

RESTORING THE CHURCH OF THE CROSS

In approaching the subject of the restoration of the Church of the cross, we will begin again from Fox's sermon on Firbank Fell, in which he described "the state of the apostasy that has been since the apostles' days" (Ni:109). For Fox, this apostasy involved not merely error, but *loss*. In his book, *The Great Mystery*, he charges his opponents that "the Quakers are risen up in the night of apostasy, and discover you all what you are in, and what you went from, and what hath been *lost* since the days of the apostles" (3:99, italics added).

In discussing worship, I pointed out that Fox said the true worship had been lost, and the same was true of ministry and of gospel order. Another of the things that was lost was the church of the cross. "Here began the apostasy," says Fox, "... when they ... apostatized from the true cross, the power of God, and from the true church" (4:171). And he wrote in 1657 that "there hath been an apostasy in the whole of Christendom from the cross of Christ which is the power of God."⁴³

When he says that "the Christian's faith is not to stand in the wisdom of men ... but in the power of God," (8:283) he has two things in mind: the power of the gospel and the power of the cross. "The fellowship of the cross of Christ," he asserts, "... is not of man, nor by man; for it is in the everlasting power of God"; therefore, "no longer do you keep in fellowship, but as you keep in the cross of Christ" (8:67).

In a discussion of "the antiquity of our cross," written 1688, Fox asserted "That which crucifies people to the world, and the world to them, is the cross of Christ, the power of God ... and this was the church of Christ's cross in [the apostles'] days, and is the church of Christ's cross now" (6:370). And earlier, in 1662 in a time of great persecution, he had written to Friends in the Americas of "the fellowship of the cross, which keeps over all the fellowships in the world," whereas the fellowships of the oppressors were "out of the cross of Christ, the power of God" (8:218-219).

In a general epistle "to be read in all the christian meetings in the world," he cautions "my dear friends all everywhere" that "You must bow at the cross of Christ, which is the power of God, which since the apostles' days the apostate christians have lost ... Now bowing to the cross of Christ, which is the power of God, that strikes over ... that part that turns into ungodliness, and all that is bad, and is a cross to it. So bow to the power of God. If all christendom had done this, they had had a fellowship in this cross of Christ" (7:227). What has been lost is summed up in a later epistle: "The true hope, the true cross, the true faith, the true worship, the true religion, the true way, the true image, and true fellowship have been lost since the apostles' days" (7:322).

⁴³ Cadbury AC, Cat. No. 25C, p. 64.

George Fox believed that the great work to which he had been called was to gather people to Christ by the power of the gospel. His gospel message that “Christ has come to teach his people himself” is a call to people to become disciples of Christ, to be taught the principles of God’s righteousness by him, and to come into a fellowship that learns together, obeys together, and suffers together.

From the passages I have cited, I think it is reasonable to conclude that Fox was fully aware that what he was doing would result in the gathering of a church of the cross, and that it would be the role of the Quakers to be the sole representatives of the church of the cross in the English-speaking world. He saw that “they that followed Christ in his cross” would become “strangers in the world” and be “condemned by the world,” for “the world knew him not, neither doth it them that follow him now” (7:17).

Fox did not teach that there is merit or virtue in suffering as such. He was not a promoter of asceticism, nor was he like those sects in the Middle Ages who practiced self-flagellation and all manner of self-inflicted hardship in the belief that such practices would produce spiritual benefits. During the Second World War, I had a letter from a Friend in one of the largest cities in England, which was being heavily bombed, and he said that “we are beginning to learn what the cross means, what suffering means.” I don’t think this statement was made from a deep understanding of what the cross is, because it isn’t just suffering or hardship that comes from all kinds of places and causes. It means suffering for the sake of the righteousness of Christ and for bearing testimony to the truth which comes from Christ.

Fox was proclaiming that Christ has come to be a teacher of righteousness to his people, and he declares that “they who come to the church, which is in God the Father of Christ ... must come into the righteousness, true holiness, and image of God” (BI:345-346). And he urged the Quakers to “sanctify yourselves ... that ye may be a holy people to the Lord ... that ye may be the holy members of the church of Christ” (BII:474). To Friends who were suffering he wrote in 1684, “the eternal God knows, and his son Christ Jesus, it is for him alone, and his truth’s sake, we suffer” (8:251).

Suffering for the truth that comes from God and Christ involved, for the Quakers, suffering for the sake of preaching the gospel, and suffering for the sake of maintaining the worship and ministry that belongs to the order of the gospel. Also it involved suffering for refusing to obey the laws that compelled them to pay the tax that supported the ancient churchly establishment and its institutions. But, above all, it involved suffering for the righteousness that is taught and commanded by Christ. After quoting Paul (Philippians 3), Fox writes to Friends that “this is good advice, that God’s people ... let their sufferings be for righteousness’ sake, and with Christ, that they may reign with him” (8:280). And the well-known “1660 Declaration” addressed to Charles II

asserts that “although we have always suffered, and do now more abundantly suffer, yet we know that it’s for righteousness’ sake” (Ni:401).

To the Quakers Fox wrote, “If ye suffer for righteousness’ sake happy are ye, ... because ‘Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps’” (8:279, quoting I Peter 2:21). And he reminded Friends that “the Lord Jesus Christ ... hath supported, upheld, and preserved you steadfast to himself; so that neither reproaches, imprisonments, nor spoiling of your goods, [nor] death ... could ... make you turn from Christ, your life, priest, bishop, and shepherd” (8:307).

Of course the officials of established Christendom have sometimes suffered when hostile governments took away their privileges or threatened their ecclesiastical interests, as happened in Germany under the Hitler regime. But the aim of this kind of suffering is only to restore the church to its favored position of privilege and monopoly. After the Second World War the German church had several options: it could have become a free church, or even a gathered church. But, while much publicity has been given to the suffering of some German church leaders during the war period, it must be pointed out that after the war they went right back to the pattern that had prevailed before the war, in which the state picked up the cost of running the national church.

When Jesus spoke of the people of God and described them as “like a city set on a hill,” it was not his kind of monopolistic priestly establishment that he had in mind, for this statement follows the description of God’s people that he gave to his disciples:

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake:
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you,
and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in
heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt hath lost his savour,
wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but
to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot
be hid. (Matt 5;10-14 KJV)

Commenting on this passage in a general epistle to the yearly meeting at London in 1676, Fox speaks of “the Christians who lost the city, the hill, the salt, and the light since the apostles’ days” (BII:239), and again, “when they forsook the power of God, and their faith stood in words and men, and not in the power ... they lost their hill, their saltness, and their shining” (BII:237). The power that they forsook was the cross of Christ, which is the power of God; as Fox puts it, “God’s power ... is the cross, in which the mystery of the fellowship stands” (BI:346). Thus Fox is teaching that suffering, in the Christian sense, is for the sake of bearing a faithful testimony to the Truth that comes from God

and Christ, and especially for the righteousness that comes from God and Christ.

Much Protestant thought in Fox's time, as well as the fundamentalist theology of today, stresses only the righteousness that comes from the Old Testament, the Mosaic law. If there is a righteousness that comes from Christ, how are these two related? There is good reason to believe that Fox dealt with this question in his Firbank Fell sermon, of which he wrote, "I opened ... the figures and shadows and turned them to Christ the substance" (Ni:109). In the third session of this seminar we devoted a large part of the time to Fox's teaching on "shadow and substance," and we saw that there were many things in the Old Testament and Old Covenant that foreshadowed Christ. There were many shadows but only one substance, for Christ is the substance of them all. We also noted Fox's claim that not only is Christ the substance of all the shadows, but that when we come to know him as the substance we also know that the shadows have been ended and abolished.

Thus Fox says that "the law ... served until Christ the seed came ... For when the substance is come, the shadows fly away" (6:57-58). Of "all those outward things ... commanded in the law," he says that they "served till Christ the great prophet came in the new covenant and new testament, who is to be heard in all things; and he the substance putteth an end to all those figures and shadows in the law and old testament" (6:338-339). "He that is in Christ, is at the end of the law, and the precepts, and the statutes, and the ordinances, and the commandments, and is in the substance, God's righteousness" (3:270). "That righteousness which is wrought in us by the strength of Christ ... is Christ's who is the end of the law" (3:277). "God hath raised up a prophet like Moses ... who is the end of the law for righteousness' sake to them that believe, and the law served till he came, and when he came the law had done its service ... so people are to hear him whom God raised up, for he is ... the covenant."⁴⁴

Fox sums up his teaching on this theme in the great Epistle 249, written in 1667: "Christ the everlasting covenant, ends the first covenant ... And so Christ ends all the types, figures, and shadows, and variable things that were given to man since the fall, and held up by the law, ... which law served till Christ came, and was good in its place, and was added because of transgression ... This served with all its shadows till the seed Christ came; but Christ is come, who was the end of the law for righteousness sake ... and in Christ is no shadow, variableness, nor turning" (7:295).

⁴⁴ Cadbury, AC, Cat. No. 47E, p. 12