


2007

# Did William Penn Diverge Significantly from George Fox in his Understanding of the Quaker Message?

T. Vail Palmer Jr.

*Freedom Friends Church, Salem, Oregon, USA, tvailp@dnc.net*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/quakerstudies>

 Part of the [Christian Denominations and Sects Commons](#), and the [History of Christianity Commons](#)

## Recommended Citation

Palmer, T. Vail Jr. (2007) "Did William Penn Diverge Significantly from George Fox in his Understanding of the Quaker Message?," *Quaker Studies*: Vol. 11: Iss. 1, Article 4.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/quakerstudies/vol11/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Quaker Studies by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact [arolfe@georgefox.edu](mailto:arolfe@georgefox.edu).

DID WILLIAM PENN DIVERGE SIGNIFICANTLY  
FROM GEORGE FOX IN HIS UNDERSTANDING  
OF THE QUAKER MESSAGE?

T. Vail Palmer, Jr

Freedom Friends Church, Salem, Oregon, USA

ABSTRACT

Melvin Endy argues that George Fox and William Penn shared similar goals for Quakerism, and that in light of their close working relationship, scholars who argue for significant differences between Fox's and Penn's views of Quakerism must account for Fox's failure to criticise Penn's views. This paper proposes that the lynchpin of Fox's understanding of Quakerism was an empathetic reading of the Bible, so that the authority of Scripture was internalised. In Penn's writings, the Bible is appealed to as an external authority. Because Fox lacked sophistication in the relevant areas of thought, he was unable to identify the core and source of his thought or to recognise that Penn was working from a biblical hermeneutics significantly divergent from his own.

KEYWORDS

George Fox, William Penn, lynchpin of Quakerism, empathetic reading of Scripture, biblical metaphors, Melvin Endy

MELVIN ENDY'S CHALLENGE

In a recent article in *Quaker History*, Melvin Endy argues 'that Fox and Penn shared similar goals' for Quakerism, 'and that this is reflected in their relationship and less clearly in their thought' (Endy 2004: 34). He concludes 'that Penn's accomplishment was to extend and develop Fox's thought... Early Quakerism was a complex enough movement to encompass within its mainstream both Fox and Penn, and to enable them to operate largely in agreement on the essentials of the movement' (Endy 2004: 35-36).

Endy makes his case by describing in considerable detail 'the close and mutually supportive working relationship between Penn and Fox for twenty-four years' (Endy 2004: 18). He can find no evidence that Fox 'was concerned that Penn's theology

took Quakerism in new and dangerous directions'; to the contrary, he notes that 'Fox's regard for Penn's speaking and writing ability, the content and manner of his preaching, and his apparent unity with him even in thought is most clearly evident in his account of their work together during the missionary trip to Holland and Germany in 1677' (Endy 2004: 20).

Endy notes that some 'recent scholars of early Quakerism have described what they perceive as significant differences between Fox's and Penn's understandings of Quakerism' (Endy 2004: 1); some of these scholars claim 'that Penn was a leading figure in a second generation of weighty Friends who led the movement in a new direction' (Endy 2004: 2), strongly divergent from the direction originally intended by George Fox and other first-generation Quaker leaders. In order to establish his thesis, Endy criticises the thought of two of these scholars: Hugh Barbour and Richard Bailey.

I agree that Endy's *prima facie* case is strong. The close relationship between Fox and Penn and their mutual support in contending with opposing factions within Quakerism are undeniable. Nor is there any evidence that either Fox or Penn ever criticised the other's religious views or theological position. How, then, can there be any reason for arguing that Penn's and Fox's views were significantly divergent or even that Penn's thoughts marks the beginning of a decline from the purity or power of Fox's original Quaker vision?

Endy argues that there are four possible ways of accounting for the interpretations of scholars such as Barbour and Bailey:

One is that Fox and Penn were largely ignorant of what the other was about. A second is that Fox in particular was naïve or confused or both, and that Penn either took advantage of him or did not himself realize the significance of the novel direction he was taking the movement. A third is that the Fox Penn knew was not the Fox who had brought Quakerism into existence but a changed man in some respects... A final possibility is that the differences between Fox and Penn in these interpretations are overdrawn or just plain wrong (Endy 2004: 26).

Endy correctly argues that the first of these options 'makes little sense' (Endy 2004: 27). He suggests that Hugh Barbour's views partake, to some extent, in all of the other options, but that his 'explanation is primarily our second possibility, namely, that Fox and Penn were somewhat confused about the content and implications of their thought' (Endy 2004: 27). Endy argues that Bailey essentially falls into the third of his options—that by the 1660s Fox had radically changed his emphasis: 'He denied his original insight that true Christians should follow the leadings of the divine Christ within them in favor of an ecclesiastical organization that was headed by an aristocracy of London Friends' (Endy 2004: 30). Endy also suggests that Bailey may also fall into the fourth option: 'I suspect that Bailey's statement that "Fox's doctrine of celestial inhabitation was the hub of his entire world of thought" gives the doctrine undue emphasis' (Endy 2004: 32). Endy charges that in Bailey's concluding section 'Fox comes across as either incredibly confused and naïve or so hungry for respectability, and for the survival of Quakerism, that he would do virtually anything to bring it about, even realizing that the result would mean the defeat of his religious and social revolution' (Endy 2004: 33).

Clearly, a scholar's judgment as to whether William Penn's thought diverged significantly from that of George Fox, will depend on that scholar's understanding of what was 'the lynchpin of Fox's understanding of Quakerism' (Endy 2004: 29). Has Endy dealt with all of the major contesting scholarly views on this point in his article? A look at Pink Dandelion's typology of theories about Quakerism can be instructive in regard to this question. Of Dandelion's four schools of Quaker-studies theories, the Sociological school can be ignored, since it sets aside the search for any definitive lynchpin of early Quaker thought. Barbour is clearly representative of the Mainline school, and Bailey of the Metaphysical school (Dandelion 2004: 232).

What about Endy himself? He argues that the 'concept of an inward source of insight and moral transforming religious and moral power... was the lynchpin of the movement from the beginning, known more or less clearly by all Friends' (Endy 2004: 34). This conclusion is strongly reminiscent of the views of Rufus Jones and Elbert Russell: in Jones' interpretation of Fox, the 'Seed' or 'Light' was 'a basis of inward communication and correspondence between God and man and a moral searchlight revealing to man the absolute distinction between right and wrong' (Jones, R. 1949: 28). According to Russell, 'Early Friends used many names for the inward source of their religious life and faith: the Light, the Light of Christ, the Light Within, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit, the Seed, the Root, "that of God within you", the Truth' (Russell 1979: 48). Along with Carole Spencer and all other representatives of the Metaphysical school, 'the mysticism of Jones' interpretation is... a taken-for-granted starting point (though Spencer, after Endy... disagrees with Jones' analysis of mysticism)' (Dandelion 2004: 233).

Endy does not deal with any representatives of the Metatemporal school. This may be due to a lack of relevant material by these scholars. Rosemary Moore's major book covers only the period up to 1666; Penn did not become a Friend until 1667. Doug Gwyn does pay some attention to Penn, but I can find only one citation that appears to deal closely with the question of his possible divergence from Fox's core thinking:

We find in Penn a nearly schizoid breakdown of the Quaker vision into two diverging streams of thought and action. In most of his religious writings, particularly after 1670, he moves with the Protestant stream, sometimes more tightly sectarian, other times more broadly latitudinarian. In his political writings, he is a classic philosophical liberal, unabashedly contractarian and humanistic... Within Quaker thought and subsequent history, Penn became the paradigm for two diverging streams... The Protestant-liberal schism that has defined Quaker consciousness down to the present harkens back to William Penn as its founder (Gwyn 1995: 340).

If anything, Gwyn appears to support the views of both Barbour and Bailey (as summarized by Endy)!:

Barbour sees Penn as leading Friends from radical Puritanism in a liberal, if not post-Christian direction. By contrast, Leo Damrosch... Richard Bailey... and Nigel Smith... have put forward... the view that Penn... exerted a conservative influence that turned a very radical charismatic version of Christianity... in a more orthodox Christian direction (Endy 2004: 2).

But there is hardly enough material for any developed analysis of Gwyn's interpretation of Penn. We need to see whether any other representative of the Metatemporal school has anything to say on the question under discussion.

#### READING THE BIBLE WITH EMPATHY

Dandelion characterises Gwyn and Rosemary Moore as 'metatemporal' because of their emphasis on 'unfolding eschatological realization, or "realizing eschatology", as central to a reading of Quaker history across time' (Dandelion 2004: 233). I am convinced that my own understanding of Quakerism fits into this school of interpretation. Evidence of this can be found in one of my early writings:

The heart of George Fox's message was that Jesus Christ *had now come*—to teach his people himself. He meant this in terms of the final coming of the Kingdom of God... But history since then has proved that Fox was just as premature, in his expectation of the final coming of the Kingdom, as were Jesus and Second Isaiah, long before him (Palmer 1973: 4).

Although I have for a long time subscribed to an essentially metatemporal understanding of the message of George Fox and the earliest Friends, it is only in more recent years that I have arrived at and articulated a clearer understanding of the source and core of that message. I first spelled out this interpretation in my essay, 'Early Friends and the Bible: Some Observations'. Since that time, I have developed and expanded this interpretation to some extent in a number of lecture series on Friends and the Bible.

My new approach to the thought of George Fox, Edward Burrough, and Margaret Fell was 'to look intensively at a few brief writings and brief sections of longer writings, to see if I could discern *how* the Bible was used in these writings' (Palmer 1993: 42). What became clear to me at once was that Fox, Burrough, and Fell 'did not seem to be appealing to these [biblical] quotations and citations as external resources or as authorities to which they were asking Friends to conform themselves' (Palmer 1993: 43). They did not look on the Bible as 'primarily a handbook, a collection of resources and guidelines for salvation and Christian living' (Palmer 1993: 48). I came to the insight that Fox, Burrough, and Fell were reading the Bible with radical *empathy*:

As far as possible, Fox and Burrough were indeed thinking *with* Paul, John, and Luke; they had entered sympathetically and imaginatively into the New Testament community and were reliving its sacred history. Furthermore, they were expecting and assuming that their Quaker readers were likewise standing within the Bible—within the thought- and life-world of the earliest Christians—and were looking out at the world through the window of biblical faith (Palmer 1993: 44).

I had long since noticed that Fox's and Robert Barclay's claims, that the Scriptures were a secondary authority, subordinate to the authority of the Spirit, are found almost entirely in polemical and apologetic works, addressed to non-Friends. 'Fox apparently felt no need to instruct or remind his contemporary Friends of the nature of biblical authority' (Palmer 1993: 42). Now, recognising that Fox and his readers

were already standing *within* the world-view of the earliest Church, I exclaimed, 'No wonder that George Fox felt no need to spell out for his fellow-Friends any careful doctrine on the status of biblical authority!' (Palmer 1993: 44). Carole Spencer has stated it well: for Friends, 'the Bible was not an external authority ("a paper Pope") but an internalized authority. Quakers lived, breathed and were infused by the wordsof Scripture. It was foundational to all their theology and spirituality' (Spencer 2004: 129).

I was already deeply indebted to Alan Kolp for an understanding of the spirituality of George Fox. Kolp had suggested that, for Fox, 'Even though he used words, they were words of the heart. Although not poetic, his language of the heart was imaginative and sensual, rich in symbols and metaphor. Fox's language tended to be more metaphorical than conceptual' (Kolp 1991: 42). Kolp argued that 'Fox's particular mode of being spiritual is predominantly "affective"... Affective spirituality is more emotional and less intellectual, more spontaneous and less formal' (Kolp 1991: 42).

I noted that this 'affective' spirituality is tied in directly to Fox's empathetic reading of the Bible. Like the writings of Fox, the biblical writings are 'rich in symbols and metaphor', they 'abound in verbal and visual symbolism' (Palmer 1993: 48). I noted: 'the writings of the early Friends, even including William Penn, were full of biblical metaphors'. For an affective spirituality like Fox's, 'metaphorical and symbolic language is clearly the most appropriate form of expression. Empathy, of course, is an emotive, 'feeling'-oriented route into someone else's world' (Palmer 1993: 49).

I observed that putting an emphasis on the empathetic reading of Scripture, as foundational to early Quaker spirituality, helps us understand some of the more unusual, 'apparently bizarre actions of the first Quakers' (Palmer 1993: 45), such as Fox's belief that he was called to proclaim 'Woe unto the bloody city of Lichfield', the claims of some Friends (including Robert Barclay) that the Lord called them to walk naked, as a sign, or the actions of James Nayler's followers, in taking off their clothes and spreading them on the road ahead of his donkey, as he rode into Bristol.

At a deeper level, I had observed in 1969 a remarkable similarity between John Yoder's description of the community of disciples founded by Jesus (Yoder 1972: 46-47) and Rob Tucker's description of the early Quaker community (Tucker 1967-68: 6-8).

I noted in my 1969 paper that the similarity between Yoder's and Tucker's insights was at the sociological, descriptive level, and concluded with a theological question: Even if we have some idea of what such a revolutionary community might look like, how does it actually come into being? I am now ready to suggest a clue about the origin of the distinctive Quaker community: It resembled the community of the first disciples precisely because the early Quakers had internalized the life of the early church with such deep empathy, because the history of the first apostles had become their own. They 'were there when they crucified my Lord' (Palmer 1993: 47).

In the terminology proposed by Endy, I am now prepared to claim that the lynchpin of George Fox's understanding of Quakerism was his *hermeneutical method*: his reading of the Bible with empathy, which led to an affective spirituality, grounded in biblical symbolism and metaphor.

This hermeneutical method was not unique or even original with Fox and the earliest Friends. I had myself first become acquainted with it when I immersed myself in the twentieth-century biblical theology movement: such scholars as Karl Barth, Bernhard W. Anderson, and G. Ernest Wright had insisted that the goal of all biblical criticism was to enable us to enter with empathy into the world and world-view of the biblical writers and their communities. Carole Spencer notes that

early Quaker understanding and use of scripture has stronger affinity with the spiritual interpretation practiced by the early Greek fathers... Karen Torjesen [in her book on Origen] describes biblical hermeneutic as a process of the reader being placed within the text and its meaning written on the soul (Spencer 2004: 143).

Paul Bock, in conversation with me, has suggested that my description of Fox's empathetic approach to the Bible seems very similar to Ignatius Loyola's use of Scripture.

The way in which early Friends used the Bible *was* distinctive, however, in seventeenth-century England. Puritans of all stripes (except perhaps for some radical Seekers) were insistent on the primacy of Scripture as an external authority and almost instinctively recognised in Quakerism a challenge to their understanding of Scripture.

Early Friends' empathetic understanding of the Bible did lead them to make at least one significant unique, original contribution to Christian thought and spirituality—the 'Lamb's War'. Hugh Barbour and Canby Jones were the first scholars to emphasise this metaphor as an important theme in the writings of Edward Burrough, James Nayler, and George Fox (Barbour 1964: 40–41, 94–95; Jones, C. 1964: 37–41; 1972: 97–107). Canby Jones pointed out the significance of the role of the Lamb's War in George Fox's 'realising eschatology': 'The climactic result of the Lamb's War will be what Fox and the early Friends believed was already coming into being: a new heaven, a new earth, a new covenant with mankind, a new Jerusalem coming down from heaven to earth' (Jones, C. 1972: 106). Doug Gwyn also portrays the theme of the Lamb's War as an important aspect of his interpretation of early Quakerism (Gwyn 1986: 193–97; 1995: 106–107).

The Lamb's War theme clearly emerged in Fox, Burrough, and Nayler's interpretation of the book of Revelation. This book presented problems for many Protestants who looked on Scripture as an external authority, as a sourcebook or handbook for doctrine and morals. John Calvin wrote commentaries on every book of the Bible except Revelation! And yet, as I have noted, I have 'a strong impression that Edward Burrough's thunder and consolation originate primarily in the book of Revelation. While he quotes a wide variety of biblical books and contexts, I suspect that Revelation was his favorite' (Palmer 1988: 41). I have suggested that what are particularly significant in Burrough's interpretation of Revelation are

the insights from Revelation on the nature of the final struggle between good and evil. These focus around the theme of the 'Lamb's war'... Burrough is quite aware that the imagery on warfare in Revelation is not meant to be literal and physical... Again and again Burrough makes the point that one of the chief differences between the forces of Christ and the forces of Satan is the nature of the weapons which each side is using (Palmer 1988: 42–43).

It is clear to me now that Fox, Nayler, and Burrough had two important factors in their favor, as they dealt with the bold, lush metaphors and bizarre symbolism of the book of Revelation: They could place themselves with warm empathy into the position of the original author and readers of this book; and they expected to be able to make what they called a 'spiritual' interpretation of the book—to make deep and full use of its metaphors and symbolism. The paradoxical images of Christ as both lion and lamb (Rev. 5.5–6) were a resource, not a stumbling-block, to them. They recognised the pictures of apocalyptic warfare in Revelation for what they were: powerful symbols of 'the whole armor of God' (Eph. 6.13–17), not literal descriptions of the fateful struggle between good and evil at the end of history. In this mighty imagery of the Lamb's War, from the book of Revelation, they found the source not only for the peace testimony but for many of the other testimonies, through which they witnessed to their faith and confronted the society of their time.

At the outset of my current line of inquiry, 'I followed up my look at Fox, Fell, and Burrough with an intensive analysis of two brief selections from the writings of William Penn' (Palmer 1993: 47). The conclusion of my examination of Penn was this:

These writings by Penn...are much less intense, much less immediately and intimately involved in the interior life-experience of the biblical writers. The empathy with the biblical worldview may not be completely lacking, but for Penn the Bible seems to have become primarily a handbook, a collection of resources and guidelines for salvation and Christian living... In spite of his clear commitment and dedication to Quakerism, William Penn was in the final analysis a second-generation Quaker, living at least in part off of the spiritual capital amassed by his immediate predecessors (Palmer 1993: 48).

Penn's hermeneutical method thus diverges significantly from that of Fox, Burrough, and Fell; to that extent, my judgment has to be that he does not firmly hold on to the lynchpin of original Quakerism. Was this because the leaders of Quakerism had strayed from their original insights by the late 1660s and the 1680s, when Penn was writing? 'To test this question, I looked at a brief 1683 epistle by Fox' (Palmer 1993: 48). I discovered that in this epistle

the sense of empathy, of intimate involvement in the biblical world, shines through as intensely as in his earlier writings. The sharp contrast between Fox and Penn in this regard is all the more striking, in that they were close friends, frequent traveling companions, and regular supporters of each other when controversies arose within the Quaker movement (Palmer 1993: 48 [original text restored]).

#### THE SOURCE OF FOX'S HERMENEUTICS

In the face of Melvin Endy's challenge, the burden of proof rests upon me. I have already claimed that Fox was *not* 'a changed man' in respect to his adherence to the lynchpin of his early message. Do I allow that he was 'naïve or confused or both' and that Penn 'did not himself realize the significance of the novel direction he was taking the movement'? Or must I grant that the close working relationship between



Fox and Penn proves that I am 'just plain wrong' in my claim that an empathetic interpretation of the Bible is the lynchpin of early Quaker thought and spirituality?

In order to deal with this challenge, I ask myself how George Fox and other early Friends may have discovered or attained their empathetic approach to the Bible. One route—that followed by the twentieth-century biblical theology movement—has been that of serious, disciplined biblical scholarship. But George Fox and the early Friends found their way to such a standpoint without benefit of this sophistication. Was this discovery by Fox and his contemporaries sheer religious genius, or was there something in their own historical situation that enabled them to do this?

Studies by Daniel Smith-Christopher and Peter Gomes suggest the latter possibility. Daniel Smith-Christopher's insights into the period of the Babylonian exile of the Jews and their return to Palestine led him to seek patterns that might be echoed in the experience of contemporary 'exile' communities. He has discovered that members of modern minority, 'exile' groups, such as African-Americans and native Americans, are readily able to identify with the work, for instance, of Ezra—a leader whom most European and European-American biblical scholars find it staggeringly difficult to appreciate!

And Peter Gomes, the black preacher who is now Plummer Professor of Christian Morals at Harvard, shows how the empathetic approach comes easily to African-Americans:

Black preaching endeavors to remove as many barriers between the thing preached and those to whom it is preached as quickly as possible, so that the 'objective' story becomes with very little effort, 'our' story, or 'my' story. Distinctions between then and now, while possibly of some rhetorical use, more often than not get in the way. Thus, when the black preacher preaches about the exodus of the Jews from Egypt under the leadership of Moses, he does not dwell on the fact that most black people have more in common culturally with the benighted Egyptians than with the Jews. *We are the Jews*, and their exodus is ours, not by analogy but by participation and experience...

African Americans who read and heard the Bible did not stop to ask if it was literally true, inspired, and inerrant, for they knew that on the authority of their own experience as a people troubled, transformed, and redeemed. The biblical world may be different from the new world to which they had been transported in chains and against their wills, but the view of God was to them the same in both worlds. Hence, what God did for Daniel and the three Hebrew children in the fiery, fiery furnace, God not only would do, but already had done with them... Far more than fact-obsessed white Protestant Christians, the African-American believer saw the story whole, saw that it had his face and name on it, and embraced the teller and the tale (Gomes 1998: 340-41).

What about early Friends? I have found Richard Vann's sociological analysis of early Quakers to be particularly suggestive: 'Eldest sons were almost never converted to Quakerism. Its appeal was all but entirely limited to the younger children within a family... Those excluded from inheritance of the family land or business were more susceptible to joining a persecuted religious minority' (Vann 1969: 84-85).

I have used the word 'movement' to describe the first few years of Quakerism because it...seems to catch the essentials of the situation: fluidity and mobility,...in the basic sense of moving about the country... The most mobile elements in the population,

wholesale traders and former army officers, were the principal carriers of the new religion. It also seems that Quakerism made its greatest appeal to men who had changed their place of residence at least once, and perhaps several times, since their births. Even the gentry converts were not, for the most part, from 'established' families, which may be another way of saying that they were at least relative newcomers (Vann 1969: 199).

As I have summarized it, early Friends were often people who were losing their centuries-old rootage in the land, were suddenly becoming geographically and economically mobile, and yet had some education and ability to articulate their distress (Palmer 1994: 43). In this situation, I can see that it was not difficult for them to identify themselves 'as aliens and exiles' (1 Pet. 2.11 NRSV) and recognise their forebears as 'strangers and foreigners on the earth' (Heb. 11.13 NRSV).

Early Friends, of course, were not sophisticated in linguistics and rhetoric; they would hardly have recognised that they were making rich use of symbols and metaphors. In this connection, I find a quotation from William Penn's *No Cross, No Crown* to be highly suggestive. Penn writes of 'Sodom and Egypt, spiritually so called [citing Rev. 11.8]' (Penn 1971: I, 337). The word translated 'spiritually' in this verse in the KJV is rendered in modern translations as 'allegorically', 'prophetically', 'symbolic'.

Fox and Burrough also did not have the sophistication to recognise consciously that they were reading the Bible empathetically—that they were shaping their own and their followers' spirituality and moral character by internalising biblical themes, stories, and figures of speech. But we can see why George Fox, when writing to Friends, never mentioned the *authority* of Scripture. For the very concept of 'authority' would imply the imposition of *external* rules and ideas!

Most of the critics of early Friends were Puritans, for whom the authority of Scripture was crucial. The early Friends had to find language that would enable them to challenge the Puritan, Calvinist view of the authority of Scripture. Fox rejected the idea of Scripture as an external, written authority.

Perhaps it was the passage in Revelation 11 which suggested to Fox that his reading of Scripture was 'spiritual', that 'the spirit of God that led them to speak forth the scriptures, was the rule to the saints and holy men of God' (Fox 1990: III, 58-59).

But if Fox was not sophisticated enough to recognise that his differences from the Puritans rested on radically differing hermeneutical methods in their interpretations of Scripture, neither were his opponents, even those who possessed a theological education. As a result their polemics tended to degenerate into mutual accusations: Friends rejected Scripture; their opponents used Scripture falsely or imported non-scriptural 'notions' into their theologies!

#### FOX'S FAILURE TO CRITICISE PENN

As I have been pointing out, George Fox was indeed unsophisticated in certain significant ways. Because of this lack of sophistication he was unable to name the heart and source of his spirituality and of his religious thought and action, or to pinpoint the source of his disagreements with his opponents, or even to recognise clearly when his own Quaker friends and allies failed to share fully in the lynchpin of the movement which he founded and led—an empathetic reading of the Bible, an

affective spirituality rich in biblical symbolism and metaphor. To say that he lacked sophistication is to say that he was naïve, in these crucial respects. William Penn was also naïve in these respects, and so had no way of recognising that he was indeed significantly diverging from the heart or lynchpin of George Fox's Christian vision.

Fox's naivety was the naivety of the 'primitive' painter or artist. Not knowledgeable about or fully aware of the source of his religious genius, he was nevertheless empowered to be the catalyst for the foundation of a powerful new movement in the history of Christianity. I dare to characterise the emergence of this movement as one of the 'mighty acts of God', the events in which God reveals Himself to His people and brings into fuller realisation the eruption of God's Reign into human history.

Neither Fox nor his opponents nor most of his followers had the sophistication to recognise that he was reading the Bible with empathy. One or two Friends—who themselves had theological training—may have had some hints. Carole Spencer states that 'the major exception to this understanding of scripture was the scholarly Samuel Fisher, who approached the Bible with a more modern historical-critical perspective' (Spencer 2004: 143); but of course a modern critical perspective is not inconsistent with an empathetic interpretation of Scripture. Dean Freiday argues that Samuel Fisher's method of interpreting Scripture 'tries to get beyond the mere superficial use of the "outside" of Scripture, and to become aware of the "inside"—"the inward Living Word of God"' (Freiday 1979: 100). In Freiday's summary of Fisher's and early Friends' approach to Scripture,

An important presupposition of this view is that the deeper meanings of Scripture...are accessible only to those whose lives possess a Christ-like quality. And such quality develops only from...getting in tune, as it were, with the Bible's human authors and the heavenly Author who inspired them (Freiday 1979: 101-102).

If Freiday is correct, Samuel Fisher seems to have grasped the early Quakers' empathy with the biblical communities, and to have suggested what this can lead to, in terms of Christ-like living.

Robert Barclay says of the Scriptures, at one point:

God hath seen meet that herein we should, as in a looking-glass, see the conditions and experiences of the saints of old; that finding our experience answer to theirs, we might thereby be the more confirmed and comforted, and our hope of obtaining the same end strengthened (Barclay 1908: 88 [Prop. 3, Sect. 5]).

Here indeed Barclay suggests an empathetic reading of Scripture, but the lynchpin of his understanding of Quakerism is doubtless stated clearly in the much more famous quotation, in which he spells out Fox's attempt to explain to non-Friends the Quaker understanding of the authority of the Scriptures:

Because they are only a declaration of the fountain, and not the fountain itself, therefore they are not to be esteemed the principal ground of all truth and knowledge, nor yet the adequate primary rule of faith and manners. Yet because they give a true and faithful testimony of the first foundation, they are and may be esteemed a secondary rule, subordinate to the Spirit, from which they have all their excellency and

certainty:... The Spirit is that Guide by which the saints are led into all Truth; therefore, according to the scriptures, the Spirit is the first and principal leader (Barclay 1908: 72 [Prop. 3, point 3]).

As for William Penn: he took one of George Fox's many metaphors for Christ and elevated it into Friends' 'characteristic, or main distinguishing point or principle'—their lynchpin!—'The Light of Christ within, as God's gift for man's salvation' (Penn 1947: 22).

The fact that early Friends were unable to recognise that they were reading the Bible empathetically and metaphorically may be one reason why this way of reading and understanding the Bible almost disappeared after the first generation of Quakerism. Barclay and Penn did the best they could, under the circumstances. They left later generations of Friends with three primary things to draw on: the obvious fact that early Friends depended heavily on the Bible in their writings, Barclay's insistence that the Scriptures were subordinate to the Spirit, and Penn's naming of the Light of Christ Within as the lynchpin of Quakerism.

#### REFERENCES

- Barbour, H., *The Quakers in Puritan England*, Yale Publications in Religion, VII; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964.
- Barclay, R., *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity: Being an Explanation and Vindication of the Principles and Doctrines of the People Called Quakers*, Philadelphia: Friends' Book Store, stereotype edn, 1908.
- Dandelion, P., 'Conclusion: The Nature of Quaker Studies', in Dandelion, P. (ed.), *The Creation of Quaker Theory: Insider Perspectives*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004, pp. 226–38.
- Endy, M., 'George Fox and William Penn: Their Relationship and their Roles within the Quaker Movement', *Quaker History* 93/1 (2004), pp. 1–39.
- Fox, G., *The Works of George Fox*, 8 vols.; (repr.), State College, PA: George Fox Fund, , 1990 (1831).
- Freiday, D., *The Bible—its Criticism, Interpretation and Use—in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Century England*, Catholic and Quaker Studies, IV; Pittsburgh: Catholic and Quaker Studies, 1979.
- Gomes, P.J., *The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart*, New York: Avon Books, 1st Bard printing, 1998 (1996).
- Gwyn, D., *Apocalypse of the Word: The Life and Message of George Fox (1624–1691)*, Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1986.
- , *The Covenant Crucified: Quakers and the Rise of Capitalism*, Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1995.
- Jones, T.C., *Triumph Through Obedience*, Quaker Lecture, Indianapolis, IN: John Woolman Press, 1964.
- , *George Fox's Attitude Toward War: A Documentary Study*, Annapolis, MD: Academic Fellowship, 1972.
- Jones, R.M., *The Faith and Practice of the Quakers*, The Faiths: Varieties of Christian Expression; Repr., London: Methuen & Co., 7th edn, 1949 (1927).
- Kolp, A., *Fresh Winds of the Spirit*, Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1991.
- Palmer, T.V., Jr, 'Preface to a Sacramental Wrap-up', *Quaker Religious Thought* 14/4 (1973), pp. 1–4.

- , 'Quaker Peace Witness: The Biblical and Historical Roots', *Quaker Religious Thought* 23/2 & 3 (1988), pp. 36-55.
- , 'Early Friends and the Bible: Some Observations', *Quaker Religious Thought* 26/2 (1993), pp. 41-55.
- , 'A Revisionist Revised: A New Look at Bernstein's *Cromwell and Communism*', in Snarr, D. N., and Smith-Christopher, D. L. (eds.), *Practiced in the Presence: Essays in Honor of T. Canby Jones*, Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1994, pp. 36-59.
- Penn, W., *Rise and Progress of the People Called Quakers*, Repr., Philadelphia: Friends Book Store, 1947 (1694).
- , *The Select Works of William Penn*, 3 vols.; Repr., New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 4th edn, 1971 (1825).
- Russell, E., *The History of Quakerism*, Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1979.
- Spencer, C.D., 'Holiness: The Quaker Way of Perfection', *Quaker History* 93/1 (2004), pp. 123-47.
- Tucker, R.W., 'Revolutionary Faithfulness', *Quaker Religious Thought* 9/2 (1967-68), pp. 3-29.
- Vann, R.T., *The Social Development of English Quakerism: 1655-1755*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969.
- Yoder, J.H., *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972.

#### AUTHOR DETAILS

T. Vail Palmer, Jr, was clerk of the Center for Christian Studies at Reedwood Friends Church in Portland, OR, USA. He received his PhD from the University of Chicago. He has been Professor of Philosophy and Religion, and Chairman of the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, at Rio Grande College (in Ohio). He was editor of *Quaker Religious Thought* from 1974 to 1978, and then co-editor of that publication (with Dean Freiday) from 1979 to 1982.

Mailing address: 1800 Center Street S.E., Albany, OR 97322, USA. Email: [tvailp@dnc.net](mailto:tvailp@dnc.net).