

# **REDISCOVERING THE TEACHING OF GEORGE FOX**

BY LEWIS BENSON

A SERIES OF TEN LECTURES  
GIVEN IN THE FALL OF 1982  
AT MOORESTOWN, NEW JERSEY  
AS PUBLISHED IN  
NEW FOUNDATION PAPERS NOS. 17-26

REPUBLISHED 2013 in PDF by  
New Foundation Fellowship USA  
[www.nffellowship.org](http://www.nffellowship.org)

Every effort has been made to reproduce this as it was printed. The punctuation has been Americanized while English spelling is retained.

## Contents

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN TEXT: . . . . .	ii
Preface . . . . .	iii
<b>THE PLACE OF GEORGE FOX IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY . . . . .</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL PREACHED BY GEORGE FOX . . . . .</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>THE RELATION OF FOX'S MESSAGE TO THE BIBLE . . . . .</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>THE NEW WORSHIP . . . . .</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>THE NEW CHURCH ORDER . . . . .</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>THE NEW MINISTRY . . . . .</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>THE NEW RIGHTEOUSNESS . . . . .</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>RESTORING THE CHURCH OF THE CROSS . . . . .</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>FOX'S TEACHING ON THE HOLY SPIRIT . . . . .</b>	<b>50</b>
Further Comments on Spirit-centered Religion . . . . .	55
<b>THE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSALISM OF GEORGE FOX . . . . .</b>	<b>58</b>
Appendix --- Firbank Fell Sermon . . . . .	62
<b>A BRIEF INDEX . . . . .</b>	<b>64</b>

## ABBREVIATIONS USED IN TEXT:

Aa MSS = Unpublished manuscripts bound with *Annual Catalogue of George Fox's Papers, Case 32*, Friend's House, London

AC = George Fox unpublished manuscripts (1669) bound with *Annual Catalogue of George Fox's Papers*, Ed., Henry J. Cadbury, Philadelphia & London: 1939

BI and BII = vols. 1 & 2 respectively of the 1902 "Bicentenary edition" of *Fox's Journal*.

BN = Lewis Benson, *Notes on George Fox*, Philadelphia, PA: The George Fox Fund, Inc. 1981

CI and CII = vols. 1 & 2 respectively of the 1952 Cambridge edition of *Fox's Journal*

MF = Margaret Fell, *A Brief Collection...* (London, J. Sowle, 1710)  
*A Brief Collection of Remarkable Passages and Occurrences Relating to the Birth, Education, Life, Conversion, Travels, Services, and Deep Sufferings of That Ancient, Eminent, and Faithful Servant of the Lord, Margaret Fell; But by her Second Marriage, Margaret Fox. Together With Sundry of Her Epistles, Books, and Christian Testimonies to Friends and Others; and also to those in Supreme Authority, in the several late Revolutions of Government*

Ni = the 1952 John Nickalls edition of *Fox's Journal*

SJ = George Fox, *Short Journal*. 2 Volumes. Ed. Norman Penney, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926

R = the Richardson MSS. containing nine of Fox's unpublished sermons. Published as: *That Thy Candles May Always Be Burning*, Eds, Max Skinner and Gardiner Stillwell, New Foundation Publications, 2001

Works = *George Fox, The Works of*, 8 Volumes, (Philadelphia and New York: William Sessions, 1831). [Republished 1991, State College, PA: New Foundation Fellowship]

Arabic figures before the colon represent the appropriate volume of the eight volume 1831 edition of *Fox's Works*

## Preface

In reading over the following material, two things seem to me to need mentioning. First is the timeless relevance of what George Fox had to say concerning the Everlasting Gospel or who Christ is and how he saves mankind. Lewis does a good job of summarizing many key points of Fox's teaching. But it is far beyond the scope of 10 lectures to exhaust all that Fox had to say! There are copies of the eight volume set of *The Works of George Fox* available which will provide the reader with an incomparable, in-print source of Fox's teaching.

The second thing that needs mentioning is how closed my ears have been and how closed modern ears are to the material that Lewis presents in the following lectures. I cannot speak to all points of view as to why we, of this age, are unwilling or unable to hear this message; but I can speak to those whose ears are closed to this message due to religion. Those who are immersed in Christianity, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic or Orthodox, have a view of the overarching problem faced by humanity as something that can be fixed by an absentee Christ whose function is to offer salvation by pardoning us from our sin in this life and fixing the root problems in the next. Thus when Fox mentions the offices of Christ, such as Heavenly Prophet and Teacher, Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, Counsellor, King, Orderer, etc., we can look at this and say, "how quaint, how interesting!" but we do not see these things as any more than that. We see no functional significance whatsoever in these "offices of Christ" that Fox talks about. We know we are saved because we have received forgiveness. We rest in the admonition that we "aren't perfect, just forgiven."

However, when Fox speaks of these offices of Christ, he is dealing with the CURE of THE PROBLEM that touches all mankind. This is the problem. We are no longer in that pure and perfect state we were created to inhabit. Before mankind fell from that state:

- ▶ we dwelt in the image of God.
- ▶ we were taught and directed in all things by the wisdom and daily counsel of God.
- ▶ He was our head, orderer, governor, and overseer; and it was this continual contact and relationship with our Creator that was the rock, the immovable foundation, of our lives.

In the fall, all this was lost and it is utterly beyond human power to repair the breach. In the fall:

- ▶ we have taken on the image of the serpent.

- ▶ we are directed in all things by our own wisdom and the counsel of our own understanding.
- ▶ we have set up the serpent, the teacher of unrighteousness, as our head.
- ▶ we are like sheep without a shepherd, each going his own way, each doing what is right in his own eyes.
- ▶ we are ordered, governed, and overseen by a multitude of conflicting interests and powers. Thus our lives are built upon the sand. In and of ourselves we have no immovable foundation for establishing our lives.

We have need of a savior who will bring us again into the image of God, who will repair the destruction wrought by the serpent, and who will return us to our rightful habitation. But if we do not understand the problem, we will not be able to hear the cure.

Now, this is what Fox has to say about whom Christ is and how he delivers mankind from our predicament in the fall:

- ▶ Christ is his people's living, infallible, heavenly prophet, counsellor, leader, king, shepherd, bishop, priest, and head.
- ▶ Christ is the light, life, way, and truth.
- ▶ He is the gatherer of God's people by his light, power, spirit, grace, and faith in his name.
- ▶ He is God's speaker to God's people—the first and last speaker, the everlasting speaker.
- ▶ He is the teacher of God's people.
- ▶ He is the substance of all the types, figures, and shadows.
- ▶ He is the husband, redeemer, purchaser, savior, sanctifier, reconciler, mediator, and captain of salvation.
- ▶ He is the one who bruises the serpent's head and destroys the devil and his works.
- ▶ He is the everlasting preacher, everlasting minister, and deliverer.
- ▶ He is the rock and foundation that stands sure.
- ▶ He is the prophet that God has raised up, whom we must hear.<sup>1</sup>

It is as Christ fulfills these roles in us and in the midst of his people that he is savior, for these things bear directly on the problem we face in the fall.

---

<sup>1</sup> compiled from an appendix entitled *THE OFFICES OF CHRIST AS HE IS PRESENT IN THE MIDST* included in Lewis Benson's *Notes on George Fox*, pp B 1-15.

Also note that Fox lays special emphasis on Jesus fulfilling these functions or “offices” as he is present in the midst of his people:

And so gather in the name of Jesus where salvation is and life and redemption and mediatorship and peace with God is, so gather, I say in his name, he is in the midst of them for as Christ saith where two or three are gathered in my name there I am in the midst of them. Then there is righteousness in the midst, there is light and truth in the midst, and a savior and redeemer in the midst to comfort them that are gathered into his name, and to refresh them. And so he is the head and they are the church, and there the head is in the midst of the Church, ordering the body, ordering the church, ordering the sanctified ones and saints, his spouse, his bride, his wife.<sup>2</sup>

It is as important to know these offices of Christ at a corporate level as on an individual level. Fox also states quite unequivocally that the true Church consists only of those who are gathered to hear and experience Christ Jesus in the midst in all his offices.

... so in his name keep your meetings, in whom you have salvation; and these are the true meetings and true gatherings who feel Jesus Christ in the midst of them, their prophet, their counsellor, their leader, their light and life, their way and their truth, their shepherd that laid down his life for them, that has bought you, his sheep, who feeds you in his pastures of life; and your heavenly bishop to oversee you, that you do not go astray again from God. And so it is that through him you overcome, and he that overcomes shall go no more forth out of his fold, out of his pastures, who shall sit down in heavenly places in Christ Jesus who is your priest that offered up himself for you, and sacrifices for you and makes you holy and clean, that he may present you blameless up to the holy and pure God and here you come to witness him and to know him in his offices, by his light, sprit, and power;...<sup>3</sup> [*NOTE: The light is not distinct from Christ in his many offices but is here included as one of his offices. The light that saves is not distinct from the presence in the midst for they are one and the same ...*] <sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Aa MSS. p. 21 Taken from the appendices entitled *THE OFFICES OF CHRIST AS HE IS PRESENT IN THE MIDST* included with Lewis Benson’s *Notes on George Fox*, p B-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Fox, Works*, vol. 8, *Epistles II*, p. 77.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis Benson’s comment on this passage is found in appendices entitled *THE OFFICES OF CHRIST AS HE IS PRESENT IN THE MIDST*, included with Lewis Benson’s *Notes on George Fox*.

Friends, all that be gathered in the name of Jesus whose name is above every other name, you know that there is not any salvation by another name under the whole heaven but by the name of Jesus, and you that be gathered in his name will feel him in the midst of you a prophet to open to you; a shepherd to feed you in his heavenly pastures of life; a heavenly bishop to oversee you in his heavenly possession; a counsellor to counsel you concerning your lot and state in the land of the living and in the things of the kingdom of God and in the world that has no end; and you will see Christ a leader and commander to lead you out of death, darkness, sin and corruption ... and command you to obey him, and hear him, and follow him, and take up his cross the power of God by which you are crucified to the world ... and to know him your priest that offered himself up for you and all men and sanctifies you and washes you and presents you to God without spot or wrinkle or blemish.<sup>5</sup>

Fox did not see this vision of salvation and life as something that only applied to a few people who were so constituted that “the early Quaker way” would suit them while the “Puritan way,” “Baptist way,” or “Anglican way” would be better suited for others of different temperament. Rather he was sent by God to challenge the whole of Christendom (so called) on the very issues of our condition in the fall and who Christ is and how he brings us salvation.

From Fox and the early Quaker vision, come ringing these questions: “You call yourselves Christians, but how do you know and experience Christ as he is the heavenly Prophet, sent to teach you the Father’s righteousness and empower you to live therein? How do you experience Christ as your shepherd whose voice you must hear and obey if you would have life? How do you experience Christ as your heavenly Counsellor, whose counsel must be heard if you would dwell in the land of the Living? How do you experience Christ, your heavenly Priest who is come to make you without spot and blemish that he may offer you up to the Father, a pure and holy offering? How do you experience Christ, the heavenly physician, sent to heal you of the malady of being like sheep without a shepherd?” And so on.<sup>6</sup> These are not just idle questions that he has put forth in an effort to engage other “Christians” in ecumenical dialogue. Rather Fox is saying “this is the very stuff of salvation and life for all people everywhere, in every generation, under all circumstances. And if you are not living your life so as

---

<sup>5</sup> Richardson MSS, p.278.

<sup>6</sup> See Fox’s letter addressed “To all the Kings, Princes, and Governors in the whole world: and all that profess themselves Christians, ...” in *Works*, Vol. 5, Doctrinals II, pp 319-320.

to know and experience Christ in all his offices, you have no legitimate claim to the name 'Christian' (Christ-like)."

When Jesus states that he is "the way" to the Father (not "a way" – "no one comes to the Father but through me") it is because of the nature of his messiahship that he can make this claim. All these things that Fox spoke about concerning the offices of Christ are the very substance of this "way to the Father" and were the things written and spoken by the prophets concerning the messiah.

By  
Ellis Hein

## **THE PLACE OF GEORGE FOX IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY**

It would seem reasonable to suppose that, nearly three centuries after the death of George Fox, there would be some measure of consensus among church historians concerning the place he should be assigned in Christian history. But this is not the case. They all agree that he has an assured place in history, but there is an astonishing variety of theories purporting to tell us exactly what that place is.

Since the purpose of these lectures is to focus on Fox's actual teachings as revealed in his writings, I shall not take time to review even the most important of these theories. What is abundantly clear from Fox's writings is that he and other early Quakers had a definite and unambiguous understanding of the place they occupied in Christian history. But most writers about Fox begin by rejecting his own self understanding as incredible, not even plausible. They tell us that Fox was mistaken in his understanding of his role and function, and that this misunderstanding must be corrected by his modern interpreters. A whole book could be written on the many ingenious attempts that have been made to explain Fox and what he was trying to do.

The choice of this subject, "The Place of George Fox in Christian History," as a starting point for this series was not accidental, nor was it prompted by intellectual curiosity. It was prompted by the fact that many Quakers today are so limited in their knowledge of what Fox taught that they think of him as having less to teach us than some of the other early Friends such as Naylor, Barclay, Penn, and Penington.

In every generation there are some students of Quakerism who feel empathy for a particular Quaker worthy of olden time and try to make him or her come alive for modern Friends. But we have not chosen to focus on Fox for any arbitrary, trivial, or capricious reason. We have not chosen to study Fox because he is the founder of the Quaker denomination, as might be the case if a Methodist or a Lutheran took up the study of Wesley or Luther. We have made Fox's teaching the subject of this study because we believe it is the prime source for understanding what produced the Quaker explosion in the seventeenth century, and also the prime source from which we can draw inspiration for a movement of Quaker renewal today.

As we have come to understand Fox's message, we have come to regard it as much more than a variant on themes derived from the Reformation of the sixteenth century, or from Roman Catholicism, or from the Christianity of Puritan England. Fox was making a new beginning from a new starting point. He claimed that he was preaching a gospel that had gone into eclipse since the apostolic age.

Fox was not preaching a revolutionary gospel unconsciously, or without a realization of what he was doing. He frequently called attention to the fact that

he was making a new beginning. I have found more than fifty places in Fox's writing where he says, "*Now* the everlasting gospel is preached *again*, after a long night of apostasy since the apostles' days" (my italics). This is quite a big claim to make: that the apostles had the true gospel and preached it, and then it went into eclipse for sixteen hundred years until the Quakers came along. In this statement Fox is telling us who he is, what he is doing, and what his place is in Christian history.

Fox also says that "the Quakers ... never came from the several Protestants nor Papists neither from their evil root nor stock." Commenting on this passage in *Catholic Quakerism*, I said, "Fox and early Quakers believed that their faith grew from an entirely different root system from that which nourished the several Protestant denominations ... they saw Quakerism *not* as a branch of Protestantism but as a new thing, which, because it springs from another root, must be seen as a whole new conception of Christianity."<sup>7</sup>

Robert Barclay declared that though the Protestants have reformed the Roman church "in some of the most gross points, and absurd doctrines, ... yet ... they have but lopt the branches, but retain and plead earnestly for the same root..." Yet the Puritan theory of Quaker origins is the one preferred in most American Quaker schools and colleges. In lecturing at Woodbrooke in 1964 I commented on this theory that "Quakerism differed radically from Puritanism in its view of the scriptures, its conception of the nature of the church, its doctrine of Christian worship and ministry, its view of the sacraments, its belief in the moral perfectibility of both the individual and the church by the power of Christ, its view of the relation of the Christian to the state, and its understanding of the meaning of the cross. Quakerism was militantly engaged in an attack on Puritanism on all these points."<sup>8</sup>

As T. Canby Jones asks, "Is it possible for Quakers to differ from Puritans about this many things and still be classified as a species of Puritanism?" But at the present time the Puritan theory is the prevailing one, although other theories still have some exponents in the Society of Friends today.

If Fox had been a reclusive scholar who merely rediscovered this lost apostolic gospel in his study and wrote a book about it, it is doubtful that he would have earned the place he now holds in Christian history. But as we now, he was called and commanded to confront the whole British nation with this challenging gospel message, and he inspired and nurtured seventy coworkers to go forth and preach that message to the inhabitants of the earth, so that during his lifetime sixty thousand people were gathered by its power into a

---

<sup>7</sup> Lewis Benson, *Catholic Quakerism* (Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1990), p. 12. (Originally privately printed by Lewis Benson 1966)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p 10. [Barclay quotation from *Apology*, Prop. X, Section 5 (quoted on p. 12 of *Catholic Quakerism*)].

gospel fellowship, and became settled and established on the gospel foundation. All of this was accomplished by the faithfulness and prodigious labors of Fox and scores of others in the seventeenth century.

Today, the Quaker community has evolved into the type of church fellowship that sociologists call a denomination. As one modern Quaker historian has put it, "The Quakers have come to accept the role of a small sect in a big world." The everlasting gospel that Fox preached is no longer a part of any living Quaker tradition. The Quakers no longer have a unique gospel message that they believe is good and true for all people everywhere and in all ages. No longer are Quaker preachers to be found everywhere with this gospel message that they have been given to preach to the inhabitants of the earth. Today, the gospel of power that went into eclipse soon after the age of the apostles, and which was recovered and preached again by Fox and his associates, has gone into eclipse again.

However, this is only one side of the Quaker story today, because the everlasting gospel is being recovered again, a second time, and it is being preached again by a band of people in Canada, the U.S., and Britain. In trying to rediscover this message, this teaching of George Fox, we are not assuming that his tactics or lifestyle or vocabulary must be slavishly imitated. This would be a step backward rather than forward. Fox's preaching did not make clones of himself. His message was a seminal one, and where the seed took root it produced a wide variety of witnesses who made the message their own through the gospel experience. But we do believe that the gospel message he preached, which was the foundation of all his teaching, could bring new life and power to the Quakers today, and we believe that God will show us how to proceed if we are faithful.

We are trying to bring something new into Quaker life. In a report in the London *Friend* on his recent visit among American Friends, Ormerod Greenwood stated that in spite of many changes in the structure of American Quakerism there seemed to him to be a lack of anything really new. In reply, our English co-worker, Ursula Windsor, reported in the *Friend* that the message preached by New Foundation workers *is* experienced by our hearers as something new.

The Quaker world today is divided into adherents of three nineteenth-century traditions: conservative, evangelical, and liberal. And it is taken for granted by many that Quakerism must be defined as a pluralistic society in which these three traditions are maintained in balance. But none of these traditions, nor all three taken together, have the strength to support a vigorous witness for these times, or for the century that lies ahead. The men and women in each of these traditions are equally the rightful heirs of the rich legacy which Fox's message and teaching has to offer. Our message to all the Quakers is: claim your inheritance.

One of the objections most often heard against Fox's claim to have recovered the gospel that had been lost since the apostle's days concerns his use of the word "apostasy" to describe all Christian history from about 35 A.D. to 1650. That's quite a claim to swallow, and the word "apostasy" seems like a red flag to a bull—people just don't like to hear it. Fox used the word all the time; certainly it is included in the majority of his early gospel messages. It is a central claim in the sermon he preached on Firbank Fell<sup>9</sup> in 1652, which was the most important sermon of his career and the one that had the most far-reaching consequences.

Of course it is not the word "apostasy" that is important, but the claim. Was there indeed a gospel which was preached during the lifetime of the first Christian apostles, which went into eclipse when Christianity moved from Palestine into the regions to the west, where there was a great influence from Greek and Roman cultures? It is generally agreed that the gospel was, at the least, somewhat altered in emphasis by this move; this has been considered by most historians as a positive development, because it helped Christianity to prosper in the Greek and Roman culture. But the question remains: was anything lost in the transition? Fox says, Yes, the *main thing* was lost in the transition. The *gospel*, the power of God, was lost.

We will go into this question in more detail in the next lecture, but we can say that there was such a lost gospel. For a long time after I read Fox's writings and came to understand that he was making this extraordinary claim for himself—that he had recovered a lost gospel—I couldn't find any substantiation for it in the reference libraries in the theological seminaries. I couldn't find any indication, before 1945, that his claim could be backed up by modern scholarship. Christianity just hasn't been interested in this; it has been interested in other interpretations of who Christ is and how he saves us.

But after 1945 the books started to come out. Modern biblical scholars are beginning to study the christology of the apostles, the earliest stratum of Jewish Christianity. The discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls in 1945, and studies of Samaritan religion, have prompted this research. And what the scholars are now finding is a tradition in the New Testament, especially in the Book of Acts, Hebrews, and the Fourth Gospel, that is very old, and that can be studied and analyzed.

It is important for us to realize that early Friends thought of themselves as a movement which was as important in history as the Reformation of the sixteenth century, and just as revolutionary. In 1677 the Quakers decided to make a major missionary effort to the European continent. They picked a blue-ribbon team which consisted of Fox, William Penn, Robert Barclay, George Keith, and a half-dozen others of that caliber, to invade Holland and Germany.

---

<sup>9</sup> For further information concerning the Firbank Fell sermon, see the Appendix. This explanation, by John McCandless, appeared in *New Foundation Papers* No. 17, March, 1985.

What did they think they were doing in this effort? In his book on Barclay, D. Elton Trueblood quotes from a letter to David Van den Enden, a German sympathizer, in which Barclay wrote that “The Protestant churches need a reformation in the main not much less than the Romans did at the time that Luther appeared.” Trueblood comments that these Quakers “thought they had a big opportunity to lead a second wave of the Reformation in Germany,” and points out that Barclay stated in this letter that “the purpose was to reform Protestantism as Luther had reformed popery.”<sup>10</sup> This is the image that the Quakers had of themselves. And where would they have gotten the energy and the capacity to suffer and bear their witness under all kinds of conditions, if they had had less of a vision?

But we do not have to go back to Barclay and 1677 to understand the vision early Friends had of their mission. The minute book of Crosswicks Meeting in southern New Jersey opens with a remarkable document written in 1684 by a group of Friends who knew where they were in history.<sup>11</sup> It is called “A Preface to the Ensuing Book,” a book which continues, for the minutes of Crosswicks Meeting are still being written:

It hath pleased the mighty God and great Jehovah, in this last age, after the great night of darkness and apostasy which hath spread over nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, since the glorious days in which the Apostles lived, by His outstretched gathering arm, and the word of His eternal power, to gather a people, who was weary of all dead forms and outside professions, into a waiting frame of spirit, where we durst not think of our own thoughts nor speak our own words in things relating to His kingdom and way of worship. And, being thus brought down by the mighty power of God, we were the more capable to receive instruction from Him, who, through and by His Son, Christ Jesus, the true light that lighteth every one that cometh into the world, appeared in us, and taught us His way and worship, which is in spirit and truth. This He taught us while we were in Old England, our native land, which, ... was, in this latter age, the first of nations where the Lord appeared in so mighty a power ... to the gathering of thousands into His fold, whereby his people became a body, whereof Christ is the head ... And the Lord, by his providence and mighty power, hath brought some of his people out of their native country, over the great deep, into this wilderness, and remote part of the world, as West Jersey, and places adjacent, where He hath laid the same weight and care upon some of us, as he did in our native land; that all things may be well among us, to

---

<sup>10</sup> D. Elton Trueblood, *Robert Barclay* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 177.

<sup>11</sup> Ezra Michener, ed., *A Retrospect of Early Quakerism* (Philadelphia: T. Ellwood Zell, 1860), pp. 37-38.

the honor of his great and worthy name; which is the ground and end of this following book.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Minutes of Crosswicks Meeting, NJ, "A Preface to the Ensuing Book," 1684.