

George Fox's *Great Mistery* and the New England Returnees

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This article focuses on the anti-Quaker critiques of three Puritan ministers returned from New England (Francis Higginson, Jr., Thomas Weld, and Samuel Eaton), as well as the response by George Fox in his 1659 work, *The Great Mistery*, and in other works. It identifies two areas in which these Puritans, because of their American experiences, made a contribution to sharpening debates over Quakerism in ways different from other Puritans: first, highlighting concerns about the similarity of Quaker views of immediate revelation with those of Anne Hutchinson, exiled from Massachusetts for embracing that alleged heresy; and second, exploring how the salvation of Indigenous Americans could best be described on an experiential basis, whether doctrinally or ethically. In response, Fox strongly defended immediate revelation and developed his view of Light-guided ethics as a means for discerning the presence of the divine Light of Christ in Indigenous Americans.



This essay explores the effects of returning New England Puritan ministers and their critiques on the Quakerism of the 1650s, and George Fox's response to their criticisms in his mammoth work, *The Great Mystery of the Great Whore Unfolded*, written in 1657 and 1658 and published in February 1659.¹ Both the New England returnees' impact on Quakerism,² and Fox's *Great Mystery*, are relatively neglected aspects of early Quaker history,³ and to my knowledge, the connection between these two themes has never been addressed. Of the approximately 117 ministers whose writings or spoken thoughts were considered in *Great Mystery*, at least five were authored, in whole or in part, by New England returnees: Samuel Eaton, Thomas Weld, Francis Higginson, Giles Firmin, and Thomas Tillam. In general, they registered their alarm about this new sect early on: Three of these five authors (Higginson, Weld, and Eaton) published their anti-Quaker attacks in the first flurry of Quaker and anti-Quaker publishing (1652, 1653 and early in 1654). Four of the above (the three early publishers, plus Firmin)⁴ hailed from the orthodox side of New England and English Puritanism, although they differed somewhat in their orientation toward debates between Congregationalists and Presbyterians. When Tillam wrote the tract to which Fox replied, however, he was a Seventh-Day Baptist.

The first part of the essay will address three areas of concern for each of these authors. First, I will provide a brief biography of three of these returnees, Higginson, Weld, and Eaton. Second, I will examine their interactions with Fox and other Quakers prior to *Great Mystery*. Third, I will briefly analyse Fox's reply to each of these authors in *Great Mystery*. The final part of the essay will analyse two broad themes as they relate to these authors. I will consider the effects that Anne Hutchinson and the Antinomian Controversy had on both their critiques of Quakers and Fox's reply. Also, I will examine the effects that Puritan and Quaker interactions with Indigenous Americans had on Quaker and anti-Quaker debates about the operation of the Light of Christ in human consciences and related matters. A conclusion then draws these threads together.

¹ Rosemary Moore, *The Light in their Consciences*, 2nd ed. (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press), 48; William C. Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism* (London: Macmillan, 1912), 301.

² William C. Braithwaite (*The Beginnings of Quakerism*, 9–10), as an aside, remarked that 'several of the ministers who most zealously opposed Friends in the North of England had lived in Massachusetts', aptly listing 'Francis Higginson, Thomas Weld, Samuel Eaton, and Christopher Marshall'. The first three published anti-Quaker tracts. There is no mention of Higginson anywhere else in Braithwaite's book, and only one or two brief mentions of the others. Hugh Barbour (*The Quakers in Puritan England* [Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1985 {1964}]) and Rosemary Moore (*The Light in their Consciences*) briefly mention Higginson and Weld, but they do not investigate the effects of their New England sojourns on their opposition to Quakers; neither Barbour nor Moore mention Eaton or Marshall.

³ Here I concur with Rosemary Moore, *Light in their Consciences*, 48, that *The Great Mystery* 'is a neglected work'.

⁴ Giles Firmin's anti-Quaker critiques and George Fox's response are described in Stephen W. Angell, 'Giles Firmin's Quaker Library', *Quaker Studies* 29/1 (2024): 1–13.

Francis Higginson

This essay will consider the work of Francis Higginson, priest at Kirkby Stephen in Westmorland. Higginson, thirty-five-years-old in 1653, was considerably younger than either Eaton or Weld, but still six years older than Fox. In 1629, at age eleven, Higginson sailed to New England, accompanying his father, also Francis. The elder Higginson died in 1630. After six years, Higginson sailed back across the ocean to attend university at Leyden in the Netherlands, and then he accepted the pastorate at Kirkby Stephen in 1648. Kirkby Stephen was one of the largest towns in Westmoreland, but Higginson would have been keenly aware that it was not the most prestigious priesthood in that northern English region. Still, Higginson hoped ‘to do most good among the ignorant people there’.⁵

Higginson was the closest of these three Puritan pastors to the epicentre of the Quaker spiritual uprising in 1652 and 1653 which affected Westmorland and adjacent areas of Lancaster very strongly. Quakers readily provoked perceptions of scandal among those persons who were not drawn to join their movement. According to fifty-eight-year-old Thomas Weld (based on a letter from fellow returnee Higginson), on October 28, 1653, twenty-six-year-old Quaker Thomas Holme⁶ ‘went naked as he was born’ through the crowded outdoor market in Higginson’s hometown of Kirkby Stephen;⁷ Holme cried out, ‘It is not I, but God, that goeth naked.’ Weld thus implied

⁵ ‘Francis Higginson’, (Sr. and Jr.), ODNB; Hugh Barbour and Arthur O. Roberts, *Early Quaker Writings, 1650–1700* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), 64 (quotation in Barbour and Roberts); David Neelon, *James Nayler: Revolutionary to Prophet* (Becket, MA: Leadings Press, 2009), 69.

⁶ Historians Braithwaite, *Beginnings of Quakerism*, 92, 126, 237; Barbour, *Quakers in Puritan England*, 46, 59; and Barbour and Roberts, *Early Quaker Writings*, 597, characterise Thomas Holme, (c. 1627–1666) as ‘a man of little judgment’, ‘impulsive’ and sometimes unwise, ‘eager and immature’, and an ‘emotional young Kendal weaver’. At the same time, he was highly esteemed by fellow Quakers, loyal, even adulatory, toward Fox, and a major force in bringing the Quaker movement to Wales. He had been convinced in 1652. He was imprisoned four times in Lancashire and Cheshire. He went naked for a sign more than once, with the last occurrence in 1655. Moore, *The Light in their Consciences*, 128; Kenneth Carroll, ‘Early Quakers and “Going Naked as a Sign,”’ *Quaker History* 67:2 (Autumn 1978): 69–87 at 77; H. Larry Ingle, ‘George Fox, Historian’, *Quaker History* 82:1 (Spring 1993): 28–35 at 31. Holme, at twenty-six years old, was not the youngest Quaker leader. Edward Burrough, James Parnell, and George Whitehead were all in their teens when they joined the Quaker movement in the early 1650s; all ascended to leadership in the Quaker movement in that decade, and none of these has been described by historians as immature or impulsive. [See, e.g., Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion, eds., *Early Quakers and Their Theological Thought, 1647–1723* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 118–126, 273–277.] Rosemary Moore has attributed the ‘excitable’ actions of Richard Farnworth (c. 1627–1666), exactly the same age as Holme, to his youth, [Moore, ‘An Author’s Response to Stephen Angell and Corey Beals’, *Quaker Religious Thought* 99 (2003): 64] but what may be more important for Farnworth and Holme was their age cohort: age thirteen at the calling of the Long Parliament, age twenty-one at the execution of Charles I; in other words, the most tumultuous events in seventeenth-century English history occurred during their impressionable adolescent years.

⁷ This was apparently a planned (not spontaneous) event, as Weld alleged that, in a barn, four Quaker men guarded Holme’s clothes to prevent them from being stolen. Weld, et al., *A Further Discovery of that Generation of Men called Quakers* (Gateside: Printed for S. B., 1654), 84.

that Holme compounded his brazen defiance of sartorial convention with blasphemy. Violation of the blasphemy laws could place him in hazard of a major criminal penalty.⁸ In later correspondence with Margaret Fell in regard to a similar action in Chester in 1655, Holme differentiated himself from the divine: 'I am clear in my obedience to the Lord.'⁹ Some Quakers justified this kind of action with references to Isaiah, Micah, and other Old Testament prophets.¹⁰ Later, Higginson had to listen to the Quakers' justifications for the startling act at Kirkby Stephen:

And to shew that this is a fact they justifie and pleade for (in stead of mourning for the horrible sin of it) Mr. Taylour¹¹ a great ring-leader of that people, came to that Towne the weeke after to seeke Mr. Higginson, Minister of that place, as he said, having a Message to him from the Lord, and being there in the Market place, he very solemnly pronounced a woe against it, for rejecting that Prophet of the Lord, which he had sent to doe signes and wonders in it, meaning, as those that heard him did conceive, that beast that went starke naked through the Towne a little before.¹²

Quakers alleged that, in an undated event, when Thomas Holme came to speak to Higginson in the Kirkby Stephen church, 'he was cruelly beat, and his clothes rent and torn, and [he was] set in the stocks.'¹³ Assuming the truth of all of these narratives, perhaps Holme's nakedness in the market and his cruel beating are different accounts of the same day, and Holme was seized, beaten, and placed in the stocks after he

⁸ Blasphemy charges were brought against the more high-profile Fox and Nayler. H. Larry Ingle, *First among Friends: George Fox and the Creation of Quakerism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1994), 54, 94; Neelon, *James Nayler*, 69, 78–79, 86–92. The full text of the August 9, 1650, act 'against several Atheistical, Blasphemous, and Execrable Opinions' can be found at <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/acts-ordinances-interregnum/pp409-412> (*Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum*, ed. by C.H. Firth and R.S. Raiti, British History Online, accessed July 16, 2024.) Among many other things, this act prohibits any person from maintaining that they or any 'meer creature' are 'very God, or ... Infinite and Almighty, or in Honor ... to be equal, and the same with the true God'.

⁹ Quoted in Rosemary Moore and Richard C. Allen, 'Afterword'. in Angell and Dandelion, eds., *Early Quakers and their Theological Thought*, 294.

¹⁰ Isaiah 20:1–6; Micah 1:8. On Isaiah, Francis Howgill, 'The Stumbling Block Removed from Weak Minds'. *A Woe against the Magistrates, Priests and People of Kendal* (London: n.p., 1654), 3. Doug Gwyn suggests that Holme's words were based on Micah 1:8 (AV): 'I will wail and howl, I will go stripped and naked: I will make a wailing like the dragons (NRSV: jackals) and mourning like the owls (NRSV: ostriches)'. This Biblical passage may have either God or Micah as its subject. Private communication, February 1, 2024.

¹¹ Probably Higginson is referring to George Taylor of Kendal. George Taylor was the Kendal Fund treasurer and a frequent correspondent with Margaret Fell. Moore, *The Light in their Consciences*, 33, 141–142; Barbour and Roberts, *Early Quaker Writings*, 475.

¹² Weld, *Further Discovery*, 84.

¹³ 'A Reply to a Book which is full of lies and slanders, set forth by Higginson, a Priest in Westmerland', in Anonymous, *An Answer to a Book which Samuel Eaton put up to Parliament* (London: Giles Calvert, 1654), 49. Joseph Smith, *Bibliotheca Anti-Quakeriana* (New York: Kraus, 1968 [1873]), 160, conjectured that this book was written by John Camm and Francis Howgill.

reclaimed his clothes on October 28, 1653. We become keenly aware of the intensely partial perspective of each narrative.

While James Nayler (in 1654) was inclined to disbelieve Weld's narrative about Holme and Kirkby Stephen,¹⁴ Fox (in *Great Mystery*) implicitly conceded its truth, and he was ready to justify Holme's naked traverse of the marketplace. Holme's action 'hath been a figure of your nakedness', as during the centuries-long apostasy 'ye have gone from the spirit of God, inwardly ravening from that, ye have wanted the cloathing with the spirit, ye have had only the outside, the sheepes clothing.' Holme wore the 'true cloathing of the spirit'.¹⁵ Fox, however, did not endorse the view that God himself had run unclothed through the Kirkby Stephen marketplace.¹⁶ The Fox of *Great Mystery* was no blasphemer. Fox's statement, published less than six years after the controversial act, obscured the degree to which the provocations of Holme and his allies aroused the ferocity of Higginson and the forces supporting him, and vice versa, in a fiery spiral of animosity.

In 1653, Higginson published *A Brief Relation of the Irreligion of the Northern Quakers*; this would be his only publication.¹⁷ This seems to have been published several months prior to the event just examined. Higginson's tract was intended as a reply to a very recent publication by Quakers Fox and James Nayler, *Saul's Errand to Damascus*. The Quakers managed to get *Saul's Errand* into print first, but Higginson's *Brief Relation* functioned as a timely and effective reply. Of the interchange between *Saul's Errand* and *Brief Relation*, Barbour and Roberts conclude that this 'first careful theological debate was also the Quakers' best.'¹⁸

While Higginson heaped vitriol on Fox (for example, he labelled Fox, Nayler, and some others 'Satan's seeds-men'),¹⁹ Higginson also partially agreed with Fox and Nayler as to the narration of the recent events which had transpired in Westmorland and Lancaster, at one point even reprinting more than a dozen pages from *Saul's Errand*

¹⁴ James Nayler, *A Discovery of the Man of Sin* (London: Giles Calvert, 1654), 42. Thomason date was June 3, 1654.

¹⁵ George Fox, *The Great Mystery of the Great Whore Unfolded* (London: Thomas Simmons, 1659), 233. Weld alleged that James Nayler had previously justified the behavior of Holme and others in going naked in the Spirit: Weld, *Further Discovery*, 84; Weld provides no source for his allegation.

¹⁶ As Richard Bauman argues, shifting and unclear meanings of 'going naked as a sign' did little to counter opponents' characterisation of the act as shameless and immoral and helped to lead to an early end to the practice: *Let Your Words Be Few: Symbolism of Speaking and Silence among Seventeenth-Century Quakers* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 88–94.

¹⁷ Higginson has two entries in Early English Books Online: *A Brief Relation of the Irreligion of the Northern Quakers* (London: Printed by T. R. for H. R., 1653); and *A Brief Reply to some part of a very scurrilous and lying Pamphlet, Called, Sauls Errand to Damascus* [same publisher and date]. *A Brief Reply* was an excerpt from *A Brief Relation*.

¹⁸ Barbour and Roberts, *Early Quaker Writings*, 64, 251, state that the Quakers 'beat out their Puritan opponents' and 'rushed ... into print' to affect public opinion in London. Quotations on p. 251.

¹⁹ Higginson, *Brief Relation*, 1.

to Damascus.²⁰ Higginson acknowledged Fox's leading role in the Quaker movement, describing him as 'the Father of Quakers of these parts' and 'the Ring-leader of this Sect'. Nayler was portrayed as 'the principall spokesman [for Quakers] in these parts'.²¹ Higginson attributed to Quakers a strong predilection to regard Fox and Nayler as apostles in the same mold as the first-generation Christian Apostles. When Quakers meet, he alleged 'sometimes they onely read the Epistles of Fox and Nayler, which according to their Principles are (to them) of as great Authority as the Epistles of Peter and Paul.'²²

Quaker historians have placed great value on Higginson's pamphlet, because of its vivid contemporary accounts of 1652 Quakers. Hugh Barbour and Arthur Roberts reprinted most of Higginson's work in *Early Quaker Writings*. Of all the Puritans' writings against Quakers at that time, they judged that Higginson's tract was 'the best at reproducing early Quaker writing and preaching, as well as showing why the opposition to Friends reached the intensity' that it did. Other recent Quaker historians concur with this assessment. Rosemary Moore asserts that Higginson provided 'the earliest full assessment of Quaker teaching'. Nayler biographer Leo Damrosch characterises Higginson as 'an intelligent and articulate critic' of Quakers. Both make extensive use of Higginson's work. Fox biographer H. Larry Ingle, more grudging in his praise, allows only that Higginson, whom he calls a harsh critic of Quakers, 'did not exaggerate by much'.²³

According to David Neelon, Higginson was not just an observer, but someone who actively sought to entrap 1652 Quakers, so they might be prosecuted on the serious charge of blasphemy. Whilst Nayler was eventually apprehended and charged with blasphemy, he was not convicted in the subsequent trial at Appleby in January 1653. Another Puritan minister, Christopher Marshall, mentioned by Higginson as an inquisitor of Fox and Nayler, had been a close associate of Nayler in the New Model Army. But Marshall's church, to which Nayler belonged, had expelled Nayler at about the same time that he became Quaker. Marshall was also a close associate of Higginson and may have fed Higginson and the Puritan Justices information with which to interrogate Nayler. The rise of the Quaker movement in the North of England thus appears as a severe disruption of some ongoing close associations within Puritan

²⁰ Higginson, *Brief Relation*, 44–57; George Fox and James Nayler, *Saul's Errand to Damascus* (London: Giles Calvert, 1654 [1653]), 20–34.

²¹ Higginson, *Brief Relation*, 2–3, 18; Moore, *The Light in their Consciences*, 41.

²² Higginson, *Brief Relation*, 12.

²³ Barbour and Roberts, *Early Quaker Writings*, 64–75; Barbour, *Quakers in Puritan England*, 48; Moore, *Light in their Consciences*, 41; Leo Damrosch, *The Sorrows of the Quaker Jesus: James Nayler and the Puritan Crackdown on the Free Spirit* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 20; Ingle, *First among Friends*, 59.

leadership in the region.²⁴ Ingle describes Quaker distrust of Higginson, stating that Higginson was well known to Friends in Northern England, one of whom, Thomas Lawson, characterised Higginson in unflattering terms as the ‘dragon’s mouth’.²⁵

Fox’s feistiness and resentment toward the Kirkby Stephen minister was evident as he composed his response to Higginson’s work, probably in 1657. Fox avoided much of the personal invective, or ‘railing’, that pervaded much of the anti-Quaker literature and Quaker debate tracts. Fox permitted himself some apocalyptic thundering, in response to Higginson’s characterisation of Quakers as ‘false prophets and false Christs’. He turned the accusation against Higginson and other Puritan ministers: ‘And so the false Prophets and the Antichrists, you have had the sheeps clothing, but have been the wolves, ravening and devouring the lambs’. Drawing on imagery from Revelation, Fox proclaimed, ‘The Beast and the Whore have been upon your Tongues, which makes you Orthodox men.’²⁶

Fox chose carefully which parts of Higginson’s work he wished to reply to. Of the forty-two supposed principles of Quakers that Higginson deprecated, Fox chose eleven to champion in *Great Mistery*: affirming that any declaration in worship needed to come from ‘Christ the word in you’; condemning the use of the plural pronoun to address any single person; decrying ‘sprinkling infants [as] ... an invention of men’; and so forth. Unlike his affirmation of perfectibility in his *Journal*, here Fox danced around Higginson’s contention that Quakers claimed to ‘attain to a state of perfection’. Accusing Puritans like Higginson of ‘oppos[ing] the commands of Christ’ (such as Jesus’s injunction to ‘be ye perfect’, perhaps) was as close as Fox came to vindicating that principle.²⁷

Just as notable were the more than thirty points that Higginson attributed to Quakers that Fox chose not to address in *Great Mistery*. Fox did not reply to Higginson’s contention that some Quakers felt it ‘was no great matter if all the Bibles in England were burnt’; or that many of the Quakers ‘deny ... the Resurrection of the body’; or that ‘Quakers hold that there is no Locall Heaven, or Hell.’²⁸ Higginson included extensive descriptions of Quakers quaking in 1652. Fox remarked in *Great Mistery* that Higginson was wrong to suppose that quaking and trembling were only ‘the shaking of the soul’,

²⁴ Neelon, *James Nayler*, 71–79; we need more studies of ministerial networks, both intra-sectarian and inter-sectarian, such as that involving Nayler, Marshall, and Higginson.

²⁵ Norman Penney, *First Publishers of Truth* (London: Headley Brothers, 1907), 248; Ingle, *First among Friends*, 315.

²⁶ Fox, *Great Mistery*, 67.

²⁷ George Fox, *Journal*, ed. by John L. Nickalls (London: Religious Society of Friends, 1975), 27; Fox, *Great Mistery*, 68; Higginson, *Brief Relation*, 4–10.

²⁸ Higginson’s points 8, 23, and 24, in Higginson, *Brief Relation*, 5–6.

adding vaguely, ‘The power of the Lord God cometh to shake down that nature which prisons the soul, etc. and sets it free’.²⁹ One gets a revealing glimpse from Fox’s terse responses and silences as to ways that the Quakerism of 1657 and 1658, when a more cautious Fox was writing *Great Mystery*, differed from the Quakerism of five or six years earlier. For example, in 1653 Higginson had confronted Fox with his own statements: Fox had said ‘the letter of the Scripture is carnal’, and that ‘the letter is death’.³⁰ In *Great Mystery*, whilst Fox preserved his view that the Scriptures were a secondary authority to the Spirit, he carefully responded to Higginson with less inflammatory words: ‘The scriptures are the words of the prophets, and of the apostles, and of Christ ... The letter [is] written in paper and inke; now paper and inke are not spirituall, but that which it speaks of is spirituall.’³¹ In *Great Mystery*, Fox was less likely to apply the word ‘carnal’ to the Scriptures.³²

One notable feature of Fox’s treatment of Higginson is that he does not mention that much of Higginson’s treatment of Quakerism came from discourses between James Nayler and various Puritan representatives, rendered dramatically in conversational format. In the aftermath of the Bristol affair of 1656 and Fox’s own struggle with Nayler, Nayler went unmentioned in the text of this section, and indeed all sections of *Great Mystery*, even when Fox’s source material was highly dependent on Nayler.³³

Thomas Weld

Also, in *Great Mystery*, Fox addressed the criticisms of a group of Puritan ministers in Newcastle, a group centred on the imposing figure of Thomas Weld. Fifty-eight years old in 1653, and Cambridge-educated (receiving his degree in 1613), Weld moved to Boston in 1632, and was the lead minister in the Roxbury, Massachusetts, congregation until 1641. There he served as co-pastor with John Eliot, the Puritan minister who became widely known as a missionary to the Indigenous peoples. Weld served on the overseers of Harvard College, and he was deeply involved in colonial governance, perhaps most memorably as an inquisitor in the state and church trials of Anne Hutchinson. Weld returned to England in 1641, seeking to bolster Massachusetts land claims in the area that is now Rhode Island, unsuccessfully as it turned out. In 1643, he was dismissed as Massachusetts land agent. He became a priest in Gateshead in County Durham.³⁴ Leo Damrosch noted that Weld ‘was notorious for his rigid opinions and

²⁹ Higginson, *Brief Relation*, 76; Fox, *Great Mystery*, 72.

³⁰ Fox, *Saul’s Errand*, 7; Higginson, *Brief Relation*, 5.

³¹ Fox, *Great Mystery*, 68.

³² In nearly 400 pages, I could find only one possible instance, where he applied ‘carnal’ to the ‘letters’, but not to the ‘Scripture’ which ‘speaks of’ things that are ‘spirituall’: *Great Mystery*, 78.

³³ Compare Fox, *Great Mystery*, 71–72, with Higginson, *Brief Relation*, 48, 53, 56, 76.

³⁴ ODNB, ‘Weld, Thomas’; Damrosch, *Sorrows of the Quaker Jesus*, 291.

appetite for controversy'. On one occasion, he excommunicated 'more than a thousand parishioners, ... reducing his ministry to fewer than a dozen true believers.'³⁵

In Durham, Quakers presented Weld and his colleagues with a set of nineteen queries.³⁶ Weld and four colleagues published their replies in *The Perfect Pharisee* in 1653.³⁷ This ignited what Rosemary Moore characterised as 'the first major pamphlet war' between Quakers and their Puritan opponents.³⁸ James Nayler twice published responses to Weld's work, and Weld issued his *Further Discovery* to counter Nayler's claims,³⁹ all before Fox would weigh in with *The Great Mystery* in 1659. Rosemary Moore notes that Weld knew much about Fox and Nayler, and he described Fox as the Quakers' 'grand master'.⁴⁰

Weld took an extensive interest in Quaker doctrines of immediate revelation, as well as the soteriological implications of their assertions that the Light was already working within the Indigenous persons of the Americas prior to Christian contact and proselytisation. That portion of the interchange between Weld, Fox, and other Quakers will be considered below. As regards other parts of Weld's writings that Fox found to be worth a reply, Fox denied Weld's assertion that for people to be led with a light within, 'this is clearly to make Scriptures useless'. Fox crafted his reply so that it became an attack on the compensated 'hireling' ministry of representatives of the national church, such as Weld: 'No, this lets [all] see the scriptures in their place ... which were given forth to be believed, practised, read, and fulfilled, not for men to make a trade of them.'⁴¹ The tone and content of Fox's reply to Weld were similar to that to Higginson. He waxed with apocalyptic rhetoric at times, claiming that Weld represented 'the Beast and false Prophet that makes war against the Saints'.⁴² Mostly, however, Fox was content to display a quieter faith that preserved its spiritualised Christian roots, which was enough to set the Quaker movement apart from the Puritanism of men like Weld.

³⁵ Damrosch, *Sorrows of the Quaker Jesus*, 87.

³⁶ These queries were published in this book by an anonymous Quaker: *A Brief Discovery of the Threefold Estate of Antichrist* (London: Giles Calvert, 1653), as well as Weld's book (see note 33).

³⁷ Thomas Weld et al., *The Perfect Pharisee under Monkish Holinesse* (Gateside: Printed by S.B., 1653).

³⁸ Moore, *The Light in their Consciences*, 102–103.

³⁹ James Nayler, *An Answer to the Book called the Perfect Pharisee* (n.d.: n.p., 1654). This was followed by Weld et al., *A Further Discovery of that Generation of Men Called Quakers* (Gateside: Printed by S.B., 1654), which in turn prompted the publication of James Nayler, *A Discovery of the Man of Sin* (London: Giles Calvert, 1654).

⁴⁰ Rosemary Moore, 'Leaders of the Primitive Quaker Movement'. *Quaker History* 85 (Spring 1996): 29–44 at 37; Weld, *Perfect Pharisee*, 3–5, 10–11, 27. Quotation on 27.

⁴¹ Fox, *Great Mystery*, 74; Weld, *Perfect Pharisee*, 21. For the larger context of debates about Quaker usage of the Scriptures, see Stephen W. Angell, 'Richard Farnworth, Samuel Fisher, and the Authority of Scripture among Early Quakers'. *Quaker Studies* 19/2 (2015): 207–228.

⁴² Fox, *Great Mystery*, 75.

Samuel Eaton

Samuel Eaton, the priest in Dukinfield and the neighbouring town of Stockport⁴³ in Cheshire, was the first Puritan minister (of 117) to be addressed in *The Great Mystery*. He published *The Quakers Confuted* in 1653, when he was fifty-seven years old, a full generation older than George Fox (twenty-nine years old in 1653). Like Weld, Eaton was drawn into controversy with Quakers by a list of nineteen queries that was presented to him. Eaton had been educated at Cambridge University, garnering both Bachelor's and Master's degrees (1625 and 1628). Eaton sailed for New England in 1637. There he preached regularly at Harvard College. After moving to Connecticut, Eaton differed from many of his ministerial brethren; they thought the right of voting should be reserved only to church members, whereas he favoured a broader electorate. After three years, in 1640, Eaton returned to Cheshire to protect his priestly position in Cheshire and to gather a group of persons to settle new lands that he had been given in New England. Eaton never returned to the 'wilderness' of New England, however. He was known as a relatively tolerant minister from the middle of the theological spectrum, one who strove to fashion a *modus vivendi* for Congregationalists, like himself, and Presbyterians, but he strongly opposed the bishops and royalists in the 1640s and then was alarmed by the radicalism of many of the new religious movements, like Quakers, that arose in the 1640s and 1650s.⁴⁴

Roger Williams, the Rhode Island Baptist turned Seeker, was impressed by Eaton's critique of Quakers. After Fox, in *Great Mystery*, attempted to rebut Eaton's critiques, Williams would later side repeatedly with Eaton, not Fox.⁴⁵ I have not found any recent historians who had written about Fox's responses to Eaton's work.

Unlike Higginson and Weld, Eaton apparently knew nothing about Fox, Nayler, or other Quaker leaders. His intervention, in the first instance, was occasioned by the desire of his congregation to reclaim a female member who had strayed into the Quaker camp. She had hastily married a Quaker named Richard Waller, and then the couple moved from Cheshire to southern Lancashire to have more Quaker companionship. Eaton wrote a letter to urge her return to the Congregationalist fold. Waller intervened by visiting Eaton's congregation, bearing a reply full of railing language and a list of nineteen questions from the Quakers (the same list of questions that Weld was responding to). The theological differences were wide, and both sides easily conceived

⁴³ Eaton moved from Dukinfield to Stockport in the 1650s. His tract *Quakers Confuted* was written in Dukinfield; when Fox addressed his reply to Eaton, he identified the latter as the 'teacher of the Church of Christ at Stockport'.

⁴⁴ ODNB, 'Eaton, Samuel'; *Calamy Revised*.

⁴⁵ Roger Williams, *George Fox Digg'd Out of His Burrowes* (Boston: John Foster, 1676), 73–74, 121–122, 286, 323.

the other as Satanic. The main text of Eaton's pamphlet, *The Quakers Confuted*, was structured as a response to the Quaker's nineteen queries.⁴⁶

A close reading of *The Quakers Confuted*, and Fox's reply to it, show why that reply was an excellent way to open *Great Mystery*. The Quakers' nineteen queries provided a clear structure for Eaton's work. Eaton, in turn, was gifted with the ability to render lucidly a mainstream Puritan position on the theological issues at hand. Fox contented himself with brief replies that drew effective contrasts between the beliefs of Quakers and Puritans. Eaton and Fox traded accusations that the other side in the debate as to which side harboured 'satanical delusions' (a mutual preoccupation), but they did so without the passion that was displayed in the debates with Higginson and Weld.⁴⁷ But, aside from a perfunctory final sentence that the Eaton will have to answer 'for the rest of [his] lies ... in the day of his judgment', Fox's reply is notably lacking the kind of apocalyptic fire that can be found in his responses to both Higginson and Weld.

Samuel Eaton, Thomas Weld, and Immediate Revelation

One of the largest controversies in Massachusetts during the 1630s was Anne Hutchinson's confrontation with most of the Puritan ministers in Boston. Hutchinson allegedly and scandalously accused them of advocating a 'covenant of works', and eventually the authorities sought to end the conflict by putting Hutchinson on trial in 1637 for slandering Boston's ministers. For most of the two-day state trial, Hutchinson nimbly defended herself, giving doubt among the colony's officials that they would be able to convict her of anything. In the middle of the second day of the trial, however, she prophesied vigorously against her inquisitors ('God will ruin you and your posterity and this whole state'), claiming 'immediate revelation', or unmediated revelation, as the basis for her prophecies – heresy, for those sitting in judgment of her, since according to standard Puritan doctrine, revelation had ceased with the completion of the Scriptural canon.⁴⁸ She was convicted of heresy, banished in 1638 to Rhode Island, and she died five years later, in 1643, as a result of an attack from Indigenous Americans in New York, where she was then living.⁴⁹ Quakers in the 1650s, including Fox, remembered her as the sister of Rhode Island Quaker Katherine Scott.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Samuel Eaton, *The Quakers Confuted* (London: Printed by R. White for Thomas Brewster, 1653), unnumbered prefatory material, 55–79 (appendices).

⁴⁷ Eaton, *Quakers Confuted*, 40; Fox, *Great Mystery*, 5.

⁴⁸ John H. Leith, *Creeds of the Churches* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982), 132, 195.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., Martin Marty, *Pilgrims in Their Own Land* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1984), 79–82.

⁵⁰ George Fox, *The Secret Workes of a Cruel People Made Manifest* (London, 1659), 10; Humphrey Norton, *New England's Ensigne* (London: Printed by T.L. for Giles Calvert, 1659), 98.

Hutchinson's friend Mary Dyer was in England in 1653, while Samuel Eaton was composing his attack against Quakers, and Dyer became a Quaker about that time. For Eaton, however, the Quakers' appeal to an 'immediate voice' of revelation must have reminded him of Hutchinson, and he critiqued Quakers for this heretical position, as he saw it. Fox's eagerness to defend Quakers on this point undoubtedly aided his decision to make criticism of Eaton the opening chapter of *The Great Mystery*.

Eaton responded to this Quaker query: 'Whether you have heard the voice of the living God of Heaven and Earth? Or whether you do not take the Prophets' words, Christ's words, and the Apostles' words, and say, he saith it, when saith the Lord, I never spoke to you?' Eaton's response was straightforward: 'The voice [which] ... comes immediately from God, we have not heard, and such an inspiration as this, we have not received, nor do we wait for it.'⁵¹ Fox asserted that this demonstrated that Eaton had never been sent by God: 'You that deny immediate inspiration, have denyed the powers and the spirit, for that's immediate, and the Ministers of Christ witness it.'

In this exchange, Eaton and Fox returned several more times to the theme of the immediate voice and immediate revelation. Those, like Eaton, who deny the immediate voice 'doth not know the Son ... nor the Father', stated Fox. They disagreed over whether the Scriptures were properly interpreted to permit or to proscribe 'an immediate voice in after ages', such as they were then living in. Fox asserted, 'All the Ministers of Christ preach the immediate word, and wait for it.' Fox maintained that the only proper use of the Scriptures in Christian worship was to wait for the Spirit 'to open the Scriptures' and thus supply 'immediate inspiration by the Spirit'.⁵² To Eaton's '[belief] and hope that we never shall know' any immediate voice, Fox retorted that Eaton and his Puritan colleagues 'never knew the spirit of the Father speaking within them, but follow their own dreams and spirits, and stops their ear against that of God in them; and ... that immediate voice within, and calls it the voice of the Devil, which is the spirit of inspiration, and the word of God in their hearts, which men must obey and do.'⁵³

Fox's statements constituted an unrepentant version of Anne Hutchinson's beliefs, from which, presumably, almost all New Englanders like Eaton would recoil. A Puritan reader would have affirmed Eaton's foresight in raising an alarm about the recently arisen Quakers. Nevertheless, from a Quaker perspective, Fox had provided a clear and cogent response to Eaton's thoroughly familiar Puritan perspectives. He aptly defended the Quakers' case for immediate revelation.

⁵¹ Eaton, *Quakers Confuted*, 13.

⁵² Fox, *Great Mystery*, 3, 4, 6; Eaton, *Quakers Confuted*, 13, 17, 44.

⁵³ Fox, *Great Mystery*, 5; Eaton, *Quakers Confuted*, 30.

Disagreements over the unmediated nature of Quakers' relationships with God also entered into the Higginson and Weld controversies, although somewhat less prominently. According to Higginson, the heretical Quakers 'boast themselves to be equal to the Apostles, to speak from the Immediate Revelation of the Spirit.'⁵⁴ In *Great Mistery*, after noting Higginson's denial of immediate revelation, Fox queried: 'How can we say ye are ministers made by the will of God, when ye tell us ye never heard his voice? Or how can we say ye are Ministers of Christ, and deny Revelation, and inspiration, and immediate voice from heaven, and so know not the Son and the spirit that reveals?'⁵⁵

The possibility for any solid answers for such questions that would satisfy both parties was greatly in doubt, given the vastly different ways that Fox, Eaton, Higginson, and Weld defined the nature of ministry itself. For Fox, directly hearing the voice of God, perhaps with a later check from a nascent Quaker meeting or a consultation with the Scriptures that many Quakers, including Fox, had nearly memorised, was enough for the ascertainment of God's will. Not so for the Puritans, as Weld would point out in his exchange with the Quakers. A valid ministerial call, Weld declared, had to be a 'mediate call', i.e., a call mediated through the church hierarchy of presbyteries, and preferably through careful instruction from universities like Cambridge and Oxford. 'Elders in every church [should] neglect not the gift ... [of] the laying on the hands of the presbytery' to empower a well-trained ministry. Weld would take a firm stance for such good church order, thereby giving no heed to the Quakers' 'railings and revilings'.⁵⁶ Those assertions brought forth a vigorous rant from Fox in *Great Mistery*. While he agreed factually that the Puritans' ministry was 'mediate', he deployed thunderous apocalyptic rhetoric to give force to his contention that mediate ministry was far from what the people needed:

You have deceived the world and Nations. ... The false Ministers, the worshippers of the Beast, Antichrist, and the deceivers, among whom is the Devil to deceive, is now taken, with the false prophet, the Beast and Antichrist the Mother of Harlots, and confounded and cast into the lake of fire, and the Lamb and the Saints shall have the victory. And the Gospel is immediate, and he is cursed that Preacheth another. ... And the Ministers that are in the spirit are immediate, ... and all that are in the life that gave forth Scripture, ... they all immediate; ... But now your Call is mediate, your Ministry, your Overseers, knowledge, Word, Gospel, people, and Church are mediate.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Higginson, *Brief Relation*, 24.

⁵⁵ Fox, *Great Mistery*, 70.

⁵⁶ Weld, *Perfect Pharisee*, 32.

⁵⁷ Fox, *Great Mistery*, 232.

In old England, the New England returnees watched with alarm during the early 1650s as the burgeoning Quaker movement breathed new life into Hutchinsonian heresies such as immediate revelation. Soon, some in England (like the future Quaker martyr Mary Dyer who had not participated in these published controversies), would traverse the Atlantic to the West and restrengthen the ranks of the contemporary prophets and apostles informed by immediate revelation. Meanwhile, however, former New Englanders like Weld placed Quakers temporarily on the defensive with another theological argument with even stronger ties to American geography.

Are the American ‘Indians’ Already Saved?

In James Nayler’s Appleby trial, Nayler and a local minister debated a commonly recognised difference between the Quakers and Puritans: whether the Light of Christ in the conscience, by which Quakers alleged that all humans were saved, was a divine light, or whether any light evidenced in the human conscience is a natural light, as the Puritans maintained. After the Puritan minister denied that everyone had a divine saving light, Nayler challenged him to find one person in their large audience who did not have such a light. The minister objected, ‘These are all Christians’, implying that it was no surprise that Christians should have such a divine light. Then his next statement reached out to the margins of Christian European empires. ‘But if a Turk or Indian were here, they would deny’ the existence of a saving divine Light of Christ. A bemused Nayler observed, ‘Thou goest far for a proof’, and he added, ‘If a Turk were here, he would witness against thee.’⁵⁸ In a conversation at Kendal with another minister, William Cole, Nayler later affirmed that God dwelt in Indigenous Americans, too.⁵⁹

Nayler’s Congregationalist and Presbyterian opponents were repurposing and redirecting an argument they had used to attack Baptists at their most innovative theological point (their excoriation of infant baptism), only this time to attack Quakers at their most innovative theological point (the availability of a universal saving light for all humanity). The use of this trope against Baptists can be illustrated by a 1649 debate in which Baptist (and future Quaker) Samuel Fisher participated in. The disuse of infant baptism, Fisher’s opponents had alleged, ‘destroys the hope that the parent can have of the salvation of their children, for it makes them in no better condition than Turks and Pagans.’ Fisher strenuously contended against this argument from his non-Baptist opponents.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Fox and Nayler, *Saul’s Errand to Damascus*, 21; Higginson, *Brief Relation*, 45.

⁵⁹ Weld, *Perfect Pharisee*, 7, 18; Nayler, *Answer to a Book*, 7.

⁶⁰ Samuel Fisher, *Babybaptism meer babism* (London: Henry Hills, 1653), 12, 189–191, 249–250, quoted in Stephen W. Angell, ‘Renegade Oxonian: Samuel Fisher’s Importance in Formulating a Quaker Understanding of Scripture’. in Angell and Dandelion, eds., *Early Quakers and Their Theological Thought*, 139.

Nayler's exchange was published verbatim in two 1653 publications, Nayler and Fox's *Saul's Errand to Damascus* and Higginson's *Brief Relation*. It was in Higginson's work that Thomas Weld learned about this confrontation, and Weld, relishing the opportunity to contradict Quaker and Hutchinsonian notions of 'immediate revelation', hastened to vindicate Puritan doctrine with his extensive knowledge of the religious ways of the Indigenous peoples of New England. Weld had conversed with the Indians, and he averred that they did not know Christ before English Christians told them about Christ.⁶¹ Weld had a major ally, John Eliot, the Massachusetts Puritan most involved in proselytising among the Indigenous peoples in New England. Not shy when it came to name dropping, Weld invoked Eliot's name in engaging this theme:

If they shall say that every man hath the knowledge of Christ by special revelation, and that immediate; then they speake that which is contrary to the common and knowne experience of thousands? who conversing with Indians never found the least hint of a Christ amongst them? Many of them, whose confessions are in Print, having bin wrought upon by the Preaching of the Word by Mr. Eliot, &c. have clearly declared they knew nothing of the true God and Christ, before their Publishing of the Gospel to them.⁶²

Although Weld and Eliot had been close associates during Weld's residency in Massachusetts prior to 1641, Eliot's intensive missionary work with Indians really began in 1646, after Weld's departure. His missionary work, a massive endeavour, was founded on Eliot's study of the Algonquin language. Eliot published a *Catechism* in that language in 1651, two years prior to the interactions between Higginson, Weld, Cole and Nayler described above. One of Eliot's primary objectives was to acculturate the Indigenous peoples to European ways, including such matters as clothing and diet. Eliot gathered his Indigenous converts into 'praying towns', and the praying Indians switched their political allegiances to the English. The Indigenous sachems were furious about the resulting alienation of their tribesmen from their own people.⁶³

Following Fox's lead, Quakers regarded their faith as experiential, or, in Fox's word, 'experimental', but a close reading of Weld's writings demonstrated that Puritans like Weld regarded their faith also as experiential. In a sense, both the Quakers and Puritans were accurate about the experiential grounding of their faiths. At the same time,

⁶¹ Weld, *Perfect Pharisee*, 19.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ ANB, 'John Eliot'; Richard W. Cogley, 'Idealism Vs. Materialism in the Study of Puritan Missions to the Indians' *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 3(1991): 165–182; Francis Jennings, 'Goals and Functions of Puritan Missions to the Indians' *Ethnohistory* 18 (Summer 1971): 198–210; Stephen W. Angell, "'Learn of the Heathen:" Quakers and Indians in Southern New England' *Quaker History* 92 (2003): 9, 12–13.

however, their presuppositions regarding their faith guided their experience. For Eliot, what he meant by knowledge of Christ entailed an understanding of the contents of the written gospels, a catechetical understanding of Puritan doctrine, and even, to a large degree, an accommodation to English folkways; what Fox, Nayler, and other Quakers meant by a knowledge of Christ was centred on an understanding of the importance of doing the right thing, of telling the truth, of loving one's neighbour. Both Quakers and Puritans could accept that the latter might well be the result of the human conscience, but whilst Quakers believed that the conscience in that circumstance was informed by a divine light, Puritans like Weld were certain that the conscience was only a natural light. So, both Puritans and Quakers claimed empirical verification of their deepest beliefs, but in many respects those deepest beliefs appeared to be incommensurable, across a gulf that could not be bridged.⁶⁴

Quaker proselytisation in the Western Hemisphere would begin in 1655, but even before that, Puritans were presenting empirical evidence for their convictions about the role of Christ in the lives of Indigenous people and demanding that Quakers produce theirs. Judging from their earliest publications, what Quakers knew firsthand about Indigenous people in the Americas was next-to-nothing. Accordingly, Nayler's response to Weld in 1653 was extremely tentative:

Now that Christ enlightens every one that comes into the World, is plaine Scripture; and if Christ be ... there to see the heart, thoughts, and intents, how shall he judge every one according to their thoughts that come not forth into actions, as well as according to what they doe? Must he then proceed as carnall Judges doe, either by prooffe or confession, and no further? And must not he judge Indians, as well as others? And who shall tell him what is in their hearts and thoughts?⁶⁵

This is an argument grounded in theory. It can be argued that the theoretical perspective was a strong one, but, in 1654, Nayler lacked the experiential data that underlay Weld's writing.

Puritans and the Experiential Basis for Sound Doctrine

In his rejoinder to Nayler, Weld (together with his co-authors) pressed his advantage, making more explicit his practical knowledge of the Indigenous people's utter lack of awareness of Christ prior to Eliot's diligent missionary efforts:

⁶⁴ Fox, *Journal*, ed. Nickalls, 11; Angell, 'Learn of the Heathen'; Jennings, 'Goals and Functions of Puritan Missions to the Indians'; Neal Salisbury, 'The 'Praying Indians' of Massachusetts Bay and John Eliot'. *William and Mary Quarterly* 31 (1974): 27–54.

⁶⁵ Nayler, *Answer to a Book*, 7.

That that light which by Christ in the creating of the world is implanted in the soule, is not a knowledge of Christ as a Mediator, will appeare by undenyable examples; for there are multitudes of men and women, without contradiction never knew the Lord Jesus as a Mediator, though it must be confessed, they had a rationally or naturall light. Those thousands of Saints that went over into new England, fully experienced it, that there is not the least hint of a Christ implanted in those Indians, one of us [Weld] having often conversed amongst them, can also fully witness it; as is more fully also evident by the confessions of many of them in Print, who have been converted by the Ministry of Mr. Eliot.⁶⁶

Weld's affirmations were careful ones. He specifies that Indigenous persons had no knowledge of Christ 'as a mediator', when the Quakers were far more interested in the revelatory dimension of Christ. Still, this aspect of the debate between Puritans like Weld and Quakers like Nayler and Fox likely paused for a few years. Until Quakers had their own stories to tell about North America, it seemed pointless for Quaker spokespeople to reopen the discussion, so focused as it was on experience.

Quaker ministers began to appear in New England in 1656. One of the first was Barbadian John Rous, Fox's future son-in-law.⁶⁷ Rous's reports provided some corroboration for Weld's accounts of 'praying Indians' mastering orthodox Protestant Christian doctrine under the instruction of Puritan missionaries such as Eliot:

John Rous being at a friends house in Sandwich, where one of them who are called Christian Indians came: he being desirous to see if any thing of God was stirring among them, he asked the Indian where God dwelt? He pointed over his head, and said in heaven, as ignorant people use to answer: I.R. asked him how he knew? The Indian answered, He would tell him if he had his book, so he shewed wherein his knowledge of God stood. And at another time, I.R. met with another Indian at the same house, and asked him if hee were a Christian? He answered I [aye]: And whether hee knew Christ? He said I: So I.R. asked him, If he ever saw Christ? The Indian said, No: So I.R. told him if hee had not seen Christ hee did not know him; to which the Indian could not tell what to answer.⁶⁸

Rous's experiences were published in the 1659 tract attributed to George Fox (*The Secret Workes of a Cruel People Made Manifest*) that registered the hope that the

⁶⁶ Weld et al., *A Further Discovery*, 36.

⁶⁷ For more on Rous, see Geoffrey Plank, 'Discipline and Divinity: Colonial Quakerism, Christianity, and "Heathenism" in the Seventeenth Century'. *Church History* 85:3 (September 2016): 504–507.

⁶⁸ [George Fox,] *The Secret Workes of a Cruel People Made Manifest* (London: N.p., 1659), 13.

Indigenous people surrounding New England would ‘not be made a prey any longer by the Priests’, by which the author meant that the Puritans’ proselytisation of Indigenous peoples should cease. While the author decried the Puritans’ ‘deceit’ and made a brief allusion to the ‘evil’ of ‘drunkenness’ caused by the English sale of alcohol to the Indigenous persons, there was no mention of the English land theft or other causes of rising tension between the New England Puritans, the antinomian Rhode Islanders rapidly converting to Quakerism, and the Indigenous inhabitants of the land.⁶⁹

Quakers and the Experiential Basis for Light-Guided Ethics

Fox (or whoever authored *Secret Workes* in his name⁷⁰) did recommend a recent Quaker-authored work by Humphrey Norton, *New Englands Ensigne*, which had begun a distinctly Quaker tradition of addressing realities and fashioning new tropes about Indigenous persons and their interactions with New England Quakers. Quakers Christopher Holder and John Copeland, ‘moved of the Lord’ to visit Martha’s Vineyard where there was an Indigenous Christian congregation, were brusquely ordered to leave the island by Puritan missionary Thomas Mayhew, Sr., when they ‘sounded the day of the Lord’ (warned of an impending judgment day) there. The Christian ‘Indian’ hired by Mayhew to transport the two Quakers to the mainland, however, was very kind to them. He fed and lodged them for several days in inclement weather until it was safe to travel to the mainland. He said to them, ‘we was strangers, and Jehovah taught him to love strangers.’ This led Holder and Copeland to contrast the love they received from this Indigenous man to the total disregard shown by the English Mayhew.⁷¹ Accordingly, the Indigenous people, enlightened with the universal saving light of Christ, were friendly persons, not corrupted by perverse Calvinist doctrines, and manifesting the goodness that would shine through human beings who had not been deformed by bad Christian doctrine. Quaker chroniclers soon recorded other similar interactions. For example, an Indigenous sachem, probably Josias Wompatuck, an apostate who had moved away from John Eliot’s ‘Praying Indians’, generously offered hospitality to an elderly Quaker, Nicholas Upshall, sentenced to banishment in 1656 by Puritans.⁷² In the Quaker narration of interaction with Indigenous persons, ethical

⁶⁹ Fox, *Secret Workes*, 13–14; Angell, ‘Learn of the Heathen’, 9–11.

⁷⁰ Whilst Fox’s authorial voice is evident in *Great Mystery*, that is lacking in *Secret Workes*. No author is named on its title page of *Secret Workes*, but it is commonly given a bibliographic listing under Fox’s name. Probably Quaker Ellis Hookes (a paid secretary, a position later designated as ‘clerk’) drafted it, but it was advantageous to have it identified with Fox. On Hookes, see Moore, *Light in their Consciences*, 142.

⁷¹ Fox, *Secret Workes*, 15; Humphrey Norton, *New England’s Ensign* (London, 1659), 21–22.

⁷² Fox, *Secret Workes*, 2; Marie Balsley Taylor, ‘Apostates in the Woods: Quakers, Praying Indians, and Circuits of Communication in Humphrey Norton’s *New-England’s Ensigne*’, in Ignacio Gallup-Diaz and Geoffrey Plank, eds., *Quakers and Native Americans* (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2019), 30–31.

dimensions of interpersonal interactions were the best indication that the saving light of Christ was being heeded. Ability to recite religious doctrines regarded as correct and orthodox by Puritan religious authorities meant nothing.

Quaker ethics in the seventeenth century, however, did not preclude Quakers from holding people of colour (including Indigenous persons) as slaves. Fox's first letter mentioning Indigenous persons, dated to 1657, was addressed 'to Friends beyond sea, that have Blacks and Indian Slaves'. In its published form (manuscript versions probably do not still exist), Fox emphasised the oneness of humanity, alluding to Acts 10:34, 'God ... is no respecter of persons'; John 1:9, the Light that enlightens everyone that comes into the world; and Colossians 1:23, 'the gospel is preached to every creature under heaven.' Fox raised the issue of 'liberty and freedom', but whether freedom is to be physical, or merely spiritual, he does not say. The epistle concludes with an exhortation of mercy: 'And so ye are to have the mind of Christ, and to be merciful, as your heavenly Father is merciful.'⁷³ These were all elevating sentiments. If his published corpus is an adequate judge, this was the only epistle he wrote prior to the publication of *Great Mystery* that specifically acknowledged the existence of Indigenous persons.

Fox briefly addressed the issue of the universal Light of Christ in Indigenous Americans in *Great Mystery*. The new covenant of Christ brought salvation to all people, Jew and Gentile alike. Fox pointed out that 'Gentile' was just another name for 'heathen', and since, by implication, both the English and Indigenous Americans were heathen 1600 years previously when the new covenant came into effect, there was no basis for the former to assume airs of spiritual superiority over the latter. The covenant was promised to Turks, Indians, English, and the Jews. Fox was responding to Weld's co-labourer Samuel Hammond, who agreed with Weld that in New England, many 'that converse with the Indians never see the least breaking forth' of the light.⁷⁴ Fox showed more confidence than Nayler five years earlier, grounded in the insights from the new literature generated from the experiences of the Quaker itinerants such as Norton in New England, when he flatly asserted to his New England Puritan opponents, 'Many of the Indians do show forth more of the light in their conversations than you do.'⁷⁵ Some of his debate opponents, such as Roger Williams, looked at Fox's assertion sceptically, since Fox had not stepped foot in North America, nor had he met any Indigenous Americans, by 1659 when Fox published this book.⁷⁶

⁷³ George Fox, *Works*, (New York, NY: Isaac Hopper, 1831), VII, 145. Epistle CLIII.

⁷⁴ Samuel Hammond, *The Quakers House Built upon Sand* (Gateshead: Stephen Bulkley, 1658), 14; Fox, *Great Mystery*, 184–185.

⁷⁵ Fox, *Great Mystery*, 185.

⁷⁶ Williams, *Fox Digg'd out of His Burrowes*, 309.

The years of the Restoration would usher in more extensive travel by English Quakers to North America and further opportunities for intercultural contact to test these theories. In 1672 and 1673, Fox met with Indigenous persons when he travelled in North America.⁷⁷ In 1675, New England erupted in a terrible war between the English, on one side, and the Wampanoag and Narragansett peoples, on the other side. Quakers in Rhode Island were drawn into this conflict.⁷⁸ Subsequently, William Penn would negotiate land rights and much else with Lenape sachems in the Middle Atlantic region.⁷⁹ In all these cultural contacts, theological questions regarding evidence for the possible existence of the Light within non-Christian peoples, questions for which origins were highlighted in this essay, can be seen as pertinent, and related reflections often surfaced in the resulting literature.

Conclusion

As a whole, Fox's *Great Mystery*, taken together with its antecedent literature, represents a series of engagements, at turns combative and cautious, and strategic silences on a massive, sprawling, and shifting set of antagonisms and alliances within England's godly communities. This was the case both outside of and within sectarian boundaries, as became clear after the rift between Fox and Nayler. Alongside appropriate examination of the antecedent literature, *Great Mystery* has much to teach us about Quakers' external relations in the 1650s.

Like that of other Puritan critics, the engagement of Quakers by the tight cohort of New England returnees addressed a wide range of issues. Their American experiences continued to shape their engagement with church life after their return to the old country. They sometimes collaborated in opposition to the Quakers' departures from godly normalcy, as in the case of Higginson and Weld working together to expose Thomas Holme's naked witness in Kirkby Stephen. Convinced that in Anne Hutchinson they had seen a concerning precursor to Quakers, Higginson, Weld, and Eaton raised an early alarm in their published tracts.

Great Mystery in 1659 supplied the possibility of comparing Fox's replies to many anti-Quaker tracts to those from Nayler, the most frequent respondent in previous years, and other early Quaker respondents. The sample size in this analysis is small, but the parts compared here suggest that Fox's responses were often different from

⁷⁷ Fox, *Journal*, ed. Nickalls, 624, 642; Ingle, *First Among Friends*, 239, 241; Plank, 'Discipline and Divinity', 514–519.

⁷⁸ Meredith Baldwin Weddle, *Walking in the Way of Peace: Quaker Pacifism in the Seventeenth Century* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 143–233.

⁷⁹ Jean R. Soderlund, *Lenape Country: Delaware Society Before William Penn* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 167–176.

earlier Quaker replies. On the matter of the presence of the Light in Indigenous Americans, the difference probably can be explained on the basis that Fox had more Quaker reports to draw upon than Nayler did. The contrasting of various Quaker responses to the universe of anti-Quaker tracts is a matter deserving of further study.

While the resurfacing of Hutchinsonian heresies surrounding immediate revelation was a pressing concern for the returnees, their most original contribution to the Quaker and anti-Quaker debates was their prompting of new modes of considering whether or how the Light of Christ was manifest in Indigenous Americans. We have seen that, in the 1650s literature on Indigenous persons in North America, whilst both Quakers and Puritans were committed to experiential methods of determining truth, they differed on whether the deepest truths were fundamentally doctrinal or ethical. In his reflections, Fox stuck to the Quakers' position that ethics guided by the Light of Christ mattered more than doctrine. When one closely examined events in the part of North America where the Puritans had settled, he often maintained that the Indigenous people displayed a higher ethical orientation than the Puritans, especially as it concerned the reception of Quakers.

However, widening our lens to bring into view Quaker (and Puritan) practices of enslavement and dispossession of land of people of colour in the seventeenth-century complicates and problematises any assessment as to how convincingly the Quakers' Light-guided ethical framework might have countered the Puritans' more strictly doctrinal approach. During the latter half of the seventeenth century, as wars with Indigenous peoples and enslavement of them became increasingly prominent, Quakers, including Fox, would need to consider carefully how to adapt their inclusive soteriology to expanding British imperial realities, with which they were mostly complicit. At best, *Great Mystery* was a holding action. As it turned out, many debates in *Great Mystery* were passing from the scene, yet the contested nature of the Quakers' Light-guided ethics, a major focus of this essay, in all its mixed nuance as applied to Indigenous Americans, would continue to gain relevance for both Quakers and their opponents as North American European settlements multiplied and grew.

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