

“The Jews” and “the Pharisees”
in Early Quaker Polemic

Clay Javier Boggs

Department of History

Temple University

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In the beginning, it seemed as though the medieval thinkers replicated me.

—Kalman Bland¹

Introduction

Ever since George Fox wrote his *Journal* in the 1670s, the creation and maintenance of Quaker archives and the writing of Quaker history has largely remained within the domain of members of the Society of Friends. Such exclusivity has had its costs. Quaker historiography has been characterized by hagiography and apology, as denominational historians project their idealized versions of the Society of Friends onto the early movement. The early Quakers have thus tended to “replicate” their historians.

In the twentieth century, leading Quaker scholars such as Rufus Jones, Hugh Barbour and Douglas Gwyn have written sympathetic histories of the early Friends that reflect their own vision for contemporary Quakerism. Rufus Jones, who promoted a liberal and mystical Quakerism, represented the early Quakers as Spiritualists who drew from a continental tradition of mysticism.² Hugh Barbour, who was motivated by the ecumenical desire to “open the way for deeper discussions between liberal and conservative Quakers, as well as between Friends and non-Friends,” described the early Quakers as Protestants who fully belonged to the Puritan milieu.³ Douglas Gwyn, who intended to reinvigorate the Society of Friends with a passion for transformation, attempted to re-write early Quakers as an apocalyptic movement.⁴ These efforts at denominational history have used early Quakers as a foil to promote their visions for contemporary Quakerism, and, in the process, replicated Quaker historiography as an essentially filio-pietistic pursuit.⁵

In the past fifty years, the denominational tradition within Quaker historiography has begun to weaken its grip. Social, cultural and political historians, such as Christopher Hill, Barry

Reay and Leo Damrosch have written histories of the early Quakers that break free from the restraints of hagiography. More critical analysis of the early Quakers, their ideas, and their role in society has challenged the perception that early Friends were saints. Scholars such as Hill, Reay and Damrosch have criticized the effects of the denominational influence on Quaker historiography from George Fox's time to the twentieth century⁶

Although these critiques reveal the limits of traditional Quaker historiography, they do not negate the important role that history plays in contemporary Quaker life. The Society of Friends has much to learn from its past that may not be of interest to political, social or even religious historians of seventeenth-century England. However, Friends need to listen to the concerns of non-Quaker scholars who have witnessed our historiographical practices from the outside. Making George Fox and his cohort into saints (or idealized versions of ourselves) makes bad history. It also makes inhibits our ability to think critically about our own practices. As H. Larry Ingle writes,

The ultimate tragedy of this myopic course for Quakerism, however, is even more profound. Having no theologians, the Society of Friends depends on historians to keep the human key to its repository of past traditions and experiences. For this reason, if for no other, Quaker practitioners of history have an important added inducement for accuracy and completeness.⁷

Ingle lays out the costs of hagiography for the Society of Friends. When Quaker historians get the early movement wrong, the denomination loses a rich source of “traditions and experiences.” Ingle, who is a thoroughgoing critic of Quaker historiography, still sees a vital function for Quaker history by-and-for Quakers. Seeing seventeenth-century Friends as they really were could give contemporary co-religionists access to the practices, thoughts and feelings of our forebears, providing us with an essential means for self-reflection.

Like Ingle, I take the position that Quaker history plays a necessary role in the religious life of contemporary Friends. I am enthusiastic about the prospects for a denominational history that transcends hagiography and apology. What if we let go of the assumption that early Quakers were saints allowed them to emerge as the complex historical figures that they really were? What if we let go of using the Quakers as a foil to convince others to think like us, and instead used our history as a way to “think differently”?⁸ A history that engages critically with the early Quakers has the potential to create new insights about our religious and cultural heritages, even when they create discomfort.

In this essay, I attempt to begin such a history by interrogating the rhetoric of printed debates between early Quakers and Puritans. When the Quaker movement emerged in the early 1650s, it was greeted with hostility by mainstream puritans. The Quakers, in turn, singled out puritan ministers and educational institutions for harsh criticism. Some commentators have suggested that the debates between Quakers and Puritans were mostly a matter of posturing, vitriol and misunderstanding.⁹ Others have emphasized the substantive issues—such as the nature of Christ and the proper organization of the ministry—were at the heart of the Quaker-Puritan conflicts.¹⁰ In this essay, I do not focus on the content of the arguments between Quakers and Puritans. Instead, I focus on the rhetorical techniques that Quakers employed in their polemics against Puritans.¹¹ Specifically, I draw attention to the early Quaker practice of comparing Puritans to Jews. Quakers interpreted New Testament portrayals of Jews as evidence of an essential opposition between Jews and Christ. As a result of their naïve reading of Scripture, early Quakers generally viewed first-century Jews as irreconcilably “other.”¹² The trope of “the Pharisees” came to stand for corrupt and false religion, while the trope of “the Jews” came to stand for bibliolatry—excessive worship of the Scriptures. A careful examination

of the anti-Judaic tropes in early Quaker polemics can lead us to key insights about how early Quakers interpreted the Bible and the consequences of their exegetical practices when it came to the politics of identity. Additionally, the echoes of this practice can be detected in quotidian practices of contemporary Friends. For example, “Lord of the Dance,” a twentieth-century song that is included in Quaker hymnals, replicates this biased and disturbing view of Jewish history. By interrogating the tropes of “the Jews” and “the Pharisees” in early Quaker writings, I hope to open up space for critical discussion about the ways that the reverberation of these tropes can still be felt in contemporary Quakerism.

My essay progresses as follows. In section one, I use a 1655 printed exchange between James Nayler and the famous Puritan minister Richard Baxter to examine the ways that Quakers used “the Pharisees” to signify the embodiment of religious corruption. In section two, I use George Fox’s defense in the 1653 Quaker tract, *Saul’s Errand to Damascus*, to show how Quakers used “the Jews” as the paradigmatic example of bibliolatry. In my conclusion, I attend to the echoes and reverberations of the early Quakers’ tropes in contemporary Quaker practice by analyzing the presence of “the Scribes and the Pharisees” in the Quaker hymn, “Lord of the Dance.”

1: “In the Steps of the Pharisees”

Between his conversion in 1651 and his “fall” in 1656, James Nayler rose to prominence among the ranks of the nascent Quaker movement.¹³ Although some thought of him as the leader of Quakers during this period, it is probably more accurate to describe him as the movement’s chief polemicist, for the leader of the Quakers was George Fox, whom I discuss below.¹⁴ Nayler gained notoriety in 1656 when he entered the town of Bristol seated upon a horse in apparent imitation of Christ’s entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Tried by parliament, Nayler was

whipped, branded with a “B” (for blasphemy), and a hole was bored in his tongue. Thereafter, he became a rather uncomfortable figure for Quakers.¹⁵ As biographer Mabel Richmond Brailsford put it, James Nayler was a “skeleton in the Quaker cupboard.”¹⁶ Recent scholarship has attempted to release Nayler from the bind of denominational historiography’s shame.¹⁷

Nayler’s opponent, Richard Baxter, was a leading Puritan minister. He served the parish of Kidderminster during the 1650’s. In 1653, he set up the Worcestershire Association for parish pastors and is credited with promoting the Puritan parish system. He was also a prolific writer and in 1673 published the important work on puritan ethics, *Christian Directory*, for which he is best known.¹⁸

According to Baxter, a number of Quakers came to Richard Baxter’s service on a day when he was not there. They interrogated and heckled the minister and then left. Quakers also sent him a number of antagonistic letters and queries.¹⁹ In response to both the episode and the correspondence, Baxter published *The Quakers Catechism* in 1655. The fifty-two-page tract opens with a number of short sections. In “To the Reader,” Baxter explains his purpose in writing about the Quakers and tells of the many ways that they have been bothering him. Two other epistles follow: “To the Separatists and Independents in England” and “An Answer to a young unsettled Friend, who before inclining strongly to Anabaptistry, at last fell in with the Quakers, and desired my thoughts of them and their waies, which seemed to him agreeable to the Scriptures.” Baxter then attaches a testimony of one George Cowlshaw, who claims to have spoken with an Irish Franciscan who identified some Quakers as fellow Franciscians. In the main body of the tract, Baxter answers the Quakers’ twenty-four queries one by one and then offers a number of his own. The queries concern those topics that were most heatedly debated by Quakers and Puritans: tithes, the possibility of freedom from sin, the nature of Scripture and the

institution of ministry.²⁰ In Baxter's twenty queries to the Quakers, he accuses Quakers of being papists (hence the importance of Cowlinshaw's testimony). More generally, he charges that they are not only proud and arrogant, but that they are actually in league with Satan.²¹

James Nayler responded to Baxter's tract in the same year. The structure of Nayler's book, *An Answer to a book called The Quakers' Catechism*, mirrors Baxter's tract, as Nayler replies to each section separately. He thus replies not only to Baxter's twenty queries, but challenges Baxter's replies to the Quakers' original queries. In the final section of the book Nayler offers his own fourteen queries to Baxter, which focus on the importance of the Inner Light and the Spirit.

The exchange between the Quakers and Baxter and then Nayler is therefore quite complex in its inter-textuality and is highly segmented. In this section, I focus on query nineteen of the Quakers' original queries, to which Baxter and Nayler each devote a great deal of attention. The query reads, "Whether they that stand praying in the Synagogues or Idols Temples, and love greetings in the markets, and bindes heavy burthens on the people, and are called of men Master, be not out of Christs Doctrine?"²² The query itself is almost entirely excerpted from Matthew 23, of which the relevant passages are:

- 23:4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay *them* on men's shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers.
- 23:6 And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues.
- 23:7 And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.
- 23:8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, *even* Christ; and all ye are brethren.

The Quakers cobbled together query nineteen from these passages, interpolating only the phrase "idols temples" and the framing "whether...be not out of Christs Doctrine?"²³ It will become clear, as I discuss how Baxter's response and then Nayler's counter-response, how the concerned parties interpreted the query. First, however, I want to briefly interpret the original passages. My

argument in this essay is that the Quakers based their tropes of “the Jews” and “the Pharisees” on polemical New Testament representations of first-century Jews. It is therefore of primary importance to examine those representations themselves.

It is generally recognized that the Gospels as a whole, and Matthew in particular, contain a great deal of polemic against the Pharisees, a first-century Jewish sect that emphasized Torah study and strict observance of the Law. Rabbinical Jews generally identify the Pharisees as their predecessors.²⁴ The entire passage of Matthew 23 is a denunciation of the Scribes and Pharisees, in which Jesus advises his followers “whatsoever they bid you observe...but not ye after their workes, for they say, and doe not” (Matthew 23:3). Jesus is saying, in other words, that the Scribes and Pharisees are hypocrites, and his followers should therefore do as they say, not as they do. The polemic of Matthew is best understood as a reflection of Matthean Christians’ conflicts with the Pharisees, another Jewish sect. Both of these Jewish groups wanted to lead Israel, but it was the Pharisees who, following the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., were ultimately successful.²⁵

The gospel of Matthew expresses its resentment through the words of Jesus, who represents the Scribes and Pharisees as “hypocrites.” Once reified as scripture, the historical conflict between the Matthean Christians and the Pharisees became timeless. Quakers and Puritans read Matthew 23—a polemical representation of Jewish history—as a sacred text that mediated access to eternal truth. As a result, they reproduced a vision of first-century Jews as opposed to Christ. It is to the Quaker and Puritan (as represented by James Nayler and Richard Baxter) representation of the Pharisees that I now turn.

Baxter’s reply to query nineteen, as I have mentioned, is lengthy. His main argument is that Quakers misunderstood the reasons why Jesus condemned the Pharisees. It was the pride

and hypocrisy of the Pharisees, not the visible practices of their ministry, which set them at odds with Christ.

If you are not willfully blinde you may perceive that it is not all the external actions mentioned (Matt. 23) that Christ condemne, but the pride and hypocrisy which the Pharisees manifested in them. Mark first that he bids men even hear the hypocriticall Scribes and Pharisees, and observe and do what they bid men observe and do, because they sate in Moses chair. It is not therefore all the faults there charged on them that will acquit men from observation of their doctrine. Is this agreeable to your practice who damn men that despise not and reject not Christs most upright and faithful ministers? Their sin is laid down in the fifth verse] *All their works they do to be seen of men.*] Prove this by us if you can?²⁶

Baxter defends himself against association with the Pharisees by arguing their “pride” and “hypocrisy” was distinct from their ministry, which was merely pious and observant.²⁷ Baxter goes on to refuse to apologize for being called “Master,” arguing that it was not the precise term, “Master,” to which Christ objected, but rather the absolute obedience which Pharisees demanded of their pupils. Indeed, Baxter argues that this same level of strictness is found in Catholics’ obedience to the Pope.²⁸

Nayler defends the Quakers’ original ideas of what was wrong with the Pharisees. He argues that the “pride” and “hypocrisy” of the Pharisees were inseparable from their actions.

And thou goes on and where you cannot deny but thou art in the steps of the PHARISEES yet sayes thou, I do not love it, they loved it to be called Master, & c. but I do not; well, thou sayes in words thou loves it not but come to thy practice, and it will appear thou who art but one, hast made more lyes and crooked wayes to uphold it in this thy book, then all the generations of thy fathers the Pharisees.”²⁹

Nayler argues that Baxter’s practice gives the lie to his statements and proves that he is as “proud” and “hypocritical” as the Pharisees. He then argues that Baxter’s defense, since it is clearly a lie, makes him a liar worse than the Pharisees. Since Nayler reads the polemical New Testament representations of the Pharisees as eternal truth, he can deploy “the Pharisees” as a trope for “pride” and “hypocrisy” in his argumentation against Puritan institutions of ministry.

By assuming that this biased and pejorative idea of the Pharisees can be taken for granted, Nayler replicates anti-Judaic polemic as “common-sense.”³⁰

Nayler goes on to dismiss Baxter’s defense of the term “Master.” He admits that Pharisees and the Pope both command absolute authority and demand complete obedience but argues that Puritans engage in the same practice. Hence,

Thou may read on all the rest of thy charge against the Pope, and find thy selfe guilty, and stop thy mouth, and see the Pharisees, the Pope, and thee, and thy brethren, all on a Line, and that it is not words we contend about, but your whole practice, which being found in and condemned, words and meanings cannot hide you.³¹

The metaphor of a “Line” serves to unite Pharisees and the Pope with Baxter and the Puritans. They all share a practice that is opposed to Christ. Here again, the argumentation is enabled by the trope of “the Pharisees” (and now “the Pope”), which signifies “pride” and “hypocrisy,” and, more generally, a “false” and “anti-Christian” ministry. Nayler’s extended efforts to associate Baxter with “the Pharisees” rest upon an interpretation of New Testament polemic against the Pharisees as indisputable truth.

There were serious issues at stake in the dispute between Baxter and the Quakers. They had profoundly different visions of what “true” Christian ministry looked like. However, even as they contested the meaning of “the Pharisees,” both sides took for granted that the New Testament portrayed the Pharisees accurately. For both, “the Pharisees” could be deployed as a rhetorical weapon. The tragic consequence of this practice was that the rhetoric of Quaker-Puritan debate reproduced the distorted image of Pharisees that New Testament authors had used as rhetoric in their own debates with Pharisees and thus contributed to the history of anti-Judaism.³²

2: “For the Jewes which had the letter, persecuted Jesus Christ the Substance”

While James Nayler was the chief polemicist of the early Quakers, it is clear that George

Fox was the spiritual leader of the movement. At age nineteen, the melancholy Fox left home to wander about the country and began to preach in the north of England in the late 1640s. He gathered followers, who became the nascent Quaker movement. A pragmatic visionary, Fox sustained many challenges to his leadership and oversaw the transformation of the Quakers from an enthusiastic movement to a disciplined sect as they responded to increasing persecution following the 1660 Restoration.³³

Published in 1653, *Saul's Errand to Damascus* was the first major work of anti-Puritan polemic that the Quakers printed. It followed the trails of Fox and Nayler at Lancaster and Appleby on charges of blasphemy. The purpose of the pamphlet, however, was to respond to a petition to Lord Protector Cromwell that Puritan ministers intended to publish. In fact, *Saul's Errand* reached the London public before the petition of their interlocutors was published and was so effective that the Quakers' opponents decided to forgo printing the document. The puritan minister Francis Higginson later responded with his pamphlet, *The Irreligion of the Northern Quakers* (1653).³⁴

It seems that at least three Quakers, Fox, Nayler and John Lawson, co-authored *Saul's Errand*. The pamphlet is best described as a compilation of documents and does not follow the thread of a single debate in the manner of Baxter's *Quakers' Catechism* or Naylers' *Answer*. It begins with three short introductory notes: "to all that love the Lord Jesus Christ;" "To the Contrivers and Subscribers of this Petition," and "to the Christian Reader." It is unclear who wrote these introductory passages. What follows is the Puritans' petition, quoted in its (apparent) entirety. The first portion of the short document attempts to show that Fox and Nayler promote dangerous ideas that will lead to the "destruction" of society. In the second portion, the Puritans accuse Fox of six specific blasphemies and level further charges against Fox's cohorts James

Milner, Leonard Fell and Richard Hubberthorne. Fox and Nayler each respond to the petition line by line. Then, Nayler gives an account of his “persecution” by the “Priests of Westmerland [sic]” In a final and brief note, John Lawson responds to the charge that he claims to have been resurrected. The following analysis is concerned exclusively with Fox’s response to the Westmoreland petition.

The issues that are raised by the petition were hardly incidental to the debate between Quakers and Puritans. Portraying the Quakers as dangerous subversives was partly rhetoric intended for a Parliamentary audience, but it also reflected the Puritans’ serious disagreements with the Quakers. Two points in particular are emphasized in the pamphlet. The first concerns Scripture. For Puritans, the Bible was the source of religious authority, and study of the Bible was *the* spiritual practice of puritan ministers. Quakers, however, saw the Bible as secondary to the Spirit that had inspired its authors. Scripture could not be interpreted without that Spirit, and so it was the Spirit, not the Scriptures, that provided the ultimate source of authority for early Quakers. The petition also reflects the Puritan-Quaker disagreements about the theological meaning of Christ. The idea that Christ dwelt in man [sic] was common to Puritans and Quakers, but they had different ideas about how Christ related to the host. Puritans saw an irreconcilable chasm between the perfection of Christ and the sin of man [sic], while Quakers believed that Christ and the Saints could become one. For the Puritans, this was blasphemy, and their discomfort is clearly reflected in the petition.³⁵ It is in Fox’s discourse on Scripture that he mobilizes “the Jews” as a trope, and I will therefore focus on that discourse here.

Fox responded to the charge that “George Fox said the Scripture was carnal” with the following defense:

The letter of the Scripture is carnal, and the Letter is death, and killeth but the Spirit giveth life, which was in them that gave forth the Scriptures that I witness, which is

eternal and not carnal: for the *Jewes* which had the Letter, persecuted Jesus Christ the substance: and so do you now, which have the Letter, and not the Substance: there were Ministers of the Letter then, and ministers of the Spirit, so there is now; the same Christ being manifest, is unknown to the world...³⁶

In this passage, Fox mobilizes the New Testament extensively to answer the Puritans' charges. The first portion is a summary of the Quaker position on the Scripture, ("The letter of the Scripture is carnal, and the Letter is death, and killeth but the Spirit giveth life, which was in them that gave forth the Scriptures that I witness, which is eternal and not carnal") which subordinates the carnal "Letter" of the Scripture to the "Spirit" that inspired the Scripture's authors. Fox cites Hebrews 7:16, "Who is made not after the Law of a carnall commandement, but after the power of an endless life," which lays out the major Pauline dualisms of flesh and spirit and Law and Christ. His words also echo II Corinthians 3:6, "Who also hath made vs able ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giueth life," which opposes the "letter" with the "spirit." Fox uses Paul's binary oppositions of "flesh" and "spirit" and "letter" and "spirit" (which subordinate "flesh" and "letter" to "spirit") to argue for the Quaker position that the "spirit" is the primary source of religious authority and that the scripture in and of itself is an unreliable guide.³⁷

Fox's use of the New Testament does not end with the opposition of "letter" and "spirit." In the second portion of the passage ("for the *Jewes* which had the Letter, persecuted Jesus Christ the substance"), Fox employs the trope of "the Jews" to argue that the "spirit" is more important than "the letter." His evidence for this is that the Jews "persecuted Christ." This use of "the Jews" as a trope depends on two key ideas about first-century Jews, both of which come from an uncritical reading of the New Testament. The first idea is that first-century Jews were legalistic and hypocritical, which is the argument that I have located above in Matthew 23. This portrayal of Jews as legalistic and Christians as spiritual was an act of polemic, although it

continues to be read as historical truth.³⁸ In Fox's discourse, it is grafted on to the binary opposition of "flesh"/"letter" and "spirit," so that Jews are associated with the "flesh"/ "letter" and Christians are associated with the "spirit." Hence, "the Jews had the letter" signifies the New Testament charge that Judaism was characterized by hypocrisy and formalism. The second idea of Jewish history that enables Fox's trope is the notion of Jews as "Christ-killers," or persecutors of Christ. Responsibility for the death of Jesus is handled differently in each of the gospels. Of the canonical gospels, John is clearest in condemning "the Jews," as a people, for the death of Christ.³⁹ The following passage is exemplary

And thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friends: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgement seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gab'ba-tha. And it was the preparation of the Passover, and about the sixth hour: and he said unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate said unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar. Then delivered he him unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away. And bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Gol' ga-tha: Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst (John 19:12-16).

John is unambiguous about Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus. Pilate, the Roman authority, attempts to free Jesus, but the Jewish crowds all desire his death. So Pilate releases Jesus to the Jews, who take him to Golgatha and crucify him. Like the stark contrast between legalistic Pharisees and spiritual Christians, John's story about the death of Jesus reflects historical conflicts between Christians and Pharisees in the first-century. Gospel passages that allege that Jews persecuted and killed Jesus have a particularly troubling history of interpretation. For instance, the "mystery plays" of Medieval Europe emphasized Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus and were often followed by anti-Jewish violence. The death of Jesus became a story that, to borrow Crossan's phrase, "sent people out to kill."⁴⁰ Such was

the violent discourse that Fox evoked when he attempted to associate his puritan opponents with “the Jews” who “persecuted Jesus.”

Having established that “the letter” did not stop “the Jews” from killing Jesus, Fox goes on to identify Puritans with “the Jews” and Quakers with Christ (“and so do you now, which have the Letter, and not the Substance: there were Ministers of the Letter then, and ministers of the Spirit, so there is now; the same Christ being manifest, is unknown to the world”). Just as “the Jews” persecuted Christ, so do the Puritans persecute the Quakers. Puritans are just like “the Jews”; Quakers are just like Christ. Just as Nayler sets up “the Pharisees, the Pope, and thee, and thy brethren, all on a Line,” Fox posits a dualistic moral universe. There is Christ, and then there are those who persecute Christ. Quakers are on one side of the line; Jews and Puritans are clearly on the other.

In the short passage from *Saul’s Errand to Damascus* that I have analyzed here, Fox deploys the New Testament to construct “the Jews” as a trope that props up his argument that Scripture is secondary to Spirit. He reifies the idea that early Christians were “spiritual,” while first-century Jews were “legalistic.” More disturbingly, he reproduces the murderous myth of Jews as “Christ-killers.” Then Fox sets up a Manichean morality in which Quakers and Christ are opposed to Puritans and Jews. Fox’s reproduction of “the Jews” as “Other” is an effective rhetorical device with destructive consequences.

3. “They would not dance.”

In important polemical works, George Fox and James Nayler attempt to compare their Puritan opponents to first-century Jews. Fox uses the trope of “the Jews” to support his argument that Scripture is secondary to the Spirit. In doing so, he draws on New Testament representations of Pharisaical legalism and Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus. He also evokes the

medieval idea of Jews as “Christ-killers,” with all of its disastrous consequences. Nayler’s use of “the Pharisees” to criticize the institutional ministry of Puritan opponents depends on Matthew’s polemic against Pharisees, which portrays them as “hypocritical” and “legalistic.” In both cases, Quaker writers read the New Testament as eternal truth. In both cases, the consequence was the replication of historical antagonisms that were embedded in the Christian scriptures and the reification of “the Jews” as “Other.” *An Answer to a Book Called the Quakers’ Catechism* and *Saul’s Errand to Damascus* demonstrate the consequences of reading anti-Judaic passages in the New Testament as divinely inspired truth without considering the polemical aims of those passages or the historical tragedy of Christian anti-Judaism.⁴¹ For contemporary Friends, acknowledging the shortcomings of our movement’s founders can remind us that we are not immune to anti-Judaic readings of the New Testament. In this concluding section, I want to suggest that such interpretations can be found in contemporary Quaker texts and practices.

Sydney Carter’s hymn, “Lord of the Dance,” is not an exclusively Quaker song, but it is included in *Worship in Song*, the hymnal of liberal Quakers. It is regularly sung at Quaker events (I remember singing it in youth group on Sunday mornings as a child) and is therefore part of Quaker practice. The song belongs to a very different genre than the polemics by Fox and Nayler that I have examined here. Carter is not attempting to defend Quaker ideas against antagonists, but rather is trying to promote the idea of Christ as a spontaneous, free and joyous spirituality—“The Lord of the Dance.” Yet Carter, like Nayler and Fox, engages in the practice of defining “Christian-ness” (or “good religion”) against the tropes of “the Jews” and “the Pharisees.” His portrayal of Christ as “dance” depends on the idea that first-century Jews represented the opposite of “dance.” Watch the way that he contrasts the disciples with “the scribes and the pharisee”

I danced for the scribe
 And the pharisee,
 But they would not dance
 And they wouldn't follow me.
 I danced for the fishermen,
 For James and John -
 They came with me
 And the Dance went on.⁴²

For Carter, “the scribe and pharisee” refuse to see the joy, freedom and spontaneity that the message of Christ represents. Where Nayler used the trope of “the Pharisees” to charge Puritans with hypocrisy and corrupt ministry, Carter deploys “the scribe and the pharisee” to contrast the Christian “dance” with the “stubbornness” and “blindness” of the Jews, a trope that originated in the New Testament dichotomy between “believing Gentiles” (James and John) and “unbelieving Jews” (“the scribe and Pharisee”).⁴³ Such a reading of the New Testament lacks historical awareness at best and is anti-Judaic at worst. Carter’s discussion of the death of Jesus, while somewhat less explicit, does little to challenge the murderous myth that “the Jews” killed Christ.

I danced on the Sabbath
 And I cured the lame;
 The holy people
 Said it was a shame.
 They whipped and they stripped
 And they hung me on high,
 And they left me there
 On a Cross to die.

The vagueness of the term “holy people” and the use of the pronoun “they” could perhaps be seen as an effort to mitigate the anti-Judaism of the gospel stories of the death of Jesus. Carter does not explicitly charge Jews with responsibility for the death of Jesus, but opts for the generic “holy people.” However, it is difficult to see how “dancing on the Sabbath” would offend any “holy people” but Jews. The Gospels are replete with stories of Jews being offended when Jesus cures people on the Sabbath. In Matthew 12, Jesus heals people on the Sabbath, and the

Pharisees are so upset that they held a counsel against him, how they might destroy him” (Matthew 12:14). As it turns out, “holy people” merely stands for (and does not displace) “the Jews” as the persecutors of Christ. Carter includes a footnote claiming that “they” refers to the authorities responsible for the crucifixion, mainly the Romans.”⁴⁴ Such an argument, given the song’s repeated invocations of anti-Judaic polemic in the New Testament, hardly inspires confidence. I have already discussed the consequences of the idea that “the Jews” killed Jesus. Carter’s use of this murderous myth is disturbing in light of this history. As a Quaker, I am especially concerned that this song remains in our hymnal and that Quaker children grow up singing songs (as I did) that reify the Manichean dualism of Jesus and “the Jews.” The message of “Lord of the Dance” contradicts the “Guiding Principles for Hymn and Song Selection” used for *Worship in Song*, especially the principle claiming that “The book as a whole will be inclusive within a Quaker understanding of theology, gender, images of the Divine.”⁴⁵ The anti-Judaic theology that “The Lord of the Dance” promotes only qualifies as “inclusive” in the narrowest sense.

The reappearance of anti-Judaic tropes in Quaker hymnals signifies the urgent need for contemporary Friends to reconsider our history. I am not suggesting that we should give up looking to the early Friends for inspiration, or that there is little in our past we can be truly proud of. The never-ending search for our “roots” in the early Quaker movement (as well as our increasingly ambivalent engagement with our “roots” among the early Christians) is as necessary as it is fraught. What I am suggesting, rather, is that we attempt to temper the desire to assimilate the early Quakers to ourselves (or ourselves to them) by acknowledging both the ways we are different from our religious predecessors as well as the more problematic aspects of our inheritances.

Notes

¹ Kalman Bland, “Medievals are Not Us,” in Laura Levitt and Miriam Peskowitz, eds. *Judaism Since Gender*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

² See Melvin B. Endy Jr., “The Interpretation of Quakerism: Rufus Jones and His Critics.” *Quaker History* 70, no. 1 (1981): 3-21; H. Larry Ingle, “From Mysticism to Radicalism: Recent Historiography of Quaker Beginnings” *Quaker History* 76, no. 2 (1987): 79-82.

³ Hugh Barbour, *The Quakers in Puritan England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), xi. See also Hugh Barbour and Arthur O. Roberts, *Early Quaker Writings, 1650-1700* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), 16n.

⁴ Douglas Gwyn, *Apocalypse of the Word: The Life and Message of George Fox* (Richmond, Ind.: Friends United Press, 1986), xi.

⁵ For thoughtful commentary on twentieth century Quaker historiography, see Endy, “The Interpretation of Quakerism” and Ingle, “From Mysticism to Radicalism.”

⁶ See, for example, Leo Damrosch, *The Sorrows of the Quaker Jesus: James Nayler and the Puritan Crackdown on the Free Spirit* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Adrian Davies, *The Quakers in English Society, 1655-1725* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Barry Reay, *The Quakers and the English Revolution* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985); Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1975); Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Kate Peters, *Print Culture and the Early Quakers*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Catherine M. Wilcox, *Theology and Women’s Ministry in Seventeenth-Century English Quakerism : Handmaids of the Lord* (Lewiston, England: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995).

⁷ Ingle, “From Mysticism to Radicalism,” 94.

⁸ Hence, Foucault writes, “But, then, what is philosophy today—philosophical activity, I mean—if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: Volume 2 of The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 9.

⁹ See Barbour, *The Quakers in Puritan England*, 134-147.

¹⁰ See Damrosch, *The Sorrows of the Quaker Jesus*, *passim*.

¹¹ See Susan Shapiro, “A Matter of Discipline: Reading for Gender in Jewish Philosophy,” in Levitt and Peskowitz, eds. *Judaism Since Gender*, in which Shapiro makes a strong case for reading metaphor as constitutive of logic. Although she is primarily focused in the essay on Maimonides, the argument is a broader methodological one.

¹² My understanding of this process is indebted to Edward Said, who writes that “it seems a common human failing to prefer the schematic authority of a text to the disorientations of direct encounters with the human.” Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 93. Indeed, the tropes that I am concerned with here were produced at the same time that Quakers were in Amsterdam, where they met, and tried to convert, local Jews. In polemics, however, the Quakers based their portrait of “Jews” on the New Testament representations of Jews rather than the experiences of Quaker missionaries. There is a rich historiography on this topic. For an overview of the Quaker mission to Amsterdam, see William Hull, *The Rise of Quakerism in Amsterdam 1655-1665* (Philadelphia: Patterson & White Co., 1938) and Claus Bernet, “Quaker Missionaries in Holland and Germany in the late Seventeenth Century: Ames, Caton, and Furlly,” *Quaker History* 95, no. 2 (2006), 1-18.

¹³ Damrosch, *Sorrows of the Quaker Jesus*, 115.

¹⁴ Rosemary Anne Moore, *The Light in their Consciences : The Early Quakers in Britain, 1646-1666* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 23.

¹⁵ Damrosch, *Quaker Jesus*, 6.

¹⁶ Quoted in Damrosch, *Quaker Jesus*, 6.

¹⁷ See *ibid.*, *passim*.

¹⁸ N. H. Keeble, “Baxter, Richard (1615–1691),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), <http://shelob.ocis.temple.edu:2178/view/article/1734> (accessed April 6, 2007).; Barbour and Roberts, *Early Quaker Writings*, 263.

- ¹⁹ Richard Baxter. *The Quakers Catechism* (London: A.M. for Thomas Underhill, 1655), A3. Available online at *Early English Books Online* <http://shelob.ocis.temple.edu:2145/search> (accessed April 6, 2007).
- ²⁰ Baxter, *Quakers Catechism*, 1-25.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 25-36.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 15. Quakers frequently repeated this formulation (or some variation thereof) in polemic tracts. See, for example, For similar examples, see James Nayler, *The Works of James Nayler (1618-1660)*, vol. 1, ed. Licia Kuenning (Glenside, PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2003-), 4, 35, 49, 90, 99, 112, 215, 242, 387; George Fox. *True judgement* (London: Printed for Giles Calvert, 1654), 3,5; George Fox, *A Paper Sent into the World* (London: Giles Calvert, 1656), 1,2; George Fox, *A Message from the Lord: To the Parliament of England* (London, 1654), 4-5; George Fox, *To All that Would Know the Way* (London, 1654), 11,12. The works by Fox are all available online via *Early English Books Online*. It should be noted that the database at Early English Books Online is typographically sensitive and utilizes the original spelling. To my knowledge, the original queries sent to Baxter have not been preserved. However, James Nayler reprints the quote in *An Answer to a Book Called the Quakers Catechism* (London, 1655), 29. The edition of Nayler's pamphlet that I accessed is available online via Early English Books Online, where his works can be found under the name "Naylor, James," a typographical variation.
- ²³ For a thoughtful discussion of how "idolatry" represented "false religion" in the polemical discourses of seventeenth-century English Protestants, see S.J. Bartlett, *Idol Temples and Crafty Priests: The Origins of Enlightenment Anti-Clericalism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).
- ²⁴ For a basic description of the Pharisees and the bias against them in the New Testament, see Louis Jacobs, "Pharisees," in *A Concise Companion to the Jewish Religion* (Oxford University Press, 1999) *Oxford Reference Online*. http://shelob.ocis.temple.edu:2110/views/BOOK_SEARCH.html?book=t96 (Accessed April 6, 2007). For the relation between the Pharisees and rabbinical Jews, see also Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 2. For more on Christian-Jewish conflict in the first century, see also Rosemary Reuther, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury, 1974), ch. 2; and John Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes Toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), ch. 2.
- ²⁵ John Domenic Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper, 1995), 17.
- ²⁶ Baxter, *Quakers' Catechism*, 25-26.
- ²⁷ Baxter's defense the practices of the Pharisees seems to me a difficult argument to make, given Matthew 23:3 "All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, *that* observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not." This awkward interpretation (that Jesus did not criticize the ministry of the Pharisees) is a tacit admission that there were similarities between the Pharisees (as portrayed in the New Testament) and the Puritans. The Quakers exploited this apparent consensus by citing Matthew 23 frequently in anti-Puritan polemics.
- ²⁸ Baxter, *Quakers Catechism*, 17. It should be noted that in seventeenth century England, "Master" was a term equivalent to "Mister" or "Sir" in twenty-first century English. See "Master," in *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2006) Online edition. http://shelob.ocis.temple.edu:2233/cgi/entry/00303043?query_type=word&queryword=master&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&result_place=1&search_id=t7T9-VIROCI-4598&hilite=00303043 (accessed April 6, 2007).
- ²⁹ Nayler, *An Answer*, 29.
- ³⁰ In fact, it is not entirely clear that Nayler *knew* that New Testament representations of the Pharisees were anti-Judaic, because there is little evidence in his writings that he understood that Pharisees were a sect of first-century Judaism. Nowhere in his writings, to my knowledge, does Nayler identify "the Pharisees" as Jews. However, the Quakers' apparent ignorance about exactly who the Pharisees were confirms my overall argument: their representations of Jews were dependent on the New Testament rendition of Jewish history
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 30-31.
- ³² See Leon Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism*, vol. 1: *From the time of Christ to the court Jews* (New York: Vanguard, 1965).
- ³³ See H. Larry Ingle, *First Among Friends: George Fox and the Creation of Quakerism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- ³⁴ Damrosch discusses Higginson's pamphlet extensively in *Sorrows of the Quaker Jesus*, *passim*.
- ³⁵ Barbour, *The Quakers in Puritan England*, 139-140; Damrosch, *Sorrows of the Quaker Jesus*, 88-95.
- ³⁶ George Fox, *Saul's Errand to Damascus* (London: Giles Calvert, 1653), 7-8.

³⁷ On Paul's oppositions of "flesh" and "letter," on one hand, and "spirit," on the other, see Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, *passim*.

³⁸ Rosemary Reuther, *Faith and Fratricide*, 78.

³⁹ See John Domenic Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, 82-117.

⁴⁰ Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, 32. For the history of passion plays, see Poliakov, *History of Anti-Semitism*, 129-131.

⁴¹ Oldenhege, Tania. *Parables for our Time: Rereading New Testament Scholarship After the Holocaust*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

⁴² Sydney Carter, "Lord of the Dance," in *Worship in Song: A Friends Hymnal* (Philadelphia, PA: Friends General Conference, 1996), 115-116.

⁴³ See Reuther, *Faith and Fratricide*, 84.

⁴⁴ Carter, "Lord of the Dance," 115.

⁴⁵ *Worship in Song*, iv.

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