

Claus Bernet



Rufus Jones
(1863–1948)



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Foreword

Rufus M. Jones (1863-1948) is undoubtedly the most influential Quaker figure since the seventeenth-century beginnings of the Religious Society of Friends. Claus Bernet's very useful bibliography of Jones' writings reveals the sheer volume and wide range of Jones' scholarship and writings. But Bernet's biographical sketch places all that in the wider context of an amazingly active life. Jones was not only a scholar but a social activist, Quaker minister and organizer, teacher, and mentor. I have been told that his motto was, "There is always time to do one more thing." Clearly, he lived accordingly. It of course helped that two wives, a daughter, and many students were happily pressed into service to his work. Rufus Jones' daughter, Mary Hoxie Jones, still devoted time and energy to her father's legacy well into her nineties.

In the wider Church, Rufus Jones made important contributions to the liberal renewal movement, particularly in America and Britain. Given the liberal emphasis upon the authority of personal experience, Jones' emphasis on mysticism was a much-needed complement to liberal theology and ethics. Through his scholarly work and his popular writing, he was an important influence on liberal Christian leaders such as Harry Emerson Fosdick, Howard Thurman, and Vida Scudder. His emphasis on mysticism in his popular writings was sometimes liberally vague. But his scholarship on medieval mysticism and subsequent spiritualist reformers was pioneering, at least in the English-speaking world. Jones was also concerned for Christian missions. The nephew of Quaker missionaries to Palestine, he was a strong proponent for the updating of Christian missions, particularly through his contributions to the International Missionary Council's *Re-Thinking Missions* in 1933.

Jones' interest in the renewal of Christian mysticism was tinged by the influence of personalist theology, owing particularly to his year of graduate study at Harvard University in 1900-01. *Social Law in the Spiritual World* (1904) is one of Jones' most ambitious popular works, employing the German idealist per-

sonalism he had learned from Josiah Royce, George Herbert Palmer, and William Ernest Hocking, together with the new psychology he had gained from William James.

Jones' influence in the Quaker world was extensive. He is the decisive figure in the liberal renewal of Quakerism in the early twentieth century, on either side of the Atlantic. His influence also penetrated well into the pastoral stream of American Friends, although more evangelical Quakers reacted negatively against his modernism. As Bernet comments, Jones' strong emphasis on social reform and progress were intended partly to shake Friends out of sectarian isolation and the mutually hostile camps that had dominated nineteenth-century Quakerism. He was the central figure in the organization and early leadership of the American Friends Service Committee, founded in 1917. AFSC provided much catalyzing influence among Friends and impact around the world. Jones lived to see the AFSC awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947. He was less active as a leader but very influential in the beginnings of Pendle Hill, the Quaker study center near Philadelphia, in 1930 and the Friends World Committee for Consultation in 1938. When one combines these with several other initiatives mentioned by Bernet, one realizes that Quakerism as we know it today is largely attributable to Rufus Jones' direct action, wider influence, and continuing legacy.

Critical scholarly reassessment of Jones' work in Quaker history and theology began in the 1950s, with the doctoral dissertation and subsequent publications of Wilmer Cooper. Another important critic of Jones in the 1960s and 1970s was Lewis Benson, who gave more systematic study to the writings of the Quaker founder George Fox. Much of the criticism of Jones' scholarship follows the general pattern of the Neo-Orthodox reaction to the overly optimistic outlook of classically liberal theology, especially after the horrors of two world wars. At the end of his life, Jones himself had already begun to reconsider some of his interpretations of Quakerism. But he was probably the most

resilient and infectiousy confident leader among Friends since George Fox. His imprint on Quaker faith and practice is nearly as great.

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