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Response to Carole Spencer

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RESPONSE

JOSHUA BROWN

RESPONSE TO CAROLE SPENCER

Thanks to Carole Spencer for her review of the *Autobiography of Allen Jay*. Spencer's stature as a scholar of Friends in the holiness tradition is a very welcome addition to the discussion. Spencer's use of Hannah Whitehall Smith as a well-known contemporary of Allen Jay is very helpful.

One of the biggest challenges in studying Allen Jay and the fabric of 19th-century Quakerism is that he overlapped with so many different Friends, and the scenery changed so quickly, that it's hard to keep track of them all and judge their influence on Allen Jay's life and ministry.

For example, Spencer makes the valid point that Allen Jay hated division among Friends. She quotes, "It is a cause for thankfulness that today in nearly every portion of Indiana Yearly Meeting love and harmony are prevailing. . ." (p. 293). However, in the paragraph just previous, Allen Jay noted, "It has been of great importance to be able to prevent those who are introducing disturbing elements, calculated to divide and scatter meetings, make contention and dissension, from coming into the limits of our yearly meeting. It has been the course of our committee [the Evangelistic and Pastoral Committee of IYM] to say but little about this class except when they came among us and actually produced trouble by their wild and extreme hobbies and fanatical doctrines. It is then their policy to quietly advise the closing of our meeting-house doors against them, Indiana Yearly Meeting having given this committee this power a few years ago in order to avoid this fruitful source of trouble."

Allen Jay was clearly talking about the controversy over the outward sacraments of baptism and communion. Jay was extremely reluctant to disparage the ministry of any individual. Without naming names, he was referring to well-known holiness Friends such as his contemporary, David B. Updegraff. Jay knew Updegraff personally, and gives a lively portrait of their first meeting on page 65 of the

Autobiography. However, Jay also clearly disagreed strongly with Updegraff about the sacraments and about both the substance and the spirit of many of the innovations which Updegraff and some other holiness Friends were advocating. Jay used much of his considerable influence to close these Friends out of Indiana Yearly Meeting.

Spencer takes Jay to task over his relative silence on the subject of women's suffrage, a topic of increasing national interest during the later years of Jay's life. It's possible that Jay was uneasy about women getting the right to vote, though in several places he speaks very positively about Quaker women's business meetings. He also mentions many prominent women ministers, evangelists, writers and traveling Friends. Why would he have kept silent on the issue of suffrage?

One simple explanation might be that many of the leading figures in the suffrage movement were women from the Hicksite yearly meetings—in particular, Lucretia Mott and Susan B. Anthony. Although Jay clearly had many contacts with Hicksite Friends and deeply deplored the Great Separation, in his *Autobiography* he is very careful not to alienate his Orthodox audience.

The central point of Spencer's review is that Allen Jay was a holiness Friend, and there is no question that he shared many experiences and beliefs in common with the holiness movement. He strongly supported revivals, and participated in many of them. As Spencer notes, in many places Jay's theology is in line with holiness teachings. Jay described his own conversion experience at length, along with many other spiritual openings.

However, I would suggest a note of caution where Spencer quotes from places in the *Autobiography* which she uses as evidence of Jay's holiness bona fides. These quotes, which are taken from pages 356-363 in the *Autobiography*, are from the memorial minute written at the time of Allen Jay's death. These are accurate estimates of Jay's character—but they were written by prominent *opponents* of the holiness movement, including Elbert Russell and Harlow Lindley.

Another key point of divergence between Allen Jay and holiness Friends is the attitude taken toward elders. Jay was determined to work in harmony with the elders of meetings. As he says (p. 176), “ I had that early in my religious work decided to work in harmony with the Church, and after fifty years' active work in the ministry have never seen cause to change my mind. I do not believe the cause of

Christ is advanced by pushing in innovations or change of practice faster than the weight and religious sentiment of the meeting is able to go.”

By contrast, many of the leaders of the holiness movement viewed elders as an intolerable hindrance to their revivals. Tom Hamm notes this in *The Transformation of American Quakerism* (pp. 91-92): “The traditional duty of elders was to restrain and direct ministers, but their attempts to do so early in the revival had created bitter resentment. Some of the revivalists attacked the office of elder as unscriptural and tried to abolish it... No one could judge a minister, the revivalists said, since the call to preach came from God, and the minister was responsible only to him.”

I agree with Spencer where she says, “As the revival movement became more polemical and doctrinally rigid, Jay seems to have distanced himself from those interpreting holiness in a narrow paradigm, yet he never denigrated them.” A good example of this was his relationship with Dougan Clark, one of the leading figures of the holiness movement. Jay and Clark were well acquainted with each other, and Clark had established himself as head of the Biblical Department at Earlham in 1885. Nine years later, Clark was baptized at Ohio Yearly Meeting, much to the displeasure of leaders in Indiana Yearly Meeting. A line had been crossed, and President Mills soon orchestrated Clark’s resignation.¹

Perhaps the strongest evidence of Allen Jay’s divergence from holiness Friends was the part he played in bringing about the Richmond Declaration of 1887. Although Jay did not claim to contribute to the actual wording of the Richmond Declaration, it was drafted at his desk in the living room of his home, and Jay brought refreshments to the members of the drafting committee as they were working. He kept the pen used to write the Richmond Declaration as a souvenir for the rest of his life.

As Jay recalls, the purpose of the Richmond Declaration, expressed by Joseph Bevan Braithwaite, was, “We want the original Quakerism free from the influence and thought of some of our Friends who have imbibed some of the spirit and practice of other denominations or have been influenced by their environments.” (*Autobiography*, pp. 299-300) It is hard to imagine a stronger disavowal of the extreme wing of the holiness movement.

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Allen Jay was strongly sympathetic to many of the desires which led to the holiness movement among Friends. He was deeply evangelical, and rejoiced at the growth which Friends enjoyed in the second half of the 19th century. But he grew up in the shadow of the terrible Orthodox/ Hicksite split, and he saw at first hand the fresh division which many of the leaders of the holiness movement encouraged. Allen Jay was all for holiness—but not at the cost of division, and not at the cost of casting out the Friends who disagreed with the spirit and methods of the holiness leaders.

In *The Transformation of American Quakerism*, Tom Hamm talks about the difference between Friends who wanted *renewal* versus Friends who wanted *revival*. Interestingly, in his charts of the leadership of the two groups, Hamm includes Allen Jay in both.²

Allen Jay began life as an unprogrammed Friend, and his early years of ministry in the local meeting and as a traveling Friend were perfectly in harmony with the tradition he inherited. He graphically describes the opposition his family faced as they adopted unheard-of practices such as family Bible readings and family prayers. His characteristic response to the growing revival movement among Friends was, “I did not start it, and I shall not stop it.” (*Autobiography*, p. 175)

RESPONSE TO HOWARD MACY

Howard Macy’s review of the *Autobiography of Allen Jay* raises a different set of issues. Like Carole Spencer, I sense that Macy feels a bit of hesitance towards the idea that Allen Jay’s writing deserves to be included on the same level as George Fox and John Woolman.

It’s not just a rhetorical flourish on my part, and it’s not because I am currently serving as pastor at the meeting which Allen Jay helped to found. (I first read the *Autobiography* a number of years before coming to West Richmond Friends ever crossed my mind!)

Many Friends have remarked that the characteristic form of Quaker writing is not systematic theology, but the spiritual journal or religious autobiography. Friends value the opportunity to watch a person grow over time, to make fresh discoveries and to experience sufferings and solaces over a lifetime and in contrast with what other Friends of their day thought and felt.

Quaker writings of this kind also offer the kind of “first-hand witness” which Macy mentions. The stories Friends tell are often our

answer to the situations and issues of our day. When talking about the peace testimony, Friends today are likely to quote George Fox saying to William Penn about his sword, “Wear it as long as thou canst.” When talking about the testimony of simplicity, Friends are apt to quote John Woolman’s inward struggle to lessen his outward business as a merchant, and to “live more free from outward cumber.”

Allen Jay offers the same kind of rich and highly quotable resource to modern-day Friends. He was, as Macy says, a great storyteller, and he was on a first-name basis with nearly every Orthodox Quaker leader of his generation in the U.S. and in Europe. Even more significant, Jay’s *Autobiography* is used as primary source material by most Quaker historians studying the 19th century. While there are many other documents and resources, none has quite the same stamp or authority as Allen Jay. He was there, and he was personally involved, in so many of the changes on the Quaker scene, that no serious student of Quakerism in the 1800’s can fail to refer to him.

Allen Jay gave shape and expression to many of the religious projects and testimonies which still involve Friends today—racial equality, Native American rights, conscientious objection, organized relief work, missionary work, substance abuse, international peace work, and especially education. Allen Jay helped to gather the audiences, create the larger organizations, and raise the funds for all these endeavors, using methods which are still used by Friends today.

Howard Macy’s review gives special attention to Allen Jay’s work in education, both in North Carolina after the Civil War and for Friends schools and colleges for the rest of his life. Although Jay was only a teacher himself for a short time, he was a pioneer in modern education. The arc of his lifetime went from the one-room log school of his childhood (which Jay rates as better than anything available to most frontier families), to a nationwide network of Quaker schools and colleges.

Jay makes a brief but highly significant comment in the *Autobiography* when he says on page 54 that when he studied at Antioch College, it was under the presidency of Horace Mann. I really missed a good opportunity for a footnote here. Most readers today don’t know anything about Mann unless they are students of educational history.

In his day (1796-1859) Horace Mann was recognized as one of the leading reformers and theorists of education. Mann advocated

universal, publicly-funded education, longer school years, and the creation of normal schools for teachers (similar to the one Jay created in North Carolina). In his widely-reprinted report in 1843, Mann urged the adoption of many educational reforms which should sound familiar to us today: mandatory kindergarten, national testing, a graded national curriculum, and a common learning experience to bring together the children of diverse backgrounds and make education a force for improving society. Mann's ideas are clearly reflected in the life and work of Allen Jay.

Jay remained deeply committed to Quaker education, but he helped to lift it up from the level of the frontier log-cabin schools to the kind of education we recognize today. Jay wanted modern, comfortable and well-designed buildings; highly-trained teachers of outstanding moral and spiritual character; communities which understand the value of learning for their children; and endowments adequate to sustain the institutions.

Unlike many of the contemporary Orthodox and holiness Friends who were his contemporaries, Jay was not afraid of the fruits of modern science or of the modern study of the Bible. While he felt that personal conversion and devotion to Christ were absolute requirements for the ministry, he also felt that Quaker ministers in his day were often poorly educated. He said, "Our congregations are being filled more and more by persons who know more than the minister, who weigh him and decide wherein he is wanting. They have their spiritual experiences as well as the minister, and know that which feeds the soul and builds up the spiritual man. The minister who ignores these facts my satisfy for a season, but soon he will find he is not wanted. . .If we have neglected the preparation we must not murmur. If they have grown tired of our oft-repeated sermons and turn to fresher ones with new thoughts and fresh life in them, we must not complain." (p. 304)

Both Howard Macy and Carole Spencer commented about Allen Jay's attitude towards conflict, division and separation, and many of the questions I have heard at lectures on Allen Jay and letters which I have received from readers of the *Autobiography* also center on this point.

There is little doubt in my own mind that if Allen Jay were here today, he would plead and preach against the spirit of division which overshadowed his own lifetime, a spirit which still seeks to destroy Friends today.

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I could wish that Friends would listen to Allen Jay as he asks, “Have they been able to grasp the fact that you cannot make people see the great truths of the Gospel just alike? The Saviour presented himself in His glorious saving power to one in one way and to another in another, but was precious alike to them all and they all alike precious to him... as I listened methought I could hear a voice saying, ‘My children have not learned the lesson. They are still finding fault. They are still judging. They are still asking if they may call down fire from heaven and burn up those who do not see me as they do.’ ...Has a separation ever caused more people to hear the Gospel? Ever enlarged the Church? Ever shown to the world more of the gentleness and meekness of Christ? Has a separation ever caused the world to exclaim, ‘Behold how these Christians love one another?’” (pp. 93-94)

Thanks to both Carole Spencer and Howard Macy for their kind and thoughtful reviews. I hope that you will take the time to read the *Autobiography of Allen Jay*, and to find ways to share his wisdom and spirit with Friends wherever you go.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Russell, Elbert, *Elbert Russell, Quaker: An Autobiography* (Jackson, TN: Friendly Press, 1956), p. 80.
- 2 Thomas Hamm, *The Transformation of American Quakerism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), Chart 1, pages 32-45 and Chart 2, pages 79-81.