

Chapter 14

THE WARNERS AND RELIGION

The unknown Warners who crossed the English Channel brought with them many superstitions. They believed in supernatural creatures such as elves, dwarves and giants who often brought harm to humans. The Anglo-Saxons had temples that housed images of their gods as well as altars.

A ritual drinking feast with alcohol provided magical knowledge. This magical knowledge is typically associated with the quest for good fortune. The religious ideas of the Anglo-Saxons made allowance for the worship of many gods. The names of their many Gods became a part of our calendar. Their language, Angl-ish, became our English language.

Sunne, the sun god became our Sunday; Mona, the moon god – Monday; Twi, the god of warfare and battle – Tuesday; Woden - ancestor of people, leader of the hunt and carries off the dead – Wednesday; Thunor, the god of thunder, who rules the storms and sky—Thursday; and Frige, the goddess of love and the wife of Woden became our Friday.

In 597, Pope Gregory sent St. Augustine to England to convert the pagan English. He may have done this because King Ethelbert had pretty well unified the Anglo-Saxons and had married, Bertha, daughter of the Merovingian King (France) a practicing Christian who brought several chaplains with her.

In 780 Charlemagne decreed the death penalty for all Saxons who failed to be baptized, who failed to keep Christian festivals, and who cremated their dead. “By the sword and the cross,” Charlemagne became master of Western Europe. He was responsible for the death of masses of people who refused to accept Christianity or their new king. Because many chose to keep faith with their old gods and leaders, thousands were slaughtered. It is obvious that the unknown Warners were converted when faced “convert or die.”

As the Anglo-Saxon culture developed, those first known Warners were probably Catholic. The power of king and church were combined in mutual support of one another. The national throne and the church attempted to control what the people were to believe and how they were to worship. The growing awareness of individual rights and natural curiosity led to opinions and discoveries in nature that challenged both church teachings and tradition. Early attempts to reform the “church” led to the Reformation and several new Protestant denominations.

The Puritans were Calvinist in their theology and believed in the harsh judgment of God. They embraced predestination and rejected free will. Quakers on the other hand saw God as a Spirit who lives in the heart of every human being and offers direct and personal guidance. Personal experience with God is taken to be more authoritative than the Bible. The Warners were Quakers in the 1500s until Captain William Warner (7) chose to join with the Puritans.

The Puritans came to America to establish a “pure” community of the “true faith.” They tended to see all events as divine blessing or punishments. They expected members to experience a conversion that was validated by an intense examination. If they were approved they became a

part of the church, and only church members could vote. Beliefs that differed with theirs were the work of the devil, and nonbelievers were banished or persecuted. They even hung some of those who spoke out against them or were accused of being devil controlled witches. This persecution led to "Proclamations of Toleration" issued by three different English kings.

Captain William Warner and family traveled with a group of Quakers when they came to America. No record has been found that Captain William and Anne ever affiliated with the Quakers but their children married into the Society. The Quakers got off to a bad start in the new land. They were the radicals. They denied the power of the authorities, clung to their way of dress, continued the use of "thee and thou," and refused to take the customary oaths. Some even resorted to the form of witnessing called "going naked as a sign" as the Biblical prophets Samuel and Isaiah had done.

The Puritans and Quakers differed on their belief about the relationship between man and God. The Puritans believed human beings were depraved and unable to commune with God. Only by grace (that is, by God's decision) could any individual achieve salvation. There was nothing man could do to achieve it.

Quakers believed that Christ was like a bridge between God and man. They believed the Sermon on the Mount was to be taken literally and, by obeying Jesus' commands, that individuals could earn salvation. What the Quakers and the Puritans had in common was the belief that, in the end, the vast majority of people would not be saved.

Members of the Quaker movement became trusted and respected for their honesty and were described as "living the faith that others distorted." They sought to live in peace with everyone, including the Native Americans, and practiced religious toleration within their communities.

We can imagine the Captain's grandson, William Warner (9), sitting in the usual Quaker Meeting where someone had just spoken about the treatment of slaves. When they gathered for their Meetings, they sat in the circle. All people were considered as created equal and could speak but not interrupt another. There would be meditation and consideration of what the Lord would want. During a silence or meditation, a revelation was thought as direct from God. Feeling such was enough to make one's body shake hence the name "Quaker." I wonder how William reacted when he felt that God wanted him to forget the wealth of his investment and release his nine slaves.

Six generations of Warners were Quakers. The son of Mordecai (12) and Jane, John Lewis (13), was the last. He had grown up a Quaker but did not join a Meeting after leaving New Jersey. I wonder if it was because his father was kicked out for his warlike tendencies.

Many of the children of John and Charity became active in the Baptist Church. James Wells Warner was a Baptist until his marriage, and then he transferred to the Palestine Christian Church where he was an active member for fifty years and served many years as an Elder. His brother Samuel S. "was of serious mind and early in life received a license to preach in the Baptist Church."

The church near the house MH Warner built in Calais was the Seneca Valley Church of Christ. This was a church that did not permit mechanical musical instruments. The basis for this belief was that the New Testament did not authorize the use of instruments. Roger, Rodney, Thurman, Hubert and Hildred attended this church until they moved to Woodstock in 1915.

When RJ wrote about religion and the relatives back in Calais he wrote, “The Bible was the book read in many homes. Sometimes it was revered more than the message it contained.” MH was more conservative than Louisa Belle. Ethel wrote, “When I was growing up, card playing and dancing were not allowed in our home. Mother always enjoyed seeing people play games and dance but my Dad thought it was awful. Me, being an obedient daughter I never tried to dance while he was living.”

The older boys had grown up in a green world – a world of clean air, creeks, orchards, woods, meadows, pastures and dogs, sheep and cattle, horses and farmyards. They read selections from the great historians, orators, novelists, essayists, and poets. The McGuffey Reader was a literary storehouse for family reading and a portable library for ambitious youths in a nearly bookless country.



Sixth
McGuffey
Reader used
by both
MH Warner
and
RJ Warner

Now in
possession of
Elvira Warner
Covey
Published
1879



RJ wrote about religion:

A heaven to gain and a hell to shun, was the way the pronouncement of the evangelists who introduced my generation of our family to religion, at the beginning of the twentieth century. The broad road ahead led to the destruction and eternal damnation. The narrow road led to a life of eternal bliss. Each road had a guide to assist us in our passage through this life. The “devil” would direct us down the broad road and would introduce us to all the sins that humanity enjoyed, while the “Son of God”, would lead us down the narrow road, through many trials and temptations, but to a victorious future. We were urged to choose a leader that would make us a winner.

The message of Christ's saving death was offered as a choice for empowerment to live life for eternal good. The transforming and positive power of this belief appears regularly in the conversion stories of many individuals who find joy in God's love and grace. RJ had a framed scripture that always hung above the headboard of his bed, "Lo I am with you always." Matthew 28:20.

A few years after he was married and bought the house in New Rome, RJ took his family to a church just down the street. During the service he noticed that every time a certain man got up to speak they immediately sang a hymn. After a while an usher came over to him and said they were having a problem and apologized. It seems the man wanted to say something about the theory of evolution and the congregation did not want to hear him. The next Sunday RJ took his family to another church and that may be why we were raised as Methodists.

While I was growing up we always attended Sunday school and church. Sometimes we would get up early, go part way to visit a relative and attend a church along the way. Mom was a stickler for perfect attendance (fifty Sundays a year) and made sure we earned our Sunday school attendance pins. My brother, R. David had pins for thirteen years. Mine, shown here is for ten years.



Dad always taught a Sunday school class. His choice of Bible was the King James with the Thompson chain reference. Mom had several Bibles and usually added the latest translation to the bookshelf beside her chair. She started the junior church when the teaching method was telling Bible stories using a flannel board. The Bible characters came in a book, were colored with crayons, cut out with scissors and placed on the board as the story was told.

Dad gave me a Bible when I left home. He wrote this inscription inside the front cover.

Dear Bob,

Christmas 1943

This is the best book I have ever known. It has helped me and it will help you wherever you go. Study its pages and you will find secret strength for all the trials of life: guidance for all the dark pathways that might lead to wrong, and you will develop character that will stand every test man knows. When the years of life ripen into old age, if you have accepted Christ, you can look back and see that you have lived a good and useful life.

Dad

While I was growing up I never felt that I was pressured to "get religion" but rather I felt that my parents had discovered something that I should catch up with. Like my Dad I attended revivals at other denominations and came to my own conclusions. The Christian story has much to offer: power to overcome wrong choices, release from the burden of guilt and reproach, service to one's neighbor, and sensitivity to the suffering of the least. It offers a sense of confidence that life has meaning and purpose.

The MH Warner family was a religious family. Perhaps having parents in different denominations developed a greater awareness of what was really important in matters of faith. They had attained a confidence that goes with grasping truths that are above the meaning of words. In something like the Quaker tradition they were confident of their ability to ascertain what was of God and what was not. They left the hills unencumbered with many of the restrictions imposed by some believers. Many members of the following generations are active in various churches and several are preachers.