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Friends' Fundamental Principle

For the people called Quakers, the foundation of all religious belief is this: God, through Christ, has placed a guide in each person to show them their duty and has provided each with the ability to follow that guide. In every nation, race, and religion, there are those who follow this guide—these are the people of God—and those who live in disobedience to it and are not God's people regardless of what they say. This is the Friends' ancient, first, and unchanging principle. This is the testimony they have made and will continue to make to the whole world.

The Nature of This Principle

Friends understand this guide as divine. Although it is found within all people, it does not belong to them. It is from God and of God. For those who will let it, it will lead them back to God.

The Names Given This Principle

There are many names for this Divine Principle. By some, it is called the Light of Christ or the Light Within (John 1:9), which is the oldest, most common, and most familiar phrase. Others call it the Revelation (Romans 1:19, Titus 3:4) or Appearance of Christ (Acts 17:28), the Witness of God (Romans 8:16, 1 John 5:10, 12), the Seed of God (1 Peter 1:23, 1 John 3:9) or the Seed of the Kingdom (Matthew 13:19, 23). Still others identify it as Wisdom (Proverbs 1:20-23, 8:1-4), the Word in the Heart (Deuteronomy

30:12-14, Romans 10:6-8, Psalms 119:10), the Grace Available to All (Titus 2:11-12), the Spirit Sent for Each Person's Benefit (1 Corinthians 12:7), the Truth Within (Psalms 51:6, Isaiah 26:2, John 14:6), or the Leaven that Transforms the Lump of Humanity (Matthew 13:33). Many of these are figurative expressions, but all have been used by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They will be used in this treatise since they are frequently found in Friends' writings and ministry. But, Reader, do not be misled or confused by the diversity of terms—please remember that when you see any of these terms, it always refers to the one, unchanging Divine Principle I have mentioned above. As I have said, it is in us, not of us, but of God; and although inspired writers have called it by many names in relating its various manifestations and actions, it is One.

Faith and Practice, Ministry and Worship

It is to this Principle of Light, Life, and Grace that Friends refer all. They identify it as the single great active force in religion, without which there is no conviction, no conversion, no rebirth (John 3:5), and, consequently, no entry into the kingdom of God. By conviction, I mean a true recognition of one's own sinfulness and sorrow for it. This is necessary to spur people to conversion—giving up a sinful life and overcoming evil. Without conviction and conversion, people can expect no forgiveness of sin and no justification from it—that is, acceptance by God and peace within the soul—no sanctification or becoming virtuous, holy, or good. Without justification and sanctification, there is no salvation.

Indeed, the reason there is so little true religion among those who call themselves Christians—so much superstition instead of devotion, so little enjoyment in practicing their faith, and so little real change in their hearts—is that people overlook and neglect

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this principle in their religious lives. They claim to be faithful without it and to be Christians without it, but without it, they are neither.

In this degenerate state, it is natural for people to prefer ritual over obedience, to believe rote words are prayer, and to hope outward ceremonies will reconcile them with God. In that corrupt state, it is only natural people will excuse themselves from the requirements of this principle: taking up their cross, giving up their bodily comforts, and doing whatever God requires of them. This is true religion—to be holy, humble, patient, meek, merciful, just, kind, and charitable. Everyone who is truly religious acts these ways, but they cannot achieve this by their own efforts, only by embracing what the Light reveals and teaches them. This Divine Principle is the root of all true religion and the good seed from which all good fruit grows.

To sum up what Friends have said about the nature and qualities of the Light, this principle is divine, universal and effective in granting humanity the following:

first, knowledge of God and of themselves, and consequently an understanding of themselves, their duty to God, and of their disobedience to God;

second, a true sense of and sorrow for sin in those who seriously consider what the Light shows them;

third, the ability to give up sin and be sanctified from it;

fourth, through God's mercy in Christ, forgiveness of past sins and justification for all who sincerely offer repentance and obedience; and

fifth, the ability for the faithful to persevere, leading them to perfection and the assurance of everlasting blessedness.

Primitive Christianity Revived

Friends offer three things in evidence of the truth of this claim: first, the ample witness of the Scriptures, especially the New Testament; second, the self-evident reasonableness of it; and lastly, the spiritual experience of all people and, in particular, their own. The truth of this experience has been demonstrated in the fruits of their ministry and the results God has granted in answer to that ministry.

These are acknowledged by all impartial observers. In the rest of this work, I will briefly outline the history of Friends to illustrate these points.