

The late Lewis Benson was the leading student of George Fox (1624-1691). His word to present-day Quakers and indeed all who are seeking a deeper Christian faith adequate to modern spiritual needs is that it can be found in the writings of George Fox. Lewis Benson finds that Fox's teachings were in part forgotten soon after his death; in part misrepresented by succeeding generations of Quakers, and even partially supplanted by other forms of Christianity. The published writings of other exponents of the Quaker Christian faith reveal their misunderstandings, or even rejection of vital beliefs held by Fox and the other itinerant Quaker preachers who stirred England in the 1650s. This loss of truth, Lewis Benson urges, caused the Quaker movement's loss of power after Fox's death.

This paper is a report of a week-end Summer Gathering held in July 1974 at Friends House, London, and introduces some of George Fox's principal teachings.

What did George Fox teach about Christ?

LEWIS BENSON

I. CHRIST THE FOUNDATION

The people gathered about me, with several of their preachers. It was judged there were above a thousand people: amongst whom I declared God's everlasting Truth and Word of Life freely and largely* for the space of about three hours, directing all to the Spirit of God in themselves; that they might be turned from the darkness to the Light and believe in it, that they might become the children of it; and might be turned from the power of Satan, which they had been under, unto God; and by the Spirit of Truth might be led into all truth, and sensibly understand the words of the prophets, and of Christ, and of the apostles; and might come to know Christ to be their Teacher to instruct them, their Counsellor to direct them, their Shepherd to feed them, their Bishop to oversee them, and their Prophet to open[†] divine mysteries; and might know their bodies to be prepared, sanctified, and made fit temples for God and Christ to dwell in.

And in the openings[†] of the heavenly life, I opened to them the prophets, and the figures and shadows, and directed them to Christ, the Substance. Then I opened the parables and sayings of Christ and things that

had been long hid; showing the intent and scope of the apostles' writings, how that their epistles were written to the Elect. And when I had opened that state, I showed also the state of the apostasy, that has been since the apostles' days. (Part of George Fox's Sermon on Firbank Fell, Westmorland, 1652. Ellwood's Journal [1694 edition]. Ellwood has re-arranged the material in the Spence MSS, see Nickalls's edition [1952], pp. 108-110.)

When George Fox preached this sermon at Firbank Fell, many of his audience and all their teachers were convinced, some becoming leaders in the new movement. This was the first of a series of long sermons that he preached to large crowds within a few years' time. It is of special importance because historians have chosen it as the point in history at which the Quakers emerged as an important religious movement.

At the large, open-air meetings like the one at Firbank Fell, it was Fox's aim to give a comprehensive presentation of his whole interpretation of Christianity and to confront his hearers with a real alternative to the Christianity that they already knew. His summary of this sermon is a checklist of the themes that are central to his message. He returns to them again and again in his ministry and in his writings throughout his whole life.

* freely and largely: without hindrance

† open: to explain or reveal spiritual meaning; hence 'openings'

Fox's Revolutionary Message

Our object in these sessions is to concentrate on the message that Fox preached. Fox's message is rooted in his early experiences as a seeker and finder, and it will help us to understand both him and his message if we review some facts of his early life.

As a seeker his quest centered on two things. First, he was seeking for the source of power to resist temptation and the power to answer God's call for righteousness. And, second, he was seeking for the Church which is in God, of which Christ is the Head. He did not find the answers to these two questions in the churches he visited nor among the Christian leaders he consulted. He believed that God had been dealing with him directly and had led him to see that Christ is the answer to both the things for which he was seeking. He saw that Christ can teach us what we ought to do and give us the power to do it, and he saw that Christ is able by his power to raise up a people who live by his Word and who are ordered and governed by him.

His public work (as distinct from his personal quest) began with gospel preaching. The gospel he preached was the foundation of everything he taught and everything he did. This word "gospel," like many of the words that have to be used in dealing with these matters, is heavily loaded with connotations that don't help us to understand Fox and the gospel he preached. In America we have "gospel hymns," "gospel tents," "gospel buses," and all kinds of gospel things, and they are all related to a particular

kind of gospel—the kind that we hear from professional evangelists. I wish to maintain that Fox uses the word "gospel" in a way which is different from that in the main stream of Christian teaching.

It is a tendency among present-day Quakers to think of the Christian content of Quakerism as its closest point of contact with other Christian traditions. Fox did not look at it that way. His gospel preaching was intended to challenge the churches' teaching about Jesus Christ and how he "saves" men. In his most unequivocal statement about the relation of Quakers to other groups of professing Christians he says, 'The Quakers have revolted from you apostates.'¹

Fox was a revolutionist. He was not, in any sense, a reformer. He had no program for reform—no list of reforms that he advocated as the means of church renewal. The churches had departed so far from the apostolic teaching that a new beginning was necessary. He states in his *Journal* that before he became a Quaker he "was never joined in profession of religion with any."² "I am not separated from you for I was never of you"³ was his reply to those who called him a separatist.

He was making a new beginning from a new starting point. His starting point was the gospel that was preached in the apostles' days, which he claimed had been lost but which was now being recovered and preached again. He repeatedly asserts that "now the gospel is being preached again after a long night of apostasy since the apostles' days."*

In its shortest form, this gospel appeared as the proclamation "Christ has come to teach his people himself." This is a kind of symbol--an abridged form of the gospel. When he tries to compress his statement about what he is preaching, this is how it comes out. When he is describing the content of the evangelical epistles that he addressed to the heads of state of many countries he says that he "wrote books...to the most part of the world, how that God was to teach people himself by his Son."⁴

In the summer of 1952 nine hundred Quakers gathered in the North of England from many parts of the world to commemorate the new beginning that was made in 1652 at Firbank Fell. The Third World Conference of Friends that was held that summer at Oxford proclaimed boldly in its Conference Message: "With George Fox we declare that Christ has come to teach his people himself."⁵ If Friends had really learned what Fox meant by these words, it would have had explosive revolutionary consequences. But there was not revolution. The glow of rediscovery did not last much longer than most conference enthusiasms.

Now, what is the whole content of the gospel message that is symbolized by the phrase "Christ has come to teach his people himself"? There are at least four major parts of Fox's preaching about Christ. The first of these is that Christ is alive. Most Christians affirm this and it wasn't discovered by Fox. But the kernel of what he is affirming when he declares that "Christ is alive" is that Christ is alive and *present*. He is not just affirming that Christ allows himself to be known by worshipping groups as they meditate on the facts of his earthly life. He is saying that Christ is alive

and present in the midst of his church in a *functional* way; that is, when he is present he *does* something. If we attend a church service at which a priest presides, we expect him to do something; the priest is not merely present; he performs a function—he is actively present.

* He repeats this at least 42 times in his writings.

A Basic Teaching: Christ in his "Office" as Spiritual Prophet

So Christ is not only alive and present in the midst of those who gather in his Name, but he is alive and present, as Fox says, "in all his 'offices' (i.e. functions)." We can know him as our Prophet. "We can hear our Prophet in silence (i.e. silent worship)." ⁶ "We know the reign of Christ amongst us...for amongst us Christ is King." ⁷ Jesus Christ may be known "in the midst of you as a Prophet, Priest, and King...to open and reveal to you, and rule you." ⁸

The offices of prophet, priest, and king are the three offices that, traditionally, involve an initiatory anointing, and therefore they have special messianic significance. But Fox doesn't have, as Calvin had, a doctrine of the three-fold offices of Christ in which there are *just* these three offices. Fox also sees Christ as a spiritual commander, counsellor, leader, orderer, and minister.

I have collected 124 instances where Fox refers to two or more offices of Christ in series. (In 41 of these passages he is making specific references to the offices of Christ as he is "present in the midst.") The office of prophet occurs most frequently (112 times) and then, in descending order, the offices of shepherd, bishop, priest, king, counsellor, leader, and head. These are the offices which he mentioned in his Firbank Fell sermon and to which he constantly refers in his writings. Thus Fox puts a lot of emphasis on Christ's office as prophet, and unless we understand what he is saying on this subject, we cannot understand the message that he preached, nor understand why it was so revolutionary.*

* Acts 9:3-6 describes Paul's experience of "Christ as heavenly Prophet," in which with his "spiritual ear" he hears "the spiritual voice of Christ" inwardly teaching righteousness and giving a command. - Eds.

The Scriptural Basis of this Teaching

In the early chapters of Acts, Luke is trying to tell us what the earliest gospel preaching was like, and he must have done some historical research, because by this time the earliest gospel preaching was already old fashioned.

The speeches of Peter in Acts are the most explicit New Testament sources for our knowledge of what the primitive apostolic gospel was like. Peter's words are very precious to Fox, who refers to them again and again.

In Acts 3:22, Peter says, “For Moses truly said unto the fathers ‘A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.’”[†] Here, Peter is preaching Christ as the fulfiller of Moses’ prophesy in Deuteronomy. Stephen, in Acts 7:37, also refers to this prophecy.

Now the church has never made much use of this very early apostolic teaching about Christ as “the prophet like Moses.” With the death of Peter and Stephen, this understanding of Christ disappears from the main stream of Christian history.[‡] Modern historians of Christian thought tell us that it disappeared in the apostolic age and has never reappeared. The reason why historians say this is because they have never made a serious study of Fox’s thought. The fact is that Fox does stress the office of Christ as prophet as it has not been stressed since the apostolic age.

This is the basis of Fox’s claim “*Now* the gospel is being preached *again* after a long night of apostasy since the apostles’ days.” (Italics are mine.) When he states “Christ has come to teach his people himself,” this statement is based on his understanding of Christ as prophet. The prophets were sent to teach God’s people the principles of God’s righteousness and call them to obey. And this is what Christ does in his office as spiritual prophet.

When I first began to see this pattern emerging in Fox’s thought, it was all entirely new to me. I discovered this teaching first in Fox’s writings, and with Fox’s help I found some confirmation of it in the Bible. But when I tried to get further confirmation by consulting works of modern biblical scholarship, I could find nothing on Christ the prophet. Well, this was back in the [19]40s and early [19]50s and at that time not much had been written on the subject. But with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, it became evident that there actually were people in the time of Jesus who were expecting the prophet described in Deuteronomy 18. New studies of the Samaritans have also been a factor in accelerating the interest in Christ as the fulfiller of this prophecy in Deuteronomy.

So now, for the first time in Christian history, biblical scholars are giving serious attention to that strand of apostolic Christianity that deals with Christ as prophet, and much valuable information has been brought to light—much more than Fox knew. But the fact is that Fox *did* know about this and he made full theological and practical use of what he knew. As far as I know, all the new material that is being discovered by modern biblical scholars about Christ the prophet has had no consequences whatever for Christian thought and life.

The office of Christ as prophet was known to John Calvin, and he is generally regarded as the one who introduced the threefold office of Christ--prophet, priest, and king--into dogmatic theology. In the first edition of Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, he speaks of Christ’s offices as he is priest and king. In the second edition he added the office of prophet. But when he added the office of prophet, it did not alter his conception of Christianity in any way. But with Fox, his whole conception of Christianity

from beginning to end is conditioned by the weight that he gives to the importance of the office of Christ as prophet.

Everything that is distinctive in Quakerism is related to his teaching about Christ the Prophet. He gives a full theological and practical weight to it, and he is the only one that I know of since the time of the apostles who has done this. It is often said that "Christianity is Christ," and if this is true, then our conception of who Christ is will determine our conception of Christianity as a whole. Fox does have a distinctive understanding of who Christ is and how he saves men, and this, I believe, accounts for his distinctive understanding of the meaning of Christianity.

† Deut. 18.15

‡ It lingered in a corrupt form for some time among the Ebionites.

The Foundation of Fox's Message

Fox did not travel all over England in order to tell people about the value of not taking a vote in reaching group decisions, or the value of pacifism, or that women should have an equal share in the ministry. His message is a message about Christ, and the central core of this message is his teaching about the offices of Christ. He is telling people that there is one sure Foundation on which they are to build, and this is the knowledge and experience of Christ as he is present in the midst of his people in all his offices.

This gospel that Fox preached is the answer to all who are asking the questions that Fox asked as a seeker, namely: "How can I find the church that is kept by the power of God and does not scatter in times of persecution"? This gospel leads people to the knowledge of Christ as one who not only teaches us what is right but gives us the power to do the right. It tells us that Christ has the power to save us *from* captivity to sin. And Christ himself describes his mission as bringing liberty to the captives.

The preaching of this gospel aroused the most vigorous opposition from the Calvinistic Puritans who believed that assurance of one's personal salvation can be experienced apart from obedience in righteousness. The Quakers preached "salvation *from* sin" and the Puritans preached "salvation *in* sin." This was the crux of the Quaker-Puritan controversy. Calvin never seemed able to see that if all the world could be brought to the status of justified sinners,* the sin that these justified sinners would commit would have just as tragic social and historical consequences as the sin of unjustified sinners.

* Justification: The action whereby a man is justified or freed from the penalty of sin, and accounted or made righteous by God. (Shorter O.E.D.)

Evangelical Protestantism: A Comparison

Something more needs to be said at this point about the meaning of the word "gospel." Fox used this word as the proper term for the message that he preached. In order to better understand what he meant by "gospel," we can contrast his use of the word with its usage among Evangelical Protestants and Evangelical Quakers of the present day.

Evangelical Quakerism emerged as a distinctive type of Quakerism in the early nineteenth century in both England and America. In America, Evangelical Quakerism is not as strong as it was at the end of the nineteenth century, but it has survived in strength. The Evangelical Quaker tradition contains much that is distinctively Quaker, but its understanding of the gospel is not substantially different from that we find among Evangelical Protestants. In this Evangelical tradition, gospel preaching has one objective: to evoke a public response in individual hearers to accept Christ as their personal savior. Thus the successful evangelist is one who causes the greatest number of individuals to make their public confession: "I accept Jesus Christ as my personal savior." This gospel has been preached by American Quaker evangelists for over one hundred years. It has been the basis of Quaker missions in Asia, Africa, and South and Central America. Directly or indirectly, this kind of mission work accounts for a very large proportion of the total number of Friends reported annually by the Friends World Committee.

This view of the gospel appears in the uniform Discipline of the Friends United Meeting (1964) in these words: "Friends are received into active membership whose faith in Christ as personal savior is manifest in their lives." One of the spokesmen for the large body of Evangelical Friends in America wrote, "Those are enrolled as members who profess and evidence faith in Jesus Christ as personal Savior." (*The People called Quakers*, Arthur O. Roberts, 1956.)

This kind of gospel preaching is aimed at the individual, and it is based on an individualistic conception of salvation. It leads to an individualistic conception of Christian morality, and it is not the means of building a Christian fellowship that learns together, obeys together, and suffers together.

Now, what does it mean to "accept Christ as my personal savior"? I think it means accepting Christ as "savior" in relation to his sacrificial death on the Cross, which is an atoning act that assures us of forgiveness and makes us acceptable to God *if* we accept it. This gospel has its roots in the priestly tradition of the Old Testament, and it understands *Christ the Savior* as a priestly figure. He is the forgiver and the interceder.

Fox also preaches Christ in his office as priest, but his intention is to expand this conception of Christ's saving work, and Christ is also savior in his offices as prophet and king. When we receive Christ we enter into a community of which Christ is the living, present ruler; governor; and orderer.

He is the prophet who must be heard and obeyed in a community that learns together, obeys together, and suffers together.

Thus the gospel that Fox preached is not only concerned with the personal salvation of the individual. He claimed that, through Christ and his gospel and new covenant, God is still calling men to righteousness and community. So the two main consequences that follow the preaching of this gospel are a new righteousness based on obedience to Christ and a new community led, governed, and ordered by Christ.

In the sessions that follow, we will be exploring in more detail the meaning of the new righteousness and new community.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The questions have been condensed, where necessary, but not to such an extent that it was felt necessary to submit the edited versions to the questioners.

Christ as "heavenly Prophet"

Robert Hewison (Westminster Meeting): Would you enlarge upon what you understand and what George Fox understands by "Prophet"?

Lewis Benson: There are a number of modern writers who think of Christ as a prophet. They are mostly on the rationalistic side of Christian thought. They maintain that if we understand what a prophet is, in the Old Testament sense, then we can simply put Christ in that category. But this is not what Fox is trying to tell us. This is not what Fox is talking about, nor what Peter, in Acts, is talking about. And it is certainly not what I am talking about.

Fox says, "Now everyone, having a Light from Christ Jesus, the Son of God, him by whom the world was made...sees him the Prophet, whom God hath raised up, whom Moses spoke of, who is the end of the prophets." ⁹ Christ says, "The law and the prophets were until John" (Luke 16:16), and Fox interprets this to mean that John the Baptist belongs to the succession of Hebrew prophets and is the last of them. But Jesus is a prophet as he is the fulfiller of the Mosaic prophecy of Deuteronomy 18. Fox says, "This Prophet like Moses was the Messiah,"¹⁰ and he understands Christ, the Messiah, to be a prophetic figure. "The Messiah is come...who is the Prophet like Moses."¹¹

So Fox is certainly not telling us that we can just think of Jesus as a prophet or as one of the prophets. He says that Christ "is the Prophet whom God has raised up, and his command is to hear him in all things, for Christ is the Word by which all things were made and created, therefore he is to be heard, who is the Mediator...and their Prophet."¹² We can know him as our Prophet because we can know him as one who is alive and present in our midst, teaching us.

The language of prophecy may sound strange to modern ears, but I do not see how we can get away from it. It has been said that prophecy was the most distinctive thing about the religion of Israel. No other nation had prophets like the Hebrew prophets. Some nations had prophets of a sort who by going through certain rituals could tell you where to find a lost cow. There were official prophets and court prophets, and the Old Testament speaks frequently of false prophets. But the prophets whom we know from the prophetic books of the Old Testament are unique to Israel.

Now Fox believed, and I believe, that God wants us to understand who Christ is in the context of the history of prophecy. God is coming to us in Christ in the way he came to the Hebrew people through the prophets. He is coming to us through Christ to teach us what is right and what is wrong, and to give us the power to do the right and reject the wrong, and to gather us into a community that learns together, obeys together, and suffers together. Without Christ the heavenly teacher and prophet, we do not have this kind of community, and we do not have this kind of moral strength and certainty. Therefore, it seems to me that Fox's recovery of the prophetic element in the earliest apostolic teaching is a tremendously important event in the history of Christian life, faith, and thought.

Christ as Prophet and "the Concept of the Inner Light"

Hugh Ross (Highgate Meeting): How does this emphasis upon Christ the Prophet relate to our concept of the Inner Light? The true experience of God or Christ or the Holy Spirit came to Fox inwardly in his solitariness. What does he mean by putting such emphasis on Christ's being Prophet and Teacher? He must have meant more than Christ's being a prophet or teacher, as it were, standing in front of him. He must have meant something inward and personal. What does Fox mean by that kind of relationship? How does calling Christ a Prophet help to express this relationship?

Lewis Benson: I have not found in Fox's writings a "concept of the Inner Light" or even the words "Inner Light" as a term that is associated with such a formal concept. The Inner Light became a central concern of the "apologists" (Penn, Penington, Barclay) who in expounding and defending Quaker beliefs were trying to answer the question: What is it that is most central and distinctive about the Quaker faith? These early Quaker apologists opened the gateway to a path of speculation that caused some bolder spirits in later centuries to erect a Quaker doctrinal structure with the "concept of the Inner Light" as the chief cornerstone.

If we compare the canonical writings of the New Testament with the Christian literature of the second century, we find that there is a wide gap between them. The later writers seem to be operating in a very different religious climate. And there is a similar gap between the writings of the first Publishers of Truth and those who came after and tried to describe and explain the faith of the Quakers.

Fox has a lot to say about the Light within and the inward Light of Christ. But, for Fox, this “light” terminology is a way of telling us something about Christ. The Old Testament says “the Law is light” (Prov. 6:23), and the Law is light because, through it, God’s people learn what God wants them to do and what he forbids. Christ is Light because he is alive and present in the midst of his people teaching them and giving them the knowledge of what is right and what is wrong.

The “Light” that Fox is proclaiming is God’s Son speaking to God’s people. Fox says, “The Lord is the Teacher of his people by his Son...and when the Son of God was come, and God sent him into the world, he said...‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear him’¹³ so God is come to teach his people himself by his Son...Therefore, all must return by the Spirit, light, Grace and Truth to...Christ Jesus, the great Prophet, Shepherd, Bishop, Leader and Counsellor, that they may hear God speak to them by his Son.”¹⁴

One important difference between Fox’s language and the language of the Quaker apologists is that Fox frequently uses the words “speak,” “voice,” and “obey” in connection with the Light. He says “Hear the Light” at least 46 times. He speaks of “Hearing the Voice of the Light,”¹⁵ and he says “This Light...speaks to you.”¹⁶

“Hear his Voice who is risen from the dead”;¹⁷ “Since he is risen and ascended, they must have their spiritual ear to hear the spiritual voice of Christ.”¹⁸ Fox is calling men to listen to the Voice of the risen Christ who is alive and present in the midst of his people. But this kind of language gradually fades away and is rarely found in later Quaker writings.

The encounter with Christ, the Light, is an encounter with a personal sovereign will that is distinct from our own will. The Light reproves and condemns and calls to repentance. It is experienced as a voice of command that must be heard and obeyed. This is what gave moral certainty and moral strength to the early Quaker community.

The Holy Spirit and the Experience of Christ

A.N. Other: What did Fox teach about the Holy Spirit?

Lewis Benson: There is a certain kind of Evangelical Christianity that separates the experience of the Holy Spirit from the experience of Christ. Christ is thereby the author of salvation, but the person who is “saved” is only a second class Christian if he has not *also* experienced the Holy Spirit and does not give outward evidence of experience the Holy Spirit. In the teaching of Fox, the experience of the Holy Spirit is not separated from the experience of Christ, the great Prophet. In his *Journal* he says, “For though I read the Scriptures that spoke of Christ and of God, yet I knew him not but by revelation...as the Father of Life drew me to his Son by his Spirit.”¹⁹ After quoting Jesus’ words “No man can come to me, except the Father, which sent me, draw him” (John 6:44), he then comments, “Now, what is the means

that the Father doth draw people to his Son, but by his Holy Spirit...By this Holy Spirit the holy and righteous God doth draw people from their unrighteousness and unholiness, to Christ, the righteous and holy One, the great Prophet in his New Covenant and New Testament, whom Moses in the Old Covenant and Testament said God would raise up, like unto him, and whom the people should 'hear in all things'...They that do not hear the Son of God, the great Prophet, do not mind the drawing of the Father by his Holy Spirit in his Son; but to them that mind the drawings of the good Spirit of the Father to his Son, the Spirit giveth an understanding to know God and Christ."²⁰

God knows that we need his help to understand who Christ is and how he saves men and he sends his Spirit to "give us an understanding." The Father "draws" us to Christ, and his Spirit is given us for this purpose. Without this Spirit that the Father sends, we cannot know Christ and hear his Voice and obey his commands.

In Fox's teaching there is no speculative theologizing about "the Holy Spirit" in a way that diverts attention from Christ to the Holy Spirit. There is a type of Christianity whose distinguishing mark is the special emphasis it gives to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, but Fox's Quaker faith is not simply another appearance of this type of Christianity.

The Atonement

Joseph Joachim: I cannot accept the Evangelical view of the Atonement. From William E. Wilson's *The Problem of the Cross*, I understand that it's based upon a misinterpretation of what Paul said. What was Fox's view? Yet while I cannot accept the theology of Evangelicals, they do seem to know the risen Christ. Isn't the guidance of the risen Christ the same thing?

Lewis Benson: I will begin with the second question: Isn't the experience of those who make the Atonement the central thing in their understanding of Christ an authentic thing? I do not feel I have the right to question the authenticity of the experience of the risen Christ that people have. But I think that in this Evangelical point of view what is happening is that all the theological weight of salvation is being put upon the office of Christ as Priest. The actual knowledge of Christ, as one who is present in the midst of his people, giving them the order and government of the New Covenant—this is a special kind of Church Fellowship, that springs from the preaching of the Evangelical gospel. We shall go into this further when we deal with Fox's doctrine of the Church and how it springs from his gospel preaching.

What does Fox have to say about the Atonement? I have had some controversy with modern Quakers on this subject of the use that Fox makes of the Atonement. Hugh Barbour of the Earlham School of Religion claims that Fox does not give the Atonement as much attention and emphasis as he should. As I see it, the fact is that Fox has a doctrine of the Atonement; that is to say, Christ's office of Priest is a genuine office--God wants him to be a Priest, as he wants us to experience forgiveness through our knowledge of

Christ. But because Fox has an expanded view of the offices of Christ (because he includes the offices of Prophet and King in his doctrine of the Church), the Atonement is no longer the central thing in Fox's teaching about Christ, as it has been in the teaching of the churches right down to the present time and still is. So, as far as Fox's leadership is concerned, we do not have to abandon the doctrine of the Atonement. It simply comes into a different perspective in Fox's thinking.

II. THE COMMUNITY THAT IS FOUNDED ON CHRIST

In this session we shall be considering one of the consequences of this gospel. When Fox preached it he always assumed that it would lead those who received it into a particular kind of community, based upon what he called "the gospel order."

Two Views of the Church

Now when Billy Graham or any evangelist in that tradition preaches his gospel, he isn't just satisfied to have people come up and make a confession for Christ. He wants them to be gathered into a church. But he doesn't care at all what kind of church--it can even be the Society of Friends! The evangelists have follow-up teams that try to get everybody distributed in the different churches. A good many people have come into the Society of Friends in America by this method, that is, they were converted in some kind of evangelistic mass-meeting and became assigned to the Quakers. An awkward situation is created as to how to assimilate people of this kind. From the point of view of the gospel that the professional evangelist preaches in America, the question of church fellowship is a secondary one. It's not very important to the evangelist what kind of church fellowship you come into.

With Fox it's entirely different. He claimed and believed that the message he preached would lead everybody who accepted it into a particular kind of fellowship. And that is what actually happened. Nobody, as far as I know, said, "Yes, I accept this message but I don't care anything about this fellowship you are talking about."

When Margaret Fell* had been convinced by Fox's preaching for about two or three weeks, she decided to go to her parish church¹ because, according to Fox, "she was not wholly come off from them." Apparently he thought that a fortnight is plenty of time to break a life-time of association with a Christian fellowship! The following quotations show how the gospel preaching is directly related to coming into the gospel fellowship that belongs to it.

For the preaching of the gospel of Christ Jesus is to the intent that all may come to be heirs...of Christ and of his government. (*Journal [1902], 241*) Now is the gospel preached and true fellowship come into again. (*Works [1831] VII, 172*) Our order and government are of Christ and his gospel. (*Works [1831] VIII, 172*) All that receive this gospel, the power of God unto salvation, in their hearts, receive Christ (the power of God) and his government and order. (*Works [1831] VIII, 207*) The fellowship of God in the Spirit and gospel differs from all the fellowships that have been made since the apostles' days. (*Works [1831] VIII, 31*)

Fox says, "Keep your testimony of the life and of grace, and of the gospel and the order of it."² Thus to him the *fact* of a community's being gathered into a particular form of order and government and discipline under Christ through this gospel is a *testimony* for Christ. Fox gives warning about what happens if people do not keep their testimony for this order and government of Christ. He says, "Keep the order of the gospel," "Stand up for your liberty in the gospel and in the faith which Christ is the author of. For if you lose it, or let another spirit get over you, you will not soon regain it."³ Now this is a solemn warning. The course of Quaker history would have been different if Friends had taken it seriously.

* Later Fox's wife.

Fox, the Early Friends and "the Gospel Order"

Fox did not preach about this order of the gospel when he first made contact with groups in towns and villages all over England and confronted "priests" (ministers) and their congregations after public worship. He began to speak about gospel order later. Because of this, Rufus M. Jones* says that Fox had no idea at the outset of having any kind of gospel fellowship, order, and government, but that this occurred to him later because there were so many Quakers and they were so disorganized that something had to be done about it. But I think that Fox had a vision of the people of God in the new Covenant from the very beginning, and that he saw that this vision could not be realized until the gospel had been preached. He says, "(God) sent me forth...first to declare his everlasting gospel, and then, after people had received the gospel, I was moved to go through the nation, to advise them to set up men's meetings and the women's...And this was the end, that all that had received the gospel might be possessed of it, and the gospel order."⁴

Fox ran into trouble about this immediately. Friends had been getting along for some years without this gospel order and they liked things the way they were--in other words, with no restraints upon the individual. Fox said at the time, "Here is the order that preserves in Life and I know (that) to be brought into this many (Quakers) are as dark[†] as the 'priests'";⁵ this is about as dark as you can get! So there was an open revolt all over England, and in many places there were separatist Meetings. Many people connected with this movement of revolt had been sufferers for Truth, had been among the first Publishers of Truth and even among "the valiant seventy." Fox says of the separatist leaders, John Wilkinson and John Story,[‡] their opposition was to "the order of the gospel," which for Fox means the order and government of God's people which springs from this particular gospel.

Fox says the gospel order was lost.⁶ Therefore the gospel order and the government of Christ are to be set up *again*. So whatever notions we may have absorbed from our Quaker environment today about the origins of the Quaker mode of church government (and there are many such explanations), I believe the true basis of the Quaker conception of church

government lies where Fox says it does, in the gospel he preached. This should be the foundation of everything in Quaker life and thought.

So much for the current theory, that Fox had a genius for organization and that it was because of this gift that he was able to impose on the Society of Friends a particular system of government which has some merit in it, a system that, in other words, he invented. But Fox says at least twenty times that his gospel and the order of it is “not *of* man, nor *by* man,” that is, he did not receive it from any human source neither his own resources nor those of other people. He believed that it was given--something given by God.

* American Friend, 1863-1947, contributor to Rowntree Quaker History series

† dark: unenlightened - Eds.

‡ For an account of the Wilkinson-Story controversy in the 1760s and 1680s, see *The Second Period of Quakerism* by W.C. Braithwaite (1921), Ch. XI - Eds. See also C.J. II, 312, 315 (Journal Cambridge: Univ. Press 2 vols. 1911).

The Community that is Governed by Christ

Fox believed that the coming of Christ into the world brought the possibility of a new kind of community, a community which owed its ordered existence to the presence of Christ in its midst. Fox says, “These are the true meetings and true gatherings, who feel Jesus Christ in the midst of them. There you come to know him in his ‘offices.’”⁷ In another place he says, “There is no true Church but where Christ exercises his ‘offices’ in and amongst them.”⁸ Also he says, “They may as well deny Christ as deny his heavenly order of his gospel, and his heavenly spiritual government.”⁹

For Fox, then, the preaching of the gospel and the establishment of gospel order were parts of one whole. But it was a wholeness which had to come in the special sequence of first preaching the gospel and, secondly, gathering people into the order of the gospel. In this ordered community the order consists in their *seeking together to hear and obey the Voice of God and Christ, and in being prepared to suffer together for the Truth, which is taught to the whole community by Christ.*

Thus the great exercise of the whole Quaker community is *finding the right way for all--something we do not see much of nowadays in Quaker Meetings. Finding the right way for all, and watching over one another for good, means that once a vision of Truth has come to the Church, so that it sees clearly that it is bound to uphold certain moral principles, it should strive to be faithful as a community to these principles and not let them be forgotten.*

The “Advices and Queries”: their Forgotten Function

This is the reason, I believe, the Advices and Queries were originally collected and published. Recently they have been, I would say, perverted to

a certain extent, at least in America.* We are continually being told that the purpose of the Queries is for individual self-examination. This is something we do in our private devotions: read these queries and put them to ourselves. But in the early days of Friends and right down to our own time, as I can remember, the purpose of the queries was for the *Church* to examine itself. The Queries read: Are Friends doing this? Are Friends doing that? The Meetings had to answer these queries and send the answers up to Quarterly Meetings and thence to Yearly Meeting. So by the time the state of the Society was considered at Y.M. a report would be before the whole body as to whether or not we were learning together, obeying together, and suffering together. And if we were not, we had to *do* something about it. Nowadays the Queries are no longer used in this way. They don't really contribute very much, it seems to me, to the moral life of the whole community in the way they are now used.

*The change in the purpose of the Advices and Queries has also taken place within living memory in London Yearly Meeting.

True Worship

We are not able in our short time together to make a comprehensive study of Fox's teaching. We can't go as fully as would be desirable and profitable into Fox's understanding of the Church as the community that is foretold and foreshadowed in the writings of the prophets, the community that is approached through the Spirit of hearing and obeying, that is, through the Spirit of prophecy. In this Church the whole paraphernalia of religion--rites and ceremonies, rituals, sacraments, priests, temples, and all the rest of the cultic side of religion--would be replaced by a new kind of community in which God is approached through Christ alone. I think this was achieved to a very great extent in the early Quaker community. In later generations also we have had a community with no clergy and no laity and in which the worship of God in the Spirit of prophecy has in some measure survived but always within a cultural tradition which is being eroded as it changes and loses its contents.

Fox says, "In that* is God worshipped that brings to declare his will."¹⁰ In other words, if we gather together in any other spirit, if any search is on our minds other than to do God's will, this is not the worship that God desires. I don't think Fox ever gave a moment's thought to what kind of worship would meet his *own* needs. He never raised that question. For him the question was: What kind of worship does God call for? When Jesus speaks about true worship--on the only occasion when he does so (to the Samaritan woman)--he says that the hour is coming and *now* is, when God will be worshipped in Spirit and in Truth. "For the Father seeks such to worship him" (John 4:23). Jesus is contrasting the new worship in the new Covenant to the worship associated with Mount Gerizim and Mount Zion. He is saying, we are not going to have that kind of worship any more. A new kind of worship is coming in.

Fox in all his work and teaching is trying to gather Friends into a worshipping fellowship that is based on the New Covenant, and on the authority of Christ and his promise that where two or three are gathered together in his Name, he would be in the midst of them. In this kind of fellowship there is a liberty because we are not bound by creed or the authority of ancient scripture or bishops or priests. But we are bound by Christ himself who is present in our midst, Christ who is our King, our Priest, and our Prophet, who is to be heard and obeyed in all things. When Christ says, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Mat. 11:30), I don't think he means that there is no suffering or struggle--no Cross--involved in following him. I think he means there is no easier yoke and no lighter burden. When we try to get around the way of the Cross to find some easier way, it always ends up by being a harder way. We suffer more and accomplish less.

So preaching this gospel was a means of bringing into existence a new community. Peter writing to the early Christians says, "Once you were not a people, but are now the people of God" (Pet 2:10). Fox repeats these words to the Quakers after they had been in existence several decades. They became an outwardly visible, gathered community with certain distinguishing marks which everyone could recognize.

* The Spirit of God that "gave forth scripture" (in preceding sentence of passage quoted).

The Growth of Sect-mindedness in the Society of Friends

Unhappily this community very soon became sect-minded and thought of its distinguishing marks as marks of a sect: "Our sect does things this way; other sects do things some other way." Sect-mindedness does not belong to the gospel Fox preached. He believed the message was good and true for *all men everywhere* and in *every age*. He never doubted this. In the middle of the nineteenth century the winner of a prize of a hundred guineas for the best essay on why the Society of Friends had declined had this to say about the universality of Quakerism: "In 1658 there was not a Quaker living who did not believe Quakerism to be the one only true Church of the living God. In 1858 there is not a Quaker living who does believe it."¹¹

I think we have surrendered to the spirit of sect-mindedness to a very large degree in the Society of Friends. The best remedy that I know against this is large doses of Fox's message and teaching! It is hard to maintain a sect-minded attitude with Fox challenging you as he continually does. Sect-mindedness is a vicious thing. Fox continually lashes out against it as he finds it cropping up in Quaker life. The Mennonite Church illustrates it. This Church is a little larger than the Society of Friends, yet has seventeen branches. One of these broke fellowship with the others because some Mennonites did not feel free to use sliced bread. Well, Jesus didn't use it--he *broke* bread!

Many Quakers today, I believe, think of our Quaker principles and characteristics as being in that same category, that is to say, we have our denominational peculiarities, and these distinguish us from other groups. I think it is a serious weakness when we begin to think of the distinctive features of Quaker life as representing sectarian trends.

George Fox saw the message he preached and the community he helped to gather as a real alternative to Christianity as it had been known up to that time. Those who accepted his message believed this too, and they were willing to pay a big price to bear witness through their lives and their spoken testimony to the truth of this message.

The Relevance of Fox's Teaching Today

Now, the people who are friendly disposed toward me and want to keep me from making a complete fool of myself keep telling me that there is no point in going round telling people that Christ is a Prophet that speaks from heaven and who must be heard and obeyed in all things! What has this got to do with modern life? Well, what is *more* relevant to the conditions of modern life than this? This is the question that I would put. I don't know of anything more relevant. This is the way that God chose to help us to solve our human problems. In order to respond to it we have to swallow our pride and accept our creaturehood and know that the Creator has spoken to us and made known to us the way that he would have us restored to himself. This is the best kind of answer I can give to this question.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Quakerism in the Perspective of Christian History

Christ-Centeredness in Quakerism

*Henry Ecroyd (Croydon Meeting):*²¹ I have two points uppermost in my mind since yesterday. I understood Lewis to say that it was not a more Christ-centered Quakerism in which he is interested, or for which he is hoping. What he is interested in and hoping for is a Christ-centered body of people, irrespective of whether they were "Quaker" or other label or no label at all. I would like to make sure that I have understood him rightly, because if I have, it's a point of basic importance that I think we ought to allow to sink deeply into our minds, as we proceed further in the direction in which Lewis is leading us.

The second point is this: I am sure it is most valuable to put Fox's work under the microscope as Lewis has been doing. I feel at the same time, it is good to retain the ability to stand aside and see Fox and the movement which he initiated in the perspective of Christian history. Any movement

looks very different from the inside from what it does if you look at it from the outside. Inside, it is a living experience. Its tenets and its forms are the expression of a living experience. One sees in a movement from the outside, in the first instance, its outward forms and its creedal statements, and not the living experience which these things may be the vehicle of for those who are within that tradition. I believe it will be good for us to try sometimes to look at Fox and his movement as if we were in some other tradition, with another experience, to look at them from outside, in the perspective of history.

Lewis Benson: Beginning with the last question first, a lot depends on where you are when you look at Friends from the outside. This is the first generation of Quakers, I think, who have a lot of members in the Society, especially in America, who have been to a theological seminary. Very few of them have been to the Earlham School of Religion, which is rated as a theological seminary and calls itself one. Most of them go to seminaries run by other denominations. Some of them have a perspective on Quakerism which is the perspective of the theological position of the tradition of the school to which they go. So, if you are not taking the Quaker perspective, then you are taking some other perspective! I don't see how you can get around that! There is no place where you can take a stand outside of all Christian traditions.*

Now, I feel a certain sympathy with the questioner because my own interest in Fox's revolutionary message is not a sectarian interest. I have encountered Quakers whose enthusiasm for Quakerism appears to be due to the fact that they have been immersed in the Quaker tradition and don't know any other tradition. If you limit your intake to Quaker impressions and nothing else it will cause you to have a decided preference for Quakerism and Quaker ways!

If the message of George Fox is to be restored and preached again today we will have to do better than repeat his message in an imitative way. We will have to speak the language of the twentieth century and use the best resources that are available to us in the twentieth century.

It just happens that that the last 25 years is that period in Christian history when biblical scholars have given more attention to that strand of apostolic tradition which Fox used most extensively for his revolutionary understanding of the meaning of Christianity. There is much to be learned from contemporary biblical scholarship that can help us to understand Fox and his message. We need to be aware of the work that is being done in recent biblical scholarship that throws light on the apostolic era.

My concern is not to promote a species of "Quaker conservatism." On the contrary, I believe the recovery of Fox's revolutionary message will restore the universal dimension to the Quaker message. And this would mean that the Quakers' self-image as "a small sect in a big world" would come to an end.

What I've been doing in my own study at home is weeding out the Quaker books and distributing them to various places and filling the shelves

with books printed in the last ten to fifteen years on the subjects that Fox talks about. I want to understand them not just from Fox's point of view but from the point of view of solid biblical scholarship at the present day. I would also get theological books if there were any that follow on this biblical research that is being done on the Deuteronomy 18 prophecy, but there aren't any. So I haven't been able to do that. And that saves me a lot of money! So, I feel the need very much that those who are preaching Christ in the footsteps of Fox today should not be simply repeating his message in an imitative way. We should make it our own with the best tools that are available, in the best language that we can find to express it in at the present day. So I do agree with the point of view expressed in your second question.

Now, your first question: I'm not entirely sure that I understand it. It's framed in a context in which I find it awkward to frame an answer. When I said that I wasn't concerned about "Christ-centeredness"--what I meant to say is that I am not an exponent or representative of Christ-centered Quakerism as it is found in the Society of Friends today. That is, I don't belong in the Christ-centered section of Quakerism. And they *certainly* don't think I belong there! This is mutual! The reason is that there is so little in this modern Christ-centered type of Quakerism that reflects the distinctive teaching about Christ that we find in the early Quaker movement. This is what I was trying to say.

As to the other part of the question: my concern is about Christ-centered Christianity in the world no matter where it is. Here again it's very hard for me to formulate an answer. There are *all kinds* of Christ-centered Quakerism. There is one type that doesn't have as much Quakerism in it as you could get under your fingernail. It's just a Christ-centered faith which springs entirely from traditions other than the Quaker tradition. So it doesn't raise my spiritual temperature when I hear that there are people all over the world in the Society of Friends glorifying Christ, people who believe that Christ is the center of their faith. What I am concerned about is that there should be voices in our time who can challenge the Christ-centered Christianity of *our* day in the way the Early Friends challenged Christ-centered Christianity of *their* day. The trouble with Christianity in Fox's day was not that it was not Christ-centered. It certainly was Christ-centered. That wasn't the trouble with it. But the Christ that they were glorifying and pointing to was a Christ who did not have the power to save that God intended him to have. They had taken away this power from him through their theology, through their interpretation. They told people that Christ will not give you victory over sin until you are dead. And this is a thing that Fox was not willing to accept. He came forward with another gospel which challenged this gospel, and this created a real controversy. An either/or decision was put before people. You either accepted the faith that gives victory or you accepted the faith that does *not* give victory. This was the alternative that Fox put to people. I think people need to have this alternative put to them today. Either we experience the power of Christ to

really save us from the power of sin, or we experience Christ in some other way. Whether a faith or movement is Christ-centered or not is not the decisive thing for *me*. What *I* ask is, what kind of Christ are they holding up to us?

* Lewis Benson has requested that the following be inserted here by way of further explanation and amplification. He says: I have found that "looking at Quakerism from the outside" has usually involved taking a stance borrowed from some other tradition that is incompatible with Fox's revolutionary gospel. This kind of "outside" evaluation is taking place today. Fox made an "outside" evaluation of the dominant forms of Christianity of his day and made this evaluation from the standpoint of a very early apostolic tradition. (Most scholars today say that it is the earliest Christian tradition.) I would say that instead of trying to get a perspective on Quakerism from the standpoint of other Christian traditions, we should be recovering that distinctive understanding of Christianity that Fox claimed went into eclipse for 1600 years and which gave him a perspective on the Christianity of his own day and would do the same for us. -Eds.

III. THE NEW COMMUNITY AND ITS ORDERING

At the previous session I said that the gospel Fox preached produces a new community. Although Fox has a lot to say about the new righteousness and the new community in his pastoral epistles he doesn't enlarge on these subjects when he is preaching the gospel. He does not say: "This is the gospel, Friends, and now that you have heard it and received it, you are ready for the new righteousness and the new community." He takes these things one step at a time, the first step was to preach the gospel, and those who were convinced were urged to come together and to wait together to feel the presence of Christ and to let Christ himself be the builder of the new community. Margaret Fell says, "Christ Jesus...is become the Head and Corner(stone) of his building, his holy Church and House, which house are we, which he is rearing and building up in this his day."¹ "This is the great work which the Lord is working in this his day, and the spiritual building that he is rearing and setting up; and he has put his hand to the work; and when he works, who can let* it."²

Fox called the internal ordering of this new community "gospel order"--the order for God's people in the new Covenant. We can discuss gospel order and ask questions about it, and seek answers. But the experience of being gathered into the gospel order involves much more than intellectual understanding. All I am trying to do here is to make the claim that there is such a thing as gospel order and to give some content to this term. In my subject index of Fox's writings I have collected more references on the subject of "the Church" than any other subject. And under the general subject of the Church the largest sub-section is the one on gospel order.

* let (archaic): hinder or prevent

The Gospel Order

So, what is gospel order? Gospel order is not simply a scheme or system of church organization. A regular system of meetings was set up in the seventeenth century consisting of Preparative, Monthly, Quarterly, and Yearly meetings, but these meetings, in themselves, do not constitute gospel order. We can have all these meetings and go to them with great regularity and still not have gospel order. Unless we experience the active presence of Christ in these Meetings, we do not have gospel order. The reason for having these meetings is to experience Christ's presence and to be led and ordered by him.

When Fox began to call attention to the need for gospel order some of the early Quakers objected. They said, "Why do we have to have a system of meetings? Why can't we just meet whenever the Spirit moves us"? Well, you know, it's not that simple. We have to accept the limitations of our human condition and recognize the need for social conventions. If we are going to

meet together, we need to have stated times and places. But this orderly arrangement for holding meetings is not, itself, the gospel order. Gospel order is what happens after the people are gathered--the learning together, the obeying together.

When the religious sociologist studies church structures and organizations, he sees them simply as examples of how human beings organize themselves for various purposes. Thus the church is seen as a man-made organization for religious purposes. It is no less a human institution than, say, the Standard Oil Company.

But in the Old and New Testaments we learn about a very special community that is brought into existence by God and whose identity is conditioned by the words of God and social acts of God. The word "Kahal," or people of God, is the name for this community in the Old Testament. In the Greek version of the Old Testament the word Kahal is translated "ecclesia," and this is the word the early Christians used as their self-designation. The Kahal or ecclesia is not simply an organization for certain religious purposes. It is the name for the people of God functioning in the full exercise of all their communal activities, and not just as a group organized to accomplish certain religious objectives. *The early Quakers thought of themselves as "the people of God" in this biblical sense.* Christianity of this sort is not just a species of the genus "religion." And the ordered corporate life of the people of God in the New Covenant is not just a species of religious organization.

"Religionless Christianity"

In the writings of the Hebrew prophets there is a tension between the claims of religion in its generic sense and the need to respond in obedience to the speaking God. The prophets are not interested in making people more "religious." It has been said of the Hebrew prophets that there is no parallel in history to their attack on religion. Their harshest words are for the most religious people and their scrupulous observance of religious practices. God doesn't care, they say, for all these religious activities that you engage in, your new moons and feasts and holy days and sacrifices. But what God does care about is justice and whether or not we hear and obey his word.

The prophets have been criticized for calling people out of cultic religion and cultic worship* although they do not offer a real alternative to it. There is some truth in this. But they *do* have a vision of a time when there *will* be an alternative to it. And they *do* tell us about this vision: a new covenant is coming and a new kind of relationship to God is coming. *Christ* is the answer to the prophets' vision of a time when there will be a new way to worship God and to answer the call of God for obedience in righteousness, apart from cultic religion.

The Jews never thought of their faith as one of "the great religions of the world." And the Christians of the apostolic age never thought for a moment that they were starting a new religion in this sense. Alan Richardson

says, "It is only to be expected that those who had not understood the uniqueness of Christ would think of Christianity as one "religion" among many...The New Testament writers, however, do not think of the Christian "way" as a "religion" at all--or, if they were to think in terms of religion, they would say that it was the religion to end all religions."³

The archetype of the non-religious man of God is Abraham--the man who left the securities of an established and sophisticated national religion at the command of God and went forth "knowing not whither he went." Fox takes Abraham as the model of the man of faith "who by faith saw God, who is invisible"⁴ and did not tarry in "the world's invented seats of religion" when God called him. "The Quakers", he says, "are of...the faith of Abraham and never came from the several Protestants nor Papists."⁵

* Cult(us): system of belief, formal worship

Christ in the Midst of his Church

In his early days Fox had a vision of the work to which God had appointed him and the declaration of his divine commission takes up several pages in his *Journal*. In this declaration he says:

Now, when the Lord God and his Son Jesus Christ sent me forth into the world, to preach his everlasting gospel and kingdom, I was glad that I was commanded...to bring people off all their own ways to Christ the new and living Way, and from their churches which men had made and gathered, to the church in God...which Christ is the Head of...and off from all world's worships...And I was to bring people off from all the world's religions, which are vain, that they might know the pure religion."⁶

In his writings he refers many times to "man-made religion." He thinks of the Christian religion as a man-made religion, that is, as an effort of man to construct, on the basis of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, a "world religion" complete with authoritative sacred scriptures, rituals, ceremonies, holy days, holy weeks, sacred ground, priests, temples--the whole "works!" On the other hand, he believed that where people gather together in the name of Christ and experience his presence in their midst in all his offices, this is the place where the true new Covenant community is known. And where Christ is felt to be in the midst, "then there is Righteousness in the midst, there is Light and Truth in the midst and a Savior and Redeemer in the midst...and there the Head is in the midst of the church, ordering the body, ordering the church, ordering his...saints."⁷ This church is "raised up" by the power of God *without the aid of any religious apparatus whatever.*

When Fox speaks about gospel order he is talking about the power of God to gather an ordered community who live under his rule apart from the paraphernalia of religion. *The center and foundation of this gospel order is*

Christ. “So here is the foundation of our meetings,” says Fox, “the foundation of them is Christ...which (foundation) is not of man, nor by man, so man has no glory but God and Christ alone.”⁸ Concerning several meetings that were established in Buckinghamshire in 1668, he says that they were settled “in the order of the gospel, and upon the foundation Christ Jesus.”⁹

Fox sees Christ as not only the fulfiller of certain particular prophecies, such as Deuteronomy 18 and Isaiah 53, but as the fulfiller of the whole redemptive purpose of God as this is foreshadowed and prefigured in the Old Testament. The Old Covenant gave the people of God an order. It gave them the Law; it gave them a cultic approach to God, and a priesthood to administer this cultus; it gave them a geographical center, the Temple. All these things are now abolished, Fox says, and in their place we have Christ. In the New Covenant there is a new and living Way to God, and this is Christ himself. He stands *in the place of* the Law and the priesthood and the Temple and all the many things that prefigured him in the Old Testament and Old Covenant. In Fox’s sermon on Firbank Fell he proclaimed that Christ is the *Substance* of the types, figures, and shadows in the Old Testament.

So Christ *is* the New Covenant. He is not the messenger of the New Covenant as Moses was of the Old Covenant. *If* we know him as he is present in our midst in all his offices, *then* we know that he is God’s Covenant to us, and that through him we can experience the covenant relationship to God that God intended and which he was all along preparing men to receive through his dealing with Abraham and the fathers and Moses and the prophets.

The Power of God in the Church

The condition for receiving this gospel order is receiving this gospel message that Christ is alive and present in the midst of his people in all his “offices.” If we receive this gospel and come into obedience to Christ, we are brought into the New Covenant community where there is a new kind of worship, a new way of coming into unity and reaching decisions in unity, a new way of being taught the righteousness of God and coming into obedience to it, a new unity of faith and witness.

But there are limitations to what we can learn about gospel order by hearing it described in the abstract. The theoretical understanding of gospel order is not the same as knowing it by experience. Gospel order is really known only in the event. It has to be experienced. And the only way of experiencing it is to come to the knowledge of Christ as he is proclaimed in this particular gospel that Fox and Early Friends preached and which is now being preached again.

Fox’s vision of “religionless Christianity” can be reduced to something that is more traditional and denominational than revolutionary, and there is certainly evidence that such a reduction has taken place in Quaker history. The universal gospel that Fox preached and which he believed to be good

and true for all men everywhere then becomes the *-ism* of the sect--"Quakerism."

Fox was not interested in "Quakerism" or in "Friends Principles." He was interested in the Truth of God that came to Abraham and Moses and the prophets and the apostles and that came to *him*. He is trying to publish this Truth, and help people to become established on it and build on it. He certainly expected that the great ingathering that took place in his life-time would go on growing and eventually cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

I don't think that there can be any question but that this vision has been lost. And this is a *big* loss. Our concern here is with the recovery of this vision and with building again on this gospel foundation.

The principle literary source of information about this gospel is in Fox's writings. This is not a meager source. Fox's writings exist in abundance. Throughout all his writings he is telling how God is drawing all men to himself through the power of Christ and the power of his gospel. It is possible to misunderstand the nature of this gospel in the way that Simon the sorcerer did (Acts 8:9-19). He was a fellow who was obsessed with the desire to possess the power of God--he wanted to control and exploit this power. He saw in the apostles a manifestation of God's power and he was ready to pay money for it. But the power of God, as it was manifested in the faith of the apostles, cannot be bought or sold. It is the power of God for salvation to all who believe in it. And what is salvation if it is not deliverance from captivity to sin and temptation, and deliverance from the alienation and "lostness" that we experience when we try to organize our lives without God?

The gospel of power that Fox preached is the answer to all who are seeking for power to overcome sin and evil, and the power that brings us into the community ruled by God--our true spiritual homeland. I don't know of any other gospel that has answers to these questions, and that is why I have spent so much time studying Fox's writings.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Personal Relationships and the New Community

Louise Torbe: I notice that nowhere in your words so far have you mentioned personal relationships. You have spoken a lot about the Christian community and the fellowship of God's people. If we read the gospels we find the revolution that Jesus started was not primarily in people's life styles but in their hearts, souls, and minds. Any other change in their way of life came as a result of the change inside them. Isn't this true now, just as it has always been true: that if we are to carry on the revolution Jesus started (and that George Fox, if you like, gave a rebirth to), it has to start in ourselves and in the quality of our personal relationships; and that we are to build up loving

and caring relationships with one another and with people around us, before we can even start to build anything else?

Lewis Benson: I agree with this. I don't think it needs further comment. But I feel there is a difference between a community that seeks for deeper human relationships between the members, and a community that seeks to relate to one another in the context of a common recognition of God's presence and a common recognition that there is a Truth and a Power which is beyond all human striving and on which the social fabric of the group rests. The temptation would be I think in the absence of this dimension of the Eternal, to rely upon group dynamics and techniques that would certainly not bring the fullest possible kind of community that Christ makes possible.

Fox and Pauline Teaching on the Church

George Wilkinson (Boston): You mentioned George Fox saying that the new community was to be in the gospel order. Steeped as he was in the Bible, you would think that he saw some of the factors that St. Paul wrote about in his epistles to the churches. He told one church about being sectarian and having divisions among themselves and, to the church at Galatia, about not having the spirit of envy, and that the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, and so on. Do you think that that was the kind of community George Fox was visualizing?

Lewis Benson: Yes, I do. I think Fox's views on the Church come mostly from the writings of Paul, who, Fox thought and I think, was the one who really understood better than most N.T. writers what the nature of the Church would be. In Paul's list of gifts that Christ gives to the leaders in his Church, the office of prophet, that is prophetic minister, is very high. This is something that I don't think the Society of Friends could claim--that our chief leaders are people who have the gift of prophetic ministry. For a long time the most conspicuous feature of Quaker life was its prophetic ministry. We lost this, and not only have we lost it, but when you speak about it in a group like this, there are usually not more than one or two, and perhaps none, who have ever actually encountered a Quaker prophetic, that is, a "recorded" minister, a minister who belongs to the long tradition of prophetic ministers who served the Society as their chief leaders for a good many years. So this Fox got from Paul. (I said this morning that Fox got his view of Christ from Peter. That was an over-simplification--there are other parts of the Bible from which he got it.) But this is certainly also the tradition that belongs to Peter and the Jewish Christianity of Palestine. *This* is the tradition to which Fox turned in order to revise the orthodox views of Christ that he heard in his own day. But he doesn't go to Peter for his doctrine of the Church. He goes to Paul. He identifies with Paul himself. When he speaks of "the Apostle" in his writings, it is almost always Paul that he is referring to. And he considered himself a kind of apostle, that is, in the same manner that Paul was an apostle. So this is the way in which Fox uses the Bible: for his

understanding of Christ he turns to Peter and James, and for understanding of the Church he leans more towards Paul and quotes him and makes great use of him.

Is the Quaker Christian Message for all Men?

Chic Fyson (East Grinstead): It seems to me, and not just from this weekend, that Quakerism is a particularly difficult form of worship or life practice to carry out. Human beings are individuals and they need perhaps different roads to get to the same place. Some may need to go one way because they have plenty of signs to guide them on the way. They have plenty of people to say, You go this way and if you go wrong then you can go to someone who's qualified to say, all you've got to do is to go away and do this and that and provided you feel truly repentant, you'll get a further step along the road. Quakers feel that they have a direct communication with God. I remember as a choirboy in a Church of England choir that I could never concentrate on what the sermon was about because there were so many different colored shadows coming through the stained glass windows, and so many crosses and so forth. I couldn't concentrate on what was being said. I found in Quakerism that there was nothing, apart from a bowl of flowers in most cases, to distract a train of thought. But at the same time, not everybody needs a totally blank room. Some people seem to need guidelines. If we are going to have an evangelical movement such as George Fox's obviously was, it seems to me that it would be a better idea--rather than to hope that everybody is going to be a Quaker--to hope that every one is going to be a Catholic, a Moslem, or whatever, to the best of their ability. And in that way the Kingdom of God would come to the earth.

Lewis Benson: The only way I know to respond to this kind of question is to jump in with both feet! What I am concerned about here is the character that Quakerism takes on when we think of it as a religion for a particular type of person. Now, as you've suggested, there are some people that seem to be able to get a lot out of worship in a great ancient building with stained glass windows and boys' choirs, an organ music background and so on, but not everybody needs this. So the Society of Friends is this God-given community which is just for people who don't need it! I can picture George Fox going around England in the seventeenth century and saying, "Now we are going to start this new little sect! It's just for people who don't need temple worship and sacraments, and so on. You may be just this type of person and if you are, well then, you will be added to the number of Quakers in the world, and everybody will be happy"!

Well, I won't be happy about this! I've never thought that the truth of God in Christ is for a particular type of person. It's "God so loved the *world* that he gave his only begotten Son." In the twentieth century we have developed this theory that the denominations in the world are God's answer to the variety of temperaments in the world. Therefore you may put forward

the argument that people who are already in these denominations are the people who ought to be there. They are the people for whose temperaments the interpretation and practices in this particular denomination are specially suited. An old Quaker lady in New York told me once, that there are already as many Quakers in the world as there can be. That is, Quakers appeal to a very rare type, and we've already reached them all! Therefore we've come to the end of whatever effort we have to make to bring people into Quakerism.

Now Fox is very strong in his testimony about "the many Names."¹⁰ Of course the term "denominationalism" didn't exist in the seventeenth century. It is familiar to us but it wouldn't have meant anything to Fox. "Many names" is the same things as "denominationalism." He says, the many Names do not come from God. God wants us to be gathered in the *one* Name, to know one another in all our different temperaments and all our different backgrounds and so on, to be *one in Christ*. This is the vision of unity that he saw. But I don't think that any group in the seventeenth century was pleading for its interpretation of Christianity because it had a particular niche in the denominational economy. *They* weren't making this kind of argument. They all believed they had truth and Fox recommended that there should be a central place where they could all come and argue it out, confront one another. The Quakers themselves took the lead in this and rented a pub in London, the Bull and Mouth, and there was a continual argument going on there between all the Quakers and others during the early years of London Quakerism. On one such occasion, I don't think it was in London, when they had a discussion of this kind, the crowd went out from this meeting crying, "Thomas Taylor has got the day." There was a real sense that truth will prevail. I feel this myself much more than the temptation to settle down and live in denominationalism as if it was something that God wants and intends to exist for ever.

Facing the Theological Problems

Reginald Smith: What I feel a deep urge to try to put to Lewis Benson and lay before Friends generally is the culmination so far of the exercise that's been going on in me ever since these very wonderful meetings began. I went away Friday night saying that it had been the most moving meeting I had known for a very long time. I ended yesterday (Saturday) feeling rather benumbed. I had still felt the moving power. I had learned a great deal on the information level and been stirred by the deep intellectual integrity that had been shown. And I had felt the deep spiritual movement, the spiritual unity in the worship. But on the very essential intellectual side, I didn't feel that I had been helped towards the answers to the kind of questions that Lewis Benson has ended with—that have been implicit I think in everything that he has said and have certainly been stirring in my mind and, I know, the minds of a great many other Friends for quite a long time.

Lewis Benson quoted yesterday the humorous but very wise story which has stayed in my mind ever since I first heard it about 30 years ago: "If I were you I wouldn't start from here!" We all know we've got to start from here. The other thing that some of us have found it even harder to learn is that so far as other people are involved in any effort at forward movement, we've got to meet them where they are. And that of course is often the hardest thing to do in any kind of human relations and human activity. One of the neglected Quaker prophets of this century, John William Graham, was for me the first real teacher, after I'd come to Friends, of the significance of Quakerism. One of the thoughts in *The Faith of a Quaker* that he sowed in my mind in my early twenties was that the effect of beliefs does not depend only on their truth. There is a power that springs from a belief, not regardless of its truthfulness, but in spite of a great deal of incompleteness and even large measures of error. And when we look at the tremendous miracle in Friends in the seventeenth century--I think it is a miracle, wrought by God in the main--I think we've got to be prepared to recognize that there are possible psychological effects in the particular form or forms that the message took, which are not the guarantee of the fullness of eternal truth that is contained in them. I haven't one-hundredth part of our Friend's scholarship about the beginnings of Quakerism or about George Fox, but I have--under deep exercise about the future of the Society in relation to the future of the world (and I do agree with him that the future of the Society of Friends could be a very vital factor in the future of the world)--wrestled with what George Fox was saying and especially with his early experience. What has always troubled me so far--and I don't think Lewis Benson has removed the difficulty--is that it isn't easy to find out just what Fox means by "Christ." This is the first time I've met Lewis Benson, but I have deeply respected everything I have known as his work (I read *Catholic Quakerism* six or seven years ago, and I think I felt something of the reservations about it that I'm trying to express as gently and appreciatively as I can now.) I do feel that one can't just brush aside the metaphysics, the theology, out of which Fox's particular thought forms--I think, undeniably--grew to some extent, however much they were transformed and deepened and renewed under his own personal spiritual experience. In this day we have got to be prepared ourselves to face all the theological and metaphysical problems that arise out of such a tremendous saying, for instance, as "Christ has come to teach his people himself" and that the living Christ must be at the heart of the gospel order.

The Seventeenth Century Seekers and Silent Worship

Lastly, in relation to Meetings for Worship: in all my wrestling with the special mission of our Society, the indispensable minimum has been the Meeting for Worship. We are all, I think, agreed in trying to

preserve it, though I have the same kinds of feeling about the rarity with which we attain it, that Lewis Benson has expressed this morning. I think we must be very careful not to undervalue the miracle that was already going on in Westmorland before George Fox appeared on the scene--the Seekers, the people who had gone through Fox's negative experience of not finding what they needed in the preachers. Many of the preachers were tremendously deeply exercised Christians, but they hadn't satisfied these earnestly and honestly seeking people. One of the really great miracles of history was the sudden coming together of this waiting group (perhaps almost waiting in despair) and this profoundly convinced positive prophecy.

Lewis Benson: Reginald Smith has covered a lot of ground here, but I'm very grateful for it all. With respect to the very last thing that was mentioned--the prepared ground in the seventeenth century especially among the Seekers. I know that some of the Seeker ministers were outstanding people and became major leaders in the Society of Friends later. But all the references that I've found to Seekers in the seventeenth century in the Quaker literature have been rather uncomplimentary, that is, they're lumped in a series with Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists, Ranters, and so on. They were all being invited to stop being all these things and become Quakers. And this challenge went to the Seekers also. They stopped being Seekers and became Quakers. What was the difference?

As far as I can discover, their worship, although it was largely unprogrammed, was a limited kind of unprogrammed worship, very similar to what can be experienced today in the traditional "prayer meeting" that has its roots in the Wesleyan* tradition, that is, a meeting in which personal testimony and prayer are the only types of contribution that are made. This is in some ways similar to Quaker worship, just as this kind of meeting is similar to Quaker worship today. But it certainly isn't the same. They hadn't already discovered Quaker worship. These "prayer meetings" had never been intended to take the place of worship as it is known in the Christian world. For the Early Friends the worship that they practiced *was* intended to take the place of other kinds of worship. Now the Seekers didn't have that kind of worship to offer to anybody. I believe that the Quakers did. The Seeker leaders too had to make a change when they became Quakers.† It probably wasn't as big a change as some other types of Christians would have had to make. But George Keith‡ says in 1687 of the people who came in from the other denominations--that is from the Baptist, Seekers, Presbyterians, and Independents--who had already a status of teacher and minister in these groups: "Many teachers of others for many years came to be convinced that they had need to learn the very first principles of the doctrine of Christ." They moved into another kind of Christianity, into a new dimension when they came to be Friends. I think this is a point that needs to be made especially since so much has been written about the advantage that the Quakers had because the Seekers were already there, practically

ready to jump into the Quaker fellowship without any effort on the part of the Friends. This isn't strictly the way it was.

* John Wesley (1703-1791), founder of the Methodist movement

† *'Journal'* 1652, Firbank Fell: "...the Lord's convincing Power accompanied my ministry and reached home to the hearts of the people, whereby many more were convinced that day, and all the teachers of that congregation (who were many) were convinced of God's everlasting truth that day."

‡ George Keith (1638-1761): a leading Scottish Friend who afterwards became an opponent

The Society of Friends Today: Pressures Within and Without

I don't know whether it would be profitable and helpful for me to try to make specific and definite responses to particular points that have been made by Reginald Smith. Some of the questions that have been raised are questions about the situation in the Society of Friends--about where we have to begin today if we are to take the Early Quaker vision seriously and do something about it. As the questioner observed and as probably some of the rest of you observed, I haven't got a blueprint or strategy about where we go from here. But I do know something about what happens if we go on in the way we have been.

I think the history of the Society of Friends has been the history of a community without a strong grasp of its own central truth, being constantly moved in one direction and another by movements outside itself. And this is still going on today. I don't see any specific remedy against this except to strengthen our understanding and commitment to the thing which belongs to the Quaker heritage and tradition, and to let that be the thing that arouses us to enthusiasm, and not some other thing that just happens, so to speak, to be stuck in front of us and to which we react.

In the early nineteenth century the Quakers were not an outgoing group, as we all know, and didn't become so until the influence of Wesley's Evangelical Movement reached the Society in this country and America and sent it forth in all kinds of missionary activities abroad and also at home. This became the vital force in Quakerism, something that originated outside, in the Wesleyan Movement. John Wilhelm Rowntree wasn't happy about this. He saw that as a result of it, the Quakers were becoming exactly like any other kind of Evangelical Protestant denomination. He knew that it was something different from this. We don't know exactly what his vision of Quaker truth was because he died at such an early age with most of his great projected work lying ahead of him. But in place of this wave of Evangelical Quakerism we were, in the event, treated to several other kinds of Quakerism in which on the one hand there was a strong rationalistic, or philosophical kind of mystical influence, and on the other hand a liberal, or modernistic influence. And these influences also came from the outside. I remember the flash of illumination that came to me when I realized that the

modernism in the Society of Friends had parallels in most Christian groups, that is, the same process was taking place in other denominations. Of course Quaker modernism was a special kind of modernism but it was a real parallel nevertheless.

I have just been reading John William Graham's essay--dated 1924, the 300th anniversary of Fox's birth--which he contributed to a volume of appreciations of Fox. He asks in the beginning of this essay, "Why cannot we shake the nation as George Fox did? The views and principles we hold are essentially what his were and make a similar appeal."¹¹ I think Graham jumped to this conclusion. I think it is open to question whether the Quakers of 1924, or the present day, could be said to be in possession of the message that Fox preached. Graham goes on to say that Fox accepted the "Christian system he had been taught" but left Friends free to revise it where it offended their sense of "credibility" or "moral sense." In other words Fox was a modernist! "Early Friends were Modernists all the time," he says.¹² The basic revolutionary character of Fox's gospel seems to have made no impression on Graham. At this time Evangelical Friends were calling Fox an Evangelical, and the followers of Rufus Jones were calling him a mystic. These attempts to represent Fox as one like ourselves come and go. They reach a peak and then recede--and then we start all over again. And so we make no real progress.

I have felt the impact, since I have been over here in the last six weeks, of the "charismatic movement." People, very earnest Christians, have told me that this is the way that God is manifesting himself in our time. We cannot ignore this, they say. Well, I think there have been many people who could say something like this to us during the last 200 years. That is to say, there has *always* been *something* that occupied the forefront of the religious news, in every generation. These things are not necessarily the things in which God is manifesting himself or the channels through which he wants us to work. If we are continually listening to what the religious section of *Newsweek* magazine is telling us, we will never be able to be the witnesses for this new kind of Christianity, this uniquely powerful kind of Christianity, that belongs to the Quaker tradition as it belongs to no other. And if we continually evade this task, I believe that somebody else will take it up.

It may be that the Quakers will just become that denomination which moves with the times better than any other! This is what Kenneth Boulding says in his book *Man and the Twentieth Century*. He says that in the twentieth century, nothing remains stable for very long. Cultural, economic, and scientific changes happen so rapidly that a continuing civilization is impossible. That is, you cannot transmit from one generation to the other any kind of religious tradition because it is already out of date by the time it is transmitted. Now, he says, in this kind of age the best kind of religion to have is the one that can change the fastest. And that's Quakerism, he says! So he is offering this to the world as the answer to its problems of how to be religious in this kind of situation. I don't know who this appeals to but it doesn't appeal to me.

Conclusion

What we need in this kind of world is a foundation that cannot be shaken. The New Testament bears witness to the fact that there is such a foundation. And so does Fox. I believe that many men and women can find this foundation and build on it today, just as truly as they ever have in any other generation. What I am pleading for here--regardless of all the pressures upon us, religious or secular--is to recover the vision of Truth and to learn to walk in what Barclay calls "the straight and even path of Truth."

NOTES

SECTION I

1. The Works of George Fox, 8 vols. (Phila: Marcus T. C. Gould: New York: Isaac T. Hopper, 1831) III.p.101. Hereinafter, it is referred to as Works (1831).
2. The Journal of George Fox, rev. ed. by John L. Nickalls (Cambridge University Press 1952) p.10.
3. Headley MSS. p. 69: Cat. No. 22.320.
4. Taken from "How the Lord by his power and spirit did raise up Friends to declare his everlasting gospel and truth" etc. in Narrative Papers of George Fox, ed. By Henry J. Cadbury, 1972, pp. 19, 20.
5. Friends face their fourth century, 1952.
6. MSS Ann. Cat. 82E (MSS bound with the original catalogue of Fox's papers).
7. Works (1831) VII, 272
8. Works (1831) VII, 139
9. Works (1831) IV, 110
10. Works (1831) V, 79
11. An answer to the arguments of the Jews (1661), p. 20
12. Headley MSS, 154, 7, 112F
13. Works (1831) V, 339
14. Works (1831) VI, 404
15. Works (1831) VII, 225
16. Works (1831) IV, 32
17. The Journal of George Fox, 2 vols. (Bicentenary edition, 1902) Vol II, p. 112. Hereinafter referred to as Journal (1902).
18. Works (1831) VI, 284
19. Nickalls ed. Journal, p.11
20. Journal (1902) II, 458

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1. Journal (1652), Ulverston
2. Works (1831) VIII, 132
3. Journal (1902) II, 250
4. Works (1831) VIII, 61
5. Richardson MSS, 406
6. Works (1831) VIII, 59
7. Works (1831) VIII, 77, 78
8. Works (1831) VII, 244
9. Works (1831) VIII, 174
10. Journal (1902) I, 316
11. Hancock, Thomas, *The Peculium* (Phila: 1860) p. 21

SECTION III

1. Fell, Margaret, Works (1710), 322
2. Fell, Margaret, Works, 322
3. Richardson, Alan. An Introduction to the theology of the New Testament (1958)
4. Headley MSS. 309, Cat. No. 8, 81F
5. MSS, Ann. Cat. P. 85 (85E)
6. Journal (1902) I, 36, 27
7. MSS. Ann. Cat. P. 21 (51E)
8. Works (1831) VIII, 79
9. Journal (1902) II, 90, 91
10. See also Works (1831) III, 33.

All these names...amongst all that are called Christians, are got up amongst them since the days of the apostles...So look in whole Christendom and see what abundance of names there are, which should be one family, and all these names...have had the words but were out of the life...

Ibid. IV, 298 Therefore are you (called Christians) broken into so many sects...and so many heads, and names...and this is the cause, the being out of the Power and Life of Christ, that, and his Wisdom, which the apostles were in...

Ibid. III, 170, The false spirits and false prophets...and the false apostles...These, since the days of the apostles, have been the...gatherers of people into names...

11. New appreciations of George Fox (1952) p. 26
- 12 Ibid. p. 44