

Rufus Jones Never Did Establish that Quakerism is a Mystical Religion

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Abstract

Rufus Jones holds a place in history as the thinker who established the idea of the mystical origins of Quakerism and thereby invigorated the theological basis of Liberal Quakerism at a critical juncture. Yet Jones rejected the mystical tradition. This article investigates this paradox using mainly the evidence available in the two seminal works that presented Jones' interpretation and an early statement of his theology from 1904. The proposed resolution is that Jones effected something of a theological conjuring trick: the heart of his religion was essentially a religious humanism comprising a rational ethics allied to a powerful social gospel. To this he appended a redirected definition of mysticism that he named 'affirmation mysticism'. The result of this conclusion is a suggested caution in referring to Quakerism as a mystical religion, together with a question mark over what then does constitute the theological basis of Liberal Quakerism.

Keywords

apophatic, humanism, liberal, mysticism, social theism, spiritual religion.

Introduction: Two Paradoxes, One Doubt and a Suspicion

The student of Jones' *Studies in Mystical Religion* and *Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries* is struck by the discrepancy between his reputation as the leading proponent of the mystical interpretation of Quakerism and his rejection of the mystical tradition.¹

On the one hand is the security of Jones' reputation for enhancing Liberal

¹ Jones, R., *Studies in Mystical Religion*, London: Macmillan, 1909; Jones, R., *Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, London: Macmillan, 1928.

Quakerism around the end of the nineteenth century by providing it with a much needed theoretical support. His adoption of mysticism served to resist the pressure, exerted by the Evangelicals, to adopt a doctrinal creed, a situation that was brought to a head by the Richmond Declaration of Faith. John Punshon, for instance, cites Jones as ‘the founder of modern mystical Quakerism... that captured a whole generation [and] answered the needs of the silent tradition in Quakerism at a critical point in its history’.² Jones’ formulation has served well and still serves in the often encountered summation that Quakerism is an experiential or ‘a mystical faith’.³ Jones’ legacy, despite objections from alternative theories,⁴ remains embedded in Quaker theology. As Wilmer Cooper noted, after stating his own doubts about the thesis, ‘at least from the perspective of liberal Quakerism it is an identification which is likely to stick for some time to come’.⁵ In the hostile reception given to his doubts, Cooper discovered the element of unquestionable status achieved by Jones’ mystical interpretation.⁶

On the other hand, Jones made it abundantly clear that he did not like the mystical tradition. He considered it to be an immature stage of religious development. Jones quoted Augustine. ‘God is best adored in silence; best known by nescience best described by negatives’. He commented on this:

This negative mysticism will meet us again and again and can be permanently transcended only by a truer psychology than that which was possible in the ancient and medieval world. It will be noted that Augustine, in his mystical passages, is decidedly personal and subjective. He thinks of man as an isolated individual... but he has discovered no social principle... and this individualism which is characteristic of Augustine continues throughout the whole history of Roman Catholic mysticism.⁷

Jones commented on Dionysius with similar disappointment:

It is Neo-platonic philosophy slightly sprinkled with baptismal water from the Christian font... The goal is beatific gazing... the world is left behind and forgotten... It is rather an emotional, sensuous thrill... and it descends easily to unwholesome dreams and pathological states... there is no place for genuine *evil* ‘All things that exist... are good’... we are here far away from the simplicity and concreteness of the Gospels... The mischief of turning away from the God who

2 Punshon, J., *Portrait in Grey: A short history of the Quakers*, London: Quaker Books, 2006, pp. 257, 259.

3 Spencer, C. D., *Quakers in Theological Context*, in Angell, S., and Dandelion, P., (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 141.

4 Nuttall, G., *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948; Gwyn, D., *Apocalypse of the Word*, Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1986.

5 Cooper, W., *The Legacy of Rufus Jones*, in Snarr, N., and Smith-Christopher, D., (eds), *Practiced in the Presence*, Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1994, p. 22.

6 Cooper, W., ‘Reflections on Rufus M. Jones: Quaker giant of the twentieth century’, *Quaker History* 94 (2005), pp. 25–43.

7 Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, pp. 95, 96.

is known to an unknowable Deity, is fully committed in these writings, and the groping of centuries after a God who hides is the pitiable result.⁸

In relation to the Beguines and the Beghards, the semi-monastic charitable communities founded in the Low Countries in the twelfth century, Jones stated further categorical objections:

The fatal weakness of this entire mystical movement all the way back from its popular form in the fourteenth century to its lofty formulation in Plotinus and Plato is the negative and abstract feature of it... With no positive vision of the Divine Character... the mystic... opened wide the door for caprice and vagary... asceticism... libertinism. If God is for thought only an Infinite-Nothing-in-Particular... He is vague, empty, and characterless.⁹

For good measure elsewhere in the text he adds, 'Infinite Being is the *emptiest* of all conceptions... a *via negativa* ending in a blind alley of quietism.'¹⁰

Jones was sceptical about the value of the epiphenomena of mystical experience. 'Trances, losses of consciousness, automatism, vision of lights, audition of voices, "stigmata", and such-like experiences are evidences of hysteria, and they are not in themselves evidences of... Divine Presence.' There is a danger of mysticism 'becoming relatively detached'. 'Overemphasis on ecstasy', 'shortcuts and unspiritual aids', risk 'moral and spiritual bankruptcy'.¹¹

It follows from this rejection of the apophatic tradition that whatever basis Jones was to put forward as the mystical basis of Quakerism had to be his own new definition of mysticism. For the purposes of this article, this composition will be referred to as 'redirected mysticism'. Jones named his new formulation 'affirmation' or 'affirmative mysticism'. The term 'affirmative spirituality' was introduced in the 1909 work.¹² The term 'affirmation mystics' contrasted specifically with 'negation mystics', which appeared in his earlier work of 1904, *Social Law in the Spiritual World*.¹³ I have not adopted his name affirmation and have treated it with caution due to a potentially misleading ambiguous element. The contrast 'affirmation/negation' suggests that Jones may be venturing into the cataphatic side of the mystical tradition that exhaustively recites the attributes of God. The evidence, however, is that he did not take up this reverse side of the mystical coin as he did not pick up on the traditional divine attributes. The likely reason for that is displayed in his objection to the apophatic tradition. The endless speculative and contemplative list of God's attributes, such as omniscience, immensity, incorporeality, eternity and infinite power, would be a candidate for Jones' dismissal as

8 Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, pp. 110–11.

9 Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, pp. 211–15.

10 Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, pp. 226, 298.

11 Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, 'Introduction', pp. xxviii–xxxvi.

12 Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. 294.

13 Jones, R., *Social Law in the Spiritual World*, Philadelphia, PA: The John C. Winston Co., 1904, p. 149.

rarefied intellectual exercises. Jones' affirmation is directed elsewhere to an object identified in the next section on his theological character.

The second paradox arises from retrospective comparison of the history of mainstream liberal Christian theology with Liberal Quakerism. Liberal Christianity has adopted the apophatic tradition as its platform in opposition to the apocalyptic tradition.¹⁴ The apophatic tradition that Jones despised took on new vitality within twenty years of Jones' rejection, in the form of 'process theology'. Alfred North Whitehead updated Pythagorean/Platonist physics with Einstein's theory of relativity.¹⁵ This conjunction of science with mysticism continues today with unabated vitality in, for instance, Catherine Keller's influential rendition of feminist, eco theology as interactive/relational.¹⁶ The mystical stream was renewed in another vein by Paul Tillich's influential existentialist God as 'being-itself'.¹⁷ The apophatic revival in theology can be witnessed in this century's pages of the journal *Modern Theology*, which has spawned assessments of Dionysius and Gregory of Nyssa.¹⁸ Over the past fifty years this mystical panentheism, in its various strands, has become the new orthodox basis of liberal Christianity.¹⁹ The apophatic tradition that Jones rejected is flowing today with renewed vigour. The Liberal Quakerism that Jones founded thus stands in opposition to and in curious isolation from the mainstream of liberal Christianity.

In addition to the queries raised by these two paradoxes, a source of doubt enters the equation. Jones' redirected mysticism has been studiously ignored by scholars of mysticism.²⁰ Jones may have persuaded Liberal Quakers but he did not take the mystics with him. Even within Quaker writing, concepts in the same vein, such as 'everyday mysticism',²¹ do not reference Jones' affirmation mysticism. I have not been able to discover any trace of affirmation mysticism outside Quaker theology... No trace of Jones' mysticism appears, for instance, in the autobiographies of recent renowned mystics such as Thomas Merton²² or Matthew Fox.²³

14 Rock, H., *God Needs Salvation: a new vision of God for the twenty-first century*, Winchester: Christian Alternative, 2014, ch. 2.9.

15 Whitehead, A. N., *Process and Reality*, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957 [1929].

16 Keller, C., *On the Mystery*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008.

17 Tillich, P., *Systematic Theology*, London: James Nisbet, 1953, vol. i, p. 263.

18 Coakley, S. (ed.), *Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa*, Chichester: Blackwell, 2003; Coakley, S., and Stang, C., (eds), *Re-Thinking Dionysius the Aeropagite*, Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2009.

19 Rock, *God Needs Salvation*, ch. 2, 'The House of the Platonists'.

20 Macquarrie, J., *Two World's are Ours: an introduction to Christian mysticism*, London: SCM Press, 2004; McGinn, B., *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, New York: The Modern Library, 2006; Inge, W., *Christian Mysticism*, London: Methuen, 1948.

21 Gillman, H., 'Everyday Mysticism', *Friends Quarterly* 4 (2014).

22 Merton, T., *The Seven Storey Mountain: an autobiography of faith*, New York: Harcourt Brace, 1998.

23 Fox, M., *Confessions: the making of a post-denominational priest*, New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996.

It is doubtful whether it was within Jones' gift to call time on a two-and-a-half-thousand-year-old religious experience, and so it has proved in the event.

There is lastly a suspicion that hangs over Jones' theological motives. These can be questioned as a marriage of convenience. There are good reasons why, if you wanted to set up a basis of religion that was opposed to doctrinal religion, you would choose mysticism. The claim to direct mystical experience of God necessarily suggests that church officials and creedal formulations are secondary if not redundant. The mystics have long been recognised as subversive both of church authority and of doctrines. Direct experience of God notoriously undermines priesthood, sacraments, dogmatic statements and scripture. That is why, with sure instinct for the usurping tendency, the Church consistently persecuted the mystics. Matthew Fox, for example, feels the scandal of the history of the persecution of the mystics by the doctrinal authorities.²⁴ As Bernard McGinn notes, the perennial tension is no accident but is due to the 'explosive tendencies' in the relation of mystics to ecclesiastical authority.²⁵

A related aspect of the tradition that was convenient for Jones is that its origin in Pythagorean philosophy underpins natural theology or rational religion in which God may be envisaged as an impersonal force emanating from the universe.²⁶ This contrasts with revealed, apocalyptic religion in which God speaks directly to humanity through the Bible. Jones did not highlight this attraction but he indicated his allegiance by letting slip his disdain for supernaturalism.²⁷

This advantage of doctrinal dissolution built into mysticism was of value to Jones because it was a perfectly suited and ready-made vehicle to resist the Evangelicals. This attractive feature was compounded with his repulsion from the mystical tradition. The equivocation in Jones' union of Quakerism and mysticism can be expressed by analogy. It has the air of an arranged marriage to a foreign national: Jones was attracted to the benefits of citizenship but he did not like the girl.

This set of paradoxes, doubt and suspicion prompts a re-examination of Jones' theological composition. The theological position that drove the works on mysticism is conveniently set out in the 1904 work *Social Law in the Spiritual World*.²⁸ The following three sections first examine that theological position, adopt a working definition of mysticism and then examine how the theology played out in practice in Jones' constructive work in framing his redirected mysticism.

24 Fox, M., *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1988, p. 63.

25 McGinn, *The Essential Writings*, p. 482.

26 Inge, W., *The Platonic Tradition in English Religious Thought*, London: Longmans Green & Co., 1926.

27 Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. 131.

28 I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer of an earlier draft of this article for drawing my attention to this work which provided a key clarification of Jones' theological inclinations.

Jones' Theological Character and Context

In the introduction to *Social Law in the Spiritual World* Jones positioned his work as a companion that progressed from a widely read work of twenty years earlier by Henry Drummond—*Natural Law in the Spiritual World*.²⁹ Drummond, a scientist turned religious thinker, was part of that theological era of Jones' student days that had to come to terms with evolution. Drummond comfortably reconciled religion and science by taking up the Pythagorean tradition that God is revealed to us in the processes of nature. According to Drummond, human spirituality is a second stage of evolution that faithfully reproduces the processes of natural evolution, the whole seamlessly expressing the purposes of God. Jones considered the disturbance to faith from science satisfactorily settled. In the light of Drummond's argument 'studying nature only added to the riches of the knowledge of God'.³⁰

For Jones the new threat to religion came from psychology, which submitted faith to investigative tests. Psychology was the exciting new science of his day. The key work of psychology in relation to religion was William James' 1901/1902 Gifford Lectures³¹ published as the now classic *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.³² James, the epicentre of a wider movement, was among Jones' teachers at Harvard and was cited by Jones in his acknowledgements. Jones applied Kant as a confirmation of the threat from psychology. Everything is revealed to us through consciousness, including natural theology. Therefore, if consciousness itself is now threatened by the dismantling of science into an automaton view of mind then religion too is threatened. Jones related his own task, in a veiled reference, to Schleiermacher's nineteenth-century rescue of religion from the critics of doctrine. 'The basis of religion, the seat of truth and authority is in the soul itself.'³³ This, for Jones, is the citadel of faith which psychology now undermines. If this citadel is to be saved, then the subject of consciousness must itself be defended. Jones set out to prove that what we call variously mind, soul or consciousness cannot be reduced to 'ether vibrations'.³⁴ Jones' line of defence is that consciousness is a product of human relationships in our moral and social environment and it is here that God is revealed to us.

This introduction by Jones to his mission in the book provides the vital clues to a mature theology that underlay his later works. It states the difference between his title *Social Law* and Drummond's *Natural Law*. Jones is what I refer to as a 'Social Theist'. He knows God to be manifest in human relationships. He is not

29 Drummond, H., *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1885.

30 Jones, *Social Law*, p. 20.

31 An annual lecture endowed in the University of Edinburgh dedicated to the discussion of natural as opposed to revealed theology.

32 James, W., *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Glasgow: Collins, 1960 [1902].

33 Jones, *Social Law*, p. 14.

34 Jones, *Social Law*, p. 12.

what I refer to as a 'Nature Theist' who knows God to be manifest in the natural laws of the universe. This explains his attitude to the apophatic tradition, which, on account of its Greek descent from Pythagoreanism, is essentially a Nature Theism. The separation between the two theisms is not hard and fast but the difference in emphasis is marked. It explains a natural indifference in Jones to the apophatic mystical tradition. That tradition is simply redundant for Jones because God is vitally and sufficiently revealed in human relationships. The redirection of emphasis helps understand what Jones was driving at in his insistence on affirmation. If God is known only as a moral force in a fifth dimension operating at one stage removed through the physical universe, then there is indeed little that can be affirmed about God. But if God is revealed in social relationships there is plenty that can be affirmed about God, in, for instance, reciprocity, conscience and obligation.

This Social Theism is also the clue to understanding Jones' confusing name 'spiritual religion' that he applied to his religion, which he saw as emerging from the reformation and which incorporated his affirmative mysticism as a component.³⁵ The confusing element is that all religions can be said to be spiritual so his epithet is tautological. What Jones was doing with the epithet was staking the boundary between three religious types differentiated by their source of authority. The name spiritual religion draws the boundary of social religion, which takes its authority from moral relations. This distinguishes it from nature religion and revealed religion. As an admirer of Schleiermacher Jones is firmly part of the natural theology tradition that discounts the revealed.

Natural theology, however, has two branches: the nature branch and the moral branch. Jones can be placed as a theologian in the moral branch of natural theology. This moral branch is an underdeveloped, repressed theological enquiry owing to the immense influence of Schleiermacher who barred the gate to this avenue of development. Schleiermacher founded religion in a dualist metaphysic and specifically excluded the possibility that God and religion could be founded upon morality.³⁶ Ineffable experience was Schleiermacher's citadel that Jones related to but also branched off from. Jones was bold and original in this breakaway theological enterprise and belongs to a minority tradition with a small number of representatives. Something like the moral branch of natural theology surfaces in the ethical religion of Albrecht Ritschl and Adolf Harnack, who precede Jones, and in the great figures of Martin Buber and John Macmurray, who postdate him. Social Theism can also be discovered in the American Unitarian thinkers Francis Bowen and Henry Ware.³⁷ Despite the sympathies, Jones does not specifically

35 Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, p. xiv.

36 Schleiermacher, F. *On Religion: speeches to its cultured despisers*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958 [1799]. The discounting of morality is made in the second speech, 'The Nature of Religion'.

37 See Howe, D., *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard moral philosophy 1805-1861*, New Haven, CT: Harvard University Press, 1970. Quotations on p. 95.

relate himself to the Social Theist line of thought which is a poorly articulated theism that remains more of a tendency than a movement. For our perspective, however, it is a useful relation to have in mind.

The second defining feature of Jones' viewpoint, which goes hand in hand with the Social Theism, is that he is not a Platonist. Platonism is excluded from Social Theism because it holds a view of the soul or person as a discrete entity. That discrete entity enters the debased physical world from a spiritual realm and has its true relationship with a God also discrete in that other world. Jones, as a Social Theist, understood the person to be *wholly a product of relationships with others*. He says 'nobody is born a person... the self and the other are born together... Treat a person as an independent "discrete entity," and no explanation can be given for anything that occurs to him. The clearest fact about him is his relationship. He is a social being.'³⁸ To understand the person to be a relationship is, for Jones, a precondition of the possibility to know God revealed as an embodiment of 'Us' in the creative reciprocity of this relationship. Nor does Jones have any sympathy with Platonist idealism. 'Out of the material of our world we construct ideals.'³⁹

In this departure from Platonist dualism and the Platonist view of the soul, which has dominated so much of Christian theology, Jones' chapter 'The Realization of Persons' anticipated the great mission of John Macmurray,⁴⁰ philosopher, theologian and Quaker, which was expounded in his 1953 Gifford Lectures.⁴¹ Macmurray's Social Theism is a liberal theology that has been studiously ignored by the mainstream liberal theology which is Platonist. Social Theism is the theology that Jones brought to his redirected mysticism and this is the personal and historical context in which that mysticism can be understood.

A Working Definition of Mysticism

A survey of the pamphlets written by American Friends and published on the website 'What Canst Thou Say?'⁴² illustrates the fact that what qualifies as mystical experience covers a spectrum from acute to diffuse. If we are to discuss mystical experience with enough clarity to decide in what way Jones never did establish that Quakerism is a mystical religion, it is necessary to have a working definition of what we are referring to. A recent call for entries by 'What Canst Thou Say?' succinctly states the nature of the acute experience. The issue is to be entitled 'Paradigm Shift' and asks for accounts of experiences that have

38 Jones, *Social Law*, pp. 53, 57, 17.

39 Jones, *Social Law*, p. 77.

40 John Macmurray (1891–1976), Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh and in retirement member of the Quaker community at Jordans in Buckinghamshire.

41 Macmurray, J., *The Form of the Personal*, 2 vols.: *The Self as Agent and Persons in Relation*, London: Faber and Faber, 1957.

42 See www.whatcanstthousay.org, accessed 26/05/2016.

altered fundamental assumptions or conceptions of reality. That acute experience defines the high point of mysticism. It is neither commanded by the person nor can it be repeated. Recurrences, although they may repeat the sense of another reality, occur in the context of previous experience of that reality. I take acute and recurring experiences as the definition of mysticism. Descending from this level are diffuse mystical experiences or moods which disperse into contemplative practices, a sense of wonder at nature or at the mystery of love in relationships. Diffuse experiences are set aside for purposes of this discussion.

Although the mystical experience itself is agreed by the mystics themselves to be indefinable it is not difficult to say what the experience is about. It is the experience of a different level of reality that is not accessible to the normal state of human consciousness. John Hick's 'fifth dimension' captures this aspect of what he calls 'the spiritual realm'.⁴³

Mysticism, in the Western tradition, is more specifically described as Platonism and this offers another clue to analysis. Platonism has two modes in which it can be experienced. It can be a sensual experience or it can be appreciated intellectually as a logical proposition. Plato derived his conception of an ideal real world and its designer inhabiting a supersensual fifth dimension of existence from the problem of universals in the theory of knowledge. In this scheme Plato proposes that because we are able to recognise many individual examples of, for instance, beauty, truth or a bed we must have reference to some ideal standard of essence of beauty, truth or a bed. Since this ideal essence is not apparent in this world then it must exist in some other. Hence Plato's logical proposal of a parallel real universe, of which the world of human existence is but an unreal imperfect copy.

The logical conclusion thus arrived at by Plato is indeed a statement of a mystery but it is not in itself a sensual mystical experience. That sensual experience is the province of the great mystical interpreters of Plato, such as Plotinus, Dionysius the Aeropagite and Meister Eckhart, to name just a few of the influences through which today's apophatic mysticism has been handed down.

The second aspect of Platonism that is pertinent to the analysis of Jones' reinvention is that the fifth dimension is ethicised. It is the source of moral good. It is never, for instance, a dimension that is indifferent to or has evil intent toward human existence.

From these characteristics of Platonism, I define mysticism as 'direct experience of fifth dimension dualism'. This is a three-component definition. Fifth dimension refers to another dimension of reality beyond human senses. Dualism refers to the ethicisation of that dimension. Direct experience refers to the knowledge of the mystic that although the fifth dimension is unknowable by human senses there is the occasional possibility that it can be entered or experienced, be it through extraordinary flashes, through ascetic preparations, or momentary immersion in that other dimension.

43 Hick, J., *The Fifth Dimension*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1999.

Jones' Redirected Mysticism

At the end of *Studies in Mystical Religion*, having surveyed and dismissed the apophatic tradition, Jones set out his ambition for a reconstructed mysticism. He wanted 'a new mysticism... a social gospel... a religion more simple, practical... in a word more Christlike than any of these spiritual movements'.⁴⁴ He wanted to see the spiritualising of this life rather than dogmatising on the next life. He admired Fox and Gerrard Winstanley for turning visions into deed. Winstanley, the leader of the Diggers, it should be recalled, was a pure pragmatist in religion. He had a religious vision of Christ, similar to Fox, but unlike Fox understood Christ to be the light of reason inspiring a form of communist society.⁴⁵ Winstanley was prompted by this to direct action, taking over common lands at St George's Hill to the south of London.

Jones' *Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries* began his exposition of redirected mysticism, which he named 'Spiritual Religion'. The name incorporates a dilution of the mystical element. Spiritual Religion is composed of three parts: the mystical tendency, humanistic or rational tendency, and faith tendency. This can best be grasped as what could be called 'incarnation mysticism'. What Jones meant by faith tendency was the focus on Christ as the mystical object in place of Platonist abstraction. By humanist, Jones referred to the incarnation as pointer to the divine in the human: Jesus as perfect human represents the divine. The particular sense of this humanism, in the context of the spiritual reformers, is that it is a refutation of Calvinism. It rejects Calvin's doctrine of the total depravity of humans. The incarnation is taken to indicate a newly confident estimate of human capacity for good and a change of emphasis from the Calvinist condemnatory Eternal Will to the possibilities of humanity.

This incarnation mysticism redirects mysticism in three stages from the apophatic cosmic abstraction, to Christ, and then, with Jones' interpretation of Christ, to an inner focus, the divine in the human. Jones has come close here to identifying ethical possibilities as the object of mystical contemplation. Jones described this as 'inward religion'. As he said, 'eternity has been set within us', 'there is within us a supra individual Reality'.⁴⁶ This combination of the humanist and the mystic became Jones' theme tune with which he characterised his preferred group of spiritual reformers.

Having formulated this new humanist, incarnation mysticism in which mysticism is supplemented and tempered by reason into a 'wider synthesis' an unexpected feature emerges in Jones' proposition. Mysticism is relegated to the status of an ornament. It is a source of occasional 'direct refreshment' for 'devoted

44 Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, pp. 298, 447.

45 Winstanley, G., *The Saints Paradise*, in Sabine, G., (ed.), *The Works of Gerrard Winstanley*, New York: Russell and Russell, 1965, pp. 93–96.

46 Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, pp. xxxiv, 24, 81.

Humanists'. It is 'only one element in a vastly richer complex, and it must not be given undue emphasis'.⁴⁷ As a general religious practice, Jones rejected it for the reasons of exclusivity outlined above. It is consistent with his position on this that he did not adduce his own instance of mystical experience as a recommendation.

Elizabeth Vining reported Jones' mystical experience which occurred in France in 1886:

I was on a solitary walk, absorbed with thoughts about the meaning and purpose of life, wondering whether I should ever get myself organised and brought under the control and direction of some constructive central purpose in life, when I felt the walls between the visible and the invisible suddenly grow thin, and I was conscious of a definite mission in life opening out before me. I saw stretch before me an unfolding of labour in the realm of mystical religion, almost as clearly as Francis heard himself called at St Damians to 'repair the Church'.⁴⁸

This mystical experience does not qualify as mystical in Jones' own terms of reference. As noted above, he distrusted 'audition of voices' as evidence of direct experience of God.

The Rational Mysticism within Jones' Affirmation Mysticism

The adopted working definition of mysticism as 'direct experience of fifth dimension dualism' is in fact ambiguous. It could name equally *sensual* experience of fifth dimension dualism or *logical appreciation* of fifth dimension dualism. My reading of Jones' redirected mysticism is that he relies on logical appreciation. This could be named rational mysticism to distinguish it from the tradition of sensual mysticism but is perhaps more clearly stated as 'rationally known to be a mystery'. This rationalism has the corollary that it tends to dispense with the dualism. The fifth dimension is no longer necessarily the source of ethical commands which seem to be actually felt in the sensual experience. The rational source of ethics derived from the dynamics of human relationships may be brought into play as a self-sufficient alternative. That seems to be the case with Jones.

Jones revealed his temperamental rational leaning with regard to fifth dimension dualism in his statement of 'Reason's postulate of God'.⁴⁹ His own religion incorporated fifth dimension dualism not by direct experience but as a logical proposition. As he explained, 'if the life of moral endeavour is to be essentially consistent and reasonable there must be a world of Reality that transcends this realm of empirical, causal and utilitarian happenings... there must be some personal Heart that *cares*... some Mind that sees the way'.⁵⁰ This rational mystery

47 Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, pp. xix, xxix.

48 Jones, R., *The Trail of Life in College*. Quoted in Vining, E., *Friend of Life*, London: Michael Joseph, 1959, p. 49.

49 Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, p. xxxviii.

50 Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, p. xxxvii.

is that aspect of Platonism that was identified above as its taught proposition, not its sensual proposition. Anyone may intellectually appreciate that life and the universe are a mystery and appreciate what it is that mystics sense or seek, but that appreciation *is not in itself a mystical experience*.

Jones gave some hints of his rationalist basis of ethics in his term 'religion of the lay type'.⁵¹ This switches emphasis from religious doctrines to humanist ethics. As Jones stated with approval, 'So far as Humanism was a religious force it was pushing toward a religion of the lay-type, with man himself—man with his momentous will—as the centre of interest'.⁵² In Jones' opinion the particular mystics that he adopted as spiritual reformers were driving mysticism to converge on humanism. 'The general trend of this mystical tendency, as also in the Humanistic movement, was in the direction of a lay religion'.⁵³ In a one-off aside, he referred to 'what we today call the ethical way of salvation'.⁵⁴

Jones did not, in the two books under discussion, detail what the ethical basis of a secular religion might be but it is possible to elicit what this is by examining his use of the word Christ. Jones did not adopt Christ in the apocalyptic sense of a metaphysical transaction of atonement and salvation. As Melvin Endy pointed out, Jones considered that 'at the very heart of Quakerism is a Spiritualist objection to what [he] called "forensic" [apocalyptic] Christianity, with its focus on the death of Jesus Christ as the means by which men were made acceptable to God through the imputation of Christ's righteousness to them'.⁵⁵ Salvation, for Jones, is an ethical event within a person. Christ shows the way to this in the exemplary life of Jesus as an embodiment of God. Jones referred on a number of occasions, either in his own words or those of the spiritual reformers, to Christ experienced now such as: 'know Jesus Christ experimentally'; 'the present, living, inwardly-experienced Christ, as Eternal Spirit, Divine Light, and Word of God'.⁵⁶

It is notable that in all such references of the type 'the living Christ within us' the set of ethical principles embodied in the teaching of Jesus can be substituted for the word Christ without loss of sense. Those principles might be summarised as: concern for the sick and poor; inclusion of outcasts; the equal value of all persons; an ethic of deed instead of ritual observance; refusal to reciprocate violence; limitless patience with enemies; consideration for others prioritised over consideration for self; indifference to material wealth; spontaneous, renewing forgiveness. It is an open-ended list and the word Christ operates as a shorthand reference to this whole set of ethical principles. Were it necessary, for instance, to explain Christ to a young atheist today for whom 'Christ language' is

51 Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, pp. 3, 4.

52 Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, p. 3.

53 Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, pp. 3, 4.

54 Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, p. 76.

55 Endy, M., 'Rufus Jones and his critics', *Quaker History* 70 (1981), p. 16.

56 Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, pp. 240, 253.

incomprehensible, we could explain Christ, in Jones' usage, as cultural shorthand for these ethical principles.

These ethical principles discovered in the life of Jesus are effectively the drivers of Jones' social gospel. As the life of Jesus is identified in the incarnation scheme as a revelation of God it can be taken to follow that the ideal potential of these ethical principles is God. Or, as the First Letter of John sums it up, God is love (4:8). This foundation essentially upon ethics, not mysticism, is what I would elicit as the 'religion of the lay type' that Jones suggests but does not specify in detail. In this understanding of the light as reason Jones is a relative of his admired Winstanley. In this ethical foundation Jones confirms his inclination to Social Theism. Both apocalyptic, evangelical Christ language and fifth dimension dualism are effectively superfluous to Jones, although echoes of these remain in his mode of expression.

To summarise the character of Jones' redirected mysticism, the content of 'logical appreciation fifth dimension dualism' is a formulation which no sensual mystic would credit as mystical experience. Jones produced to his own satisfaction what could be described as 'humanist rational mysticism'. The supposition of a rational mysticism is, however, a contradiction in terms. The fifth dimension is, by definition, beyond the rational. Thus, Jones aborted mysticism as the basis of Quakerism by keeping the name without the substance. Here lies the theological conjuring trick which Jones effected in the service of liberalism: he harnessed a rational religion and social gospel under the seeming bridle of mysticism.

A Theological Overview on Jones' Spiritual Religion

If Jones never did establish that Quakerism is a mystical religion, how can we characterise the religious position that he formulated as affirmation mysticism within the complex that he named spiritual religion? My proposal is that Jones' religion represents a half-way modernism. It has moved in the direction of a fully humanist basis for religion.⁵⁷ Jones lies on the cusp of what Gary Dorrien identifies as the essentially Victorian mindset of nineteenth-century American liberal theology.⁵⁸ This sought to introduce a measure of rational elements to religion and steer a middle path between the horror of French Revolution-inspired, wholly rational infidelism and the morally questionable Calvinist God that inspired the Great Revival. Jones' burgeoning humanist Christianity has not quite relinquished the metaphysical remnants of Platonist dualism and Apocalyptic supernaturalism out of which it is born. The language of the eternal, the one and the infinite, is retained as a gloss on the humanism.

57 Guy Aiken, among others, has brought out the humanistic interpretation of the inner light in Jones. See Aiken, G., 'Who Took the Christ out of Quakerism? Rufus Jones and the person and work of Christ', *Quaker Religious Thought* 116 (2011), pp. 37–53.

58 Dorrien, G., *The Making of American Liberal Theology: 1805–1900*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

If that humanist reading is correct then it highlights an underlying difficulty with the interpolation of mystical experience that Jones attempted. God revealed to people in human relationships is present in the social dimension, not a fifth dimension. There may be a parallelism with mystical experience in the sense of the immanent and the transcendent in the dimensions the 'I', 'Thou' and 'Us' of the self and the collective self. The creative potential of this engagement may be a source of wonder, praise and love but it is not the fifth dimension of the acute mystical experience.

A comparison of Jones' nascent theological position with that of Macmurray's later and more developed position gives a useful overview of the direction in which Jones' theology was headed. Macmurray's ambition was nothing less than the overthrow of the Platonist/Cartesian view of the person that dominates Western thought. With his social understanding of God Macmurray identified the egocentric individualist proposition of Cartesianism as essentially atheist, because it defies relationship.⁵⁹ For Macmurray, all human experience of community is personal experience in relationship. God embodies this communion by 'the idea of a universal personal Other'.⁶⁰ Macmurray presents all the mystery of the human experience of the self with none of Jones' mysticism. By turning round the philosophy of the self Macmurray effectively puts the theory behind Jones' practical approach to religion and the general Liberal Quaker disdain for doctrines. In that turn around, 'I do' not 'I think' is the primary certainty of existence.⁶¹ Macmurray is also a reminder of the great fork in the highroad of Humanism that divides between theistic and anti-theistic renditions of life. The Social Theism of Jones and Macmurray takes the religious humanist branch that passes by the position, voiced by the British and American Humanist Associations, that reason and technological progress will redeem humanity.⁶²

The context of the wider religious situation outside Jones' mission within Quakerism is pertinent to an assessment of his religion. That context is the gravitational pull of the Social Gospel Movement. The immediately apparent cause of this was the publication by Walter Rauschenbusch of *Christianity and the Social Crisis* in 1907.⁶³ The movement had roots in a response to the uneasy feeling that Marxism had stolen Christianity's clothes and upstaged it. Rauschenbusch provided a rallying call on the basis that there is nothing in the social vision of Marxism that was not prefigured by Jesus. Jones does not mention Rauschenbusch

59 Macmurray, *The Form of the Personal*, vol. i, p. 19.

60 Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, p. 164.

61 Macmurray, *The Form of the Personal*, vol. i, pp. 208–09.

62 Kurtz, Paul, and Wilson, Edwin H., 'Humanist Manifesto II' (1973), http://american-humanist.org/humanism/humanist_manifesto_ii, accessed 25/05/2016; 'Preface', para. 1 and 'Ethics'. Also: 'Humanists... look to science instead of religion as the best way to discover and understand the world', <https://humanism.org.uk/>, accessed 25/05/2016.

63 Rauschenbusch, W., *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, New York: HarperCollins, 2007 [1907].

but the movement was aflame during the years of writing these two volumes. Out of his own inclination and seeing the revitalisation of mainstream Christianity that was being effected, Jones gave the same renewed impetus to Quakerism by means, as in the quote above, of his simple, practical, more Christlike, social gospel, redirected mysticism. Quakerism, with its tradition of social action, might after all lay claim to be the original revival of the social gospel.

The second piece of contextual information is theological. It is an appreciation of the fact that Christianity is composed of two different Gods. This has not been well theorised in Christianity because it is taboo to acknowledge that the great monotheism incorporates two Gods.⁶⁴ But appreciation of these two Gods is a valuable diagnostic tool in relation to Jones' redirected mysticism. One of these Gods has already been encountered in the exposition of Platonism. I refer to it as the Nature God. It is the companion to Nature Theism. The other God derives from Jahweh, the God of the fortunes of the tribe. I refer to this as the Community God. This is the companion to Social Theism. The names Nature and Community are intended to highlight the two absolute dependencies of human existence from which religion arises: the cosmos and the human social matrix. These two fundamental dependencies originate the two different kinds of God which came up against each other when the good news from Galilee encountered the God of Greek philosophy in second century Alexandria. The two Gods have been in tension with each other ever since and they underlie the perennial tension between what theology debates under the more conventional terms theism and pantheism.

Jones had a distinctive relationship with these two Gods. As illustrated, he disliked the abstract character of the Nature God but he liked its anti-dogmatic qualities. His allegiance lay with the social character of the Community God but he disowned the supernaturalism and the architecture of scapegoat, blood sacrifice and atonement which are inimical to the Nature God. Jones' inclination then was to hybridise half of the qualities of both Gods to make a new whole. This is the combination made in his redirected humanist mysticism which he sums up as 'a serious attempt to unite inward, mystical religion with active social endeavours'.⁶⁵

Conclusion:

The Need to Refine the Meaning of the Quaker Mystical Claim

Setting Jones aside, any claim that Quakerism is a religion of direct experience of God or a mystical faith in the apophatic tradition would be objectionable on a number of counts.

⁶⁴ For a detailed presentation of this analysis, see, Rock, *God Needs Salvation*, Part 1, 'A Tale of Two Religions'.

⁶⁵ Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. xxxviii.

The claim that Quakerism is an experiential faith is special pleading if it suggests that this is different from Christian experience in general. Christianity, in the figure of Jesus, possesses a high degree of conversational intimacy with God. Jesus, who is both God and human, is revered as friend, guide and intercessor. It is a central proposition of Christianity that Jesus lives and talks to people today. That is the experience on offer to all Christians. The direct experience claim does not then differentiate Quakerism.

In what sense could a person have indirect experience of God? Here one might turn to the distinction between revealed and natural theology. Revealed theology, spoken to people in the Bible, is in a sense indirect. It is, by legal definition, hearsay. Natural theology on the other hand proposes direct intimation of God in the processes of the universe. But it is not possible to rely on this distinction because revealed theology is the source of direct experience of God and the sustaining Holy Spirit in Christianity. Nor does the distinction between priesthood and the priesthood of all believers prove any indirectness. The Catholic and Anglican claims to facilitate revealed religion do not vitiate the direct conversation of the person with God. Nor does it seem legitimate to frame George Fox or the early Quakers as adherents of natural theology. Theirs is the revealed language of apocalypse and Pentecostal experience.

Mystical experience is moreover exclusive to a limited selection of people. Not all people can or ever will have a mystical experience. Yet Quakerism is proposed as an inclusive religion of potentially universal appeal. As Cooper pointed out, Jones faced a permanent quandary in reconciling the exclusivity of mysticism and his universal proposition of Quakerism.⁶⁶ The discussion between the biblical scholar Michael Goulder and the liberal mystical theologian John Hick is an illustrative exploration of the discriminatory occurrence of mystical experience.⁶⁷ Goulder resigned his promising career in the priesthood because he thought he ought to have, but was never favoured with, such mystical experience, not for want of trying. In view of this exclusiveness, to claim mystical experience as the sole basis of Quakerism, far from being liberal, would curtail the hoped for inclusiveness.

Many religious traditions have their mystical, usually minority, branches. Judaism has Kabbalah, Islam has the Sufis, Christianity has its apophatic tradition. It is safe to say that Quakerism has its share of true mystics and a flourishing mystical conversation.⁶⁸ Out of 420 Pendle Hill Pamphlets, for instance, approxi-

66 Cooper, *The Legacy of Rufus Jones*, p. 19.

67 Goulder, M., and Hick, J., *Why Believe in God*, London: SCM Press, 1983.

68 Although without definite accompanying statements of mystical experience it is never quite certain whether or not the apophaticism represents a prevalent convention, a syndrome which Pink Dandelion has identified within Quakerism as the 'absolute perhaps'. Dandelion, P., 'The Creation of Coherence: the "Quaker double-culture" and the "absolute perhaps"', in Dandelion, P., and Collins, P., (eds), *The Quaker Condition: the sociology of a liberal tradition*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 22–37.

mately 8 per cent can be counted as mystical explorations. American Friends number notable mystical adherents, such as Margery Post Abbot,⁶⁹ Howard Thurman⁷⁰ and Scott Crom,⁷¹ to name only a few. Amongst British Friends, Alex Wildwood,⁷² Rex Ambler,⁷³ Brenda Clift Heales and Chris Cook⁷⁴ are just some of those who have gone on record in their Swarthmore lectures.⁷⁵ Quakerism happily accommodates many true mystics as a leaven and blessing within its fold and would be a religion less rich without them. But it is equally true that many Quakers, on both the left and the right, do not rely on mystical experience for their faith. Christine Trevett, for instance, finds satisfaction in the apocalyptic revealed tradition.⁷⁶ Richard Peters can speak for rational humanist Friends. In his 1972 Swarthmore lecture, Peters stated: 'I have never been able to make much of the mystical tradition within the Society of Friends... indeed I find it rather at variance with the striving after clarity.'⁷⁷

In view of this mixed situation it seems fair to register the claim to direct experience as not more significant than the distinction between the natural and the revealed basis of religion. What has become a reliance on Jones' label for Liberal Quakerism as a mystical faith needs to be treated with a deal of caution. The label is so fraught with objection that it may leave wide open the question of what the theological basis of Liberal Quakerism actually does consist. Nevertheless, despite questioning Jones' putative mysticism, it may be that his underlying Social Theism accurately voices the religious experience of many Liberal Friends. Given the lead that two great liberal Quaker theologians, Jones and Macmurray, by coincidence shared fraternity in Social Theism, it might be fruitful to investigate the possibility that this frames a substantial part of liberal Quaker theology, alongside Nature Theism and in contrast to Calvinism. Pending progress toward a more satisfactory basis of liberal Quaker theology, it is the failure to suggest anything other than Jones' affirmation mysticism that lies behind Cooper's recognition that the mystical label is the one that stuck.

69 Post Abbot, M., 'Quaker Views on Mysticism', Pendle Hill Pamphlet 375 (2004).

70 Thurman, H., 'Mysticism and the Experience of Love', Pendle Hill Pamphlet 115 (1961).

71 Crom, S., 'On Being Real', Pendle Hill Pamphlet 155 (1967).

72 Wildwood, A., *A Faith to Call Our Own*, Swarthmore lecture, London: Quaker Home Service, 1999.

73 Ambler, R., *The End of Words*, London: Quaker Home Service, 1994.

74 Clift Heales, B., and Cook, C., *Images and Silence*, Swarthmore lecture, London: Quaker Home Service, 1992.

75 The annual lecture charged with the interpretation of Quakerism delivered to British Friends' Yearly Meeting since 1908.

76 Trevett, C., *Previous Convictions*, Swarthmore lecture, London: Quaker Home Service, 1997.

77 Peters, R., *Reason, Morality and Religion*, Swarthmore lecture, London: Friends Home Service Committee, 1992, p. 85.

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