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What Future for Evangelical Friends?

CHARLES MYLANDER

When John Wooden was coach of UCLA's basketball team he taught his players who scored a basket to honor the teammate who passed the ball to him. While running back down the floor the scoring player pointed to the one who gave the assist or set the pick. Since those now-famous days you can often see basketball players pointing to a teammate, giving credit for setting them up to score. In this book many of us are pointing in honor to Dr. Arthur O. Roberts, our professor who again and again gave us an assist that made a significant difference in our lives.

When I was first approached about writing a chapter, one thought popped into my mind. Over and over Arthur Roberts used to talk about "a Friends Church—evangelical in nature and worldwide in scope." Some of us caught his dream and to this day we pursue his vision. Dreams never come true just like the man with the original vision pictured. But some do come true in a form that is clearly recognizable. This one is in progress, still in the making.

I would like to divide the chapter into three major headings, *Theology*, *Vision* and *Strategy*.

Theology

As we look at a Friends Church that is "evangelical in nature," it immediately suggests the stark reality, known well by Arthur Roberts, that not all Friends are evangelical. All Friends do hold their earliest history in common. To this day many share similar testimonies, distinctives and a unique

way of conducting business. Theologically, then, what essential beliefs make a Friend evangelical? Three heartfelt convictions distinguish evangelical Friends from others.

- Evangelical Friends hold to the centrality of Jesus Christ including His exclusive claims as the only way of salvation.
- Evangelical Friends hold to the authority of scripture, including its teaching on sexual issues.
- Evangelical Friends hold to the unity of Friends faith including receiving into membership only those who know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

The Chair Analogy

Compare evangelical Friends focus on Christ and His authority to a chair with a seat, four legs and a back. The seat of the chair is Christ Himself. Responding to Christ's light and grace, we trust Him as Lord, Savior and coming King. The seat of the chair is what supports us. We put the weight of our lives on the centrality of Jesus Christ.

He is the pre-existent One, God the Son
 who was incarnated Jesus of Nazareth,
 lived a sinless life,
 died on Calvary's cross,
 rose bodily from the tomb,
 ascended to the right hand of the Father,
 was seated with Him in the heavenly realms
 and is present in our lives as Lord, Savior, Teacher and Friend.

Compare our evangelical Friends view of revelation and authority to the four legs of a chair. Think of them as

the Holy Spirit of God,
 the written word of God,
 the powerful and personal works of God, and
 the faithful people of God.

The four legs are all part of the same chair. What the Holy Spirit teaches is the same truth as what the prophets and apostles taught in the written words of scripture. God's mighty works confirm this truth and God's faithful people give witness to it in their hearts and with their lips. In other words, God's truth is all one.

The back of the chair is *tradition*. All Christian movements have their unique distinctives and traditions which they value. Most often these are

interpretations of scripture and developments of historical theology. It's quite possible to sit on a chair without a back on it. However, the back brings much comfort and a feeling of security. This may well be why chairs outsell stools. So with Friends our unique history, testimonies and traditions give us support and stability. We value them.

The most comfortable part of a chair is its padding. It's also the most attractive. In this analogy the padding on the Friends chair is personal *experience*. I love holy-ground experiences, the times when a person meets God in a life-changing way. I love to share my own and to hear about other people's personal experiences with Christ.

Whenever we brag on a chair, it's almost always because of the beauty and the comfort, and not because of the quality of the frame. When we talk about Christ and the uniqueness of Friends we most often speak of our experiences with our living Lord and His people. Yet most of us would not want a chair that's all padding. Nor can we justify a faith that is all experience but is not supported by the seat of Christ Himself and the solid legs of God's Holy Spirit, God's written word, God's mighty works and God's faithful people.

With the chair analogy in mind, let's take a look at the three core convictions.

- Evangelical Friends hold to the centrality of Jesus Christ including His exclusive claims as the only way of salvation.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is absolutely believable when He says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6 NIV) We believe that there is salvation in no other name under heaven because no one else ever lived a sinless life, died as a perfect sacrifice for sin and rose from the dead to give us a living hope forever. The exclusive claims of Jesus Christ as the only way to the heavenly Father are a scandal to some today.

Unacceptable Universalism

Robert Barclay in his well-known *Apology* has rightly shown how the light of Christ gives a universal offer of salvation, even to those who have not yet heard the name of Jesus.¹ However, he denies (and so do we) a universal experience of salvation.

Indeed, the name *Jesus* signifies the saviour who will free them from the sin and the iniquity in their hearts.

I confess that there is no other name by which to be saved. But salvation does not lie in the literal knowledge of that name, but in the experience of

1. Dean Freiday, ed., *Barclay's Apology in Modern English*, pp. 112-124.

what it signifies. Those who merely know his name, without any real experience of its meaning, are not saved by it. But those who know the meaning and have experienced his power can be saved without knowing his name.

This is why God has raised faithful witnesses and evangelists in our age to preach again his everlasting gospel. It is their task to help all become aware of the light within themselves and to know Christ in them.²

A world of difference exists between what Friends originally taught and the universalist Quakers of today. A universal offer of salvation (à la Barclay and the scriptures) says that all who received the inward light of Christ will believe and trust in Him. When and if they hear His name and gospel authentically proclaimed, they will recognize and receive *Jesus* as their light. But the false teaching of universalism claims salvation for all who are sincere believers in any religious experience, even if they bypass the Christ of the scriptures.

With hearts full of love and truth we evangelical Friends reject any system that bypasses putting one's full weight of faith for salvation upon the seat of the chair, our Lord Jesus Christ. We can no longer tolerate the heresy of universalism, the false teaching that all people will go to heaven whether or not they trust in Jesus Christ and His saving light.

The second core conviction is this:

- Evangelical Friends hold to the authority of scripture, including its teaching on sexual issues.

Some Friends try to reinterpret or disagree with the scriptures when it comes to both heterosexual and homosexual behavior outside of marriage. God's Holy Spirit is the one who enlightens us, leads us and witnesses within our hearts that we belong to the Lord Jesus. The Spirit is the One who reminds us what Jesus taught and empowers us to obey Him. He is the One who inspired the scriptures. He never contradicts today by continuing revelation what He inspired in the written word of God centuries ago.

Some Friends groups polarize when the revealed truth of scripture conflicts with current thinking on sexual issues. Some liberal Quakers take pride in the practicing homosexuals in their Meetings. Some even "bless" same sex unions of two men or two women. (Some scholars have tried to reinterpret the scriptures on these issues but without success. Evangelical scholars, and many others, believe that scriptural teaching is undeniably clear that homosexual activity is forbidden.)

2. *Ibid.*, Pp. 113, 123.

From our earliest days we evangelical Friends have considered the scriptures as authoritative when it comes to disputes over our faith and practice. Robert Barclay wrote concerning the scriptures,

We consider them the only proper outward judge of controversies among Christians. Whatever doctrine is contrary to their testimony may properly be rejected as false. We are very willing for all of our own doctrines and practices to be tried by them. We have never refused to honor them as the judge and test for any disputes we have had on matters of doctrine. We are even willing to allow this to be stated as a positive maxim: Anything which anyone may do while claiming to be led by the Spirit, which is contrary to the scriptures, may be considered as a delusion of the devil. We never claim the Spirit's leading as a cover for anything that is evil. Since every evil contradicts the scriptures, it must also be contrary to the Spirit from which they came. The motions of the Spirit can never contradict one another, although they sometimes appear to do so in the blind eyes of the natural man.³

We evangelical Friends reject the teaching that homosexual activity or heterosexual acts outside of marriage are acceptable. While we welcome into our churches those with a homosexual orientation, we reject homosexual activity as sinful and displeasing to our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. We do the same for premarital or extramarital sex.

Turn your attention now to the third core conviction.

- Evangelical Friends hold to the unity of Friends faith including receiving into membership only those who know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Some Friends have claimed a mystical experience that either contradicts or is in no way related to our Lord Jesus Christ whom we worship as Creator, Savior and living Lord.

A few have even involved themselves in goddess worship, new age practices, or wicca (a form of witchcraft). We evangelical Friends reject this kind of idolatry and must renounce it as a counterfeit to true Christianity and a distortion of authentic Friends teachings.

Some Friends take into membership Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, new age practitioners, and others who openly reject Jesus Christ. They teach or imply that all sincere religious seekers are heaven-bound. We can only say with tears that the lies of universalism have replaced the truth of a universal offer of salvation through Jesus Christ and His light. When we call for a Friends Church that is evangelical in nature, we base it on the centrality of

3. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

Jesus Christ, including the unity of Friends faith which must be exclusively Christian.

Vision

A Friends Church that is “evangelical in nature” speaks of theology; one that is “worldwide in scope” calls for vision. The purpose of evangelical Friends today is to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20) in the spirit of the Great Commandment (Mark 12:28-31). Evangelical Friends exist to make more and better friends of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our passion is for everyone in every culture to know Jesus and to know Him better. Our intent is to penetrate the cultures around us, whether at home or abroad, with the life-changing gospel and loving acts of service in the name of Christ.

Our goal is to multiply family, followers and friends of Christ. To be more explicit, we intend to multiply *redeemed* family, *devoted* followers and *intimate* friends of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are commissioned to disciple the nations, all the ethnic groups of the world. Making disciples means bringing people into living union with Christ. It includes teaching them to learn from the Lord Jesus and obey His commands, in short, to become the apprentices of Jesus. The Holy Spirit who moved the first Christians and early Friends will compel us to fulfill our part of this worldwide vision.

While we do not pretend to be the only expression of the Body of Christ, we are one Holy Spirit-formed incarnation of His Church. Our intent is to plant evangelical Friends churches in recognized Yearly Meetings throughout the world. We envision each evangelical Yearly Meeting fulfilling three essential functions. In short, the three are *church*, *school* and *mission*.

The first essential function is *church*. We envision healthy evangelical Friends churches that grow and reproduce. Where we are falling short is in reproduction. We cannot pretend to fulfill the Great Commission if we nurture our present churches only. All evangelical Friends must support a great church-planting movement if we are to fulfill our part of the Great Commission. We intend to plant churches that practice intimacy with Christ (Great Commandment) and disciple-making evangelism with Christ (Great Commission). “Worldwide in scope” means we will multiply throughout our own people groups, and beyond.

The second essential function is *school*. We envision effective means of training evangelists, pastors, elders, teachers, and other workers. Their task is to build up evangelical Friends churches. We build them up when we teach them obedient intimacy with Christ and church-multiplying evangelism. We can do no less if we are to obey everything that Jesus commanded us. Nowhere in the world, Friends included, does the church prosper without adequate training for its workers and leaders. Only God calls and

ordains, but we must enlist and equip those whom He taps on the shoulder and thrusts into the harvest.

The third essential function is *mission*. We envision every evangelical Yearly Meeting in every part of the world with an effective Missions Board. The task of this Board is to send national missionaries supported by their own people. Such mobilization will happen as the national Mission Boards lift the vision of penetrating other cultures, languages and people groups with the gospel as understood by evangelical Friends. Even a moment's thought makes it clear that we will never have a Friends Church that is worldwide in scope if we only focus on our present few churches. We must step outside of ourselves and take the gospel to other people groups who will hear and respond to the good news.

If we can use an analogy from sports, we must have a forceful offense and a powerful defense. Our offense is the Great Commission, to disciple the ethnic groups of the world. Our defense is the Great Commandment, to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Our offense is powerful intercessory prayer. Our defense is winning in spiritual warfare. Our offense is church-planting evangelism. Our defense is discipleship that includes intimacy with Christ and obedience to His commands. Our offense is church growth. Our defense is church health.

We envision an aggressive offense that raises up churches and people who practice love and step outside of themselves to spread in word and deed the greatest message of all, Christ's redeeming love. Living communion with Christ and life-changing evangelism walk hand in hand. We envision a powerful defense that teaches our people to conquer the devil, the flesh and the world. All our good intentions will come to nothing if we ignore the enemies of the spiritual life in Christ. All evangelical Friends need to understand freedom in Christ, and need to live in its power. Once again may it be said of us, in the words of George Fox, "the power of the Lord is over all."

Strategy

It is compelling to speak with Arthur Roberts of "a Friends Church that is evangelical in nature and worldwide in scope." But if we only speak and never act, the dreams will never come into reality. We must turn theology into practice and vision into strategy if we are to obey our Lord. Yet there is always a danger in writing about strategy. While our theology and vision seldom change, our strategy often will. When we think and write strategically, it is always with the understanding that it may change tomorrow.

International Thrust

The brightest spots on the evangelical Friends globe are outside the United States. What do we see emerging among evangelical Friends? We

see an international, Christ-proclaiming, Scripture-authoritative, leadership-respecting Friends Church that values Biblical standards and clearly stated beliefs. This movement speaks the biblical language of today's Friends who see themselves as evangelical Protestants. More and more it is doing business, setting an agenda, and creating an identity. Regional alliances of Evangelical Friends International are already under way in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Ron Stansell, Director of the Evangelical Friends International Council reported on the progress at the 1996 meeting of Evangelical Friends International / North America.

We can indeed claim there now exists a "Friends Church evangelical in nature and worldwide in scope." Asian Friends know each other. Central American Quakers have personal friendships with South American Quakers. Each Regional conference has been marked by much learning about neighboring Friends, prayer, inspiration and drawing of strength from peers. Furthermore, cross-cultural missionary work is happening by Friends in all three Regions. Guatemalan, Honduran and Salvadoran Friends have formed a consortium to support a missionary in Nicaragua. Bolivian Friends are serving in Peru. Burundi Friends have ministered in Zaire and nurtured new churches there as well as loaning preachers to Rwanda. In Asia, Taiwanese Friends are supporting a Chinese investment of time, interest, and finances in Indonesia and Nepal as well as on mainland China.⁴

The growth and health of evangelical Friends churches is most encouraging. Evangelical Friends Mission, a commission of Evangelical Friends International has launched several new mission fields, especially among unreached people groups. A church-planting movement is evident at least on every continent. New Yearly Meetings and mission fields are growing and older ones are beginning to send their own national missionaries.

Both on the international scene and within the United States we need to implement the "thirty-fold principle." In a famous parable Jesus taught that seed that fell on good ground would bear fruit—thirty, sixty or even a hundred times more than what was planted (Mark 4:8, 20). Apply Jesus' principle to our Yearly Meetings.

Suppose that in its lifetime, one Yearly Meeting planted five others around the world. This is not unthinkable in this day of receptivity and rapid communication. Then suppose that each of these Yearly Meetings were taught to plant five other evangelical Yearly Meetings. The result would be thirty Yearly Meetings. Reproducing chains soon break down without constant effort and fresh starts. *However, workable strategies that mul-*

4. Ron Stansell, written report to the Coordinating Council of Evangelical Friends International/North America, Twin Rocks Conference Center, Rockaway Beach, Oregon, January 7, 1996.

tively Yearly Meetings produce far more than no realistic goals at all. The important principle of multiplication means that every Yearly Meeting must intend to reproduce itself again and again. It will never happen if we never try.

Discipleship Training

We will multiply evangelical Friends churches at home and abroad only when we adequately train our people. Biblical ignorance is a fact of modern life, a reality far different from the days of George Fox and William Penn. We must equip our people on at least three levels.

On the *personal level* our strategy is to lead new Christians and immature believers to maturity in Christ. Most of our churches are woefully inadequate in giving our people a comprehensive plan to master the basics of Christian living. What we need is both a quality two-year course and a delivery system for our people to use it. It will take good teaching, systematic organization and motivational leadership—and one thing more, prayer. Most of all it will take personal models of the Christian life who are examples to follow.

On the *ministry level* our strategy is to teach all of our people to dedicate themselves to Christ, enjoy their spiritual wealth and use their spiritual gifts. Ministry and stewardship become a way of life for those who live in communion with Christ. As we listen to the Lord, hear His voice and capture His heart of love, we will step outside of ourselves. He invites us to join Him in His work, and we must adjust our lives and obey. What we need are a variety of courses and training, on a non-academic level that equip evangelical Friends to use their gifts, talents and strengths.

On the *professional level* our strategy is to educate and equip our God-called leaders and discerning followers with the best we can offer. First-rate academics and on-site apprenticeships increasingly walk hand in hand. Every ministry student needs an apprenticeship in the essential life of a biblical saint and the practical roles of prophet, priest and king. Saints are men and women of God who live in constant communion with Christ. Prophets are communicators; priests are people builders and kings are leaders. How can we feed Jesus' sheep if we have poorly equipped shepherds?

National Strategy

Within the United States a strategic move might be to create one Yearly Meeting that is evangelical in nature and nationwide in scope. We no longer live in the horse and buggy days. With airlines, phones, FAX machines, computers, e-mail and continual new breakthroughs in communication technology, it is easy for us to communicate anywhere in the nation. In fact it's much easier than it was for our ancestors to communicate within regional Yearly Meetings. Our failure to build one Yearly Meeting nation-

wide has led to provincial thinking and no effective national strategy. Our outreach is limited by the horse and buggy boundaries of our Yearly Meeting founders.

Whether or not we form a single evangelical Yearly Meeting, the first and foremost strategic step for evangelical Friends in the United States is simply to redraw our boundaries. *Our new boundaries must include all of the United States, not just the states where Yearly Meetings in Evangelical Friends International now exist.* In all probability this implies that every Yearly Meeting must set a high priority on planting a new Yearly Meeting, or a new district of their present Yearly Meeting in states adjacent to their present boundaries. In many states we have few if any evangelical Friends Churches.

Church Health, Growth and Planting

If we are to fill the United States with evangelical Friends Churches then we must give priority to church health, growth and planting. What are the marks of a healthy church? While many exist, essential qualities include becoming

- missions-minded,
- church-planting,
- financially-free,
- quality-based,
- splendor-displaying.

A brief explanation will make these terms clear. *Missions-minded* churches invest their time and energy in fulfilling the Great Commission around the world. *Church-planting* churches do the same within the United States. Church planting is widely recognized as the most effective form of evangelism when measured by the standard of lasting results. *Financially-free* churches operate in a way that they pay their bills on time and do not take on debt for non-capital items. They avoid debt overload and foolish speculation with their limited resources.

Quality-based means churches that preach the scriptures and practice the spiritual disciplines that lead to intimacy with Christ. Living communion is a way of life for them; they pray and obey. In addition it means that everything is done with excellence. Shoddiness and mediocrity are out, and high standards in preaching, pastoral care, facilities, people-touching ministries are in. *Splendor-displaying* means evangelical Friends who radiate the love, joy, peace, kindness and presence of the living Lord Jesus. What happens in splendor-displaying churches cannot be explained in human terms alone; it is divinely supernatural.

When it comes to church growth our strategy is to manage activity rather than results. We intend to teach pastors and workers to listen to the

living Christ, discern His work around them, and join Him in His activity. Faithfulness in evangelism, discipleship and assimilating new people are visible examples of His work. High morale, compelling vision and continuing momentum are invisible gifts from the Holy Spirit. It takes excellence in leadership, both paid and volunteer to stimulate the kinds of activity that Christ uses for both health and growth.

When it comes to church planting much has been learned in recent years. The technology has improved and the cost decreased. The success rate of new churches has skyrocketed. The survival rate has moved dramatically upward. The greatest need at the moment is for visionary sponsoring churches and church-planters. In short, we need people called by God to launch new evangelical Friends Churches.

Prayer Power

An evangelical Friends worldwide movement of church health, growth and planting with godly, equipped leaders is a big order. It will never happen without a Spirit-inspired prayer movement. Just as prayer precedes revival, so also prayer precedes church health, growth and planting. Without prayer we will never build a strong offense.

Prayer is a primary means of overcoming the devil, the flesh and the world. Our evangelical Friends churches will never penetrate the spiritual darkness around us if we depend only on human resources, however good. Christ designed His church as a body to be connected to one Head. Without Christ's grace, truth, love, power and righteousness, our people will search for satisfaction of their inner longings elsewhere. Christ has already given all we need, but prayer brings us into awareness of our riches and of their Giver. Without prayer we will never build a strong defense.

Prayer gives us both humility and confidence. We begin to understand our weaknesses and our strengths. We begin to appreciate what we have to learn from others, and what we have to contribute. Without prayer we are doomed to mediocrity or isolation. Only prayer will turn us from a memory into a movement.

What Will It Take?

What will it take to keep the momentum going toward "a Friends Church that is evangelical in nature and worldwide in scope"?

- The inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit
- A determination to live under the authority of Scripture
- An obedient response to God's works around us
- A few God-called, Spirit-inspired leaders and many equipped, discerning followers
- A deep conviction that our Lord Jesus Christ is leading evangelical Friends churches into better days ahead.

Let us be wise enough to move confidently and carefully ahead. We must have good theology, vision and strategy. But we must have something more. We must have an active passion for people. We must feed our Lord's sheep, care for His flock and seek the wandering and the lost. Without a broken heart for the hurts of people we will miss the compassion of the Lord Jesus. We follow the Suffering Servant who laid down His life for His own, and for His enemies. Only as we humbly follow Jesus, taking up our crosses, will we attain unto resurrection!