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# Evangelical Quakers and Public Policy

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## *Evangelical Quakers and Public Policy*

LON FENDALL

In Arthur Roberts' excellent volume reflecting on his life, *Drawn By The Light*, he briefly describes his involvement in state and local politics. He ran unsuccessfully for a position in the Oregon Legislature and later served a four-year term on the Yachats, Oregon, City Council. It was not easy for Arthur to bridge the gulf between the intellectual depth and erudite vocabulary of the scholar and the rough and tumble of state and local politics. But he felt that these political involvements had "quickened my appreciation for ordinary activity as the true vocation for the church."<sup>1</sup> Arthur took his city council work very seriously, devoting a great deal of time to preparing for the meetings. He also took seriously the opportunity to bear witness to his faith in Christ and had numerous opportunities to speak to others about that faith.

Arthur Roberts' service in public policy positions has been a relatively minor part of a life devoted primarily to teaching and scholarly work. But Arthur's interest in politics invites us to consider the complex issues surrounding Quaker convictions and activities in public policy. Others have discussed the ambivalence apparent in Friends' attitudes toward government and politics. In that discussion there has not been an effort made to examine the distinctive ways in which evangelical Friends have approached the question of political participation. Since Arthur Roberts is and always has been part of the evangelical segment of Quakerism, this discussion

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1. Arthur O. Roberts, *Drawn By the Light: Autobiographical Reflections* (Newberg: Barclay Press, 1993), 214

seems to belong in a volume paying tribute to a person of great intellectual stature and a person whose words and life have impacted so many.

The term “evangelical” has been used so many different ways in this century, it needs to be defined in this discussion. Journalists often use the term “evangelical” interchangeably with the word “evangelistic.” The latter term has to do with a commitment to evangelism, but there is more to being an evangelical than seeking to evangelize. As I use the term “evangelical” here and apply it to a segment of Quakerism, it means a person or group whose theology is conservative, i.e. who believes in the historic doctrines of early Christians—particularly the deity of Christ and the accuracy and authority of the Bible as a means of knowing God’s truth.

The term “evangelical” as used here would not have been used the same way during much of the period being described in this article, but I am using the term with its present meaning. Evangelicals are sometimes inappropriately labeled “fundamentalist”. The latter term as used today connotes an ultra-conservatism in political, social and theological issues, making the label inappropriate for most evangelicals. The term “fundamentalist” certainly does not fit an evangelical Friend like Arthur Roberts. To grossly simplify a complex issue, most evangelicals are moderates on many issues while fundamentalists are on the extreme, the “right” end of the spectrum.<sup>2</sup>

Four yearly meetings broke away from other yearly meetings or from broader groupings of yearly meetings in this century to form eventually what is now called Evangelical Friends International—North American Region. The majority of Friends in those yearly meetings would describe themselves as “evangelical”, but there are many Quakers in the U.S. who are not connected with EFI who definitely belong within the definition of evangelical. The overwhelming majority of Friends outside the U.S. and Britain would also fit the definition of evangelical and their numbers are such that it is accurate to say that the majority of Friends today are evangelical. This is in keeping with the origins of the Quaker movement, as an effort to revive the doctrines and practices of New Testament Christianity.

As a part of the fiftieth anniversary of the Friends Committee on National Legislation, Wilmer Cooper prepared a brief, but helpful overview of Quaker involvement in politics. His essay is part of the FCNL anniversary volume, *Witness in Washington: Fifty Years of Friendly Persuasion*. Cooper drew on a number of the thoughts in a lecture given by Quaker historian Frederick Tolles. Quaker ambivalence about political participation was one of Tolles’ major themes, as is evident in this statement: “If anything is clear from our quick historical survey, I think it must be this: that there is no one Quaker attitude towards politics. Historically, Quakers can be found

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2. Lon Fendall, “We’re Evangelicals, Not Fundamentalists,” *Evangelical Friend*, 4.

practicing and preaching almost every possible position from full participation to complete withdrawal and abstention."<sup>3</sup>

Friends carried with them from England to the colonies an intense suspicion and aversion for governments. In England they had been persecuted not just because of major issues such as military service, but for such harmless offenses as refusing to take oaths and declining to remove their hats in the presence of officials. Founders of the first North American colonies brought with them a great deal of intolerance and bigotry and persecuted Quakers just as severely as had been done in England. But the founders of other colonies implemented greater tolerance for religious diversity, so Quakers became prominent in the governance not only of their "own" colony, Pennsylvania, but in Rhode Island, New Jersey and North Carolina. The pendulum swung very much in the other direction during the middle of the Eighteenth century, however, as Quakers ceased trying to make Quaker principles dominant in Pennsylvania, while in the other colonies they despaired of being able to resist the momentum toward using military means to obtain independence from England.

There was another shift, away from political withdrawal toward limited political participation, in the twentieth century. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and Five Years Meeting approved minutes in 1927, 1945 and 1955, commending individual Friends who felt called into active participation in government.<sup>4</sup> But the entry of the United States into what became a global war, brought to the forefront one of the issues that had made Quakers an isolated and hated minority in the infancy of the movement in England. That issue was conscription, and the energy of Friends turned more toward establishing their right to exercise conscientious objection than toward influencing national policy more broadly. Moreover, individual Quakers faced the ultimate test of their devotion to individual principle versus the will of the majority, i.e., would they be part of a government completely absorbed in military mobilization? It is not an accident that this century's two "Quaker" presidents, Herbert Hoover and Richard Nixon, were Quakers primarily in terms of family heritage and not in the sense of a wholehearted support for historic Quaker convictions, including pacifism.

The concern to establish and protect the right of individual conscientious objection led directly to the formation of the primary vehicle for Quaker political expression in the U.S., the Friends Committee on National Legislation. FCNL was an outgrowth of a national Friends conference in 1940 opposing the draft, followed by the the formation of the Friends War Problems Committee. These efforts were set in motion too late for Friends

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3. Quoted in Wilmer A. Cooper, "FCNL in Historical Perspective," in Tom Mullen, ed., *Witness in Washington: Fifty Years of Friendly Persuasion* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1994), 13.

4. Cooper, 12.

to have much opportunity to oppose the passage of conscription legislation later that year. Given the intensity of national mobilization, Quaker opposition would probably have had little effect. When Quakers formalized the creation of FCNL in mid-1943, they recognized the need to address broader issues than the draft, including such concerns as civil rights and international economic development.<sup>5</sup>

Wilmer Cooper, Raymond Wilson, Ed Snyder and others have told the FCNL story very well. The organization has made impressive contributions during its half-century of existence, providing for most Friends an attractive means of influencing government. Operating with a modest budget and limited staff, the diligence and effectiveness of such leaders as Raymond Wilson, Ed Snyder, Joe Volk have much to do with its success. The Quaker voice on national issues has been much stronger than their numbers would suggest.

In spite of the effectiveness of FCNL as a Quaker voice in Washington, evangelical Friends have been reluctant to give the organization their support. This has been puzzling to non-evangelical Friends, but it is not difficult to explain. Many of the founders of FCNL had been active in the American Friends Service Committee and for a time it even appeared that AFSC itself would become the vehicle for formulating and expressing Friends views on national issues. Because AFSC would have jeopardized its eligibility for receiving tax-deductible gifts if it had begun active lobbying and because AFSC lacked a strong tie to the Yearly Meetings, a separate organization, FCNL, was formed.

Those who cannot understand why certain yearly meetings have never appointed representatives to FCNL do not understand how profound the antipathy of evangelicals toward AFSC has been for most of the organization's history. Northwest Yearly Meeting, only a few years before Arthur Roberts grew up, decided to withdraw from Five Years Meeting responding to the perceived theological liberalism among mainstream Quakers. Similar efforts to stop the spread of "modernism and liberalism" occurred in many segments of Protestant Christianity. The concern of evangelicals Friends was aimed as much at the AFSC as against any other Quaker entity. Evangelicals were not opposed to providing humanitarian relief for the suffering related to global war, the principal reason for the birth of the AFSC. It was the fear that AFSC's focus on humanitarian service would leave evangelism in second place or neglected completely. At issue was the historic tension between faith and works, described in the New Testament book of James. Evangelicals were rejecting what they felt was an exclusive focus on works and in so doing, opted for almost exclusive attention to the faith side of the equation. Obviously not all supporters and staff of AFSC were theological

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5. "Friends Committee on National Legislation," *Friends Intelligencer*, July 3, 1943, 439.

liberals, but some probably were. What started out as respectful debate turned into intense verbal battles and the result was a succession of withdrawals of yearly meetings from Five Years Meeting, providing the nucleus for what eventually became the Evangelical Friends Alliance (now Evangelical Friends International).

Another factor in the hesitancy among evangelical Friends regarding FCNL was the issue of militarism and the draft, central to the formation of FCNL. Members and attenders of evangelical Friends churches were not all in agreement among themselves on the question of refusing military service on the one hand or accepting the "just war" argument for military service on the other. Most Christians in the U.S., many of whom had supported peace efforts after World War I, concluded that the evils of Naziism were so great that declining to support the war effort was morally unacceptable. A study of the number of conscientious objectors in Oregon Yearly Meeting (now Northwest Yearly Meeting) revealed that in 1945 about one-third of the young men in the yearly meeting were C.O.'s, while about two-thirds of that number had accepted noncombatant service in uniform.<sup>6</sup> There were significant numbers of conscientious objectors among other evangelical Friends but there were also large numbers who served in uniform and it would have been hard to generate strong support at the time for a group like FCNL, formed in part to influence national policy away from militarism.

Additionally, some evangelical Friends may have been nervous about the hazards of being misinterpreted when speaking out on national issues. The same year FCNL came into being, there was an embarrassing incident in the sessions of Indiana Yearly Meeting, which resulted in an unfortunate story in *Time* magazine. William C. Dennis, President of Earlham College, brought to the Yearly Meeting floor a resolution endorsing proposals by former President Herbert Hoover and others which favored "the creation of appropriate international machinery with power adequate to establish and to maintain a just and lasting peace among the nations of the world...  
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The word "power" in the Indiana Yearly Meeting resolution generated spirited discussion on the floor, the opponents of the wording fearing that the statement might suggest the legitimacy of military force. When agreement was not reached, a committee attempted to revise it in a way that all could accept, but the committee brought the resolution to the floor with the word "power" still in it and only three of the five members of the committee supported it. Discussion on the floor was limited because of other pressing

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6. Ralph K. Beebe, *A Garden of the Lord: A History of Oregon Yearly Meeting of Friends Church* (Newberg: Barclay Press, 1968), p. 78.

7. "Indiana Yearly Meeting Resolutions: A Symposium," *The American Friend*, November 4, 1943, 436.

business and members approved the resolution over the stated objections of "a considerable number of Friends."<sup>8</sup>

The action in Indiana Yearly Meeting sessions would not have been expected to go further than the pages of *The American Friend*, but somehow word got to local reporters and articles appeared in the Richmond and Dayton papers, one of them with the headline, "Use of Force in Maintaining of Peace Approved by Friends." The stories characterized the resolution as a departure from the traditional Quaker peace stand. If that weren't bad enough, *Time* magazine picked up the story and ran a full column story which included the sentence: "Last week for the first time since George Fox founded the Religious Society of Friends in 1668, a group of Quakers endorsed the use of force by Quakers." Partially influencing the wording of the story was another resolution asking that Friends be supportive toward those who had chosen to participate in military service.<sup>9</sup>

Errol T. Elliott, editor of *The American Friend* at the time, wrote an editorial a few months after the fiasco in Indiana Yearly Meeting. The editorial, entitled "Let the Quakers be the Quakers," was cautiously worded and reflected the ambiguity characteristic of Friends' approaches to political involvement. On the one hand, Elliott expressed the hope that the media distortions of the yearly meeting action not prompt a withdrawal from political issues entirely. The fact that speaking out on political issues could lead to misunderstanding was "not a reason for dodging it. Certainly we cannot sit by smugly when the destiny of the next generation is being formed by legislative bodies. The question rather is the way by which we can make our testimony effective on the political front."<sup>10</sup>

Elliott warned Friends against becoming a "political pressure group," but at the same time acknowledged the recent creation of the Friends Committee on National Legislation, giving it what could safely be called "faint praise." He favored small scale efforts, such as encouraging individuals in local meetings who might feel called to work on "new world patterns" and modest efforts to serve in and study the "hot spots" of the world. He urged that future pronouncements "come out of *united* concern for an unswerving peace testimony," clearly referring to the hasty approval of a resolution around which there was not unity.<sup>11</sup>

Errol Elliott stopped short of endorsing the notion of individual Quakers becoming involved in elective office or in other ways serving in government. Interestingly, Friends in Britain moved much more dramati-

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8. "Indiana Yearly Meeting Resolutions," 436.

9. *Time*, October 11, 1943, 46-47.

10. Errol T. Elliott, "Let the Quakers be the Quakers," *The American Friend*, December 2, 1943, 471.

11. Elliott, 472.

cally away from the Quietist pattern of non-involvement in public policy. In 1820 Thomas Shillitoe had advised:

Friends, let us dare not meddle with political matters... Endeavour to keep that ear closed, which will be itching to hear the news of the day and what is going forward in the political circles... . Avoid reading political publications, and as much as possible, newspapers.<sup>12</sup>

But that attitude among British Friends changed in the Nineteenth Century, in part the result of the English Reform Bill of 1832, which permitted Friends elected to Parliament to substitute an affirmation for the usual oath of office. Many Quakers served in Parliament. London Yearly Meeting emphatically endorsed such participation in its 1911 Book of Discipline.

The shift away from caution or outright opposition to political involvement in Britain happened in the U.S. as well, but without the resulting widespread participation in elective office. After Quakers abandoned their "Holy Experiment" in Pennsylvania it took some time for the mood to shift, but minutes adopted in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and Five Years Meeting in the first half of the Twentieth Century strongly supported individual Friends who might choose to get involved in government and politics. Why, then, would it be so difficult to come up with a list of Quakers who have served in Congress or in some other nationally prominent positions, corresponding to the impressive list of Quaker Members of Parliament in England?

Frederick Tolles in his lecture at Guilford in 1956 declared that Quakers more than others must choose between seriously compromising their ideals while in public office or remaining true to their ideals and accepting the reality that their impact would be nil. For Quakers, said Tolles, "compromise is under no circumstance allowable. If there comes a collision between allegiance to the ideal and the holding of public office, then the office must be deserted. If obedience to the soul's vision involves eye or hand, houses or lands or life, they must be immediately surrendered." The contrasting group of pragmatists, said Tolles, had concluded that "to get on one must submit to existing conditions; and where to achieve ultimate triumph one must risk his ideals to the tender mercies of a world not yet ripe for them."<sup>13</sup>

At the time Tolles spoke, a non-Quaker politician had begun what was to be a very long and successful political career. In the early Sixties Arthur Roberts invited the Governor of Oregon, Mark O. Hatfield, to speak in a convocation at George Fox College. Roberts was impressed with the

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12. Cited in Cooper, 10.

13. Cited in Cooper, 13.

thoughtful, principled way this young governor spoke and responded to questions from a student panel. Hatfield's emphatic witness to a recent "born again" experience of personal faith in Christ put him clearly within the category of evangelical, but Hatfield did not accept many of the conservative political and social clichés of some evangelicals. Hatfield later served on the Board of Trustees at George Fox and returned with regularity to speak on campus.

Mark Hatfield is not a Quaker and has not called himself a pacifist, at least in the sense of an absolute refusal to serve in the military and absolute opposition to the use of military means in the international arena. But if Quakers were permitted to "adopt" an individual public figure whose political actions they might support most of the time, Mark Hatfield would probably be on the short list. It is revealing to look back through the annual issues of the FCNL newsletter in which the staff rate members of Congress on the compatibility of their votes on selected issues with the policy statements of FCNL. Senator Hatfield has often been ranked near the top in the FCNL rankings, surprisingly for a Senator who has remained loyal to the Republican Party.

If Mark Hatfield had been a Quaker and a conscientious objector, would he have been successful in his first campaign for the state legislator and his subsequent campaigns for statewide office, then the U.S. Senate? To answer "no" might be to accept Tolles' thesis that determined idealists like Quakers, particularly Quakers firmly committed to the peace stand have little future in politics. Another question might shed some light on the issue. What if Oregon voters had known when Mark Hatfield first campaigned for the Senate that he would become one of the most consistent voices and votes in favor of peace and against excessive militarism during his soon-to-be-concluded thirty years in that body? Actually, they wouldn't have needed a crystal ball to foresee his commitment to peace. Hatfield had spoken out against the Vietnam War as a governor, a stand which in some ways hurt him in his fairly close campaign for the Senate. And each campaign after that his "liberal" views on defense and foreign policy provided ammunition to his opponents. It would be hard to find among even the most liberal Democrats another member of Congress during those thirty years who voted so consistently against excessive military spending and who worked so hard for peace initiatives such as the U.S. Institute of Peace.

Some who are not very familiar with politics in Oregon assume Senator Hatfield's success is owing to a dominant progressive sentiment among Oregon voters. Actually, Oregon's liberal image is only deserved in limited ways. The stubborn conservatism of many Oregon voters in the early part of this century produced a strong following for the Ku Klux Klan, and this bedrock conservatism still is evident in many ways. It would be accurate to say that Senator Hatfield has been successful in his campaigns, not because

of, but in spite of his liberal views and voting record. He has been an excellent communicator with Oregon voters and has earned the confidence of those who appreciate his decisiveness when others in office spend their time testing the wind and checking the polls. Those who don't agree with him on many issues praise him for his consistency and decisiveness. And some of those who can't accept his "Quakerly" voting record can at least tolerate it because of his attentiveness to the local needs of communities in Oregon and the individual needs of citizens frustrated with an unresponsive federal bureaucracy.

Republican politics in Oregon are very different in 1996 than in 1966 when Mark Hatfield was first elected to the Senate. As is true in many other states, a number of years ago conservatives set about to establish themselves in the Republican party and to get their friends elected to precinct committee positions, to the county central committees and then to elective offices at the city, county and state level. These party activists are zealots who have proven their determination to block the political careers of moderates and liberals.

Mark Hatfield has always developed his own campaign organizations independent of the Republican party. But his heroes have been the Republicans Abraham Lincoln and Herbert Hoover. Nevertheless, his respect for Republican heroes and principles would not be enough to overcome the antipathy of the Republican right wing if he were starting from scratch in 1996. He could pass the "litmus test" of opposition to abortion on demand, but his consistent efforts for peace and against militarism would make it very hard for him to win conservative support today.

Likewise, evangelical Friends choosing to run for elective office today, who firmly embraced Quaker convictions about peace and justice would have a hard time in the Republican Party. Even attempting to function in the Democratic Party might be difficult at a time when there are still millions of Americans who are confident that such U.S. military action as has been undertaken in Bosnia is both legitimate and desirable.

In conclusion, as we celebrate the life and work of Arthur Roberts, it is appropriate to issue a call for greater clarity about the response of evangelical Friends to government and politics. Among the challenges and opportunities are these:

1. *Clarifying our Convictions:* Some unresolved questions are embedded in the uncertainties some Quakers feel about political involvement. Anabaptists have typically held a dim view of governments, but Quakers from the days of William Penn have had a very different view of the redeemability of governments. Friends have considered government to be a suitable instrument of God for meeting the needs of humanity. But evangelical Friends have often absorbed strongly anti-government views from their evangelical environments. Some would come close to embracing libertarian views, feel-

ing that less government is always better. But these evangelicals, who read their Bibles carefully, don't find that view in the Scripture. Running through the New Testament is the narrative of God working in and through government to achieve justice and compassion. That would not support the notion that the least government is the best government, but rather that the best government is one that is patterned after biblical righteousness and justice. If Christian people join in the anti-government rhetoric of the day, they lose their chance to be voices for constructive change. It may be time for evangelical Friends to convene a national dialogue or gathering to clarify their convictions about political involvement.

2. *Lobbying*: Amidst their uncertainties about getting directly involved in politics, Friends in general in the last half-century have settled on lobbying as one of the most useful and acceptable channels of action. But several yearly meetings still do not appoint representatives to the Friends Committee on National Legislation, apparently still associating it with the liberalism they attribute to the American Friends Service Committee. Evangelical Friends need to take a close look at the governing process of FCNL and to discover that the development of policy statements in the annual meetings is an open process and all representatives have a voice. There would be ample opportunity for evangelical Friends to influence the policy statements guiding staff actions. If one alternative is to form a corresponding evangelical Friends lobbying group, that is not at all practical. If the other choice is to be represented only by groups such as the National Association of Evangelicals or Focus on the Family, where there is very little opportunity to influence policies, how does that allow Friends to be faithful to their particular concerns and distinctive?

3. *Serving in Office*: If one searched, they could find some Quakers who have served in significant public policy positions, but few names come readily to mind. It would seem that Quakers have shied away from major elective offices and have served in various appointive positions, particularly with international development entities and other arms of the executive branch. It is time for some dialogue about the possibilities for Friends in elective office. Was Frederick Tolles right that such service requires such major compromises that this is not a good choice for Quakers? Could it not be that persons with the moral courage and charisma of a Mark Hatfield might be found among Quakers and encouraged to pursue political service? Will that happen on its own, or do we not need to begin to nurture and seek out such potential leadership and begin to point such individuals toward elective office? Conservative Republicans have been very skillful in getting "their people" in office. Couldn't Quakers do the same?

Arthur Roberts has had an enormous influence on me personally and on many others who enrolled in his classes and did their best to understand him. Arthur was a do-er, not just a teacher. When he found that he could

write excellent poetry and produce beautiful art, he did just that. When there was farm work to be done, he rolled up his sleeves and did it. He had thought a great deal about civic virtue and the concepts of justice and morality. When the way opened for him to be a do-er, not just a thinker in the public arena, he acted on his convictions. For that example of thoughtfulness and conviction flowing into action I will always be grateful to Arthur Roberts.