Most of the following is excerpted, with paraphrasing and edits, from Lewis Benson’s\* “‘That of God in Every Man’ – What Did George Fox Mean By It?’” (<http://www.qhpress.org/essays/togiem.html> ) (This long Benson essay raises several other issues not covered here.) (Below compiled and edited by Suellen Lowry.)

“THAT OF GOD IN EVERY ONE” –\_EARLY ORIGINS

“That of God in every one” is found in George Fox’s letter to ministers, sent in 1656 when he was in prison:“[T]his is the word of the Lord God to you all, and a charge to you all in the presence of the living God: be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.” (<https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/passage/19-32/> )

Fox does not use the declarative sentence, "There is that of God in every [one]," and he never makes it the central theme of his sermons or writings. This phrase belongs to his pastoral vocabulary rather than to his doctrinal vocabulary.

In Fox's theology, the Creator communicates with people in such a way that the Creator’s wisdom and power are made accessible. Lives can be informed and shaped by the word that proceeds from the Creator.

The restoration of the image of God in people is, therefore, not accomplished by reactivating a dormant spiritual potential within, but by re-establishing the link of communication between people and Creator.

Fox's Christology focuses on Jesus as prophet. Fox's favorite descriptive title for Jesus is "the prophet who speaks from heaven." If the great need of people is to re-establish the lost line of communication with the Creator, then, says Fox, filling this need is exactly what Christ does in his office as prophet. When we hear and obey “his counsel, teaching, instruction and direction,” we become recipients of his saving power.

Concerning the voice of this heavenly prophet, Fox says it is distinct from "all the voices of natural Adam's sons and daughters," and "all the natural men's voices upon the earth." "That of God in every one" is not a human means of knowing like reason, intelligence, feeling, intuition, natural conscience or moral law within. It is a means of knowing that can be described as *seeking counsel of the Creator.*

In Fox's theology, God did not create another god. A Person is not endowed at creation with the wisdom of God, but is a creature to whom God imparts wisdom. This is not human wisdom, but the voice and wisdom of the Creator. We cannot produce the equivalent of this voice and this wisdom from our human resources. It must be heard and received. In every person there is a witness for God that summons the person to remember the Creator. This is "that of God in every one."

*The help of God's spirit is needed in a ministry that answers that of God in people.* Fox says, "The Holy Spirit teacheth the holy, gentle, meek, and quiet lowly mind to answer . . . the light, grace, and Spirit and the gospel in every creature."

Writing to Oliver Cromwell Fox says, "Friend, to that in thy conscience I speak, that with it thy mind may be guided up to God, to receive the Law from God, which is perfect, which is according to that of God in everyone's conscience". . . None knows the giver of this law, but by the spirit of God, neither can any truly read it or hear its voice but by the spirit of God."

A thing that stands out with particular clarity in Fox's teaching is his insistence that *that of God in people is not answered without fear of God.* In a General Epistle to Friends Fox wrote: "In the fear of the Lord God live . . . and therein ye will receive the wisdom of God . . . and with that ye may come to answer that of God in everyone." [Note from SL: I’ve heard that “fear” may have a relationship with the word “awe” in current language, so perhaps substitute “awe” if you like.]

The disorder in human affairs is due to humanity's unwillingness to accept its creaturehood and people’s failure to seek counsel from the Creator. There are those who "stop their ears and close their eyes to that of God in them."

Fox maintains that *there is something of God in people that shows them what is evil* . . . Is this "something of God" the same thing as conscience? Many of Fox's critics believed that when he spoke of "that of God in man" and "the light that lighteth every man" he was really talking about conscience. In reply to this Fox says [paraphrased], "The light that enlightens everyone is not conscience, for the light was before anything was made.” Conscience must be informed and instructed by a teacher who speaks with the wisdom and authority of the Creator. That of God in the conscience is not conscience itself, but the word by which all things, including conscience, were created.

THAT OF GOD IN EVERY ONE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Between 1700 and 1900 "that of God in every one" virtually disappeared from the Quaker vocabulary, but early in the 20th century it came back, and became one of the most widely used symbols for what twentieth century Friends believe.

The earliest instance of the revived use of "that of God" that I [Benson] have been able to discover is found in Rufus Jones' "Introduction" to his 2  
abridged edition of Fox's *Journal,* first published in 1903, in which he expresses his opinion that the "larger truth" implicit in Fox's early experiences is the discovery that there is a "universal principle, that the Spirit of God reaches every man." He then adds: "To all sorts and conditions of men, Fox continually makes appeal to 'that of God' in them or to 'the principle of God within man' . . . In every instance he means that the Divine Being operates directly on the human life."

However, in the following year Jones wrote: "What was the Inner Light? The simplest answer is: The Inner Light is the doctrine that there is something Divine, 'Something of God' in the human soul." As a consequence of statements like these, the phrase "that of God in every one" began to acquire a meaning for twentieth century Friends that it did not have for Fox.

Through systematic study in the last few weeks of his life, Rufus Jones located fifty-one references to "that of God in every man" in Fox's *Epistles*. This study raised doubt in Jones’s mind as to whether the interpretation he had put forward previously was consistent with that of Fox. He raised the question "whether George Fox thought of this 'more' as an inherent part of man's nature, as the mystics of the Fourteenth Century under the influence of Plotinus almost certainly thought of the Divine Spark in the soul, or whether George Fox thought of this 'more' as Barclay certainly did, as a super added bestowal of Divine Spirit; it is a question not easy to answer because he never clarified his position. But it is more probable that he agreed with the position of Barclay." (I [Benson] am not here concerned with whether Barclay's interpretation was correct, or whether Fox's was the same as Barclay's. The point relevant to this discussion is that Rufus Jones had always believed that Fox's interpretation was closer to his own than to Barclay's. A study of the sources caused him to question this belief.)

The doctrine of "that of God in every man" quickly spread throughout the Society of Friends, prompted in part by AFSC.

From the foregoing study it should be evident that we can claim, as Neave Brayshaw did, that there can be no full understanding of Fox and his message apart from a knowledge of what he meant by "that of God in every man." However, when we jump to the conclusion that "that of God" is the central truth of the Quaker message, then we cut ourselves off from that which Fox made central; namely, the message about Jesus Christ and how he saves. If we make "that of God in man" the basis of our peace testimony and other testimonies then they become an inference from a theory about the nature of people rather than a response to a divine command, and our witness loses its prophetic impact.

3

\* Per Steven Davison: Benson (1906 – 1986) was a life-long student of Fox’s work, the inspiration for the New Foundation Fellowship, and a “champion of a forgotten faith”—the Quakerism of George Fox and early Friends. In addition to his own books, he created a massively thorough concordance of Fox’s works that is an indispensable tool for later students of our prophet founder.  
Per bios at Haverford and Bryn Mawr: At 25 Lewis Benson was drawn to George Fox’s Journal, wherein reading about Fox’s struggle with despair, he found kinship and support. He became a life-long student of George Fox’s message, studying his work for over fifty years. He worked with Quakers in Britain. He participated in dialogues with Anabaptists and Quakers, including publishing much of his writings in “The Call,” which was published in Britain and the United States. He was a prolific writer and lecturer. The New Foundation Fellowship was started in the 1970s, with Benson as founding member. He was also part of the Young Friends movement in Philadelphia. He later became the first librarian at Pendle Hill.

4