

‘Creative Worship’: Howard Brinton, John William Graham and the Quaker Meeting for Worship: A Comparison

Joanna C. Dales
Independent Scholar, England

Abstract

This essay compares the views of two Quakers, John William Graham (1859–1932) and Howard Haines Brinton (1888–1973), on the Quaker Meeting for Worship. One was British, one American, both were active in succeeding generations, and both were committed to the view that the Meeting for Worship, based on silence, was essential to true Quakerism. Each developed a theology of the Meeting, drawing on both current thinking, especially with respect to evolutionary theory, and original Quaker belief and practice. They agreed on the essentially mystical character of Quakerism, but had different interpretations of the concept. My argument is that, in Brinton’s terms, Graham’s view of the meeting is akin to the ‘Puritan’ or ‘Protestant’ understanding of worship: in this view it deserves to be called ‘mechanical’ rather than ‘organic’ or ‘creative’. In Blakean terms, Graham is limited to ‘single vision and Newton’s sleep’.

Keywords

John William Graham, Howard Haines Brinton, Quaker worship, Jacob Boehme, mysticism, evolution.

Introduction: What is Creative Worship?

George Gorman’s classic *The Amazing Fact of Quaker Worship*, based on his Swarthmore Lecture of 1973,¹ uses the word ‘creative’ a number of times in the

1 Gorman, G. H., *The Amazing Fact of Quaker Worship*, Swarthmore Lecture, 1973, London: Quaker Home Service, 1973. The Swarthmore Lecture, established in 1903, is given each year on a topic of interest to Quakers.

context of the Quaker Meeting for Worship. What, one may wonder, is being created in a room full of people sitting for the most part in stillness and silence? At one point Gorman writes of ‘a kind of detachment that while standing back, accepts all experience in the hope of transcending it—seeing beyond it creatively’.² At another he writes of the possibility that we may ‘create love’.³ Transcendence and love, the ways in which human beings may hope to relate most fruitfully to the spiritual world on the one hand and the human and natural world on the other, are essential elements in Howard Brinton’s idea of ‘creative worship’, as propounded particularly in his Swarthmore Lecture of that title, delivered in 1931.⁴

Brinton’s vision depends on his idea that the Quaker Meeting, unlike some other forms of worship, is potentially ‘organic’, as opposed to ‘mechanical’. One of the major sources of his idea of the meeting is the philosophy of Jacob Boehme (1575–1624). The extent of Boehme’s influence, if any, on George Fox and other early Friends is still in dispute. Rufus Jones (1863–1958), Brinton’s early mentor, saw a strong consonance between Boehme and Fox. Brinton was less concerned with the genealogy of Quaker thought than with Boehme’s philosophy as a source for an ideal of Quaker spirituality. In particular, his understanding of Boehme’s view of creation, whether with respect to the natural world or in relation to the individual human soul, is central to Brinton’s vision of the Quaker Meeting for Worship.

By way of comparison and contrast I consider the views of John William Graham. Graham’s own Swarthmore Lecture, *The Quaker Ministry*, was given in 1925.⁵ My conclusion is that, although Graham’s view of the Meeting has superficial similarities with Brinton’s, it deserves to be branded as ‘mechanistic’ in Brinton’s terms. This I maintain despite Graham’s lifelong vehement rejection of ‘materialism’, or the reduction of all reality to material forces. Graham’s anti-materialism meant positing a ‘spiritual’ world existing alongside and interacting with the world open to our everyday, ‘supraliminal’ senses. He learned this way of thinking from members of the Society for Psychical Research, which came into existence at Cambridge University while Graham was an undergraduate there, and whose *Proceedings* he continued to read throughout the rest of his life.⁶ Later Graham reflected that, at this time in the early 1880s, ‘Personality itself

2 Gorman, *Quaker Worship*, p. 24.

3 Gorman, *Quaker Worship*, p. 70.

4 Printed in Brinton, H. H., *Creative Worship and Other Essays*, Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1957.

5 Graham, J. W., *The Quaker Ministry*, Swarthmore Lecture, 1925, London: Swarthmore Press, 1925.

6 See Dales, J. C., ‘John William Graham: Quaker apostle of progress’, PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 2016, pp. 128–58. For Graham and the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* see Graham, J. W., *The Faith of a Quaker*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920, p. 79.

seemed disintegrating before the researchers, and they were threatened with pure materialism as a result.⁷ Psychological research seemed to counter this threat.

But for Graham and the psychical researchers, the physical, the mental and the spiritual existed on the same plane, so that the spiritual world might be investigated with the tools of empirical science. This world too was material, if rarefied. Thus Graham believed that ‘the nerves hold the secret of that part of the Universe which concerns the Being of man.’⁸ This would seem to be an instance of making ‘Personality biological’, though in another place Graham denies such an intention.⁹ Brinton’s idea of the spiritual was quite different.

What psychical research did for Graham, Boehme’s philosophy did for Brinton. For Graham psychical research was up-to-date science, but Brinton found in Boehme an inspiration independent of the latter’s pre-Enlightenment thinking, pervaded as it was with alchemical lore. True, Brinton, like Graham, sought to interpret Quakerism in the light of contemporary science, especially the science of evolution. Evolution was for both a key element in their thinking about the Quaker way; but whereas Graham saw it in Darwinian terms, and as an obstacle to belief in a benevolent Creator God, Brinton saw it as the divine harmonising force that shaped both the physical universe and humankind, whether individually or collectively. Most significantly, evolution worked through the Quaker Meeting for Worship, creating an organism out of disconnected, ‘mechanical’ elements.

Mysticism among Quakers

Graham and Brinton were both engaged in the same venture: that of defending the traditional Quaker form of worship, the Meeting based in silence with occasional spoken contributions ‘as led’. Both argued that Quakerism was essentially mystical, and this belief informed their sense of what the Meeting for Worship was for and how it worked. The best-known proponent of the essentially mystical character of the Quaker faith was Rufus Jones (1863–1948).¹⁰ Graham was confessedly indebted to Jones for his view on the mystical character of Quakerism, while also relying on Anglican authorities such as William Ralph (‘Dean’) Inge and Evelyn Underhill.¹¹ Caroline Stephen’s *Quaker Strongholds*

7 Graham, J. W., *The Divinity in Man*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1927, p. 97.

8 Graham, *Divinity in Man*, p. 128.

9 ‘Foundations of Quakerism: a reply’, *Friends’ Quarterly Examiner* 65 (1931), pp. 231–36 (p. 234).

10 There are many statements of this faith in Jones’ works. Perhaps the most accessible is his introduction to Braithwaite, W. C., *Beginnings of Quakerism* (London: Macmillan, 1912), omitted from subsequent editions ‘on the ground that recent studies have, in the minds of a number of scholars, put Quakerism in rather a different light’ (Doncaster, L. H., foreword to second edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955, p. vii). See also Jones, R. M., *A Dynamic Faith* [1902], 3rd edn, London: Headley, 1906, pp. 45–60.

11 For Jones see, for instance, Graham, *Faith of a Quaker*, p. 75, where Graham pays tribute to Jones’ Introduction to Braithwaite. Inge provided Graham with material for

anticipated Jones in making the case, promoting the work of seventeenth-century French Quietists, notably Jeanne Marie Bouvier de la Motte Guyon (1648–1717) ('Mme. Guyon').¹²

One of Stephen's examples of mystical religion was the eighteenth-century English divine William Law (1686–1761), a devotee of Jacob Boehme. Law's *Works* were reprinted to Quaker acclaim in 1892–93.¹³ Although *Quaker Strongholds* appeared before this, Law's influence on Quakers of the eighteenth century onwards is well attested:¹⁴ he is quoted, for instance, in the groundbreaking book of 1884, *A Reasonable Faith*, by Three 'Friends'.¹⁵ Graham mentions Law as among authors of 'books which feed the soul'.¹⁶ For Quakers of the eighteenth century and later Law will have been their main way of finding out about Boehme, for Law produced his own, posthumously published, translation of Boehme's work, as well as other selections and appreciations.¹⁷ Brinton in his turn became part of the line by which Law's influence was passed on when the Quaker Stephen Hobhouse asked him to contribute an essay on Boehme to be included in Hobhouse's selection from the work of William Law.¹⁸

Graham's chapter on Plotinus in *The Divinity in Man*, a book based on a series of lectures on mysticism. Plotinus was for Graham a key representative of mysticism in its universal aspect. Underhill was well known to Graham. She receives three mentions in *The Divinity in Man*, and his diary records that he spoke about her in a Meeting for Worship in 1923 (John William Graham Papers [JWGP], Box 15. The Graham Papers are held in the archives of the library of the University of Manchester).

12 Stephen, C. E., *Quaker Strongholds*, 3rd edn, London: Edward Hicks, 1891. Stephen was the sister of Leslie Stephen, the well-known agnostic and man of letters, and the aunt of Virginia Woolf—a prize convert for the Quakers. Stephen also mentions 'Thomas a Kempis, Jacob Boehme, Tauler, Fénelon, ... George Fox, William Law, St. Theresa, Molinos.' For the quietists see Hastings, A., Mason, A. and Pyper, H. (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 589–90, under 'Quietism'.

13 An anonymous writer in the Quaker journal *British Friend* acclaimed Law as 'our own English mystic'. A review in the same journal calls him a 'disciple' of Boehme (Frances E. Cooke, in *British Friend*, 1894, p. 271).

14 Carole Dale Spencer mentions his influence on Quietist Friends of the eighteenth century in her essay 'Quakers in Theological context', in Angell, S. and Dandelion, P. (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 141–57 (p. 146).

15 *A Reasonable Faith: short religious essays for the times*, by Three 'Friends', London: Macmillan, 1885, p. 51. For this book and its reception among Quakers see Kennedy, T. C., *British Quakerism: 1860–1920: the transformation of a religious community*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 102–03.

16 *British Friend*, 1894, p. 256.

17 *The Works of Jacob Behmen ... To which is Prefixed the Life of the Author. With Figures, Illustrating his Principles*, left by the Reverend William Law, London: M. Richardson, 1764–81.

18 Hobhouse, S. (ed.), *Selected Mystical Writings of William Law*, edited with notes and 24 studies in the mystical theology of William Law and Jacob Boehme, London: The C. W. Daniel company, 1938.

Brinton was taught by Rufus Jones at Haverford College, where he wrote his bachelor's thesis on 'the Element of Mysticism in Quakerism'.¹⁹ The thesis insists that the essence of mysticism, as it is found among early Quakers, is the discovery of God's presence within the soul. For Fox, said Brinton, this was 'not a doctrine which he attempted to prove, it was an experience which he called all to feel'.²⁰ This remained a guiding principle for Brinton's understanding of Quakerism.

Graham and Brinton both appealed to mysticism in approaching the task of devising a theology and psychology of the Meeting fit for their times. Each taught that the distinctive feature of Quaker faith was the centrality of the Light Within,²¹ both within the human subject and particularly in the gathering of Quakers in the Meeting for Worship. This was also the starting point for Stephen in defending the essentially mystical character of Quakerism.²² The differences exist at a deeper level.

Two Quaker Intellectuals

John William Graham (1859–1932) and Howard Haines Brinton (1884–1973) were both born into Quaker families, and each remained deeply embedded in his respective Quaker community. Graham was a leader in the so-called 'Quaker Renaissance', which saw British Quakers adopt a liberal, forward-looking theology and strong engagement with social issues.²³ Graham contended both for the traditional Quaker way of worship and for openness to new developments in science and biblical criticism. He wanted a Christian Quakerism restored to its basic essentials in doctrine and in practice and valid for modern times. Brinton names Graham first in a list of men who 'performed an inestimable service in reinterpreting Quakerism in the language and thought of their own time'. He links Graham with Edward Grubb, A. N. Brayshaw, J. W. Rowntree, W. C. Braithwaite and other principal luminaries of the 'Renaissance'. Nevertheless, Brinton found fault with these predecessors of his for being too 'neo-Hegelian': they rejected Calvinism, which 'tends to make impossible the attainment of the good', replacing it with an 'idealism' which 'identifies too closely the divine and the human and runs the

19 Haines Brinton, H., 'The Element of Mysticism in Quakerism', Haverford College Bachelor's thesis, 'Graduate class of 1904' (MS in Haverford College Library Archives).

20 Brinton, 'Element of Mysticism', p. 9.

21 The early Friends sometimes used the term 'Inward Light'. Jones and his contemporaries often called it the 'Inner Light'. The departure from earlier usage is seen by Pink Dandelion as reflecting a change from the earlier, dualistic Quaker position, where the Light is a divine endowment, coming from outside the natural human being, to a more holistic position, where it is an integral part of human nature (Dandelion, P., *An Introduction to Quakerism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 132). Graham's near-contemporary Edward Grubb defended the more recent thinking in his *Authority and the Light Within*, London: James Clarke, 1908, especially pp. 78–86.

22 Stephen, *Quaker Strongholds*, pp. 26–50, 'The Inner Light' [sic].

23 For the Quaker Renaissance see Kennedy, *British Quakerism, passim*.

risk of eliminating the reality of evil'.²⁴ Graham certainly identified the human with the divine and was unshakeably optimistic about human progress, but he was more insistent than Brinton on the omnipresence of suffering and cruelty in nature and humanity.²⁵

Both Graham and Brinton were able to speak with authority on intellectual matters, including science. Graham, after a Quaker schooling, studied mathematics at King's College, Cambridge, and subsequently became tutor in mathematics and then principal of Dalton Hall, a residential Quaker institution connected with the University of Manchester, where he remained until his retirement in 1924. There he taught the young Arthur Eddington, and followed with keen interest Eddington's subsequent career as a brilliant astrophysicist and populariser of Einstein's theories.²⁶ Brinton, after studying philosophy and theology under Rufus Jones at Haverford, a Quaker College in Pennsylvania, went on to study physics for two summers at Columbia before returning to philosophy at Harvard. His earliest professional appointments were as a teacher of physics.²⁷ In 1936 he and his wife Anna moved to Pendle Hill, the Quaker study centre in Pennsylvania, as director of studies and director respectively. Both lived there for the rest of their lives.²⁸ There Brinton was necessarily occupied chiefly with thinking and writing on Quaker subjects while working with Anna to build and sustain the community, but he never lost his interest in science. It was, not, however, either mathematics or physics but rather the science and philosophy of evolution that most occupied both Graham and Brinton as they sought to reinterpret Quakerism for their time.

For Graham the idea of evolution entailed a concept of necessary progress towards a state of universal peace and beneficence.²⁹ This, presumably, was what Brinton meant when he found fault with Graham and his peers for their 'neo-Hegelianism', pointing out that two world wars have bankrupted any simplistic belief in progress.³⁰ Graham made his case for human progress most

24 Brinton, H. H., *Friends for 300 Years: the history and beliefs of the Society of Friends since George Fox started the Quaker movement*, Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1952, pp. viii, ix.

25 See Dales, 'John William Graham', p. 243 and *passim*.

26 See Wood, H. G., 'John William Graham as a Religious Thinker', *Friends' Quarterly Examiner* (1933), pp. 102–12 (p. 104). See also references to Graham in Stanley, M., *Practical Mystic: Religion, Science and A.S. Eddington*, Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

27 Manousos, A., *Howard and Anna Brinton: re-inventors of Quakerism in the twentieth century*, Quakerbridge, Philadelphia, PA: FGC, 2013, pp. 82, 46, 53, 80.

28 Gwyn, D., *Personality and Place: the life and times of Pendle Hill*, Philadelphia; Birmingham: Plain Press, 2014, pp. 82–108, 145–63. See also other references in Gwyn's index. See also Manousos, *Howard and Anna Brinton*, pp. 141–211.

29 Dales, 'John William Graham'. See also Dales, J., 'John William Graham and the Evolution of Peace', *Quaker Studies* 21 (2016), pp. 169–92.

30 Brinton, *Friends for 300 Years*, p. ix. See also Brinton, 'Quakerism and Progress', *Friend*, 21 October 1932, pp. 895–97.

fully in a book published just before the First World War,³¹ but he continued to propound the same arguments even after that war.

Defending the Meeting for Worship

Both Graham and Brinton were committed to defending the traditional Meeting for Worship, based on silent waiting, when it was seen to be under threat. In America during the nineteenth century there was a tendency, especially in states west of Ohio, to move towards a gathering which resembled a Protestant church service, with a paid pastor and a set order of worship.³² British Quakerism for the most part resisted this trend, but developments in Graham's younger days seemed to some to portend a similar departure from ancient ways. British Quakerism's evangelical phase, covering the middle and late years of the nineteenth century, led to the establishment of mission settlements headed by young men preaching a Bible-based Christianity and conducting meetings resembling Protestant church services, with hymns and spoken prayers.³³ During the late nineteenth century there was a reaction among British Quakers against these developments. Graham was prominent in the 1890s among those in England concerned to defend the type of Meeting that they believed to have been practised in the days of George Fox.³⁴ Graham undertook several journeys to America, where he campaigned for his version of the true Quaker way of worship.³⁵ For him the essential aspect of the genuine Meeting was its plainness: its freedom from any visual or auditory stimulus or symbolism,³⁶ so that the worshipper might encounter the Divine Spirit within himself, without distraction. So far Brinton would agree. But for Graham the encounter has as much to do with character-building as with the mystic encounter. 'We make contact each for himself with the Real and the Eternal, and thereby gain strength over temptation and sin.' And worship is hard work: Friends in Meeting practise 'athletics of the soul'.³⁷ In a speech at Friends General Meeting Conference in Toronto in 1904 Graham declared: 'Friends distrust the sensuous effect of ritual, and believe that such ceremonies as the Lord's Supper and water-baptism are non-essential and

31 Graham, J. W., *Evolution & Empire*, London: Headley, 1912. Graham's view of human progress towards a less cruel and violent world looks more plausible in the light of Steven Pinker's similar, amply documented thesis in *The Better Angels of our Nature: a history of violence and humanity*, London: Penguin, 2011.

32 The process is documented by T. Hamm, in his *Transformation of American Quakerism: Orthodox Friends 1800–1907*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.

33 Isichei, E., *Victorian Quakers*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970, pp. 99–101.

34 See Dales, 'John William Graham', pp. 183–230, Chapter 5, especially pp. 191–94.

35 See Dales, 'John William Graham', pp. 114–23.

36 See *The Friend*, 30 September 1904, p. 643, for Graham's denunciation of 'bell, book and candle' as unwanted accretions in worship.

37 Graham, *Faith of a Quaker*, p. 242.

even weakening to a healthy soul, while not denying their usefulness to the spiritually invalidated.³⁸

H. G. Wood, writing of Graham's religious thinking immediately after the latter's death, commented that he 'was ultra-Puritan in his desire to exclude any aesthetic appeal from spiritual worship'.³⁹ Graham himself, however, like Brinton, used the word 'Puritan' to denote a kind of religion to be rejected. Indeed, Graham equated seventeenth-century Puritanism with the evangelical Christianity to which, in his view, true Quakers stood opposed. 'Quakerism', he said, 'represented a revolt, root and branch, from the evangelical theology ... as it was held by the Puritans of the Commonwealth.'⁴⁰ For Brinton too the unadorned Meeting for Worship was essential to Quakerism. He sent copies of his 1952 book, *Friends for 300 Years*, to American delegates at the Friends World Committee Conference (FWCC) because he 'wanted to be sure that they knew what real Quakerism was'.⁴¹ In this book he wrote: 'The extreme simplicity of this act of waiting upon the Lord reduces worship to its essential universal elements, stripped of all accidental additions. This was the logical fruition of a historical evolution.' Quaker worship was the end of a process of 'purification',⁴² but it was not Puritanical. Brinton saw Puritan or, more generally, Protestant forms of worship as based on a view of the relation between God and humanity entirely at odds with that of true Quakerism.⁴³ The key to this difference lay in his concept of the 'real presence'.

Brinton and the Real Presence

In Brinton the Quaker way of worship contrasts with Protestant worship on the one hand and the Catholic mass on the other. These three constitute the three essential forms of Christian worship. Brinton records that an English initiative to set up a 'garden village' included three places of worship embodying these three forms, since 'To combine these three in one service would not allow any one of the three to reach full development.'⁴⁴ A paper of 1928 sets out Brinton's appreciation of the doctrine of transubstantiation in the Catholic mass, comparing

38 From a cutting taken from the *Toronto World*, in JWGP, Box 1.

39 Wood, 'Graham as a Religious Thinker', p. 111.

40 Graham, *Faith of a Quaker*, p. 406.

41 Manousos, *Howard and Anna Brinton*, p. xxii.

42 Brinton, *Friends for 300 Years*, p. 10.

43 For Brinton's view of Puritanism see *Creative Worship*, pp. 11–13. Except when dealing with the seventeenth-century religious movement known as Puritanism, Brinton usually prefers to write of 'Protestants' rather than 'Puritans', but he applies the same censure to the broader as to the narrower grouping.

44 Brinton, H. H., 'Prophetic Ministry', Pendle Hill pamphlets, 54, Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1950, p. 7. This is the arrangement at Hampstead Garden Suburb, founded in 1906, though here the 'Catholic' church is actually Anglo-Catholic.

it favourably with Protestant worship, which in his view leads to a ‘mechanical’ concept of the relation between the human and the divine, and hence to a ‘mechanical’ form of worship:

Salvation takes place through forces operating from a distance which are alien to human nature. Natural man and the natural world belong to the devil. The Divine Light shines in from some immeasurable distance. It does not mingle with the foreign evil substance. Religion becomes the assent to a formula as mechanics is the confirmation of physical law.⁴⁵

Quakerism turned its back on all this, though Brinton concedes that early Quakers continued to make use of Protestant theology and terminology. Everything changed for them with their discovery of the presence of God Himself within their own souls. Brinton even declares, ‘The Mass came back not externally, but internally in the heart of the worshipper.’⁴⁶ With this may be compared Graham’s view of the worship of the Real Presence in the wafer consumed in the Mass as ‘a piece of idolatry, leading, so far as it is false, to enslavement of spirit’. He goes on, however, to comment on the mysterious fact that genuine religious experience may be based on false belief.⁴⁷ For both, Quakerism had a universal appeal, transcending doctrinal formulations. Brinton expounded this view in his 1957 essay ‘Quakerism and Other Religions’.⁴⁸ Graham declared in 1898 his conviction that, precisely because it proclaims ‘the indwelling of God in the heart of man’, Quakerism is ‘the meeting-place of the faiths’.⁴⁹

Brinton likened the Protestant religious service to instruction by means of lectures.⁵⁰ It is centred on the sermon, in which the appointed minister expounds the Scripture. The Protestant’s God lives in a distant realm that the elect may enter only after death: life on earth is for proving one’s election by obedience to the commands revealed in the Bible as expounded in sermons (lectures) by His ministers. The Catholic mass is like teaching by ‘lecture-demonstration’: it is better than the Protestant way because God is deemed to be really present in the sacrament, but the worshippers are still observers rather than participants. A Quaker Meeting is like a session in a laboratory, where students conduct their

45 Brinton, H. H., ‘Vocal Ministry and Quaker Worship: a paper read at the Conference on the Ministry at Friends’ Meeting House, Coulter Street, Gemantown, Third Month, 1928’, pamphlet reprinted from *The [American] Friend*, 27 September–1 November 1928, p. 14.

46 Brinton, ‘Vocal Ministry’, p. 16.

47 Graham, *Divinity in Man*, p. 23.

48 Printed with *Creative Worship*, pp. 117–53.

49 Graham, J. W., ‘Christianity as the future Religion of India’, *British Friend*, March 10 1898, pp. 257–59 (p. 259). Brinton’s ecumenical outlook, and especially his view that ‘Eastern religions may be utilized to support Quaker testimonies’, is considered by Stephen Angell in his appendix to Manousos’ biography of the Brintons (‘Howard Brinton in Theological Context’, in Manousos, *Howard and Anna Brinton*, pp. 251–56, especially p. 255).

50 Brinton, ‘Vocal Ministry’, p. 28; ‘Prophetic Ministry’, p. 6.

own experiments and discover for themselves the reality of the God within. This is 'Real Presence' in the fullest sense of the term.⁵¹

Graham, despite his insistence on the reality of the Light Within, the 'Indweller', is actually closer in his thinking to the Protestant concept of worship as Brinton sees it than to Brinton's Quaker ideal. Brinton faults the Puritans for presenting the life of the soul as 'unremitting struggle', an attitude unfortunately bequeathed to the American nation.⁵² Not for Brinton the 'athletics of the soul'. Graham represents the individual in Meeting as essentially in internal isolation, engaged in inward exercises that build up the character and may eventuate in spoken ministry. He was at pains to distinguish Quaker ministry from the prepared sermons and prayers of the ministers of mainstream churches, whether Anglican or nonconformist,⁵³ yet his ideal is still close to the Protestant way that Brinton condemns: that of the individual standing up and preaching to the rest of the flock. Brinton grants that some worshippers 'need spiritual guidance to enable them to make proper use of the silence', but maintains that 'this help is not likely to be provided by a sustained discourse', but rather by 'a brief message which seems to grow out of the life of the Meeting and which harmonizes with the silence'.⁵⁴ Graham's own 'sermons', as he called them, as described by his daughter, while not long, were discourses addressed to the worshippers rather than arising 'out of the life of the Meeting'.⁵⁵ His description of his own practice in *The Faith of a Quaker* bears this out: 'Thoughts suggest themselves—a text that has smitten one during the week—new light on a phrase—a verse of poetry—some incident, private or public ... In five minutes from its inception, the sermon is there.'⁵⁶ For all his protests that prophetic ministry is not 'an affair of the un-aided self-purpose',⁵⁷ the sense of a Meeting united in single-hearted worship is lacking.

Brinton thought that the Protestant model was based on the false view that God was distant, existing in a heaven to be attained only through a life of struggle. Graham's God did not exist in a distant realm: indeed, it is a central argument of his two theological books, *The Faith of a Quaker* and *The Divinity in Man*, that God and humankind are inseparable, sharing in one another's life as does a tree and its leaves.⁵⁸ H. G. Wood found fault with him for claiming the support of Rudolf Otto for his views without 'seeming to notice' Otto's emphasis on the 'otherness' of God.⁵⁹ But Graham's God exists to help human beings build a kingdom to

51 See Brinton, *Friends for 300 Years*, pp. 59–82. The three ways of teaching are expounded on pp. 59–60.

52 Brinton, *Creative Worship*, p. 13.

53 Graham, *Quaker Ministry*, pp. 21–23.

54 Brinton, 'Prophetic Ministry', p. 23.

55 Sturge, R. G., *The Shining Way*, Gloucester: Fellowship Press, 1969, p. 49.

56 Graham, *Faith of a Quaker*, p. 244.

57 Graham, *Faith of a Quaker*, pp. 245–46.

58 Graham, *Faith of a Quaker*, p. 5; *Divinity in Man*, p. 48.

59 Wood, 'Graham as a Religious Thinker', p. 109. Otto was the author of *The Idea*

be realised only after aeons of evolutionary struggle. Meanwhile, life on earth necessitates compromise with the forces of evil.⁶⁰ Just as the Puritans deferred the enjoyment of God and Heaven to the afterlife, so Graham defers the enjoyment of peace and of a society where the dictates of the Sermon on the Mount might be fully practised to a far-distant future.⁶¹ The Meeting and its ministry exist chiefly to enable devotees to be strengthened in the struggle to bring this about, and struggle entails involvement in a messy world.

For Brinton the God, the Christ, who was to be met within is also capable of bringing about perfection in this life. In *Friends for 300 Years* he tackles the difficult subject of the early Friends' insistence that, through God's help, perfection 'in measure' might be attainable on earth: 'For the [early] Quaker the doctrine that complete freedom from sin was impossible was pure defeatism.'⁶² Instead of the doctrine of the imputation of righteousness to the sinner through Christ's sacrifice Quakers believed that real righteousness might be attained by the individual through being crucified with Christ and raised with him to newness of life.⁶³ But newness of life is not gained by individuals in isolation. Brinton deplors the loss of the 'organic relationship' that he believed pre-Reformation Catholics enjoyed with the Church, with Christ and with 'all the devout in all ages'.⁶⁴ Thus he emphasises the communal aspect of Quaker worship: the object of the Meeting is the discovery of the Inward Christ, the 'energizing Center', through shared worship. 'The Society of Friends escaped anarchism because its members realized that this Light was a superindividual Light which created peace and unity among all persons who responded to it or "answered it in one another"'.⁶⁵

Other writers on the Quaker Meeting, both before and after Brinton, have made similar points. Graham's near-contemporary Violet Hodgkin (1869–1954), in her Swarthmore Lecture of 1919, wrote, in words suggestive of a present kingdom, of 'the intimate communion of spirit in which, unitedly and as a body, we seek in stillness to "look with wonder at that which is before us," and thus wondering, to reign and to rest'.⁶⁶ George Gorman is more prescriptive: 'Our

of the Holy: an inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational, trans. J. W. Harvey, 2nd edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950. Otto's book appeared in German as *Das Heilige* in 1917; Harvey's translation came out in 1923.

60 See Dales, 'John William Graham and the Evolution of Peace', *passim*, especially p. 191.

61 Graham, J. W., 'Whence Comes Peace?' *British Friend*, February 1896, pp. 27–29; April 1896, pp. 77–80.

62 Brinton, *Friends for 300 Years*, p. 48. In our day Carole Dale Spencer has enlarged on the perfectionism of early Friends, especially James Nayler, in her *Holiness: the soul of Quakerism: an historical analysis of the theology of holiness in the Quaker tradition*, Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007, as well as in the essays cited in this paper.

63 Brinton, *Friends for 300 Years*, p. 46.

64 Brinton, *Friends for 300 Years*, p. 45.

65 Brinton, *Friends for 300 Years*, p. 14.

66 Hodgkin, L. V., *Silent Worship*, Swarthmore Lecture, 1917, London: Headley, 1919, p. 10.

intention must be that it should be a corporate exercise—a lending of our minds to one another.⁶⁷ Graham may have spent too much time in Meeting thinking about whether he had anything to contribute by way of spoken ministry; he lacked Hodgkin's sense of the Meeting as a place 'to reign and to rest', a perception that has something in common with Brinton's vision of the 'organic' Meeting as described below.

Evolution 1: John William Graham

We need now to consider the different ways in which Graham and Brinton incorporated ideas about evolution into their respective philosophies of Quakerism and the Quaker Meeting. Graham's understanding of evolution may have owed as much to Tennyson as to Darwin:⁶⁸ he understood the process as 'red in tooth and claw'⁶⁹ and yet somehow mysteriously working towards a happy and peaceable state. Meanwhile, there was a great deal of pain to be endured at the hands of a mindless and indifferent Nature. Graham was convinced by Darwin that "'natural selection" acts only by death'.⁷⁰ He could find no satisfactory solution to the question of how a good and all-powerful Creator God could be responsible for 'a physical and biological universe which is morally unmeaning',

where love and duty can serve no writs, where the worst cruelties are those inflicted by animals upon one another, by men on animals, and by men on men. Some insects lay their eggs in the bodies of living creatures, parasites torment their victims, terror rules through the animal world, all wild creatures die violent deaths, and men are the cruellest of all.⁷¹

To save his religion he took refuge in a dualistic philosophy, knowing that this could not be a final answer: 'Religiously, this universe of careless pain is of no value to us, except to excite our horror and stimulate our resolution to try to dominate and regulate it. Religiously we remain hearty dualists', even though, 'as philosophers', we have a 'dim, inevitable doctrine of monism'.⁷² Graham's critics were quick to suggest that this dualism left Graham with a God like the 'Invisible King' imagined by H. G. Wells:⁷³ a 'God' who was the product of collective human moral feeling, limited in power though capable of inspiring and

67 Gorman, *Quaker Worship*, p. 95.

68 For Graham's veneration of Tennyson see Michael Graham's unpublished biography of his father: Graham, M. G., 'Spokesman Ever: Lancashire Quaker J.W. Graham 1859–1932 and the course of reforming movements' (ts, 1964), 4.21. The typescript is in the Library of the Society of Friends (LSF) at Friends House, London, England.

69 From Tennyson, 'In Memoriam', LVI.

70 Graham, J. W., 'War and the Survival of the Fittest', *The Friend*, 12 November 1909, p. 762.

71 Graham, *Divinity in Man*, p. 78.

72 Graham, *Divinity in Man*, p. 81.

73 See Grubb, E., review of *The Divinity in Man*, in *The Friend*, 25 March 1927, pp. 252–53.

directing right action. This God, who, Wells insists, is not to be identified with Christ, stands over against the amoral 'Veiled Being' behind natural processes.⁷⁴ In Graham's thought the 'Indweller', or the Light of Christ within, takes the place of Wells' 'Invisible King', but as such He is no more all-powerful, or separable from the human subject, than Wells' purely humanist concept.⁷⁵

Evolutionary doctrine relates to the Meeting for Worship in that the participants are enabled in the silence and through ministry to engage with the Indweller, to align their everyday natures with the spiritual nature which is theirs by virtue of the God Who is inseparable from His human creation. This in turn gives them the discernment and the moral strength to engage in the struggle 'to dominate and regulate' the unruly forces of nature, both within and without, and thus be agents in the march of progress.⁷⁶ Graham found an explanation of how this could be in the work of the Society for Psychical Research. The researcher whom Graham knew best was Frederic Myers, to whom William James attributed an 'unusually daring grasp of the principle of evolution'. Myers suggests, says James,

that the whole system of consciousness studied by the classical psychology is only an extract from a larger total, being a part told off, as it were, to do service in the adjustments of our physical organism to the world of nature, and that the normal consciousness is thus only a portion of our nature, adapted primarily to 'terrene' conditions.⁷⁷

Myers developed the concept of the 'subliminal soul' or 'subliminal consciousness' for that part of 'the larger total' which lay below the threshold of this normal everyday consciousness. Graham's theory of what happens in the Meeting for Worship and in the 'prophetic ministry' rests heavily on Myers' concept: the extraordinary insights of genius, the kinds of extra-sensory perception that Graham attributed especially to Quaker ministers in bygone days, the inner promptings which gave rise to spoken ministry in its full power, come by way of the subliminal soul with its sensitivity to a world beyond that of the everyday senses.⁷⁸ It is through the subliminal soul above all that we have access to God

74 Wells, H. G., *God, the Invisible King*, London: Cassell, 1917, p. 119.

75 For a fuller exposition of these points see Dales, 'John William Graham', pp. 231–60.

76 Graham, *Divinity in Man*, p. 81.

77 Murphy, G. and Ballou, R. O. (eds), *William James on Psychical Research*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1961, pp. 221, 229.

78 Both Graham and Brinton were interested in the journals left by American Quaker ministers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Brinton wrote of them in his *Quaker Journals: varieties of religious experience among Friends*, Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1972, and Graham spoke of them in a speech he intended to give to Friends' Historical Society, but was prevented by death. The talk was published posthumously as *Psychical Experiences of Quaker Ministers*, collected by John William Graham ... for a Presidential Address to the Friends Historical Society, London: Friends Historical Society, 1933, *Journal of the Friends' Historical Society* (1933), Supplement 1. Both were interested in the psychic powers ascribed to these men and women; for Brinton they are the result of the 'inward

and to Christ, whose own subliminal faculty was like that belonging to all human beings, but extraordinarily sensitive and capacious, so that He was in constant communion with God the Father.⁷⁹

Graham believed in a 'spiritual' world, belonging to the natural world, but outside the Darwinian 'universe of careless pain'. He used the authority of St Paul to vindicate the view that we have a spiritual nature existing alongside our earthly nature and in touch with a spirit world. A speech given in Friends' House based on Philippians, 3:20, 'Our citizenship is in Heaven', is taken to justify a 'faith that we are surrounded by a spiritual world and are in touch with spiritual beings', and this is testified by research into the 'psychical experiences' of 'Telepathy, Clairvoyance and Premonition'.⁸⁰ Graham's theology did not stop with the humanism of an H. G. Wells.

Evolution 2: Howard Brinton and Jacob Boehme

Brinton's approach to the enigma of a God behind a Darwinian evolutionary process beset with pain and waste was to bypass Darwin altogether. In a less than comprehensive reading of Brinton I have found no reference to Darwin: instead Brinton uses such interpretations or would-be correctives to Darwin as those written by Jan Christian Smuts, author of *Holism and Evolution* (1927), Conwy Lloyd Morgan, who wrote *Emergent Evolution* (1923)⁸¹ and the pregnantly named *Life, Mind and Spirit* (the Gifford Lectures for 1926), and A. N. Whitehead, whose *Science and the Modern World* of 1929 Brinton was still quoting in 1970, along with Teilhard de Chardin.⁸² Brinton drew on thinkers such as these for his belief that there was in evolution a natural progression from the mechanical to the organic:

The creation of new forms throughout cosmic history can be viewed as a series of leaps from levels on which elements are mechanically related so that they act on each other externally by force to levels on which these elements have united to form organisms and which tend as a consequence to act upon one another internally by love.⁸³

sensitivity and awareness' bred by the Quaker way of worship (*Quaker Journals*, p. 46). For Graham they are not only this but also further evidence for the claims made by the psychical researchers.

⁷⁹ See Graham, *Divinity in Man*, pp. 92–112, especially p. 109; *Faith of a Quaker*, pp. 75, 77.

⁸⁰ 'The Quest for God' (talk given by Graham at Friends' House, 11 November 1931; ms in JWGP, Box 2).

⁸¹ See Brinton, *Creative Worship*, p. 19. For more on Smuts and Morgan and other reinterpreters of Darwinism see Bowler, P. J., *Reconciling Science and Religion: the debate in early twentieth-century Britain*, Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

⁸² Brinton, H. H., 'Evolution and the Inward Light', Pendle Hill Pamphlets, 173, Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1970, p. 30.

⁸³ Brinton, *Creative Worship*, p. 16.

This way of thinking provided a corrective to that scientific materialism to which, no less than Graham, Brinton stood opposed. Brinton's way was to reimagine evolution as both a spiritual and a natural process, a holistic act of divine creativity. For his inspiration in articulating this vision he turned above all to the early Protestant mystical thinker, Jacob Boehme (1575–1624). Boehme may have been caught in the medieval system of alchemy, but he was nevertheless a 'prophet of the doctrine of emergent evolution', as propounded by Conwy Lloyd Morgan.⁸⁴ Brinton's reading of Boehme was crucial to his understanding of Quaker Christianity, not least to his sense of what happened, or could happen, in the Quaker Meeting for Worship.

Brinton was led to study Boehme by his Haverford mentor Rufus Jones. Jones was interested in Boehme as perhaps the most prolific and influential of the 'Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries' who are the subject of his 1914 book of that title. Jones noted that Boehme was translated into English in time for Fox to have read him,⁸⁵ and liked Boehme for articulating ideas that chimed with Jones' ideal of Quakerism: that humankind, though fallen, possesses an 'immortal seed which may burst into life'; that saving faith consists not in assent to doctrinal truths but in a process of regeneration through the presence of Christ within, which means taking up the Cross through identification of the personal will with the Will of God. 'Grace' does not mean salvation gratuitously bestowed on the sinner through 'imputed righteousness', but it is 'an inward, resident Grace, which regenerates us into childlikeness, so that Christ the conqueror of

84 Brinton, H. H., *The Mystic Will: based on a study of the philosophy of Jacob Boehme*, New York: Macmillan, 1930, p. 163.

85 Jones, R., *Spiritual Reformers*, London, 1914, pp. 210, 211. Jones argues that Fox would at least have been aware of Boehme's ideas and he claimed a strong consonance between the two, but Geoffrey Nuttall contends that 'to anyone who reads Boehme's and Fox's writings consecutively and comparatively, the utter difference between their respective spiritual climates is soon apparent' (Nuttall, G. F., *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1946; quoted by Manousos, *Howard and Anna Brinton*, p. 82). For recent contributions to this debate, see Hessayon, A., 'Jacob Boehme and the Early Quaker', *Journal of the Friends' Historical Society* 60 (2005), pp. 191–223. See also Hessayon's 'Jacob Boehme's Writings During the English Revolution and Afterwards: their publication, dissemination, and influence, in Hessayon, A. and Apetrei, S. (eds), *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme: four centuries of thought and reception*, London: Routledge, 2014, pp. 77–97 (p. 89). Carole Spencer has written eloquently of James Nayler (1616?–1660), the Quaker leader whose influence rivalled that of George Fox in the early days of the movement, showing suggestive parallels between his later confessional writings and Boehme's concept of the possibility of human perfection by way of the 'yielded will'. See Spencer, C. D., 'The Man Who "Set Himself as a Sign"', in Angell, S. W., and Dandelion, P. (eds), *Early Quakers and their Theological Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 64–82, and her 'James Nayler and Jacob Boehme', *Quaker Religious Thought*, 125, article 7 (2015), available online at digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/qrt/. See also Birkel, M. and Angell, S. W., 'The Witness of Richard Farnworth Prophet of Light, Apostle of Church Order', in Angell and Dandelion, *Early Quakers*, pp. 83–101.

death arises in us and becomes a dominating operation in us'.⁸⁶ It was left to Jones' student Howard Brinton to grapple with Boehme's abstruse and antiquated philosophy and natural history and make of it an inspiration for his vision of the organic Meeting for Worship, powered by a non-materialist view of evolution.

Boehme was the subject of Brinton's doctoral thesis, published in 1930 as *The Mystic Will*. Boehme, according to Brinton, was 'pre-eminently a philosopher of evolution';⁸⁷ one who promoted a concept of evolution identifying the progress of the human soul with the creative process in the natural world. Boehme's God is not the Unmoved Mover of Aristotelian philosophy⁸⁸ but is Himself involved in the emergence of temporal nature from unformed darkness, reaching its goal in a transfigured universe. This doctrine of 'evolution' is not time-bound. The 'evolutionary process' exists now and always in God, nature and humankind, and by it 'the light of spirit is constantly reborn amid dark, struggling material forces.'⁸⁹ Boehme understands this process in terms of a three-fold universe comprising seven 'forms', 'qualities' or 'characteristics'. The seven forms are arranged in two triads, with a connecting link. In the first triad are the qualities pertaining to the material universe in its unredeemed state. The lowest is the 'dryness', 'hardness' or 'contraction' of the undifferentiated material of creation, or *Ungrund* (Brinton compares this to Milton's 'wide womb of uncreated night Devoid of sense and motion').⁹⁰ The process moves from here through 'expansion', the splitting up into multifariousness, then the agonising rotary motion in which the two first forms conflict with one another. Escape from this cycle happens with the fourth 'form', the 'flash' or 'blitz',⁹¹ which is the means for creation to break into the higher triad, consisting of the fifth form, love or light; the sixth, 'sound', or the means by which nature is made intelligible to the spiritual senses; and finally the harmonisation of the whole process in 'the subject or enclosure of the other six characteristics' in 'one ground'.⁹² The whole comprises 'Eternal Nature'. The entire process comes forth from God and God is involved in every stage. The agent of change is the Virgin Sophia, or wisdom, in whom God 'sees Himself mirrored, not as He might become but as He really is'.⁹³

86 Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, pp. 192–95. The quotation is from one of Boehme's Epistles.

87 Brinton, *Mystic Will*, p. vi.

88 See *Encyclopedia Britannica* online, under 'Unmoved Mover' [Accessed 20/07/18].

89 Brinton, *Mystic Will*, p. 13.

90 Brinton, *Mystic Will*, p. 13.

91 See *Mystic Will*, p. 145.

92 See *Genius of the Transcendent: mystical writings of Jakob Boehme*, trans. Birkel, M. L. and Bach, J., Boston; London: Shambhala, 2010, p. 9. Birkel and Bach give an account of the seven 'characteristics' taken from Boehme's *Clavis*, a work of 1624 designed as a 'key' to his writings. There is a more intelligible, if simplified, version of Boehme's scheme in Liem, A., 'Jacob Boehme: Insights into the Challenge of Evil', Pendle Hill pamphlets, 214, Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1977; repr. Pendle Hill pamphlets, 351, 2000, pp. 14–15. See also Brinton, *Mystic Will*, pp. 134–57.

93 Brinton, *Mystic Will*, p. 188.

Evil is a necessary part of creation. Pain and 'wrath' are implicit in the process whereby creation moves from one stage to another until the 'conflagration' occurs through which creation passes to a higher stage, culminating in ultimate reconciliation, which is forever present, not pushed out to some distant end-time, as in Graham. Whereas Graham was unable to resolve the contradiction between the principle of a God of love and the pain and indifference of the material creation, Brinton found in Boehme 'the reconciliation of God as revealed in nature with a God who satisfies the demands of the human spirit.'⁹⁴

And everything that can be said of the evolution of the natural world can be applied to the creation and completion of the human soul. Each one of us passes through the first three forms; then, through grace and through the 'yielded' will,⁹⁵ each one may submit to the 'flash' or '*Feuerschrack*' and pass through to the higher triad and to the final reconciliation. Sophia, the wisdom of God, then enters into 'marriage' with the soul and thus enables it to escape from bondage to the material world, saying to the soul, 'We shall bring about in this world what God has foreordained for us [to do]; we shall serve Him in His temple which we ourselves are.'⁹⁶ The alternative is to be like Lucifer, enthralled to his own will and thus condemned in perpetuity to the darkness and anguish of the first triad of forms. The 'flash' which, in the yielded will, is experienced as light, is experienced by him and his followers as fire or 'wrath'. 'Locked out of his former position, he found himself fantasised into matter, which had been prepared for him.'⁹⁷ Or, according to Brinton,

If the soul imagines toward the lower or material, the fourth form appears to it as fire, the 'anger of God' which consumes its materiality in the furnace of life. If the soul imagines toward the higher or spiritual ternary the fourth form appears as light, the love of God which unites the soul's will to God's will in *Verstand*, the higher knowledge.⁹⁸

In Boehme, *Verstand* is opposed to *Vernunft*, the rationalistic, objectifying knowledge used in mechanistic science.⁹⁹ 'The blind struggling self-will is in darkness; the will universalized, harmonized and determined by a complete knowledge of itself is in the light and the human body is born of the interaction between the two.'¹⁰⁰

The Incarnation of Christ, who enters into nature with the 'Flash', is the type and the means of this process. Through the Incarnation, 'Spirit acquires body and

94 Brinton, *Mystic Will*, p. 159. See also Liem, 'Jacob Boehme', pp. 12, 16. Graham makes admittedly imperfect attempts at reconciliation in Chapter 4 (pp. 64–80: 'Dualism and Bridges') of *Divinity in Man*.

95 See Birkel and Bach, *Genius of the Transcendent*, pp. 95–123, Chapter 3: 'True Yieldedness'.

96 Boehme, J., *The Way to Christ*, trans. Erb, P., New York: Paulist Press, 1978, p. 62.

97 Erb, in Boehme, *Way to Christ*; p. 20.

98 Brinton, *Mystic Will*, p. 147.

99 See Brinton, *Mystic Will*, p. 124.

100 Brinton, *Mystic Will*, p. 121.

body acquires spirit. ... Nature sinks back into God, but God comes forward into nature for each is incomplete without the other.¹⁰¹ Brinton took from Boehme the assurance that Christians may partake in the benefits of the Incarnation, as they take Christ's life, crucifixion and death into themselves and into their lives, resigning their wills into God's keeping.¹⁰² The tragedy of modern humanity, according to Brinton, is that men and women are all too likely to reject this way, advancing in mechanistic science but failing to match this with the advance in *Verstand*, or deeper understanding, that must accompany material progress if we are not to suffer the fate of Lucifer, trapped in unredeemed materiality.¹⁰³

Almost at the end of his life Brinton summed up the Behmenist philosophy and affirmed it as consonant with the experience of early Quakers, as revealed in their journals, in his 1970 pamphlet, 'Evolution and the Inward Light'.¹⁰⁴ Here he asserts that the method of evolution is 'reconciliation', and it is described in the Prologue to the Gospel of John. John's account of creation/reconciliation by means of the Logos, or Word of God,

is acknowledged by such various moderns as Josiah Royce, Alfred North Whitehead and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who have all agreed that the function of the divine is not to create out of nothing but to gradually bring into an orderly unity diversified and individualistic elements of being.¹⁰⁵

By God's creative act the 'swarm of atoms' becomes something greater than the sum of its parts, as the particles form living beings. So it is with the religious life, as reconciliation takes place both within the human subject and between the human soul and God.¹⁰⁶ As for the 'survival of the fittest', by this new/old theory of evolution 'the fittest is not the best fighter but one who best complies with the gospel of reconciliation or love.'¹⁰⁷

Brinton and the Organic Meeting

Ideally, this 'gospel of love' is fulfilled in the Quaker Meeting for Worship. In Brinton's view the Quaker way of worship differs from that of the Protestants chiefly in that it is based on 'organic' rather than 'mechanical' relationships. This

101 Brinton, *Mystic Will*, p. 145.

102 Brinton, *Mystic Will*, pp. 113, 117, on how we may move from a 'historical' to a 'living' faith and on the power of the indwelling Christ. See Spencer, 'The Man Who "Set Himself as a Sign"', for James Nayler as an example of this process.

103 See Brinton, *Mystic Will*, pp. 230–31. See also Brinton, H. H., *Ethical Mysticism in the Society of Friends*, Pendle Hill pamphlets, 156, Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1967.

104 Brinton, H. H., 'Evolution and the Inward Light', Pendle Hill Pamphlets, 173, Wallingford PA: Pendle Hill, 1970.

105 Brinton, 'Evolution', p. 20. See also Haines Brinton, H., 'Light and Life in the Fourth Gospel', Pendle Hill pamphlet, 178, Wallingford PA: Pendle Hill, 1971.

106 Brinton, 'Evolution', p. 24.

107 Brinton, 'Evolution', p. 33.

distinction is a theme running throughout *Creative Worship*. Brinton explains it as follows:

Mechanisms, as such, are determined, predictable and controllable. Life, as such, is undetermined, unpredictable, and uncontrollable by agencies outside itself. ... What we shall, for lack of a better term, call mechanistic worship is based on the externally and traditionally given, whether it be ritual, creed, hymn, scripture or sermon. But worship based on the Inner Light which is also the Inner Life is as open to the novel and unexpected as is life itself.¹⁰⁸

'An organism is defined as a structure or unity in which the parts exist for the whole and the whole for the parts.'¹⁰⁹ The keynote is harmony. The goal of worship is 'a life which is in harmony with itself', where 'discordant and mechanically related elements in the soul' give way to 'sparks of light' that are 'fused into a common radiance'.¹¹⁰ Thus arises 'the organic union of the worshiper with the creative life of God' and hence comes 'rebirth into a higher type of life'. The latter does not come out of strife within the soul, the human conscience struggling against evil and temptation. 'It is a new creation and its nature is unpredictable. God is sought not as a means but as an end, and only when He is sought as an end does He become a means of emergence to a higher level of life.'¹¹¹

It is not that Quaker worship, as opposed to other forms, is necessarily 'organic', while other types are 'mechanical'. But Brinton does contend that the Quaker Meeting is particularly 'hospitable to the creative impulses of life'.¹¹² 'Creative impulses' bring forth 'organisms' as opposed to 'mechanisms'. These may be individual organisms, created when 'discordant and mechanically related elements in the soul' come together in a higher form of life. An 'organism' may also be formed when worshippers find themselves 'united in a single life through the creative love of God'.¹¹³ 'In worship God binds together both the warring desires of the soul and the dissociated units of the Meeting into one living whole.'¹¹⁴ There is an important difference between the evolution of the natural world and that of the worshipping community: 'Might it not be true that in religious worship something takes place deliberately in the full sunlight of consciousness which takes place throughout the whole evolutionary process, more darkly, less consciously?'¹¹⁵ If so, it follows that worshippers have an obligation consciously to prepare for worship and to be aware of the goal of creating unity in the Spirit,

108 Brinton, *Creative Worship*, p. 30.

109 Brinton, *Creative Worship*, p. 14.

110 Brinton, *Creative Worship*, p. 27.

111 Brinton, *Creative Worship*, p. 28.

112 Brinton, *Creative Worship*, p. 31.

113 Brinton, *Creative Worship*, p. 42.

114 Brinton, *Creative Worship*, p. 42.

115 Brinton, *Creative Worship*, p. 42.

so that spoken ministry may arise ‘spontaneously out of the life’ of the Meeting, avoiding criticism and analysis, for ‘Life is killed by dissection’¹¹⁶

The Meeting for Worship aims at prefiguring the ultimate goal for humankind: ‘The Kingdom of Heaven will have come when all men are united organically with one another in the Life of God.’¹¹⁷ John William Graham also saw the Kingdom of Heaven as the end-point of the evolutionary process. This would come about through human beings responding faithfully to the Light Within, that Light which is encountered and cultivated in the Meeting for Worship. Thus, although Graham’s vision depends on a view of progress arguably more ‘mechanistic’ than Brinton’s, it is true for both that the goal of the Meeting is not confined to the Meeting itself. Brinton instances the ‘creative impulses’ that have had their origin in Quaker worship:

Doctrines and practices commonly accepted today regarding peace, religious liberty, the abolition of negro slavery, temperance, prison reform, the care of the mentally ill have come earlier to Friends, not through any intrinsic merit of their own, but because they practiced a form of worship which was especially adapted to the emergence of unforeseen qualities of life.¹¹⁸

Many of these social improvements were also dear to the heart of John William Graham.¹¹⁹ Both were engaged in making a better world, and both found inspiration and guidance in the Meeting for Worship.

Conclusion

It is now possible to propose an answer to the question posed at the beginning of this essay: ‘What is being created in the Meeting for Worship?’—at least in the thought of Howard Brinton. God uses the Meeting to create organisms out of disparate and warring elements: in the Meeting itself, in the individuals who compose it and ultimately in the world to which they return to put into practice the insights they have received through the ministry of the Inward Light. Brinton came to this view through his understanding of evolutionary science, interpreted above all through his reading of Jacob Boehme. His attitude to evolutionary science and to science in general is thrown into relief by comparison with that of John William Graham.

Graham’s attempts to ‘prove’ the existence of a spiritual realm were literal-minded. He tried to fit the spiritual world into the Newtonian Universe as if it existed on the same plane, however uncanny it might seem. That was why it could be investigated with the tools used by the Society for Psychical Research.

116 Brinton, *Creative Worship*, pp. 43, 44.

117 Brinton, *Creative Worship*, p. 43.

118 Brinton, *Creative Worship*, p. 31.

119 See Graham, ‘Spokesman Ever’, for details of the elder Graham’s involvement in a number of social causes.

By contrast, Brinton, for all his scientific training, had a poet's approach to the world. Like William Blake, whom he often quoted, he eschewed 'single vision and Newton's sleep'.¹²⁰ It is striking that William Law likewise disparaged the Newtonian world-view. 'Boehme, says Alan Gregory, 'enabled [Law] to develop what he considered to be a thorough-going alternative to the "mechanical philosophy" promulgated by Newton.'¹²¹ This is so although Boehme was an early proponent of a heliocentric view of the universe, abolishing, before Newton, the distinction between laws governing the superlunary and sublunary spheres.¹²² For in Boehme the uniformity of nature demonstrates the ubiquity of divine forces rather than of mathematical laws.

Brinton was firmly in the Blake/Law camp. From *The Mystic Will* onwards he was keenly aware of the drawbacks of a post-Newtonian scientific world-view. 'Western mechanistic science', said Brinton in *The Mystic Will*, 'cannot even find the soul of man for it looks outward, not inward',¹²³ whereas 'the whole labor of Boehme's philosophy is to find room for both outer and inner light.'¹²⁴ Brinton goes on to relate this to Blake's 'double vision', which sees everything as simultaneously physical and spiritual. Thus Brinton could find a valid insight for his times into the nature of evolution in Boehme's vision of a universe permeated throughout by divinity while striving upward to a more perfect expression of the Eternal Logos. Brinton did not need or care for the evidence of the rocks or the fossils or the methods farmers used in breeding; his evidence was 'inward': he saw through his experience of worship how discordant elements could be harmonised and applied this understanding to the outward creation. Whereas for Graham nature evolved through natural selection, which 'acts only by death',¹²⁵ for Brinton nature was the workshop of divine love, bringing light out of darkness and harmony out of discord, and culminating in the inexpressible goal of the mystic quest, where God is all in all.

Blake, Brinton was pleased to note, found inspiration and confirmation for his own philosophy in the doctrines of Boehme: 'Not only in his dualism and in his view of evil does Blake follow Boehme closely, but also in his theory of the fall as

120 See Goddard, H., 'Blake's Four-fold Vision', Pendle Hill pamphlet, 86, Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1956, p. 27. The poem from which this line is taken occurs in a letter to Thomas Butts [22 November 1802], printed in Stevenson, W. H. (ed.), *Blake: the complete poems*, 3rd edn, Harlow: Longman, 2007, pp. 488–501.

121 Gregory, A., "No New Truths of Religion": William Law's appropriation of Jacob Boehme', in Hessayon and Apetrei, *Jacob Boehme*, pp. 142–62 (p. 144). See also Hobhouse, S., *Isaac Newton and Jacob Boehme (extracted from Philosophia)*, Belgrade, 1937.

122 See Weeks, A., 'Radical Reformation and the Anticipation of Modernism in Jacob Boehme', in Hessayon and Apetrei, *Jacob Boehme*, pp. 38–56 (p. 44); Essell Jessen, E., 'Boehme and the Early English Romantics', in Hessayon and Apetrei, *Jacob Boehme*, pp. 180–95.

123 Brinton, *Mystic Will*, p. 24.

124 Brinton, *Mystic Will*, p. 97. See also *Mystic Will*, p. 72.

125 Graham, J. W., 'War and the Survival of the Fittest', *The Friend*, 12 November 1909, pp. 762–64.

a descent from unity to plurality.¹²⁶ Brinton's own emphasis, in *Creative Worship* and elsewhere, was on the ascent from plurality to unity, as ideally demonstrated in the Meeting for Worship. It was indeed, Boehme taught him, all too easy to be like Lucifer, to give way to egoism, to sink back into the realm of strife and dissonance, becoming within oneself and in one's relations with others a mass of 'discordant and mechanically related elements'. The Quaker way of attention to the Light Within, however, showed the possibility of uniting with God's creative purpose to bring about organic unity, individually, in the worshipping community, and ultimately with the whole human race, in the realisation of the Kingdom of God.

Graham and Brinton had different ideas of what it might mean to call Quakerism a mystical religion. Graham made an attempt in his *Divinity in Man* to explain the philosophy of Plotinus and relate it to Quaker insights, but principally mysticism meant for him the rigid exclusion of outward ritual and ornament so as to enable the individual to focus on the Light Within.¹²⁷ For Brinton, following Boehme, mysticism has to do with the higher knowledge, or *Verstand*, which comprehends the spiritual in the natural, as seen above all in the Incarnation. 'Adam's descendants must redeem nature by fixing their imaginations on the Son who is the goal and Savior of nature. Through such attention to the eternal we become like it and thus are enabled to bring salvation to the temporal.'¹²⁸

In a late pamphlet Brinton wrote of the question which so bothered Graham, that of the apparent contradiction between monism and dualism (or pluralism), both of which seem to be required in serious religious thought: 'The Hindu ... withdraws to the Absolute One beyond all multiplicity and returns to find that all life is one life. To injure another is therefore to injure oneself. In similar fashion, but with a different philosophy, the Quaker believes that the Inward Light is One and not many.'¹²⁹ To see in this way requires more than 'single vision and Newton's sleep'.

'Without contraries is no progression', said William Blake.¹³⁰ Brinton and Graham both knew that Quakerism had to evolve and change: it had to be open to the world in which it found itself. One phase in the interpretation of Quakerism had to give way to another: the 'neo-Hegelianism' of Graham's generation, its belief in inevitable progress in a linear direction, had to give way to new understandings, such as that of Howard Brinton. Brinton and Graham would both have sympathised with the point of view expressed by Kenneth Boulding

126 Brinton, *Mystic Will*, p. 72. Cf. Jessen, 'Boehme and the Early English Romantics'.

127 Dales, 'John William Graham', pp. 159–81, *Mysticism in the theology of John William Graham*.

128 Brinton, *Mystic Will*, p. 150.

129 Brinton, H. H., *Ethical Mysticism in the Society of Friends*, Pendle Hill pamphlets, 156, Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1967, p. 27.

130 From 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', II, in Stevenson, *Blake: the complete poems*, p. 111.

in his Pendle Hill pamphlet of 1964, 'The Evolutionary Potential of Quakerism'. Boulding uses the scientific concept of 'entropy' to suggest that everything in the world, Quakerism included, is subject to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which means that it is bound, over time, to lose its original energy and become lifeless unless some mutation occurs by which it can be changed, acquiring new energy to adapt to a new set of circumstances.¹³¹ Brinton and Graham both knew that Quakerism needed to be reinterpreted in their own generations if it were to stay alive. They each devoted much of their extraordinary intellectual and devotional energy to such a reinterpretation, drawing on the thought of their times as well as on the past. Those who believe that Quakerism may still speak meaningfully to the present generation may find inspiration in their visions while seeking for favourable 'mutations' in twenty-first-century ways of thinking to reinvigorate the Quaker stock.

Author Details

Joanna C. Dales is an independent scholar. She has a PhD in English (University of Cambridge, 1970) and one in Quaker Studies (University of Birmingham, 2016). She taught briefly at the University of Leeds and has worked in university libraries. In 2017 she spent ten weeks as the Kenneth Carroll scholar at Pendle Hill, the Quaker study and retreat centre in Pennsylvania, where she studied the work of Howard Brinton.

Mailing address: 14 Low Croft, High Bentham, Lancaster, LA2 7FD, UK

Email: joanna.dales@cantab.net

131 Boulding, K. E., *The Evolutionary Potential of Quakerism*, the 1964 James Backhouse Lecture, Pendle Hill pamphlets, 136, Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1964. Boulding was on the staff at Pendle Hill during Brinton's time (see Gwyn, *Personality and Place*, p. 197).