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The worship of the true and living God stands out of man's will and knowledge, wisdom or prudence, as in the natural; for God is a Spirit, and in Spirit he is worshipped; not with men's hands nor with bodily exercise, farther than by the eternal Spirit the body is exercised, nor doth it stand in meats and drinks, nor divers washings, nor carnal ordinances taken on by tradition or imitation of others, but as every creature is moved by the Spirit of the living God. (LL 3:63)

So that before any can rightly worship God they must wait to know his Spirit that leads to know him and his worship. . . . So that all who would so worship him as to be accepted, you must know the light, and in it wait to know what God calls for at your hands: for it is not what men appoint you to do or not to do that will acquit you before the Lord. (LL 3:63)

Nayler says clearly that worship is not of this world — it is not of the 'natural', which means that humans cannot by reason or by following instinct learn how to worship the living God; nor should they follow the ways taught by others or the traditions of their people or nation. Every creature should worship as they are moved by the Spirit of the living God, and to do that they must first know the Spirit of God and from the Spirit learn how to worship. This might seem to lead to very disparate forms of worship, all being moved in different ways, until one remembers that the Spirit is from God who is one and that the Spirit's leadings will be the same for all.

So that the way to be well-pleasing to the Father is to wait in the light till you see something of the Spirit of life which is in Christ Jesus moving in you, and then to that join, in its power to worship; and that being of God, he cannot forget himself; and that is done in the

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name of Christ, which is done in his light and power and wisdom and strength; and whatever is done in his name is not denied of the Father; . . . nor did any ever worship in this nature but they found acceptance and the knowledge thereof. (LL 3:63)

It is very important to Nayler to know that his worship is accepted by God, that it is not despised like Cain's sacrifice, that God is well pleased by what God sees. If the worship is carried out correctly in the Light, then the person is acquitted by the Lord. Nayler uses the word 'Father' for God. Although all are equal before God, we are certainly not all equal with God.

For this know, that *God made man for himself and for his service*, and the living God is not as the dumb idols, that people should imagine a way to serve him as may best suit with the fashion and custom of a nation or a people: but he that made man hath given him a life from himself, to improve it in his service; and a light hath he given wherewith to see the moving of this Spirit of life, which ever moves after the will of God, because it is of him; and so where it is awakened it ever draws the creature towards God; the mind, and will, and affections, and love of God is in it, and who walks in the light sees this. (LL 3:63–64)

I come from a secular background, and the italicized assertion above is not something I am comfortable with. 'Service' is a word that has connotations of class, of servitude, of 'following orders without thinking' that does not sit comfortably with the modern European sensibility or with the modern liberal Quaker way of doing things. We have to take it either as a way of expressing a common religious apprehension (for example, of dependence, obedience, or 'letting go') or as an aspect of Nayler's theology that is challenging for modern Quakers. But before dismissing this sentence, consider the second half, where he says the Spirit

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draws the creature towards God, and how this might be expressed today. See the following from the 2013 *Quaker faith and practice*:

Worship is the response of the human spirit to the presence of the divine and eternal, to the God who first seeks us. The sense of wonder and awe of the finite before the infinite leads naturally to thanksgiving and adoration. (QFP 2013, 2.01)

The treasure I had found [in meeting for worship] seemed startlingly simple. . . . I and others were to start just where we were at the moment and proceed at our own pace from there. How blessed that there were no constraints of belief. The promptings of love and truth were the starting places and we could move at our own pace to recognise them as the leadings of God – the beyond drew me and others on from our limitations and despairs and smallnesses. (Ruth Fawell, 1987, as quoted in QFP 2013, 2.06)

Nayler continues:

So you having received a light from Christ, in that wait, till therein you find the Spirit's leading, acting, and ordering; and here the least in the light is in God's service, when on him you are waiting in Spirit. And such as abide in the light, waiting upon God in the light, are kept from serving the prince of darkness; and having your loins girt and your light burning, you are always ready to know the voice and answer it with obedience; and then you serve God and not men, when you have a command from the living God, not taken on by tradition from men; for in vain do all worship, whose fear and service towards God is taught by the precepts of men; for all the children of the Lord are taught of the Lord. And they are the sons of God who are led by the Spirit of God. And such hearken to the Lord and know

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his voice; and what they see and hear, that they do, and do not offer the sacrifice of fools. (LL 3:65)

'So you having received a light from Christ, in that wait'. The Quaker belief about worship has not changed since Nayler wrote these words. The direct contact between the Spirit of Christ, or God, and the human spirit is the basis of our individual and corporate life.

In these sentences, Nayler moves on from the time spent in worship on a Sunday — or another day — and, by implication, extends 'worship' to include any time when someone is acting in accordance with God's wishes; waiting in the Light leads not only to worship but also to action. With the light burning in our hearts, we must go forth! I try to imagine the feelings of those Quakers, like Nayler, who left their families, their occupations, and their security and went forth to do what they could see and hear had to be done. It feels altogether too much, if that is what being Quaker involves. But Nayler does allow for those without such courage, for 'the least in the light', he says, is in God's service. Possibly even holding the bags of others is service. And I am also reminded of Thomas Kelly's words written in 1941:

How then shall we lay hold of that Life and Power, and live the life of prayer without ceasing? By quiet, persistent practice in turning all our being, day and night, in prayer and inward worship and surrender, towards Him who calls in the deeps of our souls. Mental habits of inward orientation must be established. . . . Begin now, as you read these words, as you sit in your chair, to offer your whole selves, utterly and in joyful abandon, in quiet, glad surrender to Him who is within. (QFP 2013, 2.22)

Nayler has not helped us much with forms of worship. He is very clear it should not be traditional, that anyone who does not wait in the Light but follows custom is not worshipping correctly. During the hundred years before Nayler wrote,

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religious practice had been changed frequently by legislation. Since the 1549 Book of the Common Prayer of Edward VI, Parliament had been telling the nation how to worship. The Scots had invaded England because of a disagreement over forms of worship. In 1655, Cromwell established a 'national' church accommodating the practices of Presbyterians, Independents, and Baptists whose ministers were appointed by county commissioners. The commissioners were instructed not to admit a man 'unless they could discern something of the grace of God in him'; knowledge of Latin and Greek and perhaps a university degree were no longer required. These changes had created in congregations a scepticism about all religious forms. Nayler is contemptuous of the changes in forms of worship and of those who constantly asked themselves

if this be the right worship, & have it yet to dispute? (if not confident in a false way, which is much worse); and such are you who are fighting and contending for such a manner of worship as Christ never ordained, nor his own ever practised; as you may see if you compare your national worship with the saints' practice; which is changed in every particular, and that by men and councils, under pretense of decency and conformity, or something that stands in men's will, which God never commanded. But you may long worship here and call it God's worship, ere He own it by answering you. . . .

And all you who are gone out in anything from Christ the true pattern and example, you are gone into the imaginations of men and so are become servants of men, and not of God, herein. For God is pure, and so is his way and worship, and without his command cannot be changed in the least jot . . . for it is not the name that makes it God's worship; but it is the nature of it, which must be in Spirit and will of God . . . for whatever your minds are in, that is your god you worship, and the pure God owns no such; for it's truth in the inward parts he seeks for, wherein none of you can worship who knows

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not the living word in your hearts, to keep them up to God in your worship; and that worship which is not in the will of God is the worship of devils. (LL 3:65–67)

The only evidence Nayler, or others, have that Quaker practice is the only practice acceptable to God is that it works. Of course, other practices may also work: indeed, I suspect that it is the worshippers who are particular, not God. The finite and the infinite can make contact. We have to take on trust that what Nayler says will happen, does happen — and trust that it will happen to us. Over the years since Nayler wrote, Quaker forms of worship have changed, and now different yearly meetings manage their worship in different ways. It is important to remember that these splits were not begun over differences about forms of worship, even though they are now a defining feature.

For every Quaker, the meeting for worship is the centrepiece of their spiritual life, irrespective of how the meeting is conducted. And central to that meeting is the belief in direct contact with God. As London Yearly Meeting wrote in 1925,

In our life as a religious Society we have found it true that the spirit of man can come into direct contact with the Spirit of God and can thereby learn of God. (CP 1925, p. 2)

An Evangelical Quaker yearly meeting, Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends Church, put it this way in 1987:

We believe that we may experience Christ directly and immediately without the necessity of priestly or ceremonial intervention and that this experience is available to every person. The spiritual life is nourished by the Holy Spirit, who teaches and guides us both individually and corporately according to His commandments.¹

And in 1983, North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) published the following:

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The silent worship of a Quaker meeting is communion insofar as it rises above silence as a symbol and allows the life of God into the souls of the waiting group. The worshipper becomes a part of the divine life, as it flows through, and transforms. Quaker experience supports the view that it is possible and practical to merge the values of individual and group worship. The unique worth of individual worship is in the fact that the worshipper need not adapt to any outward or traditional circumstances. A person aspiring to reach heights unattained need not be dragged down by others. However, care must be taken to avoid extreme individualism which might result in religious anarchy. The special role of group worship is found in the opportunity which it affords for the stronger to help the weaker. Those who know better the ascent can guide those who do not. But in this case an extreme of group control might create a type of uniformity out of which new life could not grow. The Quaker meeting for worship when it attains its ends avoids the two extremes and combines the power of each.²

Again, there is the belief that God and the individual can communicate directly. While advising on private worship, the above passage also praises communal worship as a way in which people can help each other to a greater understanding. This draws attention to one of the problems Quakers found with 'waiting in the Light'. Without care, a person's mind can wander, there can be an intrusion of secular ideas that may be inimical to faith, and a falling away from Quaker tradition may take place. We may start searching the Bible for intellectual support for favourite ideas or confuse the Inner Light with modern psychological theories about how the brain works. John Punshon, an advocate of programmed worship containing 'open worship', argues that silent worship became a dead form:

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It was attended by a series of conventions and expectations that were experienced as quenching the spirit and that failed to express the range of emotions and convictions many people believed were essential to the religious life. Friends had got themselves into a curious bind here. On the one hand, there was the principle that ministry had to be spontaneous, on the other, the requirement that it had to be spirit-led. These principles were both taken with such seriousness that a kind of paralysis seemed to have occurred. At any rate, many Friends found their worship inhibited by excessive solemnity and the exuberance of the holiness movement must have felt like latter-day rain.³

He goes on to argue that one of the reasons for a lack of corporate commitment to Jesus Christ in unprogrammed liberal meetings such as Britain Yearly Meeting may be that without words, music, or other formal ways of anchoring worship to the Christian revelation there is no obstacle to the entry of ideas and concepts that are fundamentally inimical to the faith. Open worship within a programmed Christian service prevents this while preserving the theological significance (direct communication with God) of the silence. Interestingly, he absolves the American Conservative tradition from such strictures.⁴

Until 1924, Britain Yearly Meeting recorded the names of Friends particularly gifted in vocal ministry. Friends meetings relied on these people to keep the worship within a Quaker and Christian framework. This was a difficult task and one that Friends undertook with trepidation. The compilers of *Christian Practice* thought it wise to repeat advice from 1725 on this issue:

Although the labours of such as are called forth by the Spirit of Christ are highly serviceable in the Church, yet the aim of every true Gospel minister is to direct the minds of all to the Divine teachings of the Holy Spirit.

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And as the religious strength both of preachers and hearers consists in their united dependence on Christ their Guide and Leader, so where any part of that dependence is broke off from Him, the holy Head, and placed on any instrument or member of that body, it hath sometime been experienced to become a burden on such instrument and a real impediment to its present service. (CP 1925, p. 5)

The visual image of the head of God upon the shoulders of a Friend in meeting is striking and brutal. Friends were clearly of two minds about recorded ministers. In 1698, Friends dissatisfied with the preaching of a minister were advised to first go to elders in the monthly meeting before publicly testifying against the minister. In 1723, they were asked not to keep their hats on while a minister preached as a ‘token of disunion’ (BoD 1834, pp. 162–63). In the nineteenth century, doubt continued. To give public ministry was both a blessing to the church and difficult to achieve:

Ministers, even those of large experience and gifts, may profitably be led into a review of their ministry in its varied relations. May all be preserved in the exercise of it in the life and power of the Spirit — dividing the word aright, — not falling short of the measure of the gift, and yet not exceeding it. Public prayer, thanksgiving, and praise ought ever to spring from a living sense of the wants and condition of the congregation. In this solemn service may all be impressed with the importance of their words being few and full. (BoD 1883, p. 55)

This advice for preachers and congregations is still relevant for Friends today.

Nayler had no advice about how worship should be managed. In London and Britain Yearly Meetings, over the years custom has suggested different forms to us. At first men and women were separated in worship — a seventeenth-century

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meeting house in my area meeting still has a gallery for the women to sit in, a raised bench for recorded ministers, and another bench at floor level for the elders — both facing the congregation. None of these are used now for their original purpose. All Friends attending meeting for worship now sit on chairs in concentric circles rather than on rows of benches. Conventionally, in most British meetings there is a table in the centre with flowers and on it copies of *Quaker faith and practice* and a Bible. The meetings usually end with everyone shaking hands with their neighbours after a signal from whoever is elder that week. When I started attending my present meeting, the clerk refused to shake hands, regarding it as an importation from the Anglicans. All these things are our customs and traditions, and Nayler, I suspect, would find all objectionable if we followed them only as custom. We may sit or stand in our meetings forever, but unless God owns it by answering our worship, it is in vain. If God does not answer, it matters not a jot whether we are in circles or rows.

One ingredient Nayler does not mention here is the presence of others in worship. *Love to the Lost* was written for the unconvinced, the nonattenders, so there would be little point in writing about the movement of the Spirit among converts. Some of Nayler's letters to meetings have survived, and in one dated 1 April 1656 — just after *Love to the Lost* was published — he writes:

[I]n the eternal unity amongst yourselves meet often together, and suffer a word of exhortation one from another in the spirit of meekness. Love one another unfeignedly, and know one other in that which is pure, that therewith you may be gathered out of the world, up to God, from whom the gift comes.⁵

Quakers are clear that gathering together to seek the Light is more effective than doing so alone. The conservative yearly meetings give a very good reason for this. The power of a meeting for worship depends on the sincere dedication of the individuals who have gathered together, which will create

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a united communion in the presence of God wherein each one overpasses the bounds of his individual self and knows a union of spirit with spirit bringing him into a larger life than that which is known in spiritual separateness. (CP 1925 p. 4)

Finally, it would be wise to end on a positive note about worship, our most fundamental activity. Ben Pink Dandelion, at the end of the printed version of his 2014 Swarthmore Lecture, counted our strengths.

We have at our spiritual fingertips the continuing power and forever-possibility of Quaker worship; the ‘magic’ of what we so regularly find in the silence together, and of all we can achieve through that practice. As we move into the silence, we are moved through it. We find the spiritual at the heart of stillness, the garden of God’s love and wisdom brought to life inwardly as a place to partake in the life of the Spirit. We find joy and wisdom and guidance and love all present, and can feel the binding of that encounter between us. In meeting for worship for business, we can still feel led by the Spirit into new and unimagined places. It is a wondrous gift, and we are changed by bringing our daily concerns into that space. We continue as the latest version of our tradition to have one foot in the here and now and one foot in heaven. Everything indeed can feel different, outwardly and inwardly. We achieve new insight, find a new place to stand in, and indeed know what to wait in. The experience of being gathered as in a net, in covenant with God, is ours if we are willing.⁶