Furnier would run him through with a knife if he felt that God commanded him to do so, and Furnier responded 'yes', to which Galenus reeled with horror (Fix 1991: 199).

It is perhaps because of incidents like these that others involved in or closely connected to the Collegiants also had negative views of the Quakers. For example, the author of *Kort Verhael van Nieuw-Nederland (Brief Account of New Netherland)*, a 1662 proposal for a utopian community in the New World, banned 'stiff-headed Quakers'.⁶ This work had been thought to be authored by Collegiant Pieter Cornelisz Plockhoy (e.g., Harder and Harder 1952), who had in fact put forward a proposal himself around the same time. More recent scholarship indicates that the actual author was Franciscus van den Enden (Looijesteijn 2009; Mertens 2009),⁷ who knew Plockhoy and was very likely influenced by him.⁸ While Van den Enden's words may seem to indicate a low opinion of Quakers, one scholar has suggested he did not regard all Quakers as 'stiff-headed' but only meant to ban those Quakers who were so (Mertens 2007). Another scholar notes that Plockhoy himself was familiar with the Quakers and was likely sympathetic with them, at least for a time (Looijesteijn 2011: 88).⁹

At any rate, the mixed reputation of the Quakers made the work of Quaker missionaries difficult (Hull 1938: 278). The theological disputes between the Quakers and Collegiants highlighted the question of how to understand the nature of divine inspiration and also how to prioritise the Light and Scripture. These points will be discussed in more detail below.

ANDREW FIX'S THESIS REGARDING SPINOZA AND THE COLLEGIANTS

Collegiant scholar Andrew Fix describes the Collegiant movement as going through three stages: (1) spiritualism and millenarianism, (2) rational spiritualism, and (3) secular philosophical rationalism. He claims that *The Light upon the Candlestick* demonstrates the shift from the first to the second stage, representing the Collegiants' departure from Quaker influence, away from a spiritualistic interpretation of the Light and towards a rationalistic interpretation, influenced by

Balling's and Boreel's close contact with Spinoza. Fix appears unaware of the Quaker interest in *The Light upon the Candlestick*, and seems not to have closely compared the document to Ames' *Mysteries of the Kingdom of God*.

Fix defines 'spiritualism' as the belief in Light as inspiration from God, providing religious knowledge that surpasses that provided by unaided human intellect. The Light is both a source of divine truth and a means to salvation (Fix 1991: 187). In the early phase of the Collegiant movement, from 1620 to 1657, the Collegiants thought that divine inspiration could be *heerlijkmaking* (extraordinary); that is, humans could be inspired in a way that gave them the power to convert others and transform the Church. But Galenus Abrahamsz had a different view, and when he became involved in the Collegiant movement, he influenced the movement to adopt his view. He interpreted the *heerlijkmaking* gift to have been present only in the early days of Christianity, disappearing when the Christian Church was corrupted by Constantine's alliance of Church and secular power (Fix 1991: 102). He thought that another kind of divine inspiration was still available: the *heiligmaking* gift; this is the view that divine inspiration can lead to one's own salvation. Thus, he had little hope that churches themselves could be cleansed from corruption. But like some of the earlier spiritualists as well, he believed that there was a true, 'invisible' Church consisting of those who were genuinely divinely inspired, and that they could support each other in their quests for personal salvation.

Fix reads this shift in the interpretation of divine gift as starting to pave the way towards a rationalising of the Light (Fix 1991: 192), the second stage in Collegiant thought, which in turn led eventually to the third stage: the rejection of the Light altogether in favor of secular rationalism. Secular rationalism is the view that human reason is all that is required for knowledge—some special gift from God above and beyond this is not necessary. While Fix classifies Galenus as a spiritualist, he places Balling in the stage of 'rational spiritualism', and thus interprets *Candlestick* as beginning to equate the Light with reason.¹⁰

Balling's work was part of what Fix describes as a 'pamphlet war' between the Quakers and Collegiants that arose following the 'final break' between the two groups in 1660 (Fix 1991: 196). Fix discusses the debate as if *Candlestick* represented a decisive departure from Quaker views. The debate began with an exchange between Galenus and Ames, with Ames' *Mysteries of the Kingdom of God* appearing as a second response to Galenus. Although Fix mentions this work, he translates the title as 'The hidden things of God's kingdom' and does not discuss its content specifically, nor comments on the fact that it is mentioned on the title page of *The Light upon the Candlestick*. He seems not to have noticed the connection between this work and *Candlestick*, except to imply that *Candlestick* is a critical response to Ames (1991: 196-97).

Other works by other authors also appeared in this pamphlet debate, but what is interesting to note is that in both Fix's and Hull's accounts of the pamphlet debate it seems that Galenus did not respond further to Ames. Fix's interpretation of the results of this 'pamphlet war' is to say:

[Some] Collegiants reacted to Quaker spiritualistic zeal by modifying traditional Collegiant spiritualism in a rationalistic direction. By developing a secular interpretation of the inner light these Rijnsburgers perhaps hoped to undercut the legitimacy of Quaker claims based on the inworking of the Holy Spirit. At the same time the Collegiants attempted to move away from what they considered to be the bad example provided by the Quakers by shifting Collegiant truth claims to an epistemological foundation not discredited by Quaker spiritualistic excess. Such a work was Pieter Balling's [*The Light upon the Candlestick*] (Fix 1991: 199).

THE UNEXAMINED LINK: WILLIAM AMES' MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Interpreting *Candlestick* as a critique of Ames and a departure from Quaker views is problematic. While it is clear that there are influences from Cartesian thought and Spinoza (described below), it is hard to argue that *Candlestick* is a defense of rationalistic thought in opposition to Quaker spiritualism. Before discussing and responding to Fix's interpretation of *Candlestick* in detail, it is helpful to describe *Mysteries*. Neither Jones, Rickerman, Swayne, nor Fix actually seem to have directly compared *Mysteries* with *Candlestick*. Once this comparison is made, it is clear that Balling borrows heavily from Ames, and thus *Candlestick* is better interpreted as drawing from and expanding on Ames' text rather than as refuting it.

Mysteries of the Kingdom of God, as mentioned above, is a response by William Ames to Galenus Abrahamsz. This discussion centers on two closely related questions, one on human nature and the other on the primary source of religious knowledge. The question on human nature concerns the origin of human sinfulness, and the question on religious knowledge is related in that it focuses on how to obtain the enlightenment that can free us from our sinful state.

GALENUS ABRAHAMSZ'S VIEWS AND AMES' RESPONSE

As we have seen, Galenus distinguished between the *heerlijkmaking* gift (the view that divine inspiration carries the power to save others and purify the Church) and the *heiligmaking* gift (the view that divine inspiration can only lead to one's own salvation), and he preached that the *heerlijkmaking* gift was no longer available to people during his time: the only remaining form of divine inspiration was the *heiligmaking* gift.

Ames himself summarises Galenus' views as follows. He claims that Galenus argues that part of human nature is corrupt, and the path to salvation is to follow Scripture as a rule for life. Only after humans have made the choice to seek redemption and have followed the rule of Scripture might Christ then come to the person, bringing saving power. On Ames' interpretation, this theory implies two kinds of Light: the light of conscience by which people originally strive to be free from sin, and by which they follow Scripture (in a literal way), and the Light of Christ which may then follow these initial human efforts. A strong implication is that humans in their natural state are radically separated from God.

This theory to Ames is puzzling and inconsistent. First, if we were created by God, it is inconsistent to regard humans as having something evil inherent in their nature and to regard humans as being radically cut off from God. Second, it is hard to imagine how humans could long for a better state without something of true goodness (hence, from God) residing already in their souls. It is this core of goodness that sparks the longing for God, and is itself from God. Thus, Ames does not want to separate two kinds of light, but argues for a single Light, present in all humans by virtue of their having been created by God. His emphasis on the Light he calls 'the first principle of true religion' (Ames, Third Difference¹¹). It is this Light that sparks the striving for release from sin. It means that Christ is within us all along. The reason that this is not obvious in everyone is that sinful nature can obscure it or hide it (but can never damage or destroy it). Where, then, does sinful nature come from? It is not inherent in human nature in a necessary way, but was inherited through Original Sin, which itself is a story of infection from a source that exists radically outside of God (and in opposition to God) that is capable of tempting human nature by appealing to individualism and earthly desires in ways that set these against God, although not thereby creating such a strong rift between humans and God as Galenus' view seems to imply.

Another reason that Ames disagrees with Galenus' views is because Galenus' views suggest a religion that is *outside of God*: any religion which prescribes a path to follow in darkness before connection with the Divine is possible is a religion that does not need the Divine, and hence Ames regards it suspiciously as a religion of darkness (Ames, Fourth Difference).

Much of the discussion in *Mysteries* concerns the role of Scripture. Galenus believes it should be followed literally: that is the path to salvation. Ames believes that it can be greatly misunderstood unless read under the illumination of the Light Within. Furthermore, Ames points out passages in the Bible (especially from the Gospel of John) that confirm his view that the main point of Scriptures is to lead people to this Light Within. His conclusion is that the Scriptures are important, but not primary. What is primary is the Light Within. Only then can one understand Scripture correctly. And so, in Ames' view, the Light is central both to human nature and to religious knowledge.

COMPARISON BETWEEN *MYSTERIES* AND *CANDLESTICK*

If we next compare *Mysteries* with *Candlestick*, we find many shared themes, including passages where Balling clearly follows Ames and thus parts ways with the points Galenus had made that Ames had argued against. But Balling is less concerned with disputing prior arguments; the tone of this piece is to share more directly this view of religious knowledge. Balling, like Ames, emphasises the notion of the Light Within, and pays more attention to its epistemological significance, developing the epistemology a bit more than Ames did. Balling echoes some of Ames' arguments, sometimes strengthening them with appeals to Cartesian, but not rationalistic, thinking. That is, we hear echoes of some of Descartes' patterns of reasoning, but we never find Balling exalting the power of reasoning

itself, or equating the Light with the faculty of reason. The examples that follow will illustrate this difference.

In both works, there is an emphasis on the Light, and on the priority of the Light over a literal reading of Scripture. In both works, the priority of the Light is said to be the first principle of religion. It is the Light that enables us to understand Scripture rightly. Without it, we cannot understand Scripture or any divine truths correctly. In fact, without it even our knowledge of nature is inadequate.

Balling also notes that we must stand squarely in the Light of truth to be able to grasp truth and to judge it accurately: He furthermore labels this as the 'Rule'. The concept of a 'rule' may seem to echo Descartes' concern with *method*, that is, rules of inquiry, by which to ensure that our extensions of our knowledge do not lead us into error. Thus, invoking the notion of a 'rule' may signify a rationalist turn. But Ames also discusses 'rules' in a similar manner (Ames, *Seventh Difference*); furthermore, if we examine Balling's use of the term in context, we see that he articulates a point of view that does resemble the Quaker perspective:

This Light, Christ, &c. is the truth & word of God, as hath been already said, and in every way appears by what we have hitherto laid down: For this is a living Word, and transmiteth man from death to life, is powerful, & enableth a man to bear witness of itself every where. This is also the true Rule according unto which all our actions are to be squared. This hath the pre-eminence before any Writing, Scripture, Doctrine, or anything else that we meet from without (Balling 1992 [1663]: 19).¹²

This passage as well as others shows that the Light is not just interpreted intellectually, but is something active and dynamic that can have an effect on a person's entire being, a view that also calls into question the rationalisation of the Light. Part of rationalising the Light is to emphasise its intellectual character and de-emphasise or even deny that it has any non-intellectual powers. Both Ames and Balling emphasise the salvational powers of the Light: Light gives life (brings us out of spiritual death). The Light shows us our true state, and helps us conquer sin and find a happy state.

Both works express similar views on the origin of human sin. This Light is available to all, even to those who have not heard of Scripture. It cannot be destroyed. While people seem to have different measures of Light, it is really a matter of how much the workings of the Light are obscured by sin.

And Ames seems to put forth a view defending *heerlijkmaking* (extraordinary) divine inspiration (though he does not use that word), near the beginning of *Mysteries*, where he discusses how the faithful today do have the same power that the servants of the Lord long ago had to convert others; this view may be somewhat echoed by Balling in his description of the Light as being what gives people the power to do good (quoted below).

There are also places where *Candlestick* adds to the points and arguments made in *Mysteries*. In some of these places, one can see Cartesian and Spinozistic influences, and these are highlighted and discussed below.

RESPONSE TO FIX'S THESIS

Fix bases his interpretation of *The Light upon the Candlestick* on both the known contact between Balling and Spinoza, and the clear Spinozistic influences in this work. Yet he fails to take into account the fact that Spinoza was also in sympathetic contact with Quakers during this same time period, and that his views on biblical interpretation seemed more compatible with the Quaker view of Scripture than the Collegiant view.¹⁵ Thus, regarding Balling's *Candlestick* as a refutation of Ames and a departure from Quakerly spiritualism in favor of rationalism is questionable. Rather, it seems more likely that the conclusion of the 'pamphlet wars' was a moment of convergence between the two groups, perhaps somewhat mediated by Spinoza, who had not yet fully developed his later more specifically rationalistic philosophy.

Clearly there were serious disagreements between the Quakers and the Collegiants, especially regarding the role of Scripture and how to understand the nature of divine inspiration. Yet there were also events that suggest a closeness that was not entirely fraught with difficulty and disagreement. George Fox reports in his own *Journal* that two times he met Galenus. The first, in 1677, did not go so well; the second, in 1684, was much better (Jones 1914: 122-23). While these incidents are later than the time period we are considering here, they indicate continuing contact between Quakers and Collegiants which calls into question Fix's attribution of a 'final break' between the two groups in 1660. During the time that *Mysteries* and *Candlestick* were written, it is entirely possible that Ames did persuade at least some of the Collegiants.

Balling himself may have intended *Candlestick* to mediate between Galenus and Ames. In his third paragraph, he refers to the 'Sea of Confusion', emphasizing throughout these opening paragraphs the great difficulties we have in understanding each other, even when using the same words, and even when not trying to be deceptive or obscure. He may well have been thinking of the dispute between his friends Galenus and Ames, trusting that both were sincere in their disputations and himself looking for the means to resolve such debates, finally deciding (and thus siding with Ames) that it was the Light Within that provided the only means for resolution and reconciliation.

Fix himself notes that the language of the Light is prominent in *Candlestick*, and admits that this language can be taken to suggest a spiritual interpretation. But he further claims that the exact language used can permit either a rationalist or a spiritualist interpretation (Fix 1991: 202). He states that 'because of its mixture of spiritualistic and rationalistic elements, Balling's work has long been considered puzzling by historians' (1991: 200), and lists the authors who offer each kind of interpretation (1991: 204-205).

The division of scholarly opinion concerning Balling's thought is eloquent testimony to the fact that [*Candlestick*] represented a truly transitional form between spiritualism and rationalism. Viewed in its proper intellectual and historical context, within a tradition of Collegiant thought evolving from spiritualism to rationalism,

[*Candlestick*] can be recognized as an intermediate work of great importance. As a writing representing the Rijnsburger religion of individual conscience in the midst of a process of secularization, Balling's work gives the reader a rare glance into the anatomy of intellectual transition (Fix 1991: 205).

And yet Fix himself fails to find convincing evidence that this work represents the beginning of the rationalisation of the Light. Fix himself admits that the word 'reason' never appears in this work (Fix 1991: 200), but he takes the echoes of Cartesian language that he finds in *Candlestick* to support his interpretation of an emerging rationalist interpretation of the Light. He takes the language of the Light being 'a principle certain and infallible' to indicate a Cartesian influence, and hence a rationalist interpretation of the Light (1991: 201). Also he quotes: 'The light...is a clear and distinct knowledge of truth in the understanding of every man, by which he is so convinced of the being and quality of things, that he cannot possibly doubt thereof', interpreting this passage as providing evidence that 'Balling thus identified the light of truth with that fundamental and indubitable rational knowledge upon which Descartes built his new philosophy' (1991: 201-202).

While these passages do clearly show a Cartesian influence, in themselves they do not clearly represent rationalism as such. That is, these passages do not equate the Light with reason nor make the claim that human reason is an independent means for coming to know religious truths in a way that does not necessitate divine inspiration. While the language of a principle that is 'certain and infallible' echoes Descartes' quest for a method we can trust that would allow us to extend our knowledge through careful, well-reasoned steps, Balling does not discuss the reasoning process. Here is the same passage in a wider context:

We direct thee then to look within thyself, that is, that thou oughtest to turn into, to mind and have regard unto that which is within thee, to wit, the Light of Truth, the true Light which enlighten every man that cometh into the world. Here 'tis that thou must be, and not without thee. Here thou shalt find a Principle certain and infallible, and whereby increasing and going on therein, thou mayest at length arrive unto a happy condition (Balling 1992 [1663]: 12-13).

Part of what is interesting about this larger passage is that the Cartesian phrase closely follows a quotation from the Bible (Jn 1:9) that furthermore is quoted repeatedly throughout Ames' *Mysteries*. While it is possible that Balling intends to say that the Light referred to in the Bible is best understood as nothing more than the principle of reason, he does not go on to say this or develop such an argument, and so such a reading of this passage is difficult to defend. The invocation of the notion of 'Truth' here is more biblical than rationalist, a broader notion of truth similar to that employed by the Quakers: one that is not just epistemological but transforms a person, allowing him or her to 'arrive unto a happy condition'.

Now turning to the passage mentioning 'clear and distinct knowledge', we find that it too shows a clear Cartesian influence but cannot be taken to be rationalising the Light when we consider what Balling says two sentences later:

This Light then, Christ the Truth, &c. is that which makes manifest and reproveth sin in man, shewing him how he has strayed from God, accuseth him of the evil which he doth and hath committed; yea this is it which judgeth and condemmeth him: Again, This is the preaching to every Creature under Heaven, though they have never read or heard of the Scripture. This is it which leads man into truth, into the way to God, which excuseth him in well-doing, giving him peace in his Conscience, yea, brings him into union with God, wherein all happiness and salvation doth consist (Balling 1992 [1663]: 14).

Again we find a much broader function of the Light than simply rationally ascertaining knowledge claims. The notion of truth invoked here again is the broader Quaker conception of 'Truth', which involves not just a clarification of knowledge but a transformation of one's whole being.

In another line of discussion, Fix himself notes that Balling 'was never ambiguous...in his insistence that the Light was an independent source of true ideas superior in authority to all other sources, including Scripture' (Fix 1991: 202). The Light was thus a source of knowledge available even to those who had never heard of Scripture. Fix seems to regard this departure from the then-prevailing Collegiant view of Scripture as evidence for rationalising the Light, because he associates spiritualism with a strong emphasis on Scripture. But here Fix fails to notice the Quaker influence: placing priority on the Light above Scripture was one of the major points of both *Mysteries* and Fisher's *Rustick Alarm*. Fix himself does go on to quote Balling saying 'the light is also the first principle of religion, because there can be no true religion without knowledge of God, and no knowledge of God without this light' (1991: 202), but interprets this passage rationalistically because the notion of a 'first principle' sounds Cartesian. Fix goes on to say:

If Balling had conceived of the inner light of truth in purely spiritualistic terms, his elevation of the light above Scripture would have been clearly in the Quaker tradition. As his usage of Cartesian phraseology suggests, however, Balling thought of the light of truth also in terms of human reason... Seen in this perspective, Balling's elevation of the inner light above Scripture takes on a meaning that sets [*Candlestick*] dramatically apart from the spiritualistic tradition (Fix 1991: 203).

Here, Fix fails to notice the distinctive nature of *Quaker* spiritualism which Balling himself is acknowledging: Balling's phrasing is in fact taken directly from Ames' *Mysteries* (Third Difference), where Ames is interpreting the Light as divine inspiration rather than the light of reason. Fix then quotes a passage that again sounds Cartesian:

Without this light man has no power or ability to do good. It must first awaken him out of the death of sin and make him living. Darkness is only driven away by the light, ignorance only by knowledge. It is folly to want something where there is nothing. There is no effect without cause. If man does anything, something causes him to do it. And this cause must contain all that the effect contains. If there is the effect of the light, the light alone must be the cause (Balling, quoted by Fix 1991: 203).

Fix interprets this passage rationalistically, especially because of the discussion of cause and effect which echoes Descartes (Fix 1991: 203). The argument structure here has similarities with Descartes' use of an argument from efficient causation which functions as part of his rational proof for the existence of God in his *Meditations*.¹⁴ Even though the reasoning pattern is similar to that of Descartes, however, the point he is making cannot be said to be the claim that the Light is equivalent to the principle of reason. The larger point here echoes Ames: the argument is that we perceive good and evil not merely because other people tell us what is good or evil but because there is something within us that illuminates good and evil, allowing us to perceive it. The passage is neutral on what this Light is: it *could* be reason itself but it could equally be a quasi-perceptual faculty independent of reason. In addition, the language of the Light giving people the power to do good suggests a stronger (*heerlijkmaking*) version of divine inspiration than Galenus had promoted.

Fix continues himself to express some ambivalence: 'Despite his inclination toward rationalism, however, Balling often returned to a traditional spiritualistic interpretation of the inner light' (Fix 1991: 204). Again, he tries to justify his rationalistic interpretation, this time by noting that Balling concludes 'on a final interesting philosophical note' (1991: 204): that the Light was how people came to know God and preceded any external knowledge of God. Fix attributes this to a Cartesian influence ('because Descartes used similar arguments in discussing the innate idea of God'), but, again, after comparing Ames and Balling, it is clear that this argument draws directly from a similar argument made by Ames (Fifth Difference).

The passages discussed above show the best evidence of influences from Descartes and Spinoza, but we now see that none of them can be said to support the view that *Candlestick* represents a departure from Quaker thought, reinterpreting the Light as nothing more than the human faculty of reason. Some of the passages that seem to use Cartesian language in fact echo Ames' language in *Mysteries*.

Furthermore, there are even some passages in *Candlestick* that reflect the Quakerly caution against excessive reliance on human rationality. While Fix and other authors have characterised the Quaker view as being anti-rationalist, that position is too strongly stated. It is not that the Quakers were wholly opposed to human powers of reasoning; it is that they were cautious about thinking too highly of it. As with the Bible, human reasoning must be employed only within the guidance and illumination of the Light. We see Balling's own caution toward human rationality in the following passage:

And if thou happenest to be one of those that wouldst know all things, before thou dost begin, yea, even those things which are experienced in a condition to which thou art so much a stranger, that there's nothing in thee hath so much agreement therewith, as to comprehend it according to truth: Know this, Thou dost (therein) just as those that would learn to Read, without knowing the Letters (Balling 1992 [1663]: 13).

This passage cautions against a strong anti-empiricist rationalism, very much reflecting the Quaker emphasis on experience. The first sentence can even be read as a direct criticism of Descartes. A rationalism that is disconnected from experience is like trying to read without bothering to learn the letters first. In addition, in the next paragraph Balling goes on to discuss the limits of human knowledge: 'To desire to know all things that we are capable of, is good and laudable; but to go further, is folly. There will be always something else to ask, and our knowledge will ever be too short. He that will not adventure till he be fully satisfied, shall never begin, much less finish it to his own salvation' (Balling 1992 [1663]: 13). This passage too suggests a critique of the Cartesian demand for *a priori* certainty.

Another passage that can be taken as critical of rationalism is:

So that if the Truth of God be presented to a man who stands not in the Light of Truth, 'tis impossible he should understand it, although he hears and comprehends the words after his manner, yet he is still fenced off from its true sence and meaning thereof. Hence, therefore, it is, that amongst so many hearers there are so few that have ears to hear (Balling 1992 [1663]: 19).

Here too is the Quakerly sense that human reason is not enough. One can hear true words or hear well-constructed rational arguments, and yet not grasp the full meaning if one is not standing in the Light.

A final passage suggesting a critique of rationalism is a discussion of the immediate (not mediated) nature of the Light, towards the end of *Candlestick* (Balling 1992 [1663]: 21-22), a passage echoing the Quaker view that the Light operates by its own direct apprehension of certain aspects of divine reality, a view that shows a clear distinction between the Light and the faculty of reason. Reasoning is a process that employs words for its functioning, but Balling describes the limitations of words (which are finite) for grasping something that is infinite (God).

DID JONES' INTERPRETATION SUPPORT FIX'S?

A final point to consider is that Fix indicates that Rufus Jones backs him up on his interpretation of *Candlestick*. In his discussion of the varying interpretations of *Light upon the Candlestick*, with some regarding it as mystical or spiritualistic, and others as rationalistic (Fix 1991: 204-205), he put Jones on the rationalistic side: 'Rufus Jones also considered Balling to be a Cartesian' (1991: 205). Rickerman and Swayne agree: 'The late-twentieth-century reader is left to speculate whether Balling's tract was primarily a product of his Descartes-Spinoza heritage, as Jones believed, or the covert acknowledgment of his conversion by Ames, as Sewel thought (Rickerman and Swayne 1992: 5).

Yet a closer look at Jones himself shows that his interpretation was more mystical than rationalistic.¹⁵ While he acknowledges influences from Descartes and Spinoza, it is not their *rationalism* that he points to, but other elements of their thought, and those elements remain compatible with Quaker spiritualism. He

notes that *Candlestick* is ‘indistinguishable in its body of ideas from Quaker teaching, and differs only in one point, that it reveals a more philosophically trained mind in the writer than does any early Quaker book with the exception of Barclay’s *Apology*’ (Jones 1914: 123). He goes on to discuss the Cartesian influence, though what he emphasises is not his rationalism specifically but rather the consciousness of God deep in the core of self-consciousness itself, this consciousness of God being indeed ‘the condition of thinking anything at all’ (1914: 125). Then, in his discussion of Spinoza, he notes that Spinoza adds to Descartes’ ‘mathematical and logical system’ a ‘warmth and fervor of mystical experience that is wholly lacking in [Descartes]’ (1914: 125).

Thus we find that when Jones emphasises the influences of Descartes and Spinoza on *Candlestick*, he is not referring to their rationalism as such but rather to Spinoza’s mysticism and to a subtle move in Descartes’ thinking that, while it can be interpreted rationalistically, may better be described as *subjectively experiential* than rationalistic:¹⁶ ‘That we are oppressed with our own littleness, that we “look before and after and sigh for what is not”, that we are conscious of finiteness, means that we partake in some way of an infinite which reveals itself in us by an inherent necessity of self-consciousness’ (Jones 1914: 125).

The sentence that immediately follows this passage does look more rationalist: ‘There are, then, some ideas within us—at least there is this one idea of an infinitely perfect reality—*implanted* in the very structure of our thinking self, which could have come from no other source but from God’ (Jones 1914: 125; emphasis in original). This passage is in fact rationalist because it is part of Jones’ general description of Cartesian thought. But in Jones’ later discussion of *Candlestick* specifically, the connections he draws are to the mystical and experiential dimensions of Descartes’ and Spinoza’s thought—not to the specifically rationalist elements. For example, Jones notes,

The point of contact between Spinoza and the spiritual movement which we are studying is found in his central principles that God is the *prius* of all finite reality, that to know things or to know one’s own mind truly is to know God, and that a man who has formed a pure love for the eternal is above the variations of temporal fortune, is not disturbed in spirit by changes in the object of his love, but loves with a love which eternally feeds the soul with joy (Jones 1914: 127).

It is important also to note that some of the passages of *Candlestick* that Jones quotes and connects to Cartesian influences in fact are echoes of Ames’ *Mysteries*. Jones notes that ‘the Collegiant author, quite in the spirit and style of Spinoza, urges the importance of discovering a central love for “things which are durable and incorruptible”’ (Jones 1914: 128, quoting from *Candlestick*), which does resonate with passages in Spinoza’s *Treatise on the Improvement of the Understanding*. But when Jones later in the same paragraph describes the conversion experience, which is what leads people to this awareness, and discusses how this conversion originates from the Light, the passages from *Candlestick* that he cites are really echoes of Ames. Consider, for example:

‘Tis not far to seek. We direct thee to within thyself. Thou oughtest to turn into, to mind and have regard unto, that which is within thee, to wit, the Light of Truth, the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world’ (Balling quoted by Jones 1914: 129).

The central point of Ames’ *Mysteries* is the centrality and unity of this Light, and the quotation from the Gospel of Jn 1:9, ‘the true light which enlighteneth every man that comes into the world’, is repeated like a poetic refrain often throughout *Mysteries*. Jones also says:

In true Cartesian fashion, [Balling] demonstrates why this Light must have its locus within the soul and not in some external means or medium. All knowledge that God is being revealed in external signs, or through external means, already presupposes a prior knowledge of God. We can judge no doctrine, no Book to be Divine except by some inward and immediate knowledge of what really is Divine. Without this Light the Scriptures are only Words and Letters (Jones 1914: 130).

While there is indeed a consistency with Descartes’ reasoning here, again the parallels with Ames are more striking: here Balling echoes and expands on an argument offered in *Mysteries* (Fifth Difference).

Finally, Jones cites the language of the Light being the ‘first Principle of all religion’, including this in his discussion of the ‘Cartesian’ influence on *Candlestick* (Jones 1914: 130-31). Yet this language too is actually a direct quotation from Ames, where Ames argues, in familiar Quaker fashion, that it is the Light and not the Bible that is central to religious faith (Ames, Third and Sixth Differences).

Therefore, despite Fix’s and Rickerman and Swayne’s claims that Jones reads *Candlestick* as more Cartesian than Quaker, we see first of all that the aspects of Descartes’ and Spinoza’s thought that Jones emphasises are the aspects that are more mystical or spiritualistic than specifically rationalistic, as such, and, secondly, that some of the passages he quotes in support of his Cartesian interpretation in fact bear a much closer resemblance to Ames than to Descartes or Spinoza. Thus, Jones’ comparison of *Candlestick* to Descartes and Spinoza cannot in any case be interpreted as supporting a *rationalist* reading of *Candlestick* that represents a radical departure from Quaker thought. Instead, we have good reason to take Sewel’s interpretation seriously.

CONCLUSION: MORE SPIRITUALIST THAN RATIONALIST

While *Candlestick* shows Cartesian and Spinozistic influences, those influences are limited to a few phrases and the employment of some rational argumentation in the style of Descartes. The actual discussion and description of the Light closely resembles the Quaker view: the Light is not equivalent to reason but is a faculty of divine inspiration. There is no evidence that the author equates the Light with the faculty of reason; not only is the word ‘reason’ never used, but there are hints of a critical attitude towards strong rationalism. The author is clearly indebted to William Ames, drawing heavily from major points of discussion in Ames’ *Mysteries of the Kingdom of God*. The facts that Ames approved of *The Light upon the Candlestick*, that *Mysteries* is prominently mentioned on its title page, that Quaker

Benjamin Furly translated this work into English and circulated it among the Quakers, and that Sewel printed it as an appendix to his history of Quakerism further support the view that this work is highly compatible with Quaker thought. Thus, rather than representing a criticism of Quaker thought and the Collegiants' radical departure from Quaker influences, *Candlestick* is better interpreted as representing a moment of sympathetic convergence between Quaker and Collegiant thought, synthesizing spiritualism with elements of Descartes' and Spinoza's thought without yet rationalizing the Light Within.

NOTES

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1. A Quaker Universalist Fellowship pamphlet reprinted an English version of *The Light upon the Candlestick*, along with an excerpt from Jones' *Spiritual Reformers*, and a Preface and an Epilogue by Sally Rickerman and Kingdon Swayne.

2. Note that 'spiritualism' in this paper does not refer to the nineteenth-century spiritualist movement, but is either meant in a general sense to contrast with 'secularism' or is meant in the more specific epistemological sense to refer to belief in the Light as inspiration from God, a source of religious knowledge surpassing the knowledge offered by unaided human intellect.

3. Sewel's parents were converted to Quakerism by Ames in 1656 or 1657 (Hull 1938: 24).

4. Women did not normally speak in these meetings, although William Sewel's mother requested permission to speak and apparently her message was well received (Sewel 1722: 442).

5. Hull notes that Galenus 'was almost persuaded by Ames to become a Quaker' (Hull 1938: 233).

6. The full quotation indicates that others were banned as well: 'stiff-headed Papists obligated to the Romish Chair, usurious Jews, English stiff-headed Quakers, Puritans and audacious stupid Millennialists' (quoted in Looijesteijn 2009: 237).

7. Mertens (2009) points out that two other scholars, Wim Klever and Marc Bedjai, independently discovered this in the early 1990s.

8. Van den Eenden's proposal was not accepted (Looijesteijn 2009: 236), but Plockhoy's was, and Plockhoy in fact established a settlement in the New World, near present-day Lewes, Delaware. After fourteen months, this settlement was destroyed when the English seized New Netherland in 1664. Another note of interest about Van den Eenden was that he had also been a teacher of Spinoza (Looijesteijn 2009: 12).

9. A further intriguing note: when the English took over New Netherland, everything Dutch was taken, including 'what belonged to the Quakin Society of Plockhoy to a very naile' (quoted in Looijesteijn 2009: 250-51). Looijesteijn takes this interesting phrasing as a further indication that Plockhoy did not agree with Van den Eenden's negative assessment of Quakers (2009: 251 n. 65, and see pp. 94-97 for more on the strong links between Plockhoy and the Quakers).

10. Here and elsewhere interesting comparisons can be made to other arenas in which Quakers and philosophers were in dialogue. For example, the Cambridge Platonists were also interested in comparing or even equating the Light with reason, and one notable Cambridge Platonist, Henry More, was frequently involved in philosophical conversations with Anne Conway and her Quaker friends. See Hutton (2004) for details on Anne Conway, and see Dudiak and Rediehs (2013) for more on connections between Quakers and philosophers.

11. Because the English translation of *Mysteries* is not yet published, instead of using page references I indicate the relevant section of the work.

12. Page references are from the version of *Candlestick* published in the pamphlet by the Quaker Universalist Fellowship, except in cases where I quote Fix's quotations, as these seem to be Fix's own translation of the work.

13. Not only do many of Spinoza's 1670 arguments resemble Fisher's 1660 arguments, but they are also compatible with the views Ames discusses in *Mysteries*.

14. To identify the 'efficient cause' of something, according to Aristotle, is to identify what brought it into being. Descartes makes use of efficient causation in his proof for the existence of God. Having established that he himself exists, at least as a thinking thing (*Meditation II*), Descartes notices that among his thoughts is a concept of perfection, a concept he could not have originated because he is not himself perfect. That concept of perfection, however, must have an efficient cause. Therefore, there must be something else besides himself—something perfect—that is the efficient cause of the concept of perfection. Thus, a perfect being must exist (*Meditation III*).

15. It should be noted that recent scholars have been re-assessing Jones' work. Elaine Pryce, for example, re-evaluates Jones' understanding of mysticism, noting his de-emphasizing the *via negativa* and favoring what can be called a more rationalistic version of mysticism, in that part of Jones' agenda was to develop a version of mysticism that is harmonious with modern, progressive Protestantism (Pryce 2010: 523), which in turn entails harmonising with the broad sense of rationalism (that is, the version that includes sense perception, inductive reasoning, and modern scientific reasoning). In my discussion that follows, I contrast Jones' understanding of mysticism with the narrow version of rationalism. The narrow version of rationalism emphasizes both a Cartesian notion of innate ideas and the deductive reasoning process, in contrast to, or even suspicious of, the experiential dimensions of human knowledge. Even those who accept Pryce's interpretation of Jones will find that the distinction I draw still holds relevantly to the rest of my paper.

16. This is not to say that Jones or I deny that Descartes was a rationalist. My own claim is simply to say that some aspects of his views might better be described as experiential (what is perceived or experienced within) than rational (what is deduced through a reasoning process).

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