

1996

Some Reflections on Quakers and the Evangelical Spirit

John Punshon

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/truths_bright

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

Recommended Citation

Punshon, John, "Some Reflections on Quakers and the Evangelical Spirit" (1996). *Truth's Bright Embrace: Essays and Poems in Honor of Arthur O. Roberts*. Paper 6.

http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/truths_bright/6

This Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Christian Studies at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Truth's Bright Embrace: Essays and Poems in Honor of Arthur O. Roberts by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University.

Some Reflections on Quakers and the Evangelical Spirit

JOHN PUNSHON

I suppose that Arthur Roberts was the first evangelical Friend I ever met. On what was probably the third day of my very first visit to the United States, I flew out to Oregon to meet him and visit George Fox College. I had been teaching at Woodbrooke, the English Quaker study center, for a couple of years, and I was beginning to get an inkling that there were many Friends in the world who were not like us. I wanted to get as far away from London Yearly Meeting as I possibly could, and Northwest Yearly Meeting seemed to be the place.

Arthur met me at Portland airport, entertained me to fruit pie on the way back to Newberg and seemed more interested in my attitude to the cultivation of filberts than the soundness of my doctrine. I remember that, as it happened, the then yearly meeting clerk was also eating in the pie shop and I wondered whether the Quakers were *everywhere* in the Willamette Valley. I spent a memorable few days with the Robertses learning a lot about Quakerism that I didn't know and being inducted into the mysteries of football (American style).

These things were a considerable advantage to me when I came back to the United States to teach for a period of some years. I come from an island, and in Quaker terms we are, well, *insular*. So as I began to move among Friends of a different persuasion and heritage from what I was accustomed to, I had to come to terms with the fact that evangelical Friends are a clear theological and organizational majority within the worldwide Society of Friends.

I wish I had known more about evangelical Quakerism, and earlier than I did. I wish that evangelical Friends had taken more trouble to find me. I could have done with their help in trying to place myself in the Quaker spectrum. In England I probably count as a conservative liberal. In America I might just pass as a reformed evangelical. Why else do I feel at home in the pastoral tradition? The answer is probably that in America I have been put back in touch with a part of the heritage of Britain Yearly Meeting which that body ignores, but which is vital to a comprehensive understanding of what being a Friend means.

The Origin of My Interest

I grew up as a Friend in Ratcliff and Barking Monthly Meeting, the area of which stretches from the neighborhood of the Tower of London, along the north bank of the River Thames down to its estuary some forty miles to the east. It is a very old monthly meeting—more comparable to America's quarterly meetings, I should explain, because it is a grouping of a number of "Preparative" or local meetings. One of these was Wanstead, which I still think of as my home meeting, though at present I belong to First Friends, Richmond, Indiana.

I mention this because Friends moved their meeting to Wanstead in 1870, since population changes required them to move away from the place where they had met earlier, in what was originally the village of Plaistow. A number of Friends lived round about that village, including the eminent physician and Clerk of London Yearly Meeting, John Fothergill, and a little later, Joseph Fry and his wife Elizabeth Fry (nee Gurney). The children of Wanstead meeting used to slide along the benches in the meeting house so that they could have the proud boast that they had once sat (though they could not be specific as to where) on the same seat as the great Elizabeth Fry. Indeed, my wife and I were married sitting on the Elders' bench in this meeting.

So my Quaker life began as a member of the same meeting that Elizabeth Fry had belonged to before me. It is a source of quiet satisfaction and modest pride to Ratcliff and Barking Friends that one of their number was such an adornment to the Society, as well as being a social reformer of the front rank. But I did not grasp what was involved in all this till some time later, when I had to sort through the books of two meetings that were closing down, and I encountered what must have been a pair of classical nineteenth-century Quaker libraries.

Nostalgic pride gave way to something else as I catalogued those books. It struck me that London Yearly Meeting in the very recent past had been part of the Orthodox, or evangelical Quaker world, not the theologically liberal one. When I read the Discipline of my yearly meeting there was very little indication that this had been so. The question was then inescapable.

Was Elizabeth Fry anything more than this figure of nostalgic pride, or were her religious principles something that led to what she had done, and might they still hold good today?

I guess my awareness of, and concern for, evangelical Quakerism stems from that experience. From being a new Friend inspired by the Quaker story and the Quaker way of life, I began to be drawn to the theological foundations of that life. I found that in the past these principles had been rather different from what I had been given to understand was the essence of Quakerism, and there was another kind of Quaker answer to my life-questions which had to do with the meaning of the scriptures and the work of Jesus Christ in addition to His teaching.

I have found myself traveling down that road, and as the years go by I have been increasingly interested in the tradition my own yearly meeting gave up. It is not quite the same as the American variety, because we developed neither the pastoral system nor holiness discipleship, but preserved silent waiting and evangelical principles throughout the nineteenth century. It might be thought that evangelical Quakerism necessarily requires a pastoral system, but historically, that is not so.

So having come to the United States I have been brought face to face with aspects of Quakerism that my own yearly meeting no longer expresses, but which are alive and well here. I have faced challenges to my Christian faith and my understanding of Quakerism that I have not encountered before.

There are perhaps three questions, or areas of importance to consider. First, there is the academic question. Until recently there has not been a great deal of interest in Evangelical Quakerism as a phenomenon, though I hope others will now come along and begin to cultivate the ground so admirably broken by Thomas Hamm. I am very struck, for example, by the sheer diversity of Evangelical Quakerism, and I would like to see some theorizing about it.

Then for me, and I suspect many other Friends too, there is the personal question of what it means to be both an evangelical and a Quaker. On the one hand, there are different kinds of evangelicalism, not all compatible with one another below the most general level. On the other, there are competing versions of what fundamental Quaker principles are. One of the facts of life seems to me to be that we are under constant pressure to define ourselves in relation to the extremes, and are pulled this way and that by strongly-held, but not necessarily strong opinions. I would also like to be able to state some of the ways in which it is possible for individuals to adopt evangelical positions that are at the same time informed by fundamental Quaker values and beliefs—in so far as these things diverge, a point which is itself at issue.

In the third place there is the "future of Quakerism" question. There are certain matters in which the whole Church needs the ministry of the Society of Friends, just as Friends themselves are not self-sufficient, and in their turn need the ministry of other Christians. In other words, there is a distinctive Quaker understanding of the gospel which needs constantly to be heard. But as a matter of history, that understanding has been overlaid by evangelical and liberal theologies of various sorts, and the question of the future of Quakerism is usually approached in terms of what we are to make of the apparently fundamental division between the two. However, my own feeling is that this is a false distinction, and we need a much deeper appreciation of the ways in which early Quakerism was understood and misunderstood at the time of our separations in the last century. We need to learn that Evangelical Quakerism was not born on the American Frontier.

So it matters to think about Quaker evangelicalism from the standpoint of Quaker history and theology, because these are the things that ultimately give us our character. But there are also reasons which I also find of interest and importance personally. For example, I have to reconcile two things, and I find many evangelicals in a similar position to me. I am firmly convinced, for example, of the need for Christian social action. But on the other hand I am equally convinced of the priority of the gospel. There can be no conversion of society without transformed individuals, and that comes first. I have the feeling that the biblical perspective on the human condition and its needs is being forgotten in the quest for contemporary relevance. The evangelical insistence on scriptural standards for belief and conduct has never been more needed.

However, as I have just remarked, there are different kinds of evangelicalism, some differentiated by their values and practices, others by particular doctrinal emphases. One aspect of evangelical Christianity which is not really appreciated by outsiders is that it is a very broad church comprising a rich variety of viewpoints. But we are always, as I have said, challenged at the extremes, and it seems to me that what we need today is a strong *Christian* humanism (which is what I conceive real evangelicalism to be) as against the defensiveness of the fundamentalist temperament. While the one seems to me to be highly compatible with the Quaker heritage, the other, I would think, is not.

Indeed, to take this thought further, I recall the words of Joseph John Gurney, that Quakerism is "the religion of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, without diminution, without addition, and without compromise." Nowadays there are difficulties with this formulation. What counts as diminution, addition, or compromise? There are some subtle points there I am not as confident about as Joseph John Gurney was. Nevertheless, in the doctrines proclaimed by the Society of Friends, I see the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ in a fuller form than I find elsewhere.

Hence, I am coming to think it is possible to take a stand on a set of principles that is both Quaker and evangelical, and possibly this is the best prospect we have for Quaker renewal. I say "coming to think," because this is the matter I am trying to test out. I want therefore to look at what the evangelical values are, to see what we might say were the essential characteristics of Quakerism, to look at the relationships between the two, and then draw some conclusions from history, and to see where we are today.

What Are the Evangelical Values?

Now I know that the correct formulation of doctrine is an important evangelical preoccupation, but Christians have to be concerned with the effects as well as the content of belief. As it has come down to us, the evangelical movement is a continuation of the profound spiritual forces generated by the Reformation. It takes a variety of forms, and is more diverse than many people are prepared—or willing—to give it credit for. It is normally thought of as a fairly rigid and doctrinaire movement, and there is that side to it. But what is sometimes overlooked is that it is essentially a religion of experience, and should be understood primarily as that.

I have to say also that I do not see evangelical values as separate from the values of the rest of the Church. Difference of opinion among Christians is one of the facts of life and has to be handled carefully. It should always be conducted charitably, too, and we need the humility to be able to recognise when we are wrong. But at the same time, there are matters of principle over which we need to have Luther's courage and say, "Here I stand, I can do no other."

The relationship of evangelicals to other Christians in such matters is sometimes a matter of principle like this, and that is why we have the National Association of Evangelicals as well as the National Council of Christian Churches. But the separatism of some evangelicals works against their own best interests. The evangelical values are essential for the health of the rest of the Church, and represent the base lines of Christianity to which the rest of Christianity always, sooner or later, returns. The reasons are not theological or doctrinal, but it is because these values represent how people really are and what Christianity ultimately represents.

First, therefore, we must understand that the evangelical faith is essentially a matter of personal experience. Many people locate the truth of Christianity in its ethical teaching, and there is much there that is of great value to the world beyond the Church. But that is not the essence of the thing. Prior to the good works comes the commitment. Prior to the discipleship comes the counting of the cost. In order to endure to the end, we need a power that goes beyond the unredeemed human condition. That can only come, says the gospel, and the evangelical faith, by conversion, and an experience of the transforming power of Jesus Christ. Christianity is not

following the rules, it is following Christ. People think evangelicalism is primarily about belief, but it is really about a relationship.

The second value of evangelicalism is its insistence on the primacy of scripture as a guide to life and the source of authority about doctrine in the Christian community. This is part of the scandal it causes in a lot of religious circles. Apart from its assertions about inspiration and infallibility there is a general point to be made about fidelity to the written Word. We are separated from the earthly life of Christ by about two thousand years. We live in a highly self-confident age and there are many people who think that the best clue to the meaning of scripture is to be found in the results of the most recent scholarship. The consequence of this is a tendency for many people to trust books about the Bible rather than the Bible itself. We need evangelicals to challenge this preoccupation with the wisdom of the age in the name of the "wisdom from on high" (James 3:17).

The third value is related to this challenge to the automatic assumptions of the age. There is an important sense in which the presentation of the gospel must be changed as the circumstances in which it is preached change. Indeed, we can see that process at work in Paul's sermon on the Areopagus in Acts. The culture of the age must be engaged with understanding. But that is a high risk strategy, and it sometimes happens that apologists for the Christian faith go beyond a sympathetic understanding of the assumptions of the world and instead adopt them. Rather than seeing the ills of contemporary life as malfunction, the evangelical mind sees them as the result of deliberate self-centered choices which it makes sense to see as "sin." It follows from this that instead of damage limitation and repair in the quest for meaning and authentic existence, the evangelical faith is a standing testimony to the possibility of personal liberation and transformation.

The Essential Characteristics of Quakerism

Let us turn now to Quakerism, the other half of our heritage. There is some difference of opinion about how we should define Quakerism in order to talk about it, but I shall follow Wilmer Cooper's line of thought that there is a central theological tradition coming down to us from the past which is not the formal basis of either the liberal or the evangelical branch of Quakerism, but states certain positions which we find ourselves unable to escape from unless we wish to sever any connection with our past. There are evangelical and liberal Friends who would be quite happy to make that escape, but I am not one of them, because I am convinced of the truth of much of the central, or as it has been called, "normative" Quaker tradition. What follows is not a complete account of that tradition, but I hope it expresses the main outlines.

Naturally, the main principle is that saving knowledge of God comes from personal experience and not intellectual processes. George Fox and the other Friends were very outspoken, and often overstated their case—but in this they were undoubtedly right. There is, of course, no other way to read either the gospel account of the words of Jesus or the New Testament letters. We are invited into a living relationship with Christ. We have to pick up our cross ourselves, and we do that with our hearts and not our heads. It takes repentance, love, commitment and perseverance, and those things come from within. Quaker preaching was originally intended to awaken these virtues rather than to teach a scheme of salvation, since the scheme was seen naturally to follow the experience, since it was a precondition of it. In any case, the early Quaker message was proclaimed in an almost exclusively Christian culture.

This means, therefore, in the second place, that our knowledge of Christ comes through His presence with us in His Spirit. However, this is not simply a matter of personal and subjective experience. The Holy Spirit descended upon the Church as a body and therefore there are necessarily two dimensions to our experience of the Spirit. We are called out of the world as individuals, and into the body of the Christ. Perhaps the most significant consequence of this is the silent meeting and the open worship that we so often fail to understand *theologically* nowadays. The traditional spirituality of Quakerism is specifically designed for us to still the clamor of our own minds and to turn within, away from outward ceremonies and distractions, so that we can hear the still, small voice of God, so that He who dwells in the high and holy place may come to dwell with those of the humble and the contrite heart (Isaiah 57:15). That is how the way of the Lord is prepared. It is on such as these that the Spirit will fall.

Now the third feature of the tradition is a theological generalization that fits these claims into the story told by the Bible. This story is sometimes called “salvation history.” It is seen as a record of the actions of God in the ordinary course of human history, and has a period of preparation and fulfillment. So when we look at the Old and New Testaments we see that each is essential to the story, but there are significant differences between them which we can resolve in a variety of ways. For example, the 53rd chapter of Isaiah and the crucifixion narratives can clearly be seen as prophecy and fulfillment. But there are several interpretative keys which we can use, and one of them is provided in Jeremiah 31, where a prophetic outline of the New Covenant (which was then in the future) is laid out, and in Hebrews 9 which Joseph John Gurney himself interpreted to show that the New Covenant was to be entirely inward and spiritual.

Fourthly, what we know as the Quaker “distinctives” necessarily follow from this. Our traditional—and contemporary—disuse of the ordinances flows from these principles. Far from teaching that these things are

unnecessary to the Christian, we can see how they are an essential, but a real, and inward one. The apparent commands to practice the ordinances derive their meaning from their theological context. They do not create that context and are perfectly capable of more than one interpretation without going outside the confines of scripture.

Moreover it is these things that have produced the church we are—one which has historically been willing to take the risk of relying on the Holy Spirit, and to this day makes that a reality by rejecting voting in the Lord's work in reliance on guidance from above; a church which recognises God can call anyone to the ministry without ordination and formal recognition, which has no clergy and has had women ministers for 300 years; a church which is known by the world as one which places a high value on simplicity and honesty, and is willing to pay the price of resisting coercion in matters of conscience.

Quakerism is known in the world through the achievements of those who have followed this tradition. We live openly because no part of life is hidden from God's purposes, demands or grace, and we produce a John Woolman. We recognise that what we follow is not a teaching but a person, so we find and carry his cross. Thus we produce a Levi Coffin. Our testimonies have led inevitably to respect for the individuals, no matter how degraded, as children of God, so we have produced people like Elizabeth Fry. And we must not forget that in the life and work of William Penn, we have helped the world to build political freedom, rejecting all that is narrow-minded, authoritarian and of a persecuting disposition.

Quakerism and Evangelicalism

So now let us look at our Quakerism and our evangelicalism side by side. In many walks of life one comes across people who are satisfied with the way things are now, and who do not think very much about the past. They like to close the book, to get to the destination, just to sit outside on a summer evening. On the other hand, when we are considering the state of the gospel in the world, or "the prospering of Truth" as the old Quaker jargon used to have it, I think that attitude is inadequate. We all have our own special call, and as scripture reminds us, we do not all have the same ministry. This applies to churches as well as people. We have particular gifts, and we have to discern what they are before we can use them.

Quakerism began as a great revival of evangelism in the seventeenth century. Quite what the historical circumstances were that caused it, we can debate. The main outlines are clear, but the details are fuzzy, and I have played my part in that debate. However, what we need to register is that the early Quakers had a well-developed theology which was in the Armenian and not the Reformed tradition. They were bitterly hostile to the proposition that Jesus did not die for us all, but only for the elect. They also said it

was a poor gospel that saved us from the consequences of sin but could not save us from sin itself. Their faith was born in the century of the European religious wars, and they retreated into a quiet seclusion when a more rational secular public mood developed, partly as a response to this un-Christian carnage.

In the eighteenth century there was another great revival of personal faith stemming from the preaching of John Wesley and his fellow laborers. It is to them that we really owe the evangelical faith in the form in which we have received it, and we can see, with the perspective time gives us, how they carried forward the great themes of the Reformation. As the century wore on, all the churches were affected by the Awakening, including the Society of Friends. It is as if there were a great welling-up of religious enthusiasm into all parts of the Church. Perhaps Wesley was the inspiration, but in fact the ground was prepared. People were ready to hear the message.

Here we return to the point about identity and historical perspective. The historical and theological roots of Quakerism were in some ways closer to the Reformation experience than those of Wesley and his followers. Wesley encountered opposition, but not persecution. He had to push at the door, but he did not have to assault the drawbridge of a castle. So his communities took a different form from the Quaker meetings of the time. In some ways they were comparable, but in others they were not. Quakerism accommodated itself to the Great Awakening rather awkwardly. It had a past, and a character, and that was going to influence how it responded to the new enthusiasm.

Over a period of some decades, evangelical ideas spread in the Society of Friends. They made greater progress in England than America, perhaps, but had an appeal in part because they offered to many a return to experience from a religion that had become highly formal. Evangelical ideas were problematic for Quakers because they were almost necessarily in tension with sectarian Christianity. This is why Quakerism as a whole has had difficulties with evangelicalism, paralleled, I might add, elsewhere. Friends by the end of the eighteenth century were already highly distinctive and dependent on tradition, and probably too small in numbers to contain strong differences of opinion.

As everybody knows, the tensions that built up after the Revolutionary War reached a head in Philadelphia in 1827 when the so-called "Hicksites" separated from the so-called "Orthodox." In the intervening years most of the Orthodox yearly meetings have matured into the pastoral, or evangelical tradition represented by Friends United Meeting and Evangelical Friends International, while the Hicksite tradition has become liberal, and is represented to a considerable degree by the yearly meetings which are part of the Friends General Conference.

So if we review our history, we find that our lineage leads back to one or other of the sides in 1827. It is difficult to be dispassionate about them, and something inside us tugs at our understanding and encourages us to support "our" side in these controversies. This attitude has served us ill, in my submission, and it is time we had a look at these controversies without regarding the protagonists like baseball teams. I have two provocative comments to make. I am afraid that the Orthodox party look pretty unpleasant to me and I don't think I would have liked them. On the other hand, I incline to their opinions against the Hicksites, so the awful possibility arises that you can be nice and wrong and nasty and right.

The second thing is that we dare not take them at face value. In squabbling over who were the real Quakers they resorted to little more than proof-texting from Barclay, Penn and Fox. The theological battle, it seems to me, was never really joined. The substance of their argument was about three matters which continue to exercise the Society of Friends: the nature of the Inward Light, the manner of the Atonement, and the authority of scripture. Let us now look at these matters in general and in detail.

The Emergence of Evangelical Quakerism

In the first place it should be emphasized that the Orthodox of the last century were concerned as much with their Quakerism as their evangelicalism. They did not see a difference between the two, and I wish more contemporary evangelical Friends shared their opinion. Though evangelical in theology, they worshipped in silence, a practice they did not abandon for another half-century. There was no question of the pastorate because they had a strict doctrine of spirit-led ministry, preaching and prayer. In addition, they maintained the testimonies, both theological and ethical, with memorable strictness. That is why in the debates of the times they sought to ground their own claims in Quaker precedent and the teachings of scripture equally.

But they had problems with the authority of scripture. The evangelical position is that there is no appeal from scripture to any other authority, whether it be reason, tradition or the Church. The traditional Quaker position, as stated by Robert Barclay was apparently the opposite of this. Since the scriptures were given forth by the Spirit, he said, it is the Spirit which was the Christian's ultimate authority and not the scriptures. On the surface, these positions look irreconcilable, and if Barclay's doctrine of scripture is one of the fundamentals of Quakerism, then the case is made. Evangelical Quakerism is a hybrid and not the real thing.

But is this inference unavoidable? There are reasons to doubt it. In spite of all the qualifications, the early Quakers accepted fully the authority of scripture in settling doctrinal controversy, and appealed to it constantly. They knew their Bibles so well that the very first historian of Quakerism,

the Dutchman Gerard Croese, said that if the whole Bible were lost, it could be reconstituted from the writings of George Fox. It can be argued that the early Friends were just as jealous of the truths of scripture as their evangelical descendants. So to say that early Quakerism had a defective doctrine of scripture is to avoid the complexity of the theology involved.

Moreover, the strict evangelical position is also problematical. To assert that scripture is our ultimate authority is easily done, but questions arise when we seek to give some account of precisely how. For example, there is a difference between understanding scripture and understanding it *savingly*. Where does that difference lie? Then again, we need to know how we can get guidance in circumstances not directly addressed in the text. How can we account for the fact that people draw divergent lessons from this same text? Then there is the consideration that we know from experience that God answers our prayers and guides us through life without apparently referring us to the sacred text every time we raise our hearts in prayer. I think we would agree that without the prior inspiration of the Living Word in our hearts, a teachable spirit and the support of a community of faith, we shall not understand the truth of the Written Word before our eyes.

The early Quakers put this in scriptural terms. Christ describes himself as the Light of the World (John 9:5), and he promises to be with his followers in Spirit, leading them into all the truth (John 16:13). In the earliest books of the New Testament we find Christians called "Children of Light" (Ephesians 5:8). With what I would describe as orthodoxy, the early Quakers said that there must be *something* which you bring to the scriptures that will assure you of right understanding and divine guidance. That they called the Light of Christ Within.

This is as good an answer as any, in fact, because it gives a realistic explanation for what we know. We are saved because of our faith. Something deep in our souls answers the call of God through the preaching of the gospel. In the words of "Amazing Grace," "I once was blind, but now I see." But the Light does not just bring us to repentance and grace, it sustains and sanctifies us in a living, active way. We can read about it in the scripture, but it lives in our hearts, and it guides us through life, charting our course through unfamiliar waters. We come to it in prayer.

Now in 1827 nobody was in the mood to think dispassionately about these things. The Hicksite group recognised that the Light was the living presence of Christ within. But they upset the balance by giving primacy to the Light and then making it a principle not of discernment, but of understanding and interpretation. The Light became a principle of selection. On the other hand, the Orthodox had become highly suspicious of the doctrine of Light. Scripture was a necessary check on personal enthusiasm. But it was not necessary to deny the spirit-led discipleship of which the scripture itself eloquently speaks, but that was the direction in which they were drawn.

At issue was the whole question of religious authority and in what sense scriptural authority is exerted. The Orthodox mistook their own reading of scripture for its correct interpretation. The Hicksites thought that because scripture was being wrongly interpreted, the principle of authority itself was open to doubt. As soon as you look at their written documents you find a tangled confusion of argument, in which both sides appeal to the original Quaker tradition. Quite genuinely, each party could look to part of that tradition in its support, but in fact a debate about a contemporary issue was going on under the guise of an argument about historical precedents. The underlying question was where we find authority. Is it scripture alone? Is it the Inward Light alone? Or is it a combination of both that is stronger than either?

This unwillingness to accept the scriptural warrant for the doctrine of the Light had fateful consequences, because in time it led to a reworking of the doctrine of the atonement among Orthodox Friends and the acceptance of the reformed theology of justification and sanctification. It is there, rather than in the doctrine of scripture, in my view, that the Rubicon was crossed, and evangelical Quakerism found its port of entry into the wider evangelical world.

Or perhaps one should rather say that this was the means by which the wider evangelicalism entered the Society of Friends. Acceptance of different doctrines will necessarily lead to a different style of preaching and discipleship, and in due course Friends found themselves receptive to both Wesleyan spirituality and pastoral system. It has also led to an attenuation of Quaker doctrine on the nature of the New Covenant, the inwardness of the ordinances and a weakening of the traditional doctrine of the ministry. It has led moreover to the lowering of obstacles to change at the time of the revivals and the influence of the Prophetic and Bible School movements in the Society of Friends.

The consequence seems to me to be that there are two forms of evangelical faith in the Society of Friends, the older version which preserves the ancient theology of Quakerism on an evangelical foundation, and a newer version for which current developments are more important than the tradition. I would characterize the former as evangelical Quakerism and the latter as Quaker evangelicalism. This is more than a distinction of words.

So Where Do We Find Ourselves Today?

While these changes have been taking place in the evangelical branch of Quakerism, similar processes have been at work in the non-evangelical branch. This is usually described as "liberal," but one must be careful with terminology because both branches display considerable diversity and are equally open to thoughtless and uninformed criticism. The relationships between them in the past has been successively hostile, tolerant and

appreciative, at any rate at the official level, but there are various indications that a new *modus vivendi* is being worked out.

In the first place, arising out of genealogy, perhaps, but certainly out of an appreciation of the past, there seems to be a deepening interest in many Friends in what their heritage has been. This is less a revival of interest in the theology or spirituality of the Quaker past as a sense of identity and belonging. People are interested, sometimes, to my mind to the point of excruciating boredom, with the whole Quaker thing—thee's and thou's and bonnets and all. There is a romance associated with Quakerism, and people fall for it.

However, there is also a deepening interest in the spirituality of Quakerism as a particular, unique and challenging form of Christian discipleship, notably the holding of silent worship in the name of Jesus, and the adoption of the testimonies as a way of righteousness rather than political statement. This is clearly noticeable among liberal Friends, and perhaps it illustrates a point that everybody comes to when they begin to take Quakerism seriously. When immigrants come to a new country they settle down and work hard and try to fit in as best they can. Their children have to get ahead and assimilate, leaving the culture of the old country behind. But then the grandchildren come and talk to their grandparents, and often find something powerful in their elderly words. So they turn to their parents and say, "Why have you kept us from our heritage?"

A little over a hundred years ago the Society of Friends, Hicksite and Orthodox together, emerged from their traditional seclusion and each took a different theological path. Now I find Friends, often convinced Friends, measuring what they know against the past, and finding it wanting. They know where they want to go, but need a guide for the route. One of the conclusions I would like to draw is that evangelicals are often better placed than others to appreciate the theology which underlies the typical experiences of Quakerism, and could have a great deal to say to the searchers for the real thing.

The realignment controversy, which still rumbles on like thunder in some places, is an illustration of the fundamental choices that many people seem to be ready to make. One does not have to take a view on that controversy to understand what is at issue. My pennyworth of comment is that there are many people outside the evangelical yearly meetings who are disillusioned with a form of religion that is so open that it seems unable to provide clear guidance in the things that really matter. Identity comes from the past and what we believe, and there is no escape from that. To assert a clear faith is not to indicate that one has closed one's mind, but to show that one has an identity and is able to ask fundamental questions with a sense of security. Many Quakers are looking for this kind of security, this kind of faith, this kind of identity. And where is it to be found? In many places, of

course, but I want to suggest that the evangelical tradition has an important role, if it would only adopt it, in nourishing these green shoots. But that means choosing to value the heritage—to be evangelical Quakers.

So What Have Evangelical Friends to Say?

In conclusion, I would like to ask what the message of evangelical Quakerism might be for today. If my analysis is anywhere near the truth, there is still a viable and important form of Quakerism, evangelical in inspiration, which can pose important questions, and suggest important answers for other parts of both the Quaker and the Christian worlds. There are also some questions it needs to ask itself.

To begin with, what do evangelical Quakers have to say to themselves? First, I think, they need a long hard look at the pastoral system. The mission-based yearly meetings outside the United States are showing encouraging growth, but at home, many Quaker congregations are small and in rural areas, where the population itself is declining. It is difficult to find the pastor's salary, let alone health insurance and pension plan, and this leads to part-time service, the unattractiveness of the pastorate as a career option or vocation, and the appointment of non-Quaker pastors.

There are yearly meetings in which the average age of the pastorate is so advanced that there is no telling where the next generation will come from. Moreover the system, if such it can be called, was superimposed on the traditional structure of Quaker church government, so that the pastor has neither the authority nor the position of pastors of other denominations. The effective use of our pastoral resources seems to me to be one of the most pressing questions that face us. The importance of these challenges should not be underestimated; but nor should they be seen as insurmountable.

The positive side is clear to me. Evangelical Friends enjoy considerable agreement on doctrine and the basics of the faith. There is a faintly puzzled air in some ecumenical Quaker gatherings, encouraged by the form in which they are arranged. Deep questions are put, but there seems to be more interest in the questions than concern at finding satisfactory answers to them. Perhaps the reason that evangelicals do not show up *en masse* for these gatherings is that they by and large do not need to debate matters of doctrine. They know where they stand. In addition to this, and perhaps the consequence of it, is a structure of meetings and yearly meetings that is corporate yet not over-centralised, with a very good track record of both evangelism and witness.

But Friends need a vision of themselves as a church that goes beyond the usual statistics of conversions made or money raised for missions. These things flow from the activities of inspired people. The great opportunity for Evangelical Quakerism, it seems to me, is to find the vision nestling in its

tradition, which is waiting to be rediscovered. In one sense, all movements of renewal are a return to an earlier vitality. Institutions can never be revived, but people can, and are.

Second, what can evangelicals say to the liberal branch of Quakerism? To begin with, it is necessary to note that while many Friends in that tradition have relinquished any connection with historical Christianity, there are still many others who do see themselves as Christians, and maintain the faith in circumstances of considerable difficulty. Explicit, corporate Christian commitment is no longer a reality in many meetings, and there is a great variety of opinion among Christian Friends. Some are content with this state of affairs, but others are not.

Evangelicals, if they could take thought about how to do it, might be of considerable service in these circumstances. I discern a deep and often unarticulated unease with that kind of Christianity in which the historical-critical method controls doctrine rather than the other way round. I meet Friends who are beginning to realise that if the substance of the faith changes as intellectual fashions change, there can be no everlasting gospel. I meet Friends who, often to their own great surprise, are beginning to realise that "modern thought" does not make it easier to hear the gospel, but rather the reverse. In these circumstances the common ground of Quakerism might facilitate a message that otherwise would not be heard.

Third, what can evangelical Quakers say to other evangelicals? I guess I have to say that this is where the distinction I drew between Quaker evangelicals and evangelical Quakers shows up. There are three matters of Quaker doctrine which make a very great deal of theological sense and depend on our essentially Reformation ecclesiology. They are the inward reality of the ordinances, the governance of the church without ordination, and the spiritual equality of women, particularly in the ministry. These are not separated ideas, each to be supported by its separate line of proof texts, but things that go to the root of our understanding of Christ and His covenant with us.

Like any other branch of the Church, evangelicals can be seduced by power, influence and popularity. There are ways of preaching the gospel consistent with the simplicity of Christ and there are ways that are not. There are ways of governing Christ's people that are consistent with His example; there are those that are not. Evangelical Friends can have a great mission still in proclaiming the truth to churches and Christians departing from the apostolic simplicity, beginning to make ceremony a substitute for sincerity, and misreading the New Testament to exclude women from the ministry.

During the last century, the main group of evangelical Quakers in the United States came to be known as the "Gurneyites." They were not all of one mind, and they made their mistakes, some of them pretty drastic. But

among themselves they protected the memory and the vision of the man from whom they were named. Joseph John Gurney had a vision of Quaker Christianity as a way of life which is as close as one can ever come to the intentions of Christ for his followers. The evangelical tradition within the Society of Friends has much to be proud of, and much to say.