

SPOKANENWORD

March
2022



Spokane Friends

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Spokane, WA 99205

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Sunday Schedule

Traditional worship in stillness
begins at 9:00 a.m.
when first person sits down

Programmed worship 10:00 am
In-Person (masked)
and Via Zoom
See Website For Link

Third Sunday of the Month
Monthly Meeting for Business
begins at rise of worship

The Mystical Experience

by Donald W. McCormick

Many influential Quakers, such as Rufus Jones, Marcelle Martin, and Howard Brinton, have seen mysticism as the heart of Quakerism. Type “mystic” into the search box of *Friends Journal* online archives, and you get 26 pages of links to articles and book reviews that refer to mystics, mysticism, and mystical experience.

Despite all this, Quakers who talk about their mystical experiences are sometimes met with indifference. They aren’t believed or get some other negative response. I spoke to one Friend who began to have mystical experiences after she started attending Quaker meeting. She obtained a clearness committee to help her understand what was going on, but its members were uncomfortable dealing with her experiences and shuffled her off to talk to a different standing committee.

There are thousands of publications in the scholarly literature on mystical experience. A central figure in this literature is American psychologist Ralph Hood. He argues that there are two types of mystical experiences: theistic and unitive.

The theistic mystical experience (also called prophetic or numinous) is “an awareness of a ‘holy other’ beyond nature, with which one is felt to be in communion.” It may be called Krishna or God or Allah or Yahweh. It’s the direct experience of the Spirit or of God. In Quakerism, mystical experience is usually thought of in theistic terms. Hearing the still, small voice of the Spirit is an example of this. Theistic mystical experiences can take the form of visions or voices, as they did with George Fox. The most common venue for theistic mystical experiences is worship, where people feel the presence of the Spirit.

The unitive is the other type of mystical experience. It is the type that is usually studied by neuroscience and psychology researchers. Many scholars who do this research argue that a sense of oneness or unity is its defining characteristic. There are two kinds of unitive mystical experience in Hood’s model: introvertive and extrovertive.

In the introvertive unitive mystical experience, there is an overwhelming sense of oneness, but there are no thoughts, emotions, or perceptions. No sense of time, place, or self. And it’s ineffable; that is, it’s impossible to adequately convey in words.

In the extrovertive unitive mystical experience, the person “continues to perceive the same world of trees and hills and tables and chairs as the rest of us . . . but sees these items transfigured in such a manner that Unity shines through them,” according to British philosopher Walter Terence Stace, whose research on mystical experience formed the basis of much of Hood’s work. In this type, one’s sense of self merges with what one is perceiving. One may directly experience oneness with everything—with other Quakers at a gathered meeting or with the ocean. Someone in this state often perceives an inner subjectivity, an aliveness, in all things, even inanimate things such as a stone or sunset.

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(continued from last page) These qualities of mystical experience aren't thoughts or ideas. One doesn't think about or feel the oneness of everything; it is experienced directly. In a unitive mystical experience, emotions like joy, love, openheartedness, a sense of mystery, awe, reverence, or blissful happiness can arise later.

People often see their unitive mystical experience as a source of knowledge more valid than everyday reality, and feel the experience is sacred or divine. Some people say they were united with God or use other religious language to describe it.

Quaker Thinking about Mystical Experience

Contemporary Quaker works about mystical experience tend to be based on the work of writers from 70 to 100 years ago, such as William James or Rufus Jones. Being stuck in the ways they thought about mystical experience is a problem because we've learned a lot about it since then.

Take William James's 1902 book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, the most influential work in the field. Some of his ideas have held up over time (the ineffability of the unitive mystical experience) while others have not (the idea that getting drunk could "stimulate the mystical faculties").

Rufus Jones is the most influential Quaker writer on mysticism and one of the most influential figures in Quaker history. He is the primary source of the idea that Quakerism is an experiential, mystical religion. But according to Hugh Rock in a 2016 article in *Quaker Studies*, Jones was hostile to the unitive mystical experience and felt that it reflected an immature stage of religious development. As with William James, many of Jones's ideas have been questioned by later research, such as his assertion that the unitive mystical experience is "a metaphysical theory voicing itself, not an experience." Anyone who's had a unitive mystical experience, myself included, knows that they are genuine experiences, not theories.

Unfortunately, almost all Quaker writings on mystical experience fail to mention developments in the study of it from recent decades. You rarely see any mention of current thinkers or discussion of contemporary debates.

Also, when I talk with fellow Quakers about the unitive view of mystical experience, the most common response is, "Oh? There's another view? What is it?" Our isolated views result, in part, because we don't talk much with Christian, Buddhist, Sufi, Jewish, or other mystics, or participate much in the discussion of mysticism that goes on around the world in books, scholarly journals, conferences, and the web.

All this limits our thinking about mystical experience and makes it out of date; we don't benefit from new developments about it that come from the hundreds of studies published about mystical experience each year in neuroscience, psychology, religious studies, and philosophy.

Our insularity also means that scientists conduct research on Buddhist, Catholic, and other mystics, but not Quaker mystics, even though Quakerism is seen as a major Western mystical tradition. We Quakers have a lot to contribute to the literature on mystical experience, but our isolation prevents this.

Reconciling Theistic and Unitive Views

Quaker writing about mystical experience tends to emphasize theistic mystical experience and de-emphasizes or ignores the unitive. But within Quakerism, we can reconcile theistic and unitive perspectives on mystical experience by thinking of different mystical experiences as falling on a spectrum: with purely theistic experiences at one end, purely unitive experiences at the other, and a mix of the two in the middle. What does a mixed mystical experience look like? Marcelle Martin offers a vivid example of one in a 2016 Pendle Hill talk accompanying her book *Our Life is Love*:

One night . . . I was walking under the stars and I suddenly knew that the stars were me. I was in the stars. That we were part of a oneness and that there was a light flowing through everything and connecting everything and I could feel it flowing through my body and out of my arms and out of my fingers into the world with great power. It wasn't my power. It was like a power of this divine reality. It took me a few years before I could say, "That's God" because it was so different from what my expectations of what God was like.

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MONTHLY MEETING FOR BUSINESS MINUTES 20 February 2022



The meeting was opened with prayer by Assistant Presiding Clerk, Jon Maroni. 12 people were in attendance.

The minutes from the January meeting were read **and approved as read**.

Treasurer's Report: We are doing well and will consider which investments would serve our community well.

Elder's Report: The speaker's schedule was discussed. Pam Emery will ask Leann Williams and Lauren Taylor, as well as Ruthie Tippin to see if she would be interested or able to bring the message for our Easter service. Jonas Cox will ask Paul Anderson if he would be available for future open Sundays. Tina Weaver will also ask a friend of hers if she would be interested in speaking. It was agreed that we would cap the number of rotating speakers to 3 months. Krista Maroni offered to do a query talk for the service on February 20th. It was noted that there was a drug bust across the street from the church a few weeks ago.

The possibility of recording our weekly messages was brought up by Kent Biel and Tina Weaver. Kent is going to re-search what is involved in doing a video recording and having a platform where anyone can access it, and Tina will re-search the same for audio recordings. Tina's search will include possibilities of the platform of either our website or a podcast. Pam Emery said that Lauren is doing well in her work as church secretary. Tina Weaver remarked that she and Lois Kieffaber have discussed bringing back Theater and Theology with a movie night that could combine people who want to come to the church or join via Zoom, with discussion of the movie afterwards. This task was sent to the Pillar of Congregational Care.

Steward's and Trustee's Report: No specific report.

Pillar Reports: Nothing specific from all three pillars except what has already been mentioned.

Old Business: Lois Kieffaber stated that there will need to be a shift in the pew arrangement if we wish to accommodate seating for the future Memorial Service for Sheri Templeton. They are expecting about 200 people attending. It was concluded that a one time change, like this, would not need to be brought before business meeting for this decision. Lois also noted that work has been started in the bathroom, with new lights installed. Bill Emery has done a lot of work on the varnish on the floor in the room across from the Library. Jon Maroni asked that we may want to think of a way to thank the people who do so much work in the church under the radar.

With no other old or new business and all hearts and minds were clear, Tina Weaver dismissed in prayer.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Nixon, Recording Clerk, and Tina Weaver, who willingly took the remainder of the minutes after Linda's internet went out.

Financial Report	
<u>Year to Date 2022</u>	
Income/Giving	\$3,085.00
Expenses:	\$6,163.07
Difference:	- \$3,078.07

Sheri Templeton, a long-time member of Spokane Friends, passed away quietly in her home on February 13 after having Alzheimer's for a number of years. Her memorial service will be held at Life Center on Government Way on Saturday, March 19, at 1:00 p.m. Next month's Newsletter will carry her obituary.

Sunday Speakers

Please tell an Elder when you would like to take a turn.

- | | |
|----------|---------------|
| ◆ Mar 6 | Sarah Scott |
| ◆ Mar 13 | Jon Kinney |
| ◆ Mar 20 | David Morrow |
| ◆ Mar 27 | Johan Maurer |
| ◆ Apr 3 | Sarah Scott |
| ◆ Apr 10 | Ruthie Tippin |
| ◆ Apr 17 | Deborah Suess |
| ◆ Apr 24 | Johan Maurer |



The Mystical Experience (continued from page 2)

Like Marcelle Martin, sometimes people who have this experience don't think of it in terms of God or the Spirit until long afterwards. That happened to me. I had an intense introvertive mystical experience, and it took me years to realize that the oneness I had experienced was "that of God" in me.

Viewing mystical experience as a spectrum from theistic to unitive makes room for the full range of mystical experience in Quakerism, does not suggest that one type is better than another, and provides a framework that can help us to benefit from decades of research on mystical experience.

The Uniquely Quaker Contribution to Mystical Experience

Howard Brinton wrote that "mystics generally think of [the experience of union] only as union with God, but the Quakers . . . think of it also as union with their fellow men." This sense of union with others is most common in the gathered meeting for worship. Current research on mystical experience generally doesn't include the Quaker group mystical experience. One of the rare exceptions is Stanford Searl's research. He writes that

a gathered meeting doesn't represent some version of ecstatic experience of mystical oneness with all creation. . . . What it represents and signifies is heightened awareness of interconnections among one's self, others in the worship setting, and others in the wider world.

Sometimes a group mystical experience can be unitive. You can see this in William Tabor's classic Pendle Hill Pamphlet, *Four Doors to Quaker Worship*. In it, he says that in the gathered meeting "The sharp boundaries of the self can become blurred and blended as we feel ourselves more and more united with fellow worshipers and with the Spirit of God" and that this experience can bring "joy, peace, praise, and an experience of timelessness."

Most writing on the Quaker group mystical experience is about the gathered meeting, but the group mystical experience also happens outside of worship. In *The Gathered Meeting*, Thomas Kelly writes of the sense of unity or oneness that can happen between Friends:

It occurs again and again that two or three individuals find the boundaries of their separateness partially melted down. . . . But after conversing together on central things of the spirit two or more friends who know one another at deep levels find themselves wrapped in a sense of unity and of Presence.

A Vision of the Future of Quakerism and Mystical Experience

My own mystical experiences and study of both Quakerism and mystical experience have led me to a vision for the future of Quaker mysticism. Imagine this scenario for ten years from now:

- Copies of *Faith and Practice* and reference works talk more about mysticism, and Quaker scholars interact with the larger community of mysticism researchers and publish in non-Quaker journals.
- People have group mystical experiences in gathered meetings for worship. Many people come to meeting and keep coming back because it's the place where they have this deep experience. More and more people are becoming Quakers.
- People in our meetings aren't afraid to talk about their mystical experiences. They don't fear that their fellow Quakers will say that their experiences are implausible, incomprehensible, or inconceivable. We understand and support people's mystical experiences. We've expanded our idea of mystical experience to include unitive ones that may not have a theistic aspect to them. This makes room for the mystical experiences of nontheistic Quakers, who now experience a closer connection to the mystical center of Quakerism.

People know that Quakers value mystical experience. We help people to have mystical experiences, to recognize their mystical experiences, and to make sense of them. As a result of all this, Quakerism has become a spiritual home for mystics in the West.

As a professor, **Donald W. McCormick** taught management, leadership, and psychology of religion. His interests include the scientific study of mysticism and Quakerism, and evidence-based methods for teaching mindfulness. He is co-clerk of Grass Valley Meeting in Nevada City, Calif., and director of education for Unified Mindfulness. Contact: donmccormick2@gmail.com. This article appeared in the August 2021 issue of *Friends Journal*. **Copyright: Friends Journal, all rights reserved, link to www.friendsjournal.org/the-mystical-experience/**

Some QUERIES

A pillar of the Quaker faith, queries are an invitation to examine one's deepest values and consider how to live one's faith in the world.

Queries have no right or wrong answers, but can open the heart to new insights when considered in quiet contemplation. The American Friends Service Committee has offered Queries for each season of the year. Here are the "Winter Queries:"

How can I **nurture the seeds of peace** within myself, my community, and the world?

How can I **increase my understanding of non-violence** and use it in all my interactions?

How do I **help others** - friends, colleagues, program participants, supporters — recognize and use their gifts?

Note to on-line readers: Sometimes we print pictures that we have as hard copy, but not an on-line version. We cut them out and paste them in before making the Newsletter copies. Thus the on-line version does not include them and you see a blank space instead. Sorry.

Those who attend services at Spokane Friends will find the missing material in the Newsletter posted on the Bulletin Board.

Quaker News

- ⇒ Julie Anderson's (Congregational Care Pastor at Newberg Friends Church) new book **William Hobson (1820-1891): Pioneer, Minister, and Founder of the Evangelical Friends Church (Quakers) in the Pacific Northwest** tells the story of nineteenth century Friends minister William Hobson and his influential role in bringing Quakerism to the Pacific Northwest. Her book is available directly from the publisher, Wipf & Stock, or from Amazon.
- ⇒ Greenleaf Friends Academy in Caldwell, ID will present **the 71st Annual Quaker Village Auction** on March 11-12, 2002, with food, family fun, and both live and silent auctions (on-line). For more information, visit <https://gfaschools.org/quaker-village-auction/>
- ⇒ Every 10 years the American Association of Religious Statisticians takes a **census of all the religious bodies in the United States**. The Friends World Committee for Consultation, Section of the Americas (FWCC) has collected that information for Quakers, and because we provided them with data from our Meeting, we will have access to the full Census Report early this summer.
- ⇒ **Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) is hiring for several Summer Internships**. Applications due: MARCH 25, 2022 – Work at FCNL's office throughout June and July to advance our witness for peace on Capitol Hill. FCNL offers several paid summer internships that provide a broad introduction to federal policy, grassroots organizing, and non-profit management. Other FCNL employment opportunities can be found by visiting [Work with FCNL | Friends Committee On National Legislation](#).
- ⇒ **Klamath Falls Friends Church seeks interim or settled pastor**. KFFC is a semi-programmed Christ-centered seeker-friendly Meeting in beautiful southern Oregon. We are a small but diverse group, with a wide array of spiritual paths. Our desired pastor will be dedicated to holding that diversity, will plan and present messages/meditations to guide our Meetings for Worship, be available for pastoral care, and provide the structure and guidance necessary to help us discern our long-term way forward. Visit klamathfallsfriendschurch.org for more information.
- ⇒ Northwest Yearly Meeting keeps quite an extensive list of Quaker Job Openings that goes beyond our own geographical area. Get more information for all these positions at <https://nwfriends.org/job-openings/>.