



April 23, 2018 • 7:30-9:00 pm • The Barn at Pendle Hill

The Keithian Controversy: Early Quakers, Christianity, and the Light Within

A talk by Madeline Ward

How did the early Quakers understand the relationship between Quakerism and Christianity? Did they think faith in Jesus was necessary? How did they view the role of theology in spirituality? What did they mean by the ‘inward Light’? These were the central issues in the Keithian controversy: a dispute which broke out among Philadelphian Quakers in the seventeenth century when George Keith – one of the most important Quaker leaders at the time – was accused of focusing too heavily on the historical Jesus in his preaching. Keith launched a furious campaign against his opponents and the dispute spread throughout the international Quaker movement. Keith eventually left Quakerism under a cloud. However, the issues he raised have reappeared in every major Quaker schism since the seventeenth century. In this public lecture, Madeleine Ward will guide us through the main events and causes of the Keithian controversy and consider what Quakers might learn from it today.

Madeleine Ward is currently the Henry J. Cadbury Scholar at Pendle Hill, having recently completed a doctorate in theology at the University of Oxford. She has taught university courses on mysticism, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the history of Quakerism, and her doctoral thesis examined changes in the early Quakers’ understanding of the ‘Light within’ over the course of the seventeenth century. While living at Pendle Hill, she has been writing a book on the life and thought of George Keith. Madeleine is a member of Oxford and Swindon Area Meeting, and formerly served as the Quaker chaplain to the University of Oxford.

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338 Plush Mill Road
Wallingford, Pennsylvania
610-566-4507, ext. 137
www.pendlehill.org



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