Simple Grey or a Tapestry of Many Colors:
A Fresh Look at Latin American Quakerism

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Introduction

In one of the most exuberant expressions of worldwide Quakerism, Latin American Friends weave a lively faith that spreads from the high Andean planes of Bolivia and Peru, runs down through the mountainous and tropical regions of Central America, then stretches into Mexico, Cuba and Jamaica. While their expressions vary as much as their geography, certain threads run through these differences, uniting them in a colorful tapestry that does not reflect the traditional 'Quaker grey' of their European and North American ancestors.[1]

In this essay we will give a brief overview of Latin American Friends, beginning with a case study of the history of Cuban Friends. We will then explore the question many have asked, "How Quaker are these churches?" We will look at the evangelical threads that run through the different expressions, then focus on what makes them Quaker, and conclude with a reflection on how the cultures of Latin America add to the tapestry.

I. The Story of Cuban Friends: A Case Study

Quaker presence in Cuba dates back to 1898 when Episcopalian missionary Francisco Cala, influenced by Mexican Quakers, became a convinced Friend himself. He changed the name of the small group of churches he had formed to the Evangelical Friends Church of Cuba (Mahalah Jay 1900, letter to Wilmington Yearly Meeting). Centered in Havana, this work was not deeply rooted and lasted only a few years. But the work of Cala's associates Arthur Dowe and Arthur and Helen Pain in western Cuba went forward, recognized by North Carolina Yearly Meeting in 1902 and partially supported by the American Friends Board of Foreign Missions (AFBFM) until 1915. This small group of Friends dissolved in 1946, after the death of Pain. Again, its Quaker roots were shallow, many of the Cuban workers having come from other denominations. The few surviving meetings passed over to the Methodists and the Baptists.

The more enduring work in eastern Cuba began on November 14, 1900 with the arrival of a small band of missionaries sent by the AFBFM. These included Sylvester and May Jones, Emma Phillips, and Maria de los Santos Trevino, a Mexican Friend. They came with clear evangelical purposes: "To preach the Gospel, always preaching Christianity above denominationalism—Christ crucified, the Savior of men—and not beginning with the words or practices of the doctrines and concepts established by Friends" (Hetty 1977, 13). By 1905 they had preached in 18 villages and organized work in seven of them.

[1] Quakers in the 18th century began dressing in the color grey as a testimony to simplicity, in protest of the ostentatious clothing styles of the times. While this particular custom is no longer carried out, the value of simplicity still characterizes Quakers.

In each mission station established, the missionaries followed the model of building a parsonage, a meeting house and a school. Evangelism and education ran side by side, with even the schools exercising a form of "quiet evangelism." Heavily influenced by the evangelical holiness emphasis of the times, they had stated goals of eventually forming a self-sustained and self-governing national church. Yet the colonial civilizing model of mission seemed predominant, with the idea that "the Cubans need to be first elevated to a pattern of civilization, adopting the model of the culture, society and image of the missionaries" (Graves, 1999, p. 10).

These early missionaries were all aggressive evangelists, yet they attempted from the beginning to train and incorporate national workers. Their success was limited, partly due to the low level of economic support (suffered by both expatriate and national workers) and the "americanizing" goals of the missionaries. Most of the national workers of this period defected to the Methodists or Baptists.

In 1921, the mission, with the approval of the board, set up a Central Committee ("Junta Central") of national leaders to administer the church, and with each succeeding year the mission handed over more responsibility. The AFBFM backed out of the work in 1927, which led to the premature formation of the Cuban Yearly Meeting on April 13, 1927. Still not completely independent from the mission, the national church was far from being native and continued to perpetuate the forms and attitudes received from the pioneering missionaries, including the strict puritanical American Protestantism of the period (Hilly, 1977, p. 106).

The work continued, gradually becoming independent of the mission, up until the Cuban Revolution of 1959 when Cuban Friends, along with all other Christian groups, were forced underground. Many of the Friends' leaders went into exile and some even renounced their faith, leaving the surviving church small and hidden, isolated from contact with Friends from other parts of the world. All Friends' schools were nationalized. Yet a small surviving body of Quaker believers continued faithful, trusting in their Lord. They met as they could, developing their own leadership and slowly becoming stable. In spite of all the difficulties, this small hidden band of Quakers continued preaching the gospel as they could.

The political situation forced all Christian groups to associate and work together, which in one sense was positive. In another sense, however, this ecumenism, plus the isolation from other Friends, put Cuban Friends in danger of losing their Quaker identity.

Some 20 years after the Revolution, a changing political climate enabled Cuban Friends to reestablish relationships with other Friends organizations, and this helped break the isolation and deepen Quaker roots. These included Friends United Meeting, of which it is now a part, the Friends World Committee on Consultation, Quakers in Britain, and in the New England and Southeastern Yearly Meetings.

For the last 20 years, Cuban Friends have focused on organizational changes and internal rebuilding, not emphasizing evangelism and growth. Yet in recent years, a spiritual awakening is resulting in a resurgence of house church worship services and prayer cells, with work in new places and the reopening of mission centers.

In 1994, Cuban Friends formed the Good Shepherd Bible Institute for the formation of its leaders. Since then, an extension of the Latin American Bible University of Costa Rica and the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Matanzas have offered their services to Friends. And in 2012, Cuba Yearly Meeting organized the Cuban Quaker Peace Institute, a result of workshops sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee. The Institute proposes to deepen the Quaker roots of Cuban Friends and provide tools for transforming conflict into peaceful solutions. With the collaboration of professors from the Earlham School of Religion, the institute celebrated its first graduates in 2015.

Today Cuba Yearly Meeting has 10 monthly meetings and four mission points for outreach. In all of their story, Cuban Quakers clearly see the hand of God.

II. Overview of Latin American Quakers

The oldest continuous presence of Friends in Latin American began in Mexico. In 1871 Indiana Yearly Meeting sent missionaries Gulielma and Samuel Purdie who helped establish the first monthly meeting in the capital city in 1888, as well as meetings and schools in the northeast of the country. In 1947, Herberto Sein helped plant another meeting in Mexico City and founded the *Casa de los Amigos* (Friends House). This work eventually led to the formation of the *Reunión General de los Amigos en México* (General Meeting of Friends in Mexico) in 1958. In 1967, the Evangelical Friends Mission sent Roscoe and Tina Knight to Mexico (L. E. Fernández González in Abbott 2003), and this work, known simply as Mexico Yearly Meeting, currently has meetings in and around the capital and in the states of Aguascalientes, Zacatecas, Sinaloa and Chihuahua. Another small evangelical yearly meeting in the state of Coahuila with ties to the Evangelical Friends Church, Mid-America, has six meetings (Dan Cammack 2015, interview). The estimated number of Friends in Mexico is around 800 (Anderson and Anderson, 2014, p. 130).

Quakers visited Barbados and Jamaica as early as the seventeenth century, with George Fox himself involved. While several meetings had been established by 1700, the presence of Friends today in Jamaica dates to 1881 when Iowa Yearly Meeting sent missionary Evi Sharpless. The Jamaican Yearly Meeting was formed in 1941 and today has several churches, as well as schools and homes for boys and girls. Currently around 400 Quakers form the church in Jamaica (Anderson and Anderson, 2014, p. 130; "Quakers in Jamaica and Barbados," n.d.).

The presence of Friends in Central America began in 1901 when the Training School for Christian Workers in Southern California (today Azusa Pacific University) sent Quaker students Thomas Kelly and Clark Buckley to Guatemala. They were followed by others and soon California Yearly Meeting of Friends took over the support of the work. Evangelical in nature and largely influenced by the holiness movement in the United States, the work advanced through church planting, schools, and pastoral formation via the Berea Bible Training School. As Guatemalan Friends reached out, meetings started in Honduras and El Salvador. The work in Guatemala received recognition as a yearly meeting in 1970; Honduras was recognized in 1983, and El Salvador in 1989. In 1986 a group broke off from the Guatemala Yearly Meeting to form

the Holiness Friends Yearly Meeting in that same country (both groups are currently linked to EFCI). Another small group of eleven Quakers families from Fairhope, Alabama formed a community in Monteverde, Costa Rica, and since 1952 that group has been sponsoring programs for alternatives to violence and a center for peace education, in addition to their meeting and school ("History of Monteverde and the Quakers," 2013). The overall numbers of Friends in Central America is estimated to be around 22,000, with most of those being in Guatemala (Pickard 2014, pp. 125-129 and Anderson and Anderson 2014, pp. 130-135).

Friends presence in the Andean region began in 1919 with the arrival of missionaries from Indiana and California. The Union Bible Seminary in Westfield, Indiana (largely Quaker but open to other holiness groups) sponsored Emma Morrow and Mattie Blount as their first missionaries to Bolivia. They were met in La Paz by Florence Smith, a woman from Kansas Yearly Meeting who had arrived two years earlier as an independent missionary.

Simultaneously, Peniel Mission of California sent William Abel to La Paz. Abel, a Native American Quaker and a graduate of the Training School for Christian Workers in California, joined forces with the three Quaker women as they engaged in open air evangelistic meetings on the streets of La Paz. Abel died of small pox that very year, but one of his disciples, a young Bolivian named Juan Ayllón, was inspired to carry the work forward. Ayllón traveled to Guatemala for training in the Berea Bible Training School, then returned to Bolivia in 1924 as a missionary sponsored by the Central American Friends Mission and the newly developing national Friends Church in that region.

The work of those early Friends who preached on the streets of La Paz in 1919 later developed into separate yearly meetings. In 1926 Central Yearly Meeting became involved in sponsoring part of the work begun by the Westfield Quakers. The work begun by Abel's disciple, Juan Ayllón, was turned over to the sponsorship of Oregon Yearly Meeting in 1930.

From these seeds grew up all the various yearly meeting groupings existing in Bolivia and Peru today. As Harold Thomas notes in his overview of Andean Quakers, "The present denominational organizations in Bolivia of the *Seminario Bíblico, Amigos 'Central,' Santidad Amigos, Estrella,* and the *Estrella de Belén* come from the mission work of the Union Bible Seminary in Westfield, Indiana (1919) and the Central Friends Yearly Meeting (1926). The *Unión Boliviana de los Amigos* and the INELA Friends in Bolivia and Peru come from the roots of Juan Ayllón…(1924) and the Oregon Friends" (1930). Most of these groups remain small splinters off the larger groups. Those that would count as major yearly meetings are the *Santidad Amigos, Amigos "Central"* and the INELA churches (*Iglesia Nacional Evangélica de Los Amigos)* in Bolivia and Peru. Thomas estimates that Andean Friends have around 30,000 people officially on the church lists, and a larger community of 50,000 (Thomas, H. 2014, pp.115-124).[i] Most of these groups participate in EFCI.

This gives an overall estimate of between 73,000-74,000 Quakers in Latin America.

III. Common Threads

While the origins, history and geography of the different Latin American Quaker groupings are complex and diverse, certain common threads run through them, in varying configurations. We are identifying these as the evangelical threads, the Quaker threads, and the Latin American cultural threads. We will explore each of these emphases in turn, although they all weave together in the life of Latin American Quakers. Many examples will come from Bolivian (INELA) Friends, but we will also use narrative essays written by Friends from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Peru, collected in the book, *De encuentro a ministerio: la vida y fe de Los Amigos latinoamericanos* (Thomas, 2012).

Evangelical Threads

The missionary movements that led to the Friends work in Central and South America came from the programmed, pastoral branches of Friends in Indiana, California and Oregon and, in the case of Cuba, from the American Friends Board of Foreign Missions, a branch of the Five-Years-Meeting. The missionaries that served under these organizations were all heavily influenced by the American Holiness Movement that formed in the mid-1880s, taking its inspiration from the Second Great Awakening in the late 18th century. Theologically Arminian in nature, it emphasized a conversion experience, complete sanctification, the authority of Scripture, correct doctrine and involvement in world missions. Its appeal crossed denominational lines and included Friends.

Around the turn of the century (1900), a number of Bible training schools rose up in the wake of the holiness movement; these focused on the preparation of consecrated Christian workers on the local and international level. Among these in Friends circles were the Cleveland Bible College, the Union Bible Seminary in Westfield, Indiana, the Training School for Christian Workers in California (Whittier), the Berea Bible Training School in Chiquimula, Guatemala, and the Portland Bible Institute in Oregon. The first catalog of the Training School in California claimed as an institutional goal, "to inspire missionary enthusiasm; and to cultivate a passion for winning souls…. We would see this school as a hotbed of germinating missionaries." This would have been typical of all these holiness training schools. This type of ministerial formation profoundly influenced the work of the early Quaker missionaries to Latin America.

Juan Ayllón provides a good example. This Bolivian young man, discipled under William Abel and educated in the Berea Bible Training School in Guatemala, returned to his native land in early 1924 as a missionary, dedicated to winning converts among the Aymara peoples of the highlands and forming them into Friends churches. Something of his evangelistic fervor comes through in his letters back to the supporting Guatemalan churches.

On Nov. 14, 1924 Ayllón wrote about providentially encountering a group of Aymara Indians in the community of Tembladerani. He reported,

> 'On Oct. 7 we established ourselves for the first time in that place and found hungry souls. In the first meeting, after having heard the message, they sought the Lord at the altar. We told them that we were sent to those of their class, to the victims of sin, superstition and darkness,

to the weary and heavy-laden ones, that they might find rest of soul. We had meetings with them six Sundays, and not a meeting passed without an altar service. We understand this is a sign of God's approval on it all….In the six months that we have been here, we have been at the front of the battle, not only carrying the responsibility and burden on our hearts of preaching the Gospel, but also the weight of the bitter pain of so many perishing people falls upon us.'

Ayllón passed his fervor and his theology on to the people who came into the church as a result of his labors. In addition to Bible training classes among the new believers, Ayllón always invited certain men in whom he saw leadership potential to accompany him on his evangelistic trips across the high planes and around Lake Titicaca. Soon new Friends leaders like Pedro Choque, Esteban Chipana and Cipriano Mamani were also preaching the gospel and leading in worship services.

By the time Oregon Yearly Meeting sent its first North American missionaries to Bolivia, the young Friends Church there had grown to a community of about 80 believers, gathering in two organized meetings and many small developing groups. The foundation laid was evangelical. The OYM missionaries carried on the same holiness emphasis in their work, and the resulting Friends Church was solidly evangelical in faith and practice. While these details are specific to the INELA, they could be replicated in all the Friends groupings in South and Central America, as well as in Cuba. This tradition has carried through up to the present time.

As the church in Bolivia grew in those early years, believers who were scattered in meetings in La Paz, on the altiplano and in communities around Lake Titicaca, gathered once a year for the annual Easter Conference (precursor to the yearly meeting sessions). The main event at those gatherings was the preaching of the holiness gospel, encouraging the believers to live lives worthy of Jesus, and to spread the good news throughout their communities and beyond. One of the earliest of several names that the church adopted was the "Evangelical Society of Bolivian Friends" (1948). Jack Willcuts, missionary in the 1940s and 50s, observed that one of the purposes of the Bible training school on the farm at Copajira was to "inculcate" Quaker doctrine, but he also noted in a letter home that "we are not here to make Quakers but Christians" (1955). This replicates the purposes of the early missionaries to Cuba, as we have seen, who determined to base their work on the preaching of the Christian gospel of Christ, rather than the precepts of Quakerism.

The strong evangelical emphasis of the early years shows up in the Christian tones of Latin American Quakerism today.

Manuel de Jesús Coronado Monroy pastors a Friends Church in Chiquimula, Guatemala. He tells the story of his childhood in a "disintegrated home." His father's alcoholism and desertion added to the poverty in which Manuel and his four siblings grew up. But through persistence and grace, Manuel managed to be accepted to the local Friends school. During his first week there, he attended a chapel service where in the strange words of the sermon he found reason to hope that his future could be better. He sensed "something special" in the school.

He got hold of a Bible, and surreptitiously went to a Friends Church service. At the end of the service, "I walked to the front, knelt down and asked the Lord to take from my shoulders this heavy burden. And the Lord, with his great power, grace and mercy, dried my tears, lifted up my anguish, and said to me, 'Don't cry anymore; from today forward, you will begin to live for me.'"

Manuel experienced an immediate change in his attitudes and habits. He became involved in the local church and began telling people what had happened to him. Several family members and street friends joined with him in this new adventure. Today he says that, "The 'something special' I felt in that Friends school was Jesus. He gave me reason to live, and we will walk together the rest of my life here, and beyond" (in Thomas, 2012, pp. 11-16).

Manuel's story could be repeated, with different details and in different settings, throughout Latin American Quakerism. The common threads are personal conversion, gathering of like-minded believers into local congregations, an emphasis on Jesus as the living word of God and on the Scriptures as the written word, and the preaching of a Christocentric gospel that encourages people to live like Jesus and to carry forward his ministry in the world around them. Worship services include lively worship music, times of prayer, and a message from the Scriptures.

Latin American Friends are almost universally pastoral and programmed, and in this light they have much in common with other Friends in Asia and Africa. In Bolivia, the yearly meeting organization legally owns local church property, but local members use their own resources to build and maintain their church buildings. (They prefer the word "church" to the more traditionally Quaker term "meeting house.") In rural areas these churches are simple structures, usually adobe, with a sign on the front clearly identifying it as an evangelical Friends church (INELA). Urban church buildings range from simple to more elaborate, depending on the zone and the size of the congregation, but all identify openly as Christian and Quaker. Bolivian Friends pastors receive a small salary from the offerings of their members, and most need to supplement this with other work. A few urban congregations give total support to their pastor.

On the INELA yearly meeting level, some members of the executive council receive a minimal salary; these include the president, the secretary of evangelism, and the treasurer. Other members serve voluntarily. Decision making in the yearly meeting sessions is through consensus where possible, but resorting to voting for the election of officers and other issues. This organizational style is similar among most Latin American Friends, although the details vary.

Quaker Threads

While the evangelical threads help define the Latin American Friends tapestry, these are interspersed with Quaker threads that give it a distinctive texture. A brief look at some of the Quaker elements of the history of the church in Bolivia gives insight.

One of the first Quaker missionaries to Bolivia was, as we have seen above, a Native American man, William Abel, who was born on a reservation of the Kumeyaay tribal group in San Pascual, California. Orphaned at an early age, he spent his childhood as an indentured

servant, herding goats and pigs in the hills of Southern California. He decided to become a Christian in 1897 as a result of revival meetings at the Ramona Friends Church. He was discipled in that church and in his early thirties went to the Training School for Christian Workers in Whittier. He arrived in time for the opening of the first group of students in 1900, the founding date of the school.

While at the school, Abel imbibed the holiness emphasis and missionary fervor typical of the times, but he also found his Quaker values and beliefs reinforced. Although the intent from the beginning was to make this an interdenominational school, the founders were predominantly Quaker. The first chairman of the board was Irvin H. Cammack, also the superintendent of missions for California Yearly Meeting. The first classes were held in Philena Hadley's home in Whittier (Philena was the vice-president of the yearly meeting's Women's Foreign Missionary Society). Mary A. Hill, a Quaker from Ohio was invited to be the first president.

One of the frequent visitors to the school was Amos Kenworthy, a Quaker leader known for his spontaneous prophetic ministry. We can imagine his influence on Abel, as the young man participated in preaching services in the different congregations in greater Los Angeles, part of his practical ministry assignment. Apparently he occasionally preached in Friends churches in California, and he spoke in the manner of Friends. In an article written several years later, Quaker missionary Dana Thomas remembers "seeing many large audiences composed of cultured, intelligent people, who were moved in a wonderful manner by this simple native. He was a true Friend, refusing to address meetings where he did not feel the Spirit's leading." (Thomas, 1907).

William Abel's service in Bolivia in 1919 was a ministry of sowing seeds; he died of small pox that same year. Abel's disciple, Juan Ayllón, is credited with actually beginning the first meeting of the Bolivian Friends Church (INELA). Ayllón, a man of mixed Aymara and Spanish blood, was drawn to Christianity through a Methodist missionary; he actually converted to Christianity in a Salvation Army church meeting; and he then began attending a local Baptist Church. But in 1919 he was drawn to the street meetings held by Quakers Abel, Mattie Blount, Emma Morrow and Florence Smith. Ayllón joined with them. Through this contact he decided he had found his community of faith among Friends. Something about the beliefs, the practices, and the ministry focus convinced him to throw his lot in with these particular people.

After three years in the Berea Bible Training School in Guatemala, the Central American Friends Mission and national church sent him back to Bolivia to plant Friends churches among the Aymara people. Ayllón brought both his evangelical holiness training and his convincement as a Friend to this task.

The correspondence from missionaries between 1924 and 1940 emphasizes the evangelical focus of the work above any particular Quaker influence. But we get hints of how the Quaker beliefs and testimonies were being taught and lived out among the people. An example of this comes from the experience of the Chaco War, a conflict that devastated Bolivia and Paraguay between 1932 and 1935, affecting the indigenous populations of both countries.

The war certainly affected the young Friends' movement in Bolivia, planted specifically among the Aymara peoples. The government drew its troops mainly from the lower indigenous classes, and as the Friends came from this population, this put a damper on the development of the work, taking away most of the young men. In letters back to Oregon in 1933 and 1934, OYM missionary Carroll Tamplin writes that young Aymara "Indians" have no chance of exemption from military service, but that some are going as conscientious objectors, carrying guns to the front but refusing to use them. He writes of encountering three young Quaker believers in meeting just before going to the front. One of them testified to the group, "Although you see me here today with this uniform, dressed as a soldier of the government, I want to testify to you that I do not fear death nor do I want to take life. I am a soldier of Jesus Christ." In another letter Tamplin wrote that of 12 young men he had been training as Friends leaders, some entered the war as soldiers, and of these a few maintained a stand as conscientious objectors and suffered persecution as a result. Others carried out their military duties like other soldiers, while others could not "take their stand as conscientious objectors and have taken to hiding." Several were killed. This shows that there was a serious attempt to teach the Friends peace testimony, even where taking the stand proved life-threatening. (Among most Latin American Friends today, the peace testimony, while not a key emphasis, is slowly gaining importance among young adults, partly through the influence of contact with the wider circle of Quakers, such as the Friends World Committee on Consultation and the Bolivian Quaker Education Fund.)

Missionaries in the following years taught Quaker Christian beliefs and practices, and the organization of the INELA grew along specific Quaker forms, from the yearly meeting structure, down to quarterly meetings, monthly meetings and outposts. Although pastoral, church government developed horizontally with the church council and monthly meeting carrying the final decision making authority. Other Quaker practices that developed include the unique combination of individualism and community (where each voice has equal value in a meeting); the combination of gospel passion with compassionate service (evidenced in the Friends grade schools that rose up along with the churches); a spiritual perspective on the sacraments of baptism and communion; and an openness to the voice of the Spirit. Again, while the specifics above come from Bolivia, they reflect the Quaker experience in other countries.

Bernabé Sánchez has served as a leader and teacher in the Honduran Friends Church, as well as a pastor in the San Pedro Sula meeting. His experience of becoming a Christian illustrates a Quaker focus on revelation. As a child he grew up in a small town where animosity between Catholics and Protestants confused him. His personal search for truth reminds me of the young George Fox, asking questions of everyone, offending some with his intensity. One day Bernabé found a Protestant New Testament in the street and, taking it home, began to pour over it, noticing that Protestants and Catholics used some of the same words. Finally his family got ahold of a Bible and began reading it aloud.

This went on for several years, and Bernabé's spiritual hunger would wax and wane, never quite satisfied. This changed when a group of Christians meeting in a home invited him, and although they used the Bible in their teachings, they focused on Jesus. That was revolutionary to

Bernabé. He decided to become a follower of Jesus and found what he had been searching for. He now says that, "Bible reading, going to worship services, prayer—that's all good, but it's not complete if we don't know the author of the Bible." Reverence for the written word of God but dependence on the living Word, Jesus, is a Quaker value characteristic of Latin American Friends (in Thomas, 2012, pp. 37-40).

Manuela Calisaya de Alanguía is a Peruvian Quaker, married to one of the leaders of the Peruvian Friends Church and a minister in her own right. She exemplifies the spirit of loving service and generous hospitality that characterizes Latin American Quakerism. Her life also gives witness to the acknowledged value of women in ministry. She remembers a time early in her marriage when, because of her own shyness, the ideas of service and hospitality frightened her. "And yet," she says, "when God wants to use you in his ministry, he prepares you."

She tells the story of God putting into her heart the thought of opening her home through hospitality even to strangers. The idea came in the form of a sermon in her Friends Church, and it wouldn't leave her alone. That very week she says that God provided her and her husband with some extra money. And of course, soon afterward, a couple from another village arrived, asking for a place to stay while the woman sought medical care.

Manuela and Noé hosted the couple and soon discovered other needs, including marriage counseling and spiritual reconciliation. Manuela experienced God using her in new ways and remembers, "It was beautiful to see God's hand touching the hearts of this couple."

The woman's physical condition was serious, and later that week, she died in the emergency room of the local clinic, leaving five children in her home village. This surprise was painful for Manuela and Noé, but they helped the man figure out what to do next and where to find help. Now, years later, the children are well, growing up, finding their place in life and following Jesus, partly because of their mother's brief encounter with this Quaker couple who opened their home to strangers. Manuela says that, "Although years have passed, I remember this experience as if it happened yesterday. From that day until now, all the blessings we've received from God we share with all who come to our home" (in Thomas, 2012, pp. 76-78page).

It's a small, simple story, but it exemplifies the testimony of service in daily life, common among Friends throughout Latin America.

Beginning in the 1970s, other groups from the wider Quaker community began making contact with Andean Friends. That has continued up to the present time throughout Latin American Quakerism. While many organizations and yearly meetings have taken part, the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC, Section of the Americas), Quaker Bolivia Link (QBL), and the Bolivian Quaker Education Fund (BQEF) have played especially important roles. These contacts have strengthened the sense of being part of the Quaker family and deepened the Quaker identity of Spanish and Aymara speaking yearly meetings, while at the same time, not compromising their evangelical perspective.

Latin American Cultural Threads:

Quakers from other parts of the world who visit Latin America often observe that these Friends don't always look or act like Quakers. The worship seems too enthusiastic, and usually lacks the element of silence. Business meetings can seem to a visitor to be too informal, perhaps even chaotic at times. Occasionally, the group votes on an issue, rather than waiting for consensus.

I (Nancy) remember the first time I participated in a large FWCC conference, for the Section of the Americas. It was held in Chiquimula, Guatemala, and I formed part of the Bolivian/Peruvian delegation. I had been invited to stay on after the event for special meetings about the production of Quaker literature in Spanish. I was curious as to how Andean Friends would respond to the more formal North American Quaker forms for worship and business that I figured would predominate at the main event. I discovered that many of these men and women had previously traveled in broader Friends circles and they knew just what to do. They fit in with the formalities and behaved calmly in "appropriately Quaker" fashion. But in the special meetings, after the North American delegates had gone home and it was just a group of about 15 Latin Americans (with a few of us gringos thrown in), the whole flavor changed. The meeting was louder, livelier, more informal and more highly participatory. The difference amused me. It also caused me to wonder: is one style more Quaker than the other? The after-sessions were definitely more Latin American!

And of course, there is not one single Latin American culture. Each country and even region brings its own unique colors and patterns. Another memory: this time it was a Latin American Friends' pastors conference, held in Santa Cruz, Bolivia. Leaders from North, Central and South America, as well as the Caribbean, gathered to share stories, learn from each other and worship together. Each evening, different groups would present the work of Friends from their country. One evening we listened to three presentations. The first, a dynamic young Hispanic pastor from California, used Powerpoint to illustrate his highly educated and articulate introduction to the work among Spanish-speakers in the US. A pastor from Cuba followed him, and he spoke quietly without notes, fanfare or technology, but I was impressed by the dignity and formality of his presentation. He seemed professorial, someone with whom I could discuss great literature. The Peruvian delegation made the third presentation that evening. Rather than one representative, the whole group of about 10 women and men gathered on stage, conferred briefly and then arranged themselves and began to sing, accompanied by a charango and a flute. While not a polished or professional performance, they sang wholeheartedly. Then several people spoke, spontaneously sharing their gratitude at being present and for God's provision. It took more time than the other presentations, but no one seemed to care.

Again, the differences in the presentations amused me, and also warmed me. These differences reflected culture more than anything else.

While differences exist within the Latin American context, some of the cultural threads that run throughout these Friends churches include the importance of celebration, and the role of music, complete with native instruments, in expressions of spirituality. If we look at broad patterns, the intuitive, emotional side of human experience seems to predominate over the more

rational, reflective aspect when people come together to worship. (There exist, of course, many exceptions.) Other common threads include the importance of the extended family, in an expanding context of community. These traits, to some degree, characterize people all over the world, but the emphasis varies from one setting to another.

Another cultural aspect that contributes to the complexity of Latin American Quakerism is the presence of the indigenous peoples in the context, especially in the Andean countries, and in Guatemala and Mexico. And in some places, a history of violence and upheaval makes its mark. One thinks especially of Cuba.

In Bolivia and Peru, the Friends Church has developed almost exclusively among the Aymara people, a pre-Incan group with its own complex worldview and cultural expressions. When Oregon Yearly Meeting (now Northwest Yearly Meeting) took on the work in Bolivia in 1930, they intentionally adopted indigeneity as a strategy for planting the church. In other words, the goal was to encourage the development of a Christian Friends church that would flow in Aymara forms and styles as much as possible. This partly accounts for the unique character of this community today.

Gaby Maita's experience illustrates the influence of an animistic background on contemporary Friends. Gaby grew up in Cochabamba, Bolivia; her family was neither Catholic nor Protestant but, like so much of the population, paid homage to the local gods. She remembers the regular incense offerings her parents made in the home, practices that obligated the whole family to use alcohol and cigarettes as well as the potions prescribed by the diviners. She remembers the hatred and fear her family expressed toward Christianity.

When Gaby was 16, she responded to the message of a street preacher and became a follower of Jesus. She says that she was immediately delivered from her alcohol addiction, not able to even stand the smell of the liquor her family sold from their home. Her conversion infuriated her parents and she suffered "punishments" at their hands for two years. Through the friendship of an older Christian woman and participation in a small church, Gaby slowly grew in her faith. In time her parents also became followers of Jesus.

Since that time Gaby and her husband Esteban Ajnota have pastored Friends churches and even served as missionaries sent from the Bolivian Friends Church to the work in Peru. She has also worked as director of the Compassion program in a Friends Church in Santa Cruz. Gaby says that, "Having found Jesus from within my own culture helps me understand how animism, with its particular customs, traps people. I've learned how to reach out to others in this culture with the Word of God" (in Thomas, 2012, p. 28).

Because of this animistic background, many Latin American Quakers are aware of the power of evil and don't take lightly the seriousness of being cursed. They are also open to the many ways God can communicate to his people, including dreams and visions. They tend to be more open to the supernatural realm than are their fellow Quakers to the north.

Ignacio Plata Mamani, also from Bolivia, was raised on a remote area of the altiplano where his family subsisted on sheep herding and a small crop of potatoes when the weather permitted. Animism, the belief in a spirit-filled world, permeated life in his community. He remembers one

time when his mother was gravely ill, watching as the local diviner scattered the coca leaves to learn the causes of her illness. The leaves showed that the illness came from an envious neighbor, a distant relative, who had cursed his mother. His grandfather then brought in a powerful *curandero* (ritual curer) to find a way to counteract the curse. This *curandero* confirmed that, "You are surrounded on all sides by evil people who are envious of your prosperity, but the worse enemy is your relative who has, by magic and cursing, placed you in the hands of the devil so that he might bring you sickness, spoil your crops and kill off your animals. They want you to leave so they can take over your land."

The *curandero* told them to sacrifice a llama and sprinkle his blood on the neighbor's fields and then told them the ingredients of an offering to counter the curse, a strange mixture of incense, alcohol, a llama fetus, small candies and colorful threads. His price to perform the ritual was high, but the family gathered the stuff and paid the price. Immediately after the ritual offering, the mother recovered, and the problems seemed to be over for a while.

But hardly a year passed when Ignacio's baby sister became sick, and this time the diviners and *curanderos* didn't seem to be able to help. An aunt who had become a follower of Jesus learned of the situation and came to take the baby to a local evangelical church for prayer. After a week of prayers and care by the women of the church, the child recovered, and to the family it was a miracle. Moved by the recovery of the little girl and the testimonies of the believers, Ignacio's family decided to also become followers of this Jesus. The believers visited Ignacio's home to bless the family and pray for their animals and fields. That long-ago day marked a radical change in the family's life. They became part of a Friends Church and they have remained faithful to this day.

Ignacio remembers learning another way to handle curses and those who place them. He moved to the city of La Paz as a young adult, and one day when home visiting his parents, he learned that the neighbor who had cursed them years before had suffered the death of his son-in-law and was about to lose his daughter to sickness. Ignacio's father told him they planned to go and pray for the daughter. Ignacio, remembering the curse, protested, saying this man was only getting what he deserved, that he was their enemy. But the father insisted, telling his son that the way of Jesus was to forgive those who have wronged us and to love the enemy. This was a foreign gospel to Ignacio, but respect for his father won out over his protests. Together they visited this neighbor and prayed for the daughter. She recovered, and relations between the families were healed, perhaps the greater miracle. Today Ignacio is active as a Sunday school teacher in his Friends Church, a husband and father to six children, and a firm believer, not only in the power of God to heal the sick, but in the importance of showing pardon and love to those around us (in Thomas, 2012, pp. 58-62).

Conclusion

The Quaker yearly meetings around the world express themselves in many ways, with both common threads and unique aspects. No one group could be characterized only by the threads of

"Quaker grey." The purpose of this essay has been to portray Latin American Friends as an expression of Quakerism, a legitimate and colorful part of the worldwide family.

The origins of the Friends Movement in England were highly contextual, rising out of specific problems of social and spiritual unrest. And the forms and content of the answers were also contextually specific. Much of the faith and practice, including the testimonies, although specific to seventeenth century England, has proved true in other times and contexts, and contributes to r Quaker identity cross-culturally.

The practice of following the Spirit's guidance for "here and now" is part of the Quaker DNA. Being Quaker means responding to the voice of the Spirit in ways that are both affirming of local culture and, at times, prophetically counter-cultural. As this essay has demonstrated, Latin American Friends exemplify this trait of response to their context, following the Spirit's guidance in ways that are both uniquely Quaker and more broadly evangelical Christian.

As in any community of human beings, Latin American Friends have their struggles, areas in which they can grow. Yet their interweaving of evangelical Christian, Quaker and Latin American threads adds color and vibrancy to the worldwide Quaker tapestry.

For Further Reading

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