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**Quaker Virtue Ethics:
Religious Life without Creeds**

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Department of Religious Studies
in Partial Fulfillment for the Program of
Major in Religious Studies

by

Dave Nagaji

McMinnville, Oregon

May 2019

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ABSTRACT

Beliefs are conventionally understood to guide people's actions. Put another way, the actions which people take are understood to be products of what they believe. However, these claims are challenged by the fact that many Quakers hold that they do not have a creed. This feature of Quakerism creates a tension with the theory that actions must follow from beliefs. That tension prompts a question: How can Quakers make ethical decisions in a clear and decisive manner when they lack a creed? The answer to such a question is significant for two reasons. First, it provides insights into the specific case of Quakerism. Second, it brings about an important examination of the role which creeds play in the ethics of religions in general. Many variations of Quaker ethics resemble virtue ethics. This is not to say that Quakerism and the tradition of virtue ethics share a common origin, as they do not. Rather, the tendencies and values of many Quakers cause them to approach moral dilemmas in a manner which closely resembles that of virtue ethics. Accordingly, virtue ethics can be used as a tool with which one can understand, explain, and defend the ethical reasoning of many Quakers.

INTRODUCTION

Beliefs are conventionally understood to guide people's actions. Put another way, the actions which people take are understood to be products of what they believe. However, these claims are challenged by the fact that many Quakers hold that they do not have a creed. This feature of Quakerism creates a tension with the theory that actions must follow from beliefs. That tension prompts a question: How can Quakers make ethical decisions in a clear and decisive manner when they lack a creed? The answer to such a question is significant for two reasons. First, it provides insights into the specific case of Quakerism. Second, it brings about an

important examination of the role which creeds play in the ethics of religions in general. Many variations of Quaker ethics resemble virtue ethics. This is not to say that Quakerism and the tradition of virtue ethics share a common origin, as they do not. Rather, the tendencies and values of many Quakers cause them to approach moral dilemmas in a manner which closely resembles that of virtue ethics. Accordingly, virtue ethics can be used as a tool with which one can understand, explain, and defend the ethical reasoning of many Quakers.

Since this project introduces its topic of investigation by looking at Quakerism's lack of belief in a creed, it is vital that the term "belief" be described and that the term "creed" be defined. Lopez asserts that belief has, largely due to its centrality within Christian thought, become the primary standard by which practically all religious people are judged to be affiliates of their respective religions. Even those scholars who use the dimensions of both belief and practice to evaluate religions have tended to view practices as "deeds motivated by belief," which maintains the view that belief is the thing at the root of all religions.¹ In addition to this, Lopez mentions three important points. First, belief is the necessary foundation upon which theology is built; belief is not the result of reasoning and concept-formation as much as it is a starting point which must precede reasoning and concept-formation.² Second, the beliefs which a person is inclined to agree with largely depend upon the cultural background and historical context in which they have lived.³ Third, beliefs often draw contrasts between different groups of people, since a belief is only a significant proposition if there are some people who do not agree

¹ Donald S. Lopez, Jr., "Belief," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998), 21.

² *Ibid.*, 23-24.

³ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

with it.⁴ These understandings reveal the concept of belief to be complex and cast some doubt on its use as a stable academic tool.

More recently, Jason M. Blum has provided his own assessment of belief as a term within the study of religions. While acknowledging that it is an idea which has its drawbacks, he asserts that a consideration of belief is still “unavoidable in the study of religion.”⁵ The presence of belief may not be sufficient to define a thing as a religion, but it is a necessary part of all religions. The universality of belief within every religion, even when it does not play a major role, can be attributed, Blum writes, to the fact that belief is an inherent feature of being human. Since the difficult category of belief cannot be abandoned by scholars of religion, Blum argues, the proper solution is to take more nuanced, detailed, and sophisticated approaches to the concept of belief. This would include distinguishing different subcategories of belief from each other, taking scholarly biases into account, and utilizing careful methodologies.⁶

With belief explained, it is time to define the concept of creeds. The Nicene Creed will be used as the paradigmatic example. It is an explicitly-worded declaration. Parsenios argues that the Creed’s specific structure mirrors that of the Bible; just as the Bible begins with the world’s creation “and ends with the expectation of a new creation,” the Creed begins by designating God as the Creator and ends by anticipating a great resurrection and a new age.⁷ Several of its passages accentuate the differences between those who recite it and those who hold opposing beliefs. The statement of belief “*in One God*” establishes a continuity with Judaism while

⁴ Ibid., 33-34.

⁵ Jason N. Blum, “Belief: Problems and Pseudo-Problems,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 86, no.3 (2018), 643, doi:10.1093/jaarel/lfy001.

⁶ Ibid., 660-661.

⁷ George L. Parsenios, “The Creed: The Symbol of the Faith,” *Theology Today* 67, (2011), 394, doi:10.1177/004057361106700402.

creating a contrast with polytheists.⁸ The statement that God is the “*Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible*” establishes God’s status while creating a contrast with the Gnostics.⁹ The statement that there is “*one Lord, Jesus Christ*” establishes Christ’s status while creating a contrast with the theology of Arius.¹⁰ In these ways, the Nicene Creed differentiates those who believe in it from adherents of neighboring belief-systems.

But the Creed does more than this. It takes positions on the relationship between God and Christ, legitimizes Christ further, explains the nature of the Trinity, and introduces the Holy Spirit as something which is also worthy of worship. But, in addition to these doctrinal points, the Creed makes claims about the Christian community. Members of this community of belief, according to the Nicene Creed, should be members of the church. They should also, expecting “a new creation,” “*look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come.*”¹¹ Even more than all of this, the Creed is a marker of identity which true believers can use, like a soldier’s insignia, to distinguish their fellows from others. It is also a way of life. “One needs to live the Creed,” meaning that they must live by the “laws and standards” of Christ, rather than the norms followed by the rest of this world.¹² Taking the Nicene Creed as the archetypical creed, one should understand creeds to be explicit statements of belief which provide positions on matters of doctrine and instruct believers in how they ought to live their lives.

Having covered these essential definitions, it is now appropriate to describe the sort of methodology which will be used in this project. It will follow the methodological suggestions of Bruce Lincoln in two notable ways, but it will diverge from this in one way. This project will

⁸ Ibid., 395.

⁹ Ibid., 396.

¹⁰ Ibid., 397.

¹¹ Ibid., 399-403.

¹² Ibid., 403-404.

study the topic of religion through the perspective of history, attempting to examine things which “represent themselves as eternal, transcendent, spiritual, and divine” through the use of “rigorous critical practice.”¹³ Similarly, this project will approach religious texts as human-made, treating what is written within these texts as claims to the truth rather than definite expressions of absolute truth.¹⁴ However, it will not share Lincoln’s focus on “material issues” and the matters of social power which may have influenced religious developments.¹⁵ Instead, it will focus on the development and articulation of ideas in and of themselves.

VIRTUE ETHICS

Due to the objective of this study, it is necessary that a working definition of virtue ethics as a concept be provided. There are many traits which, when overlapping, constitute virtue ethics. The conceptual definition will, accordingly, be based on a composite of these traits.

Virtue ethics stands in contrast to ethical systems proposing rules, commands, or duties. The Ten Commandments provide an example of the latter, as they are meant to be obligatory rules of conduct given to human beings by God. Kant also put forward an ethical system based on firm laws, but he asserted that these moral obligations were derived from human reason. Utilitarians, similarly, promote an obligation for people to do whatever maximizes happiness. In all such cases, individuals are expected to obey the rules or laws put forward.¹⁶ When one adheres to such an ethical system of duty, they will attempt to resolve moral dilemmas which

¹³ Bruce Lincoln, *Gods and Demons, Priests and Scholars: Critical Explorations in the History of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2012), 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

¹⁶ Stan van Hooft, *Understanding Virtue Ethics* (Chesham, UK: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2006), 16.

they find themselves in by consulting the principles which they believe to be appropriate. A follower of virtue ethics, however, would disagree with such an approach.¹⁷

Rather than emphasizing external norms to act upon, virtue ethicists pick their actions based on matters of character. How to act becomes a question of what kind of person one wants to be. In many cases, one who has not yet cultivated their character may act in ways which allow their character to develop in a positive manner. Once one has reached a maturity of character, they are expected to be taking virtuous action not to be virtuous but because the virtuous act is in accordance with how they intrinsically wish to act. Accordingly, while the ethics of duty are invested in judging acts as right or wrong, the ethics of virtue focus less on the propriety of acts themselves and more on what each act says about the character of the person doing it. The primary emphasis, therefore, is on the morality and character of persons; their actions are understood to be symptoms or secondary reflections of that character. It should be noted that character is something which takes shape due to habit or training, making it something which can be molded with sustained effort.¹⁸

Virtue ethicists draw on a variety of virtues and vices when assessing an individual's character. Different people have come up within different lists of virtues, and what ought to count as a virtue varies, at least in some cases, between cultures. Virtues have included such things as courage, justice, politeness, fidelity, compassion, mercy, and wisdom, in addition to many others. Some thinkers have theorized that there are certain general virtues which can be divided into more specific variations of virtue or that there exists a core of universal virtues which different cultures have expressed in different ways.¹⁹ Many virtue ethicists see vice as the

¹⁷ Ibid., 10-11.

¹⁸ Ibid., 11-13.

¹⁹ Ibid., 129-133.

inverse of a given virtue. For examples, when one fails to demonstrate the virtue of integrity, the result would be something such as deviousness, deceitfulness, or pretentiousness. These things would count as vices because they are antithetical to integrity.²⁰ Similarly, cowardice would be considered a vice because it is a failure of courage. Aristotle, however, would add that rashness is also a failure of courage.²¹ This is because, to Aristotle, virtue was a desirable mean situated between two undesirable extremes: one of deficiency and the other of excess.²²

Systems of virtue tend to rely on some degree of role modeling or mentoring. In ancient Greece, for example, athletes competing in sporting events were reenacting the virtues of heroic figures. This would provide a concrete example of virtue, helping the spectators of these events to gain a better understanding of what virtue is.²³ The poems and pieces of artwork commemorating such athletes did not celebrate the individual competitors as much as they celebrated the virtuous ideals which these competitors represented.²⁴ A modern iteration of virtue ethics has drawn on Lev Vygotsky's psychological work to argue that the virtues are best instilled through mentors. Those wishing to embody virtue are, therefore, encouraged to make themselves apprentices to virtuous role models and go about their ethical training within a social community.²⁵

While some ethical systems assert universalistic rules or duties, virtue ethics is staunchly particularistic. This is to say that, rather than holding all people to the same standards of conduct

²⁰ Ibid., 167-168.

²¹ Ibid., 141.

²² Ibid., 59.

²³ Heather Reid, "Athletes as Heroes and Role Models: An Ancient Model," *Sports, Ethics and Philosophy* 11, no. 1 (2017), 43-44, doi:10.1080/17511321.2016.1261931.

²⁴ Ibid., 48.

²⁵ Nico J. Gronum, "A Return to Virtue Ethics: Virtue Ethics, Cognitive Science and Character Education," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36, no. 1 (2015), 5, ProQuest document ID: 1737513896.

at all times, it applies different standards to different people based on their respective circumstances and the specific circumstances which they are facing. For example, a shy person handling a situation which requires them to overcome their shyness could be considered courageous, whereas a person who is not shy handling the same situation would not be exercising any notable effort and therefore would not be demonstrating courage.²⁶ To take a more severe example, virtue ethics avoids referring to abstractions, such as a “reverence for life,” preferring, instead, to examine particular living things.²⁷ And, when a person is determining how to treat a fellow human being in a certain situation, virtue ethics pushes that person to consider the other’s specific condition.²⁸ The particularistic nature of virtue ethics is especially apparent in Aristotle’s approach, since he believed that the desirable mean can only be determined by considering the condition of the actor and the nature of the situation which they are confronting.²⁹ While the relatively abstract virtues may serve as general guides, specific things in the world and their particular features become the focus when a problem or dilemma arises.

The description of virtue ethics which has been given shows how difficult it would be to come up with a real definition for virtue ethics. The truth is that it is an ethical system with many variations, these variations having only general commonalities between them. Because of this, virtue ethics is best identified as a Wittgensteinian family-resemblance concept. This is to say that the variations of virtue ethics have various points of “overlap” and that these overlapping features are like “many fibres” which connect to one another to produce a cohesive “thread”

²⁶ Van Hooft, *Virtue Ethics*, 46.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 156.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

running through all forms of the concept.³⁰ Specifically, given the above description, systems of virtue ethics appear to be defined by six core traits: an opposition to commands or laws from authority, an emphasis on character over actions, an emphasis on habit as something which shapes character, a belief in a set of virtues and vices by which to assess character, a belief that virtues can be instilled in people through role models, and a strong inclination toward particularistic decision-making.³¹

Norms of conduct containing many of or all of these traits can be designated as systems of virtue ethics or systems closely resembling virtue ethics. Meanwhile, those systems endorsing a small amount of or none of these traits can be said to not resemble virtue ethics to a meaningful degree. Based on such a framework, this study will investigate Quietist, Liberal, Conservative, and Evangelical variations of Quakerism to see how well they match up with the conceptual definition provided.

QUIETIST QUAKERS

Quietist Quakerism is the first branch of the religion which will be analyzed. As will be explained, it is older than the other branches being examined, and a considerable degree of its intellectual influence has affected more contemporary denominations. These facts make it a natural starting point.

³⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1958), 32.

³¹ This particular description of virtue ethics is my own. I have heard of and read about many definitions of virtue ethics, and these definitions often vary greatly. To resolve this, I have defined virtue ethics as a family-resemblance term, based on the common attributes which definitions of it tend to share. This strikes me as the fairest way to represent virtue ethics.

A Guide to True Peace: Or, the Excellency of Inward and Spiritual Prayer will be the example of Quietist Quaker thinking examined in the search for meaningful overlaps between Quakerism and virtue ethics. This document is significant in and of itself, but it is also notable for its influence on Quakers who were born long after its initial publication. Many of its passages bear similarities to a virtue ethicist's focus on habits and virtues. It also, though perhaps to a lesser degree, directs readers toward a particular role model and an emphasis on character.

It is important that the context of this document be understood. The text was produced in 1813 by two British Quakers and presents a form of prayer which eschews conscious exertions in favor of a contemplative approach. The Quaker community did not have any ordained clergy, nor did it have any monastics. Due to the absence of such an institutional hierarchy, there were no spiritual elites within the community for this text to be produced for; rather, it was made for all Quakers to understand.³² At the time that it was published, Quakers were nearing the end of a long period of isolation from other religious groups. The ideas which it expresses are derived from the Continental Quietism movement: a decentralized group which advocated for an unusual and unorthodox kind of religious practice. Quietists believed that one ought to make themselves as receptive as possible to God, doing so by emptying themselves of their own thoughts and volitions. By letting go of their own wills and, in some cases, their desires for salvation, practitioners sought to obtain or experience a perfect connection with God.³³

The apophatic sort of prayer which *A Guide to True Peace* describes is based on a concept of praying without content. This unconventional idea stems from the belief that human

³² Michael Birkel, "Quaker Silent Prayer: *A Guide to True Peace*," in *Contemplative Literature: A Comparative Sourcebook on Meditation and Contemplative Prayer*, ed. Louis Komjathy (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2015), 145.

³³ *Ibid.*, 147.

beings tend to imagine God differently than how God truly is. When, however, people empty their minds of distractions and cease to imagine an approximation of God, doing so creates a vacuum which is filled by the true presence of God. This form of prayer is meant to be practicable by all people, and it can be enacted in any situation. The most thorough results, however, are found when one can take the time to focus their attention single-mindedly on peace, silence, and God's presence. The surrender, submission, and self-annihilation which this text prescribes is not meant to destroy or kill the practitioner but, rather, is meant to maximize their receptivity to God's influence.³⁴

This contentless prayer can be concentrated to a fine point of intense practice, but it can also function as an ever-present state of existence which accompanies a person at all times. The usefulness of such practice arises from Quietism's understanding of human nature. Since the Quietists saw human beings as both apart from God and inclined towards sinfulness, they believed that it was best for people to annihilate their individual wills and replace them with the will of God. Such a union with God, they believed, was both desirable and possible.³⁵

Examining the text itself, one can see that it places heavy emphasis on the development of good habits. It explains that, since the minds of human beings are accustomed to "roving hither and thither," it is very difficult to break this way of thinking and prevent the mind "from those wanderings which are an impediment to prayer."³⁶ To attempt alone such a breaking and reforming of one's mental habits is futile, and doing so only serves to teach a person the degree

³⁴ Ibid., 152-153.

³⁵ Ibid., 153.

³⁶ Anonymous, "A Guide to True Peace: Or, the Excellency of Inward and Spiritual Prayer," in *Contemplative Literature: A Comparative Sourcebook on Meditation and Contemplative Prayer*, ed. Louis Komjathy (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2015), 178.

to which they are dependent on a higher power. Only God can give a person the silence which they desire.³⁷ While God serves this therapeutic and purifying purpose, part of God’s process of refinement includes putting obstacles in front of a person for them to overcome. Even those who yield themselves to God are beset by distracting thoughts which prompt them to think that they “labour to no purpose.”³⁸ This process serves to instill humility and prevent complacency. Furthermore, by being patient and persevering through such a process, practitioners will find that their “souls will be internally improved.”³⁹ In these ways, it is a process which can be compared to “wrestling” with God, as Jacob did.⁴⁰ Much as in that Biblical scene, one must continuously struggle until God concludes the struggle by granting a blessing. Over time, this practice leads the powers of God to help a person to overcome their challenges, as well as alter the practitioner’s desires for the best.⁴¹

The habit of entering contemplative closeness to God grows in strength the more that it is practiced, just as any habit would. This “inward silence” is meant to turn a person away from the bodily senses and toward God.⁴² The closer to God one becomes, in this way, the further they become from their human passions. Such a movement away from sin and material objects ingrains itself in a “habitual” way, which solidifies this closeness to God and inward-facing state.⁴³ As the text explains, all of this functions like a ship at sea. The further a ship moves away from land and away from its harbor, the less effort is needed to make it continue to move. At a certain point, the ship’s oar is no longer needed, and the one piloting the ship can keep the ship

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.,180.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 181.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 187.

⁴³ Ibid.

sailing with relatively little exertion. Such a vessel is smoothly guided by the wind, just as a mind which has attained this state is smoothly directed by God. Eventually, the ship is able to move swiftly without any effort by the crew, and any effort on their parts at this point would only slow its progress. Such a way of life, one which is reliant on “divine influence” instead of “reiterated acts of self-exertion,” is what the text calls for.⁴⁴ But reaching that level, as shown, only comes after one has the right habits.

The text’s other major similarity with virtue ethics is the attention which it pays to virtues. It squarely designates God as the source of all forms of virtue and claims that one will gain in the virtues in direct proportion to how much one immerses themselves in God. Virtues are “but as a mask” and comparable to articles of clothing, unless they “spring up from this divine source.”⁴⁵ Explained in another way, love for God is the virtue which “will produce in us all other virtues.”⁴⁶ Those things which come from the outward world stand in opposition to this inner virtue, and the former could be equated with vices if understood in the terms of virtue ethics.⁴⁷

Much of virtue’s centrality to this text is due to how it appears to be strongly linked with habit. It is, after all, the gradual alterations in a person which make them increasingly receptive to what God hopes to do. Once this process has proceeded far enough, a point is reached at which “the most ordinary and seemingly indifferent actions will become exercises of virtue.”⁴⁸ There seems to be, here, an implicit tying-together of the two concepts. The right habits enable

⁴⁴ Ibid., 192.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 188.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 194.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 188-189.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 194.

one to cross a threshold at which opportunities for virtue greatly increase, while this increase in virtuous opportunities brings greater significance to everyday habits.

The text also relates, though to a lesser degree, to matters of character and role modeling. Some attention is given to the human soul and God's ability to refine it, which can easily be seen as an emphasis on character.⁴⁹ On the matter of role modeling, Christ is very clearly presented as a role model; one is encouraged to follow and mirror the life of Jesus by taking up a metaphorical cross.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, God, as the one who polishes people's souls and reveals to people their flaws, is described as a sort of positive beacon or anchoring point which one ought to stay near to.⁵¹

A Guide to True Peace is immensely important within the Quaker tradition as whole, especially since it has connected with multiple eras and branches of Quakerism. Reaching back to the very early days of the community, this text had much in common with the thinking of George Fox. He, too, had supported an apophatic method of prayer.⁵² It has also reached forward to impact contemporary Quakerism. Liberal Quakers, though at odds with its negative view of human nature, continue to read *A Guide to True Peace*. Conservative Quakers appear to see it still as a very useful guide to spiritual practice. Evangelical Quakers have, in recent years, taken a greater interest in this document and used it as a guide for meditative and contemplative practices.⁵³ *A Guide to True Peace* has never found itself as part of Quakerism's canon, since the Quakers do not see anything other than the Bible as officially canonical. The text has also remained less popular than such Quaker classics as George Fox's *Journal* and Robert Barclay's

⁴⁹ Ibid., 189.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 186.

⁵¹ Ibid., 183-184.

⁵² Birkel, "Quaker Silent Prayer," 154.

⁵³ Ibid., 165-166.

Apology. Still, it has had a major influence on Quaker spiritual practices throughout the denomination's history.⁵⁴

In summary, Quietist Quakerism appears to be in accord with virtue ethics. It places a heavy emphasis on the interrelated matters of habit and virtue. Additionally, it contains smaller points of emphasis on character and role modeling. With that form of the Quaker tradition examined, this study will move on to three contemporary denominations of Quakerism.

LIBERAL QUAKERS

During the time between the era of George Fox and the present day, historical and cultural developments have altered original Quakerism in a variety of ways. In no case is this more apparent than in that of Liberal Quakerism. The Liberal branch of the Quaker movement was defined by a series of developments during the twentieth century, which included estrangement from fundamentalist Quakers, interactions with social movements, and responses to major controversies. It has embraced intellectualism, attempting to reconcile the faith with the findings of historical inquiry and modern science. This has led many Liberals to interpret religious truths as symbolic rather than absolute.⁵⁵

Much of Liberal Quakerism has been based on a rediscovering or reaffirming of ideas which had driven early Quakerism. Liberals, for example, came to place a heavy emphasis on creating positive social change while denigrating anti-egalitarian ideas, such as predestination. They also looked back at the history of the movement to find such figures as Fox, Penington,

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁵⁵ William J. Frost, "Modernist and Liberal Quakers, 1887-2010," in *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*, ed. Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 78-79.

Margaret Fell, and William Penn as examples of key traits: unmediated religious experience, female empowerment, freedom of religion, and political involvement. Liberals built much of their conception of Quakerism on the idea of the “Light Within,” the belief that God created all people with a connection to the divine, and they saw all of life’s activities as touched by and tying into God.⁵⁶

Liberation theology found fertile ground in Liberal Quakerism, prompting support for draft-resisters, undocumented immigrants, and the poor. Women also embraced liberation theology, using it to push what had become a status of theoretical equality within Quaker institutions to one of actual equality. Universalism also took some root in Liberal Quakerism, which has led some Liberal Quakers to see all religious traditions as at least partially true and potentially connected to the “Light Within.”⁵⁷ Those who have embraced Universalism maintain such core practices as silent worship while also seeking to borrow teachings from Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Native Americans.⁵⁸

In the present day, Liberal Quakers are mostly white and educated, and there exists an increasing number who fall outside the traditional religious norm by being divorced, gay, or lesbian. Their institutions have become more democratic, with many coming to support human consensus over divine guidance. They have also become more inclusive, with some identifying themselves as non-Christian or even atheist while retaining their identities as Quakers. Matters of peace and environmentalism are often emphasized, while matters of societal vice are generally ignored. Proper behavior has become more important than proper belief. Despite major changes

⁵⁶ Ibid., 80-81.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 88.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

such as these, Liberal Quakers have retained their emphasis on silence and spontaneity during meetings. Their meeting style remains unprogrammed.⁵⁹

“Virtuous Friends: Morality and Quaker Identity,” by Jackie Leach Scully, examines the morality used by Liberal Quakers in Britain. The system of ethics which this contemporary community appears to prefer is one of virtue ethics. Such an evaluation is the result of a study of the Britain Yearly Meeting from 1995 to 1997. Though Scully’s research project had focused on how these Liberal Quakers were responding to “advances in gene technology” and the consequent “genetic ethical dilemmas,” it reveals much about Quaker ethical deliberation in general.⁶⁰ An examination of Scully’s article reveals that the resemblance to virtue ethics is largely a product of issues relating to rule-following and particularistic reasoning, with such matters as character and virtue also playing roles.

One of the surprising discoveries of that study was the overall aversion of these Liberal Quakers to rule-based or duty-based systems of ethics. Scully’s contention is that most religious groups structure their moral thinking on a deontological foundation, basing their ideas of what constitutes proper behavior on what they believe to be divine commands. While Scully had expected the Quakers being studied to also express such a deontological leaning, this turned out not to be the case.⁶¹ This general aversion to deontology can be attributed to their “rejection of written creeds.”⁶² Since all Quakers, but especially Liberal Quakers, see “primary authority” as something which stems from “personal experience,” they prefer not to adhere to a framework

⁵⁹ Ibid., 90-91.

⁶⁰ Jackie Leach Scully, “Virtuous Friends: Morality and Quaker Identity,” *Quaker Studies* 14, no.1 (2009), 108-110, ProQuest document ID: 209634371.

⁶¹ Ibid., 110.

⁶² Ibid., 113.

which puts rules and obligations over their personal convictions.⁶³ It should be noted that this individual authority arising from one's "personal experience of the Light" can even override scripture and "Quaker precedent."⁶⁴ The aversion of Liberal Quakers to utilitarianism, that ethical school which advocates for the greatest good for the most people, is based more on social reasons. First, having rejected voting as a means of making decisions, they are naturally unsympathetic to majoritarianism. Second, as people who emphasize social justice, they distrust any system which is prone to marginalize minorities in its pursuit of the highest quantitative value.⁶⁵ Despite these overarching trends, it is important to recognize the fact that Quakers have a single deontological tenet at the core of their beliefs. This is the claim made by George Fox that there exists "that of God in everyone."⁶⁶

Similarly, Liberal Quakerism places a heavy focus on particularistic, rather than universalistic, moral reasoning. This can be seen in what Scully terms their "*moral collage*," which is their tendency to eschew ethical arguments which are "theoretically consistent."⁶⁷ Such a lack of internal coherence is not an indication of intellectual shortcoming. Rather, it is a consequence of priorities. Liberal Quakers simply do not put a high priority on this sort of consistency. Instead, they prioritize clear articulation of what people perceive and how they understand the issues at hand. It is by clearly expressing their ideas to each other, they believe, that participants in a dialogue can work toward a constructive conclusion. Additionally, Scully suggests that those who employ more than one ethical school at the same time may be doing so due to an understanding that a single ethical school is insufficient when a person is attempting to

⁶³ Ibid., 114.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 120.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 110.

solve actual problems.⁶⁸ Liberal Quakers also practice a kind of particularistic reasoning which is closely in line with advice one might expect of a virtue ethicist. This is the Quaker focus on discernment, which is a close parallel to the idea of phronesis in virtue ethics. Both of these concepts indicate the need for individuals to use experience and wisdom in determining how to best act in real situations.⁶⁹

As implied, Liberal Quakers have studied and accepted the legitimacy of many ethical schools. Scully argues that those who were participating in moral deliberations were probably not consciously drawing on different schools. Instead, citing moral psychology, cognitive science, and other research, Scully asserts that they, much as a secular group would, formed general intuitions which they then expressed through and supported by arguments. It was not that they came to these dialogues with these ethical schools in mind. Rather, the discussions and debates over real-life moral controversies led them to take approaches which resembled the typical reasoning of certain ethical schools. The moral thinking of Liberal Quakers, however, does not resemble all ethical schools equally. Utilitarian arguments, for example, were rare, and arguments resembling contractarianism were not to be found. While positions which resembled forms of consequentialism other than utilitarianism made a strong showing, it was arguments closely paralleling virtue ethics which “turned up repeatedly.”⁷⁰ From this, it appears that, while Liberal Quakers are not explicitly trained, instructed, or educated to think in the terms of virtue ethics, their values as a community lead them to take positions which are very close to or identical with what a virtue ethicist would say.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 116.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 111.

Ethical approaches of Liberal Quakers also demonstrate other points of resemblance with virtue ethics by emphasizing character and virtue. The matter of character is very straightforward. Those who practice virtue ethics decide on which decisions to make by asking themselves what sort of character they have or want to have, leading to a system in which one's actions are considered morally significant due to how they express an "agent's interior moral nature."⁷¹ Similarly, those who identify themselves as Quakers are likely to view themselves as such because of what they do more than what they believe. One can see, here, a common strand of actions being a reflection of character. This leads into the matter of virtues and testimonies. Quaker testimonies can basically be viewed as guidelines which one should consult when going about one's life. There are testimonies for such things as "peace," "justice," "equality," and integrity."⁷² Though conceptually different from the virtues of virtue ethics, there are many testimonies which stand in parallel to particular virtues and other testimonies which can be understood as ways of enacting particular virtues.⁷³

Summarizing these points, Liberal Quakerism is strongly aligned with virtue ethics. In nearly all cases, Liberal Quakers tend to avoid moral reasoning which relies on absolute rules and duties. They heavily emphasize particularistic thinking in a way which closely resembles the phronesis of virtue ethics, as well as the matter of internal character in much the same way that virtue ethicists would. And, though not an exact match at a metaphysical level, the testimonies affect Liberal Quakers in a way which is functionally equivalent to how the virtues guide students of virtue ethics.

⁷¹ Ibid., 114-115.

⁷² Ibid., 115.

⁷³ Ibid., 115-116.

CONSERVATIVE QUAKERS

Conservative Quakerism is another branch of the movement which has survived into the present day. However, whereas Liberals have been influenced by the events and norms of the outside world, Conservatives are most distinct for their especially persistent commitments to Quaker tradition and greater resistance to outside influences.⁷⁴ Quaker Conservatives have placed a heavy emphasis on retaining their distinctness, and at one point they were set on keeping a “hedge” between themselves and those who practice other religions.⁷⁵ It should be noted, however, that Conservative Quakers of the North Carolina Yearly Meeting were and still are more ecumenical than those of other Conservative Yearly Meetings. It should also be noted that Conservative Quakers have, historically, avoided involvement in national politics except to make statements of principles and that Quaker Conservatives are not necessarily political conservatives.⁷⁶

The twentieth century saw the numbers of Conservative Quakers drop substantially; only three of their Yearly Meetings remain. These Yearly Meetings in Ohio, Iowa, and North Carolina have had to begin affiliating with various Monthly Meetings, as a matter of survival. Despite these low numbers, Conservative Quakerism has been valued for the unique form of Christianity which it presents. They have, for example, embraced listening as a way of life, allowing them to be more in tune with the “Inward Christ.”⁷⁷ Despite their continued distinctness, the loosening of the ideological “hedge” dividing them from others has allowed for greater cooperation with other

⁷⁴ Lloyd Lee Wilson, “Conservative Friends, 1845-2010,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*, ed. Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 126.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 134-135.

Quaker groups.⁷⁸ Today, the defining feature of Conservative Quakerism is the guidance of God Himself in the lives of all believers.⁷⁹

Where Christ Presides: A Quaker Perspective on Moral Discernment presents a very strong example of virtue ethics in Quakerism. The book's back cover indicates that its author, Jack Ciancio, is part of the Ararat Friends Meeting and serves on the North Carolina Yearly Meeting's Peace and Social Concerns Committee. The Ararat Friends Meeting was a part of the North Carolina Yearly Meeting when the former was formed in 1924. Since 2017, following restructuring within the North Carolina Yearly Meeting, the Ararat Friends Meeting decided "to become a charter member of the North Carolina Fellowship of Friends," a status which allows for greater autonomy.⁸⁰ Ciancio's book, published in 2009 according to its copyright page, would have been written prior to this reorganizing. In it, he makes many statements which parallel ideas found in virtue ethics. To adequately cover the many points he makes, this study will begin with what Ciancio has to say concerning rules and authority. From there, it will show how his position on rules and authority flows into his presentation of Jesus Christ as a role model. After that, it will explain his connection of Jesus Christ to character.

Ciancio bases much of his thinking on Kohlberg's concept of moral stages. Lawrence Kohlberg, who was a developmental psychologist, came up with a theory that human beings progress through a sequence of stages of moral development. Ciancio argues that, despite criticisms that this theory is culturally-biased and that Kohlberg only observed male test subjects,

⁷⁸ Ibid., 135.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 136.

⁸⁰ "Ararat's History," *Ararat Friends Meeting*, Ararat Friends Meeting, 2019, <https://araratmtg.org/history.html>.

it can serve as an effective model.⁸¹ Stages one, two, and three in this theory can be explained, respectively, as avoiding unwanted consequences for oneself, as doing things because they will hopefully benefit oneself, and as acting in such a way that doing so will bring oneself into conformity with a given group. Ciancio summarizes these three early stages and makes brief criticisms of them.⁸²

He is mostly concerned with stages four, five, and six. Stage four, the “legalistic” stage, is based on a “strict, literal adherence to, and interpretation of, the law.”⁸³ Under such a system, “whatever the existing law, custom, or authority says is good,” while those who break the law are expected to face punishment.⁸⁴ “Only a small percentage of adults advance beyond this stage,” Ciancio writes, and he sees such a method of thinking as responsible for leading many people astray.⁸⁵ It is contrasted with moral stages five and six. The fifth stage leads a person to act in a way which “transcends common law-and-order reasoning” and eschews retribution.⁸⁶ It is ideal, however, for people to move beyond this and embrace the sixth stage, in which decisions are made “based on the equality and worth of all individuals.”⁸⁷

Ciancio’s in-depth evaluation of stage four is strongly negative. He argues that such an authority-based style of thinking has, historically, enabled normal people to accept Nazism, Crusades against Muslim peoples, race-based slavery, and the genocides against Native Americans.⁸⁸ He later says that it is in the nature of the fourth stage to enable the group think

⁸¹ Jack Ciancio, *Where Christ Presides: A Quaker Perspective on Moral Discernment* (Enumclaw, WA: Pleasant Word, 2009), 40.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 42-44.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 48-53.

which characterizes the third stage, offering this as an explanation of why modern United States history has seen such wide-spread support for the wars in Vietnam and Iraq.⁸⁹

In his evaluation of stage six, however, he describes it as the way of Christ, and here one can see the application of his view of Christ as a role model. Jesus Christ, Ciancio writes, “perfectly displayed” the “ultimate moral rightness” that is characteristic of stage six.⁹⁰ Ciancio takes the Beatitudes, in particular, to be an indication of Christ’s alignment with stage-six thinking, and he takes the conflict between Christ and the Pharisees to be a clash between stage six and stage four.⁹¹ It is his contention that the Old Testament in general follows the morality of stage four and those stages below it, while “the morality of Christ in the New Testament is well beyond that stage.”⁹²

But the situation runs deeper than this. Ciancio states, very early on in his book, that the modern world lacks any single “controlling moral authority,” as “there are numerous voices claiming such authority.”⁹³ Continuing on this topic, he writes that Quakers do not have hierarchies or centralized leadership. Instead, they have their history as a religious movement and their individual abilities of discernment, both of which they turn to as sources of guidance.⁹⁴ This lack of formalized or institutionalized authority causes the concept of “the Light Within,” the presence of Christ which is present within all people, to assume a high degree of importance.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ Ibid., 64.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 55.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 72.

⁹³ Ibid., 9.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 10.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 14.

With this in mind, it makes sense when Ciancio describes Christ as a sort of moral anchor. At one point, he calls Christ “our guiding star throughout this discussion.”⁹⁶ At another point, he argues that the “pacifist Christians of the first few centuries” lived in such a positive way because of “their historic closeness to Christ.”⁹⁷ Ciancio writes that, when confronting an ethical dilemma, “we are obligated to consider all sides” before selecting “the highest moral choice,” which will ultimately be “the most Christlike choice.”⁹⁸ Put another way, people should take personal responsibility for their actions and follow the compassionate example of Christ, whose life and actions constituted “a Divine Categorical Imperative.”⁹⁹

The idea of Christ as an ideal moral role model naturally ties into an idea of Christ as a role model for one’s character. This is all but said by Ciancio when he writes that “Jesus had the absolute perfect moral character and must be our role model.”¹⁰⁰ A similarity to virtue ethics becomes apparent when Ciancio explains that “Jesus exemplified a truly intrinsic ethical disposition”: that Christ only saw actions as moral if such actions expressed the entirety of one’s character.¹⁰¹ Ciancio himself holds that “only a deeply inherent moral character” can enable such people as Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Bishop Desmond Tutu, the freedom riders, and the Christians who saved Jews in Nazi Germany.¹⁰² This position confirms that Ciancio, personally, is oriented toward a concept of character which is internal, much as a virtue ethicist would be.

Another major point on this topic which is expressed in Ciancio’s work is the presence of particularism within Quaker morality. When discussing the fifth moral stage, which he is

⁹⁶ Ibid., 124.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 129.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 118-119.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 121.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 34.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 126-127.

¹⁰² Ibid., 127-128.

positively inclined towards due to its break from the fourth stage, he explains that it is a stage in which ethics become situational.¹⁰³ This appears to mark his position as one which is pro-particularistic. His book also often advocates for a care-based approach, which demonstrates his particularistic thinking. That point, however, will be thoroughly explored in this paper's section on care ethics.

In addition to those main points of similarity with virtue ethics, this book makes a somewhat smaller one concerning the virtues. Ciancio includes a brief discussion of the Quaker testimonies. While not binding rules, they are ideals which "provide moral structure" and cannot be fully abandoned.¹⁰⁴ In this discussion, he lists four testimonies: "Peace, Integrity, Simplicity, and Equality."¹⁰⁵ The function which these testimony serve, as well as the specific values which these testimonies promote, may be seen as very similar to the functions of and ideals promoted by the virtues of virtue ethics. Later, just before describing Jesus as one who "had the absolute perfect moral character," Ciancio describes Christ's "moral behaviors and characteristics—honesty, moral courage, constancy, and, most of all, his compassion."¹⁰⁶ These behaviors and characteristics could easily be listed as virtues.

To summarize, Conservative Quakerism is a nearly-perfect match with virtue ethics. It eschews absolute rules, heavily emphasizes Christlike role modeling, places great value on character, and stresses particularism. Besides this, there is a moderate amount of attention given to the virtues. This, taken together, means that Conservative Quakerism contains five out of the six traits of virtue ethics as conceptually defined.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 54.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 17-18.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 34.

EVANGELICAL QUAKERS

Evangelical Quakerism is the last branch of the religion which will be examined in this study. With much of its roots in revivalism, the Evangelical branch places a great deal of importance on expanding its numbers through conversion. The Richmond Declaration of Faith, produced in 1887, served and continues to serve as a common foundation for Evangelical Quaker communities all around the world, providing a key point of unification which exists to this day.¹⁰⁷

While the prevalent culture among Evangelical Quakers has changed with the times, there are many things which they have shown no intention of compromising on. Multiple technological and societal developments of the twentieth century have prompted Quaker Evangelicals to be less formal in their religious practices and more accepting of multiculturalism.¹⁰⁸ Despite those shifts, they have remained staunchly opposed to premarital sex, substance abuse, and lying.¹⁰⁹

The efforts of Quaker Evangelicals have led to surprising demographic changes within the faith. Many of them have participated in service missions abroad, providing essential supporting with such things as housing.¹¹⁰ They have also gone abroad to convert people, finding tremendous success. Evangelism has made considerable gains in Alaska, Ireland, Russia, Latin

¹⁰⁷ Arthur O. Roberts, "Evangelical Quakers, 1887-2010," in *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*, ed. Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 108-109.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

America, eastern Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.¹¹¹ As a result, a numerical majority of Evangelical Quakers are now from the “Global South.”¹¹²

Attempts have been made to bring the Evangelical branch of Quakerism closer to its sibling branches. These efforts enjoyed some positive results, but they have fallen short of success. Major contention exists between Evangelical Quakerism and Liberal Quakerism, largely due to the latter’s decision to move away from a belief in scripture’s infallibility.¹¹³

The Report of Fourth Triennial Conference of Evangelical Friends Held at Denver Friends Church features a compilation of speeches delivered by a variety of the conference’s attendees. Some parts of some of these speeches support a comparison with virtue ethics. T. Eugene Coffin encourages Christians to emulate the compassion of Jesus in a way which could be construed as role modeling.¹¹⁴ Similarly, Simeon O. Smith asserts that outward ordinances serve “to demonstrate some spiritual devotion or value,” going on to say “that every act of a Christian should be the outward demonstration of an inward work.”¹¹⁵ This parallels a key position of virtue ethics: that outward actions are primarily significant because of what they indicate about one’s inner character. Despite these similarities, this document, as a whole, is opposed to virtue ethics. The discrepancies are, by far, more numerous and notable than the similarities.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 120-121.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 123.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 118-119.

¹¹⁴ T. Eugene Coffin, “Do the Work of an Evangelist,” in *Report of Fourth Triennial Conference of Evangelical Friends Held at Denver Friends Church. Denver, Colorado. July 11 to 15, 1956*, 21-22.

¹¹⁵ Simeon O. Smith, “What is the Message of Friends?” in *Report of Fourth Triennial Conference of Evangelical Friends Held at Denver Friends Church. Denver, Colorado. July 11 to 15, 1956*, 24.

The speeches contained within the conference report are overwhelmingly supportive of authority, divine commands, and rule-based ethics. Paul Todd's speech refers to the story of King Asa, explaining how Asa was punished for going against the will of God and urging the audience to avoid suffering the same fate.¹¹⁶ Lloyd Hinshaw also endorses this sort of obedience, saying that both individuals and churches whom God is speaking to should "OBEY!"¹¹⁷ In a speech focusing on young people, Roy P. Clark argues that the gospel should be taught to the young "clearly, authoritatively, and intelligently."¹¹⁸ He later doubles down on this position, calling for "an authoritarian message of the Gospel to challenge modern young people for God," even if such a message must be "dogmatic."¹¹⁹

These sorts of claims and ideas show up again and again in the conference report. Harold B. Winn argues that, since Christ "has purchased us and assures us that He assumes our best interests," Christ "has the right to expect obedience" from human beings.¹²⁰ The ideas expressed within this document also make plain that the norm of Evangelical Quakerism is the infallibility of scripture. Owen W. Glassburn talks briefly about how "the MESSAGE needs no improvement," concluding with a statement that "The only answer to the world's need is the

¹¹⁶ Paul Todd, "God's Faithfulness and Man's Faith," in *Report of Fourth Triennial Conference of Evangelical Friends Held at Denver Friends Church. Denver, Colorado. July 11 to 15, 1956*, 12.

¹¹⁷ Lloyd Hinshaw, "The Challenge of Evangelical Church Extension in America," in *Report of Fourth Triennial Conference of Evangelical Friends Held at Denver Friends Church. Denver, Colorado. July 11 to 15, 1956*, 16.

¹¹⁸ Roy P. Clark, "The Challenge of Youth Among Evangelical Friends," in *Report of Fourth Triennial Conference of Evangelical Friends Held at Denver Friends Church. Denver, Colorado. July 11 to 15, 1956*, 25.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹²⁰ Harold B. Winn, "What Must I Do to Inherit Eternal Life?" in *Report of Fourth Triennial Conference of Evangelical Friends Held at Denver Friends Church. Denver, Colorado. July 11 to 15, 1956*, 34.

gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹²¹ More tellingly, the constitution featured near the end of the document states, in the first section of its third article, that “the Bible is the divinely inspired, infallible and authoritative Word of God, fully sufficient to instruct man in the way of salvation through Jesus Christ.”¹²² There is little room for ambiguity here.

One may be confused after having read this evaluation of the Evangelical conference report. After all, if this document is at all representative of their branch, Evangelical Quakers have a heavy inclination in the direction of rule following. This may seem very odd, since one would expect a non-credal group to avoid such an explicit alignment behind commands, rules, and authority. The clarification to this puzzlement, however, may be offered by the conference report itself. During the conference, it is recorded that Gerald W. Dillon insisted on a core of foundational beliefs, without which, he claimed, there could not “be any sense of Christian fellowship.”¹²³ Dillon returns to this point as he concludes his talk; he says that “this fellowship” must be exclusive, in the sense of excluding “those who deny any of the essential doctrines of the Christian faith.”¹²⁴ Furthermore, the constitution included in this conference report explicitly specifies that it “does not in any way constitute a new statement of Friends belief, for we are in full accord with the historic evangelical position of our church as summarized in George Fox’s letter to the governor of Barbadoes [sic] and in the 1887 Richmond Declaration of Faith.”¹²⁵ That

¹²¹ Owen W. Glassburn, “Revitalizing Friends Sunday Schools,” in *Report of Fourth Triennial Conference of Evangelical Friends Held at Denver Friends Church. Denver, Colorado. July 11 to 15, 1956*, 29.

¹²² The Association of Evangelical Friends, “Constitution,” in *Report of Fourth Triennial Conference of Evangelical Friends Held at Denver Friends Church. Denver, Colorado. July 11 to 15, 1956*, 45.

¹²³ Gerald W. Dillon, “The Fellowship of Evangelical Friends,” in *Report of Fourth Triennial Conference of Evangelical Friends Held at Denver Friends Church. Denver, Colorado. July 11 to 15, 1956*, 6.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹²⁵ Evangelical Friends, “Constitution,” 46.

disclaimer inserted into the constitution has much in common with the claims laid out by Gerald Dillon. It would appear to point to a strong emphasis on proper doctrine as established by particular documents. Such a strong root in doctrine could be taken as a plausible explanation for how Evangelical Quakerism is so invested in authority and rule-following.

Interestingly, the Evangelical denomination seems to be the only branch of contemporary Quakerism which is predominantly in opposition to virtue ethics. It does contain those traits of virtue ethics having to do with role modeling and character, but it is heavily differentiated from virtue ethics by its strong emphasis on obeying authority and following absolute rules. Such commands, especially when they are so heavily emphasized, carry enough weight that they more than cancel out the occasional points of overlap between Quaker Evangelism and virtue ethics. This denomination would probably bear a resemblance to or be classified as a system of deontology.

ELEMENTS OF CARE ETHICS

The three sources which are associated with contemporary forms of Quakerism all, to varying degrees, contain traits of care ethics. This is a matter of interest, given the affinity between care ethics and virtue ethics. Accordingly, this study will conclude by evaluating the elements of care ethics which are present within these sources.

In his article on Liberal Quakers, Scully brings up an interesting point about Quakerism in general, and this idea is interesting enough that it ought to be applied to Conservative and Evangelical thinking as well. He suggests that Liberal Quakers practice care ethics, which he defines “as an orientation that prioritises relationality and empathy, rather than rights and

autonomy.”¹²⁶ Some voices within academia have apparently argued that “care ethics is a subspecies of virtue ethics,” while others have called it “a broader concept that has a place in other ethical theories and approaches as well.”¹²⁷

Since Quakers appear to consider factors of relationality more than factors relating to justice, according to Scully, he argues that many of the virtues and values of Quakers lead them to take a position of care ethics. Research suggests that care ethics is practiced by “many socially marginalised groups,” suggesting in turn that Quakers view themselves as such a group.¹²⁸

Ciancio’s book appears to be in strong support of a care-ethics approach. When considering specific examples of moral dilemmas, he utilizes a particularistic outlook which molds itself depending on the care factors involved. He criticizes those who take absolutist positions on abortion, arguing that one should consider whether the pregnant woman is in danger of losing her life and whether that woman was made pregnant against their will. Ultimately, Ciancio expresses concern for both those who have an unwanted pregnancy and the fetuses which are under consideration for abortion. And, regardless of the circumstances under which a person has an abortion, he urges that others follow the example of Jesus Christ’s “loving compassion for sinners and outcasts.”¹²⁹ When considering whether or not people should be kept alive if they will only be able to live in a vegetative state, Ciancio believes that people should be treated in the way in which they have indicated that they want to be treated. He is against absolute rules stating that a person should never have a feeding tube withdrawn, since such a rule would “offer no benefit to the patient, but may cause more discomfort and pain.”¹³⁰ In both of

¹²⁶ Scully, “Virtuous Friends,” 117.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 117-118.

¹²⁹ Ciancio, *Where Christ Presides*, 95.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 102.

these situations, one can see that Ciancio is being empathetic and, to a large degree, trying to minimize harm by taking on the perspectives of those whom he is thinking about.

A reader can also find a trend of care ethics within Ciancio's presentation of Jesus Christ. When describing the traits which make Christ a perfect moral agent and an ideal role model, he designates "compassion" as the moral trait of Christ which is overlooked "most of all."¹³¹ Later, Ciancio argues that the ability to see goodness in all people made Jesus especially admirable. Christ could perceive the good in a Roman centurion, "some Pharisees," "tax gatherers, Gentiles, prostitutes, the sick, and sinners of all sorts."¹³² This wide assortment of people included members of an occupying military force, Christ's own ideological opponents, and "the outcasts of his society," but this did not prevent Christ from accepting and caring for them.¹³³ In these ways, Christ, as depicted by Ciancio, can be seen as a very committed care ethicist.

The report of the Evangelical conference also contains components which could easily be viewed as instances of care. In one case, T. Eugene Coffin says that "compassion" describes both "The motive of evangelism in our Friends Churches" and the attitude of Jesus.¹³⁴ Howard E. Kershner, too, has some things to say on this matter. He explains that punishment, a retributive form of justice, fails to help people and merely cements the negative behaviors of the person being punished. Jesus, he claims, took a different approach and decided to instead change people through love. This, according to Kershner, led Christ to forgive sinners who were willing to repent and should lead ordinary people to be forgiving towards others.¹³⁵ The Evangelical branch

¹³¹ Ibid., 34.

¹³² Ibid., 126.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Coffin, "Work of an Evangelist," 21.

¹³⁵ Howard E. Kershner, "Taking Away Sin," in *Report of Fourth Triennial Conference of Evangelical Friends Held at Denver Friends Church. Denver, Colorado. July 11 to 15, 1956*, 36.

of Quakerism also appears to have invested itself in the idea of a Christ who lived according to the ethics of care.

The relations of contemporary Quakerism to systems of care ethics do not necessarily make the moral ideas of Quakers more like or less like standard virtue ethics, as conceptually defined earlier. However, these considerations do provide an additional dimension through which this study can be viewed and may provide a suggestion for future research.

CONCLUSION

This research project has attempted to understand how Quakers are able to arrive at norms for action despite their lack of a creed. Belief has been described as the foundation of reasoning, something influenced by historical and cultural contexts, and a factor which establishes contrasts between groups of people. Though always complex and often difficult, belief's key role in the experience of being human makes it a necessary concept to use when studying religions. Taking the Nicene Creed as paradigmatic, creeds may be defined as explicit statements which express beliefs relating to both matters of doctrine and matters of proper living. To arrive at a better understanding of how Quakers could effectively conduct themselves without creeds, this project proposes that many Quakers utilize an ethical approach or attitude which closely parallels virtue ethics. For the purposes of this project, virtue ethics was defined as an ethical method which has all of or most of the following traits: an aversion to making decisions based on authoritative rules or commands, an emphasis on inward character over outward actions, a belief in habit as a major factor which influences the development of character, a consideration of virtues as guidelines which steer a person away from vices and undesirable

extremes, a valuing of role modeling as a way of moral instruction, and a preference for particularistic moral reasoning.

With these concepts in mind, this project studied an important guide to prayer from Quietist Quakerism, a scholarly report on the ethical processes of Liberal Quakers, a contemporary book written by a Conservative Quaker, and a report on a conference of Evangelical Quakers. Having examined these sources, it is apparent that the practices of the Quietist Quakers bore enough resemblance to virtue ethics to be notable. In the modern day, the thinking of Liberal Quakers and Conservative Quakers bears heavily resemblances to the thinking of virtue ethicists. Evangelical Quakers, however, express positions which have only a few commonalities with virtue ethics and many contrasts with virtue ethics. Additionally, the Liberal, Conservative, and Evangelical branches of contemporary Quakerism all contain characteristics of care ethics.

This study hoped to shed light both on Quaker ethics specifically and religious belief in general. On the matter of Quaker ethics, it has shown that two of the three major branches of the faith which currently exist employ ethical methods which are very similar to the standards of virtue ethics. This strain of thought can also be seen in their Quietist forerunners. Importantly, this similarity with virtue ethics does not appear to be due to an explicit attempt on the part of Quakers to mimic that school of thought. It seems, instead, to be due to certain values, traditions, and historical observations which predispose Liberals and Conservatives to act in ways which highly resemble virtue ethics. Evangelicals, meanwhile, appear to follow deontological rules and commands due to the high degree to which their branch is grounded in particular documents and articles of belief, such as the 1887 Richmond Declaration of Faith.

Those conclusions about the case of Quakerism lead into some conclusions about religious belief in general. It would appear that creeds are not necessary to religious life. Even without a creed, religions can function by fashioning their ethics from their values, their traditions, their histories, and observations about the histories of other peoples. One might respond by saying that such components play a role in the ethical considerations of all groups of people, from families to businesses to militaries and so on. Far from a mundane and obvious point, this might be saying something profound. It may indicate that many religions are unique in their ethical reasoning because of creeds and that religions without creeds must naturally turn to values, traditions, and history just as nonreligious groups would. This is not to say that religious groups will necessarily come to the same ethical determinations as nonreligious groups but that, without a creed to create a firm division which sets them apart from all other persons, religious groups must use the same methods of coming to their determinations that everyone else does.

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