



Voices from the Meeting

CINCINNATI FRIENDS MEETING
MAY/JUNE 2009

*Do we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?
Do we believe that Jesus died for our sins and arose from
the grave to redeem us, and give us eternal life?
Do we believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God?*

CINCINNATI FRIENDS MEETING
Monthly Meeting for Business

LETTER EXPRESSING THE SENSE OF THE MEETING
Re the 3 Questions from WYM Executive Committee
Approved May 17, 2009

Dear WYM Executive Committee:

Recently, in a letter to ministers and clerks from the Clerk of the WYM Executive Committee, we were asked for our meeting's response to three questions which, according to the letter, were related to "decision points that came out of the attempt to update Faith and Practice" at yearly meeting last year. In order to resolve disagreement over the decision points, the Executive Committee letter asked for the input of each Monthly Meeting to be submitted in writing to the Yearly Meeting office with an explanation of how the meeting arrived at its particular resolution. Specifically, the Executive Committee suggested that in order to do so, three questions must be considered and answered:

*Do we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?
Do we believe that Jesus died for our sins and arose from
the grave to redeem us, and give us eternal life?
Do we believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God?*

The wording of these questions assumes they can be answered with "Yes" or "No" responses; essentially we are given an either/or option. In asking for answers to these three questions, are Friends drawing a line in the sand to forever separate and deny each other? In these questions, we are asked to step to one side or the other—on one side are those who answer yes and thus are . . . what? "True Christians?" On the other side are those who answer no and are thus . . . what? "Not Christians?" What

about those of us who cannot reduce to either/or terms our understanding of divinity, of God, Jesus, and the scriptures?

Let us consider the three questions individually.

First, "Do we believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God?" If we answer yes, are we affirming that Jesus Christ is "the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made" (i.e., the Nicene Creed)? If we answer that Jesus Christ is not the Son of God in those specific terms, do we deny all divinity for Jesus? What if, believing the Inner Teacher or the Light Within to be divine, we associate it with the teachings of the Jewish man named Jesus who taught that we are all—*all*—children of our divine Father?

Second, "Do we believe that Jesus died for our sins and arose from the grave to redeem us, and give us eternal life?" If we answer yes, are we again affirming the Nicene Creed? If we answer no, what do we negate with one word? What if salvation for us is not going to heaven after Jesus returns, but living *now* in the Kingdom of God, which he taught is "within" us. What if salvation for us is being in right relationship with God and our neighbors? What if we believe that God's forgiveness, acceptance, and unconditional love are limitless, and extend beyond those who have a traditional understanding of Jesus?

Finally, "Do we believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God?" If we answer yes, what does that mean? Can the Bible be "inspired" without being the *only* word of God? Does answering yes to this question thereby eliminate any other divine communication or revelation? Does it freeze in time the Divine Creator and leave us all stuck with only what had been revealed to humanity several thousand years ago? If we answer no, perhaps we believe the Bible is not the literal Word of God but of divinely inspired humans, or perhaps we believe the Bible to contain divinely inspired writing as well as severely human editing. Perhaps our concept of God is too big to be limited to one and only one vehicle of truth.

To the questions from the Executive Committee, I would add two more yes/no questions:

1) Do we believe that everyone must answer these questions in the same way in order to be valued and respected members of Wilmington Yearly Meeting and the Society of Friends? The answer from Cincinnati Friends Meeting is a resounding "No."

2) Can we not only *forgive* each other for experiencing the Divine in different ways, but *rejoice* in the Creator's diversity, including God's personal and unique revelation of the universal Light within each of us? The answer from Cincinnati Friends Meeting is a resounding "Yes."

In Light and Love,
Donne Hayden, Minister
Cincinnati Friends Meeting

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES TO THE ABOVE LETTER:

From L.D.

In response to the [Donne's] letter... well done!

From D.C.

Donne, I endorse your comments as outlined in your letter.

From C.H.

Fabulous letter and answer.

From V.S.

Donne, I was out of town on the 10th and had to leave early the day of MM and I just read your response. I agree 100% with what you so eloquently stated. I was going to try to write a reply (not the easiest thing for me) until I read yours. So, I just want to offer my support and stand behind what you have written.

From R.T.

Donne, I think your letter is right on target. Each question hides a much deeper philosophical point of view. It appears to me that the purpose of these questions is to "find the true believers" whatever those might be. I can only think that some personal agendas (not "Quaker" agendas) are being served here. I personally would not answer the questions for the Executive Committee of Wilmington Meeting as the answers are matter of personal relationship with God and may relate to issues that only I can resolve for myself. I hope they are not making the answers to these questions an issue of being a Quaker.

**INDIVIDUAL LETTERS FROM FRIENDS IN CINCINNATI MONTHLY MEETING
ADDRESSING THE THREE QUESTIONS
FROM WYM EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:**

From M.P.

The desire for brevity and the wish to keep private the details of my spiritual journey are the causes of the procedure of my reply. The answer to each of the three questions is "No."

My conviction: Jesus is a prophet of God, a man of monumental wisdom, compassion, courage, understanding, and leadership. For 83 years he has been my guide and comfort. The characteristics and attributes referred to in the first two questions are not part of my beliefs. Never have I experienced the need to accept those beliefs.

Finally, I find the Bible to be interesting, often compelling, inspirational, and historically fascinating. The answer is, I repeat, "No." If "official" Quakerism determines my views to be unacceptable I will be sad, but will continue my private journey with serenity.

From R. P. and V.P.

Since V. and I don't anticipate being able to attend Monthly Meeting, we are sending a short statement about our beliefs. V. says his beliefs are hard to put into words, but he feels that all Quakers and in fact, all

Christians, would have a hard time putting their beliefs into a single statement.

I grew up in a small Presbyterian Church that was very "low church." I don't remember hearing the Nicene Creed until I attended other churches, but today I understand it is used regularly even in that small church. I do not feel a "creed" is necessary to be a good Christian. I have found Friends to be a very inclusive group. I may not agree with the way some Friends practice their beliefs, but they seem to be very sincere in following what they understand to be the Christian way to handle the situation.

I agree with most of the statements Donne made in her sermon last Sunday [May 10, 2009], especially that these questions require either "yes" or "no" answers. We need to find a way to state our beliefs so that all can feel heard, but not cut out any sincere Friends who have a different understanding of "Christian" beliefs.

Our daughter came in today and said she ran into a similar discussion in Young Friends several years ago. They finally decided they could agree in general terms but not on specific statements about God, Jesus, and the Bible. Perhaps that is the direction Yearly meeting should take. She said she was glad that she came from a Meeting (Cincinnati) that was about the middle-of-the-road on these subjects.

From S.J.

As a young teenager, I attended a revival service at an evangelical Friends church. When the altar call was given, a friend asked me if I was a Christian, and I replied, "I hope so." He said, "Don't you want to know so?" And I said, "Yes". We prayed together at the altar, and later that night as I lay in my bed I knew that all was right with God and me. The joy was so deep and complete that I didn't question many of the theological teachings I heard over the next several years. The positive side was so encouraging that I just stuffed the negatives into a kind of spiritual denial, I guess. I was taught that only those who believed as I was being taught would be saved from eternal damnation. It wasn't said in such explicit terminology very often, but it certainly bothered me. Now

it's many decades later, and I missed a lot by having God in such a little box. I believe that Jesus came to earth to show us the way to God. Other faiths do the same when we are all searching for God who is the one source of Truth and Love. The words I use may be different from yours, but if I am searching for the true meaning of existence and you are, also, we are on the right path. It is most important that we do not compare our journeys. If we do, we will begin to judge, and then love turns to hate. If I believe my way is the only way, I will cease to respect you. At worst I may want to fight you! All of this may lead me, unknowingly, to become my own god.

I believe that Jesus died as he was showing us what it means to really love God and live out that love in our every day lives. I do not think that he had to die for my sins. It is because God is alive within us and throughout the universe that we can reach for this Holy One. I believe that we are living in eternity now, and that my relationship with God today is what matters. It is wrong when I compare my life with anyone else's. Only God truly understands us, and since I believe in God, I do not need all of the finite answers. Living up to what I am learning to be true is my constant challenge.

For me the Bible was written by inspired persons, but not written directly by God through them. If we could only hear all of the messages God has for us this very moment! Before and since the Bible was written there have always been messages from God, some written, and some not. Most likely, the most profound ones we'll never know. They may have been spoken, or thought, by a young child. Perhaps an unschooled native in a remote part of the world realized more deeply what God is all about as they wondered at the beauty of nature, the love of family, or the mystery of the universe. Not being literate, we'll never know the depths of this soul's communication with the Holy. Perhaps if a profoundly handicapped person could put into words their connection with God, we would be most astounded. Parts of the Bible, as we know it, disappoint me greatly while other parts hold me in awe. They cause me to see how far I am from being all that God wants me to be. Having said all of this, I am thankful for the Bible in that for me it was a place to begin.

I am glad to be a part of Cincinnati Friends Meeting where we are all free in our differences and in our likenesses to seek together what is truly meaningful for us individually.

From E.M.

I definitely believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. However, in the Bible he usually refers to himself as the Son of Man. I think that this is to show that He came down from Heaven to experience the joys and sorrows of humans through His human side for his mother was a human but able to also experience the holy side through His Father in Heaven, and apply the Holy side to the human conditions experienced. All of nature—the plants, the sunsets and sunrises, the kindness of people to others in emergency situations such as floods, hurricanes, and tornados, the loyalty of pets to their owners, there are many things that bring God to mind and help us to worship Him. The beauty of music is another thing that I find very inspiring to bring me closer to God.

I also believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God and should be taken in context with the rest of it. You cannot rely on interpreting the meaning by reading only one part of it and accepting literally one sentence that conflicts with other passages. We need to experience the Bible as a whole and the Old Testament is required to bring into focus the culture of the people of these times and the reasons for some of the restrictions placed upon the people--for example dietary restrictions. We also see people caring for the widows and the elderly and caring deeply about family which is a good thing. We see the compassion of Jesus for the suffering and needs of the people who followed Him. The feeding of the large crowds and the healing of the sick—he went about doing good, the Bible says. That is a good example to follow and I feel we should strive to become better persons by following His example. He stated we can only come to the Father through Him.

Ours has always been a Bible-based church, based on scripture not just on fulfilling needs of others, although we do that, too. But we have always felt that the belief in God and the Bible are essential first and it leads to service to others.

From S.D.

1. Do we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?

I believe that Jesus was divine, that he had a first-hand knowledge of God and God's kingdom that is unique in human history. I am inclined to believe that he came by this knowledge because he existed with God before he was born as a human being, and that this experience was also unique.

I do not pretend to understand his exact nature, however. I am skeptical of the conventional understanding of the Trinity, that Jesus is God, or a different facet of God. I am inclined to believe that God and Jesus are separate entities. If they were one and the same, how could Jesus say he does not know what God knows (Matthew 24:36)? If they were one and the same, how could their wills be different (Matthew 26:42)? If they were one and the same, why would Jesus pray to God, or ask why God had forsaken him (Matthew 27:46)? In that sense, I am very comfortable with the phrase "Son of God" because it suggests both separation and hierarchy; God is God, above Whom there is no other.

If the subtext of this question is, "Do you believe that only people who understand the exact nature of Jesus have a right relationship with God?" my answer would be "No." I agree with George Fox that the Inner Light resides in all people, whether or not they have ever heard of Jesus, and that they can be led by that Light into a right relationship with God.

2. Do we believe that Jesus died for our sins and arose from the grave to redeem us, and give us eternal life?

I am familiar with the traditional idea that God requires a blood sacrifice—from Abel's offering, to the animal sacrifices prescribed by Moses, to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus' life—and that this somehow absolves us from our sins. I have to wonder if our understanding has been too focused on the blood and not enough on the concept of giving the gifts that God has given us back to God as a way of expressing love and gratitude. I am inclined to think that the meaning in Jesus' death is more about being willing to hold nothing back, not even life itself.

I know that I have sinned in my life, and will continue to do so until I die, and that forgiveness comes from God's mercy and grace alone. At the same time, I think it's inappropriate to use that grace as an excuse to avoid the "heavy lifting" that God calls us to—the self-examination, the need to make amends with those we have wronged, the duty to take care of the widow and the orphan and the stranger. I always try to keep in mind the passage in Matthew 7:21-23, where Jesus says that not everyone who calls him Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, only those who actually do his will. It's not enough (or even necessary) to be "theologically correct"; what we do for others matters more. Faith without works is dead (James 2:20). God ultimately decides with whom He will be merciful, and with whom He will be just. And I believe that God is good, no matter what he decides to do with me.

I do believe in Jesus' physical resurrection, and I think its meaning is symbolic— his final parable about how we are all called to die to our old lives and live better ones. I am not sure exactly how Jesus' resurrection is different from all the other resurrections mentioned in the Bible (Matthew 27:51-53, John 11:44, among others), and I don't worry too much about it.

I do believe in eternal life, but that's also not something I worry too much about; my focus is on my life here, and how I can live it in a way pleasing to God.

3. Do we believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God?

"Inspired" is the key word here. I agree with 2 Timothy 3:16-17 that the scriptures were inspired by God and useful for teaching us the difference between right and wrong. (Of course, at the time that Timothy wrote that, the Bible as we know it today did not exist, so I presume he was speaking of the Old Testament.)

I believe that the writings that we currently recognize as the Bible were produced by people who revered God and wished to understand Him and the world He created. Some did it by writing about events that they themselves had experienced themselves or heard about. Some did it through literary (rather than literal) stories and poetry. Some did it

through their letters to others. However, I do not believe that every pen stroke was dictated by God, and therefore indisputable.

I agree with the position of John Wilbur that God Himself has greater priority than scripture. While the Bible strongly influences my thoughts, opinions, and decisions, I also have to acknowledge that God reveals Himself to us even today, sometimes in ways we might not be able to immediately understand. I'm sure that Peter was extremely confused when God told him that what was previously considered unclean was now to be considered clean (Acts 10:15). I believe that God's revelation of Himself and his kingdom is ongoing, that God can speak to us through many mediums, and that while the Bible is one of those mediums, it is not the only one, nor is it the final authority. God alone is the final authority.

From J.A.

I have to preface my response with my reaction to the fact that we are being asked to respond to these particular questions at all. I am shocked that such questions would come from the Executive Committee of a Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (of the Truth.) Friends have always looked with suspicion at creedal formulations of truth; preferring instead to direct the believer to the inward experience of Christ. In fact in a certain sense, the word "belief" is antithetical to Friends' way of thinking. We experience the Light within, and that is the language we use. We do not say, "I believe in the Christ within." We say something like, "I experience the Christ within and on the basis of that experience I believe that if you look within you will also discover this inward teacher." Furthermore, Quakers have historically gone on to say, "You may not use the language of 'Christ within.' You may use other language to describe this experience- and so do we. We refer to the Light within or the Inward Teacher. God does not care what language we use to describe this experience- although God does care whether or not we turn toward the Light and live in accord with what we find there."

So—that having been said, let's take a look at these questions:

1. I experience the Light Within, both when I am alone in prayer and meditation; and when I am with other Friends in corporate worship. In this Light, I find my truest self; I find myself as I would be without sin; I see myself as God sees me. This true self stands against me, in the sense that I do not live my own life in the Light. The good that I will to do is not what I actually do. I believe that the historical Jesus did not experience this difference between himself and his true self. He was at all times at one with the person that God created. He was without sin. As far as I know, Jesus was unique in this regard. The phrase "Son of God" has no particular meaning for me; it is an archaic mythological term. I do not believe that God was Jesus' Father in some biological sense. It is irrelevant to me whether or not Mary was a Virgin.

2. Here, again, I have language problems. I do not use the language "died for our sins," "rose from the grave," or "redeem us." I do not think that Jesus was a "sacrifice" in any sense whatsoever. He was a Revelation. He demonstrated in his life, words, and deeds that it is in fact entirely possible for a human being to be without sin. We do not generally believe this about ourselves or others- "To sin is human." Indeed, it is- but Jesus' life demonstrates otherwise. And when we turn within and find the Light- we experience for ourselves the power to be ourselves. Living in the Light IS eternal life. Jesus reveals this, and calls us to this Life, Here and Now. (Not after death, in heaven.)

I should note that I do believe that "something happened" after Jesus' death which came to be called the Resurrection. Jesus' Spirit returned to his believers, and empowered them to share the Good News that they had heard from him while he was alive. In this sense, there is for me no essential difference between the Resurrection and Pentecost. Jesus' spirit returned with power.

3. Quakers have always believed that the Bible is the inspired word of God when it is read in that same spirit. In and of itself, it is not a holy book. Other books can also be the inspired word of God, as can music, poetry, dance, the laugh of an infant, the ramblings of a madman- whatever vehicle God chooses to reveal himself to me.

I sincerely hope and pray that the exercise of asking this question and listening to the answers you get brings you some sense of unity and truth

in diversity- for you are sure to get a diverse range of response. God grant you the wisdom of discernment at this time.

From K.S.

After decades of indulging in spiritual wanderlust, last year I discovered the Society of Friends. In the Cincinnati Meeting, I have found the deep spirituality and community for which I had been searching all my life.

The qualities of attitude and intention resonate deeply with me and make me feel that I have finally discovered my spiritual home. It seems to me that the attitude of Quakers can be summed up as "loving attention:" to the voice of God, to other human beings, to the natural world. It is deeply healing to be among people who believe that God speaks to us, even now. This attitude flows naturally into intention: if we listen with attentiveness and act with discernment, we come more fully to understand and participate in the divine mystery. Attending Quaker meetings has been an invitation to become my best self: humble in the presence of the Light, patient in attendance, and increasingly aware of the love that sustains all creation.

From what I have learned about Quakerism to date, I would never have anticipated that the Executive Committee of Wilmington Yearly Meeting would seek to craft answers to the three questions under consideration. I share Donne Hayden's concern that questions which require a "yes or no" response are fundamentally alienating. I am surprised and chagrined to find that there is a sense among the Executive Committee that establishing orthodoxy on these questions is desirable.

From the point of view of our human consciousness, the universe appears paradoxical; our binary minds seeks to impose an "either/or" screen on a reality which transcends any categories we can imagine. As Niels Bohr observed, "the opposite of a small truth is a falsehood; the opposite of a great Truth may be another great Truth." Coming down too strongly on one side of a paradox has been the hallmark of religious heresies throughout the ages.

During my spiritual journey, I have frequently encountered the many ways in which fear and lack of trust obscure our ability to discern truth. Fear can lead us to replace the living God with a set of doctrines which is easier for us to delineate and control. We must be on guard against the desire to rest in dogma rather than to suffer the uncertainty of waiting on God. To be fully human is to suffer this uncertainty with humility and acceptance.

From N.H.

I've been wrestling with my answers for you—they are not (as you might expect) simple yesses or nos. But to the best of my ability, here goes. *Credo in unum Deum...*

- Do we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?
Yes, absolutely. I believe that EVERY human being is a child of God. I furthermore believe that He loves us all, probably equally. I marvel at that, and have no idea how it can happen, and rejoice that God is great enough to be able to carry it off.
- Do we believe that Jesus died for our sins and arose from the grave to redeem us, and give us eternal life?

Well, partly:

"... that Jesus died for our sins ..." I believe Jesus died BECAUSE of our sins, because we humans are too separated from the will and spirit of God to tolerate Jesus' level of goodness, truth, and courage. We humans have done the same to other prophets at other times (various "saints," Christian and of other religions, and certain secular figures such as Gandhi come to mind) and continue to slaughter people with high levels of those attributes to this day. I hope that we eventually learn not to, but have no great certainty on the matter.

"... and arose from the grave to redeem us ..." I believe that death was unable to quash the beauty, truth, and power of Jesus' teachings. I believe that, if followed, those teachings can in fact lead us away from sin and into a healthy relationship with God and with one another. I even

believe that God intended that. By the way, I think that others have also contributed great teachings which can assist us in a similar way.

" ... and give us eternal life?" I have no opinion on this. I assume it refers to Heaven; if not, I don't know what it means. I have no idea what Heaven is, or how it works, or what algorithm may be applied at the Day of Judgment. Happily, I don't think I need to. I believe that God has that completely under control, and I trust God to get it right. I am willing to accept whatever He has in store for me, and believe it will be fair and appropriate.

- Do we believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God?

Parts of it, yes. However, I also believe that very little of it is the literal truth; instead, I think much of it is allegorical or illustrative. Like the parables, those parts should be understood and internalized, rather than blindly followed.

There are other parts that I believe have different sources and roles. There are sections of history, law, poetry, advice, vision

I do believe that all the writers genuinely were trying to be as honest and helpful as they knew how, and that most of them were in fact divinely inspired. It does not follow that they all faithfully transcribed the insight provided to them. My experience with divine revelation is that it seems far clearer at the time than in retrospect, and that some is intended only for the recipient rather than for the greater public.

I usually treat the Bible as I treat messages in Meeting: I listen, let it roll around in my head and heart, and try it against my own experience of the divine. If there is something which seems particularly odd, I may wrestle with it for awhile to see if I can understand it in some way that is seems truthful, helpful, or inspired. I don't have any hard-and-fast rule here, but I've learned that truth often has a particular feel to it (frequently uncomfortable) that I can recognize.



From S.K.

Wilmington Yearly Meeting has raised three questions designed to determine who we are and what we believe. These questions were submitted to each Monthly Meeting for input. It is my understanding, that the answers to these questions will be used to find a resolution to some issues that developed when the yearly meeting attempted to update our "Faith and Practice."

When I read the three questions, I saw that the questions have "Yes" or "No" answers. There is an implied value judgment. "One of the main functions of formalized Religion is to protect people against a direct experience of God," states Joseph Campbell. I equate formalized religion with belief. Religious belief is notorious for encouraging a sense of "us" against "them," according to Jaroslav Pelikan, a well-known historian of theology. The words in the New Testament, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are" can be felt in these three questions, especially if "No" is considered.

I read these three questions and sat prayerfully in silence this morning in Meeting for Worship. What came up for me through another Friend was that we are all called to listen to God (or the "Divine" in the words of this Friend). When we speak of God or the "Divine" we speak of spirituality not theology.

We are problem solvers demanding solutions in our society today. In doing so, we crowd out patience. In the presence of patience, we allow the mystery of God in the silence to allow us to discover the answers through leadings. "In the inner world there is an eternal and changeless aspect to life, mind and spirit" says, Howard Brinton in *Friends for 350 Years*. This is the spirituality of Christianity... the mystery... the miracle. It is in the QUESTIONS and not in the ANSWERS that we are able to follow God's leadings. Questions that have openness within them. It is also in being open to listening to God...welcoming surprise... accepting realities that we have no control over... shifting perspective. In my opinion, to have answers is to have misunderstood the questions. Timeless wisdom has shown that spirituality can't be proved, doesn't have a simple answer, can't be defined, and is rooted in paradox. When we try to define something, we discover not its limits but our own. Spirituality is not inherently limited to either/or, one or-the other, problem or solution,

question or answer. It is rather in the openness of questions... Who are we? Why are we? How are we to live? "True Religion is Life, not blind adherence to a particular doctrine or a special form", states Howard Brighton. The spirituality found in Quakerism is a way of life... it is not a belief or creed. It is our "Way"... the leadings we hear in the silence... how we perceive the world around us, the choices we make, and the gifts of service that we bring to the world... how our life speaks. The presence of inner peace is the main Quaker test of right guidance... the outcome is up to God.

I want to beg you, as much as I can, dear sir, to be patient toward all that is unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are written in a foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given to you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answers. (Rainer Maria Rilke)

From J.H.H.

Spaces Between Labels: Notes from a Playful Quaker

My name is John and I'm a recovering Southern Baptist.

I'm currently a dualist pantheist Zen Quaker - one who strives to live presently in the light and sees the universe as a divine Oneness made up of two substances, spirit and matter (Sharman Russell) - because no one else in our Meeting is, and I thought we needed one. We Universalist Quakers take diversity seriously, so even though my being a dualist pantheist Zen Quaker contradicts my desire to live in the "spaces between labels" (Michele Bertaux), the corporate good trumps personal desires, so here I am, a dualist pantheist Zen Quaker. My primary spiritual practice is *wu-wei* - creative quietude, acting without acting, playing with Life.

I was almost a Bokononist, but sure as passive resistance some weighty birthrighter would have gently pointed out that Bokononism was made up by Kurt Vonnegut for *Cat's Cradle*, so I'd have looked awfully silly parading around as a fictional Bokononist among real serious real Pagans, Christians, and such. There's nothing made up about a dualist pantheist Zen Friend who practices *wu-wei*.

I've spent most of my adult life searching for new church homes, finding them, then resigning. Not just fading away by never showing up again, but formally resigning. Unmistakable closure. My last resignation was in 2002, from the Catholic Church:

Pope John Paul II
PSC59 Box F
AFO AE 09624
Vatican City

Dear Holy Father:

This tenders my resignation from the Catholic Church, effectively immediately. I'm moving in other directions. Best of luck.

Warmly,
J.H.H.

That really was my last resignation. There'll be no more. I won't resign from Cincinnati Friends Meeting because I can't. I'm not a member. I can stop attending, lay it down, as we say. But I can't resign.

Why did I hook up with Cincinnati Friends Meeting? Because it felt like a dualist pantheist Zen Quaker Meeting the first time I visited. I belonged here. I was home. And Donne's being in the fellowship of recovering Southern Baptists sealed the deal.

My current passion/dream is to help build and live at Heartland Ecovillage, an intentional cohousing community to be located at, though separate from, Grailville, outside Loveland. Our vision is to live simply and mindfully in harmony with our Earth home, to be a true village where people interact, support each other, and work and play together. I'm following my calling, obeying my soul. Patanjali said it best:

When you are inspired by some great purpose, some extraordinary project, your thoughts break their bonds, your mind transcends limitations, your consciousness expands in every direction, and you find yourself in a new, great and wonderful world. Dormant forces, faculties and talents become alive, and you discover yourself to be a greater person by far than you ever dreamed yourself to be.

That said, for me it starts with playfulness. To wake up and say, Who do I get to play with today? It's an intention. I try to be a playmate-leader, which involves not simply a return to childhood, but transcendence to a higher plane of awareness that connects me to others at all levels (Fred Donaldson). Joseph Campbell called this "the gift of immaturity itself, which has enabled us to retain in our best, most human moments, the capacity for play. This requires me to give up the effort to lead in the conventional sense. To play with the role of leader takes training in the art of being a playmate, of recovering the essence of childlikeness.

On this playground there is no assertion of power over others, no striving, no threats, and no need to be protected. Perhaps the essence of playmate-leadership can best be understood by heeding the Biblical advice to become as little children, in that place where the truth of who we are is revealed by simply trusting Life, empty of beliefs, full of wonder in the present moment. This is *wu-wei*. This is dualist pantheist Zen Quakerism, sort of.

