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Remembering Our Heritage: Studies in Friends Beliefs

Charles S. Ball

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OUR
HERITAGE

STUDIES IN FRIENDS
BELIEFS

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PREFACE

The material in this booklet was first written by Charles S. Ball in the form of eight articles for *The Collegiate Contact*, the monthly publication for college students in California Yearly Meeting of the Friends Church. At the time of publication, collegians received the articles with considerable appreciation for their relevance, lucidity and scholarly tone.

In response to many requests that the articles be made available for a wider circulation, the Board of Christian Education of California Yearly Meeting has authorized this reprinting. It is our hope that this material may be of great value as resource material for membership classes, study groups, Sunday School teachers and all who may be interested in acquainting themselves more fully with Friends beliefs.

In their original intent these essays were particularly oriented to relate Friends beliefs to the basic doctrines of Protestantism at large. Topics were selected for their relevance to the college community, and the brevity of the articles was dictated by the format of *The Collegiate Contact*.

Charles S. Ball is a birthright Friend who was recorded as a minister by Ohio Yearly Meeting, Damascus, Ohio. After serving as pastor in Ohio, he headed the Friends Bible College and Academy of Haviland, Kansas, taught in the Bible Department of Friends University, and was president of William Penn College, Oskaloosa, Iowa, for eight years before becoming pastor of the East Whittier Friends Church in Whittier, California.

—C. W. PERRY, *Chairman*
Board of Christian Education
California Yearly Meeting
June, 1964.

I. Friends and Protestant Christianity

Friends are generally considered part of the great Protestant Reformation. Historically, the Reformation extended from Martin Luther's posting his 95 theses for debate in Wittenberg in 1517 to the Peace of Westphalia which closed the Thirty Years War in 1648.

George Fox, founder of the Society of Friends, was 23 years old when he found personal salvation and peace of mind through Jesus Christ in 1647, after four years of spiritual seeking. From that time he became a mighty preacher and leader with a positive Christian message. The fact that Fox began preaching in 1647 brought the Quakers under the wire before 1648 and thus related them chronologically to the Protestant Reformation.

When speaking of Protestantism, it is well to understand the meaning of the word. When the second Diet of Speier met in Germany in 1529 it had a Roman Catholic majority. "It ordered that no further change in religion be made, in Roman Catholic territories liberty of worship should not be granted to Lutherans, but that in Lutheran territories toleration should be accorded to Roman Catholics".¹ Against this, the Lutherans entered a formal "protest." Thus, it was the Lutherans in Germany who were first called "Protestants" but eventually the term was applied to all who broke with the Roman Catholic Church.

Our English word "Protestant" today seems to carry largely a negative connotation, but this was not true originally. The word comes from a compound Latin word "protestari": "pro" meaning for or forth; and "testis", a witness or one who affirms. Hence, "protestant" actually has a positive meaning "to profess" or "to declare openly."

¹Latourette, K. S., *A History of Christianity*, 1953, p. 727.

Friends, with others, professed freely their belief in salvation through Christ by grace and faith alone, in the authority of the Holy Scriptures, in the universal priesthood of believers, and in the spiritual nature of the church. Hence, on the basic doctrines they stood in the midst of the Protestant forces in the seventeenth century.

Another fact which shows the relation of our Friends church with the Reformation is that George Fox and the early Quakers carried the interpretation of Protestant Christianity to its logical conclusion in the spiritual interpretation of the Gospel of Christ in the New Testament. Most of the Protestant churches came out of the Reformation with two sacraments (water baptism and the Lord's supper) instead of the seven that the Roman Catholic Church observed. Friends interpreted Christianity as a practical and spiritual religion, rejecting all outward ordinances.²

Therefore, the historical statement in The California Yearly Meeting of Friends *Faith and Practice* is correct in speaking of "the position of the Friends as the logical conclusion of the Protestant Reformation, and marked the culmination in the development of doctrine which had been advancing by irregular stages for more than a century".³ Elbert Russell, the Quaker historian, says in the introduction of his *History of Quakerism*, "If, therefore, Quakerism was organically related to contemporary history, it should be by its chronological position the final development of the English Reformation, the most protestant phase of Protestantism".⁴

²See Colossians 2: 8-15.

³*Faith and Practice*, 1959, p. 9.

⁴*The History of Quakerism*, 1943, p. xix.

II. Friends and New Testament Christianity

Quakerism is the practical interpretation and application of the Christian faith. Quakerism really is nothing more, nor nothing less, than New Testament or Apostolic Christianity. George Fox believed that the 17th century Christians must live in the same spirit and power in which the first century apostles lived.

To do so requires that we go to the New Testament to inquire what the first disciples of Christ believed, experienced, and professed, and to determine what they found so essential and effective in their living and proclaiming the Christian message.

The title of William Penn's book, *Primitive Christianity Revived in the Faith and Practice of the People Called Quakers*, is a good illustration of the importance which early Friends ascribed to the New Testament Christianity. The more one reads of the writings and beliefs of early Friends, the more one is convinced that their faith and practice were centered in the Christ of the Holy Scriptures rather than based on human philosophy.

In studying the New Testament, we discover that the Gospel of the early church was three-fold. *First*, the apostles had a firsthand knowledge of the facts connected with the birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, our Lord. *Secondly*, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit they experienced both a spiritual birth and baptism which gave them an inward living reality of the Christian religion. *Thirdly*, they proclaimed without reserve the truths they believed and the realities they experienced. Therefore, the New Testament Gospel was: *historical*, true to the facts; *experiential*, verified in their own lives; and *practical*, to be demonstrated in the world.

This Gospel of the Holy Scriptures, and especially the New Testament, centered in a Person—Jesus Christ, our Lord. These three names or terms applied to Him

also bear out this threefold emphasis. "Jesus", the human name, refers to an historical person "born of the seed of David", "who gave himself for us", and was "raised from the dead." The designation, "the Christ", refers to His divine origin and relationships: "Christ, the Son of the Living God", "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

But in addition to acknowledging Him as Jesus the historical person, and the Christ of experience within, He is also "Lord"—the Lord of our lives. Whatsoever we do in word or deed we do to His glory.

Christianity in any period should be examined and experienced in the light of the Gospel centered in the Person of Jesus Christ, our Lord, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. Therefore, Friends have not emphasized a Gospel centered in creeds, rituals, sacraments, nor even in piety. A creed is of little value unless changed lives result; a ritual is of little value unless there is a demonstration of God in one's life outside the church; sacraments are of little value unless there is the living spiritual experiences of Christ in the soul; claims of piety are valueless without the manifestation of the Spirit of Jesus Christ in all one's relationships.

Friends have found an adequate, abiding, and full orbbed Gospel in the historical, experiential and practical religion of our Lord, Jesus Christ—the One we know about through the Holy Scriptures; the One whom we know personally in saving grace; and the One who is the perfect pattern and guide for our lives here on earth. Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of the Living God, the Lord of Life to whom be glory and majesty, dominion and power both now and evermore.

(NOTE: The ideas for this article were first suggested by an anonymous tract published some years ago by California Yearly Meeting of Friends entitled "Quakerism and Apostolic Christianity." Also, Benjamin Trueblood of Iowa Yearly Meeting, expressed some of the same ideas at the Richmond Conference of 1887 (See *Proceedings, Including Declaration of Christian Doctrine*, pp. 80-84.)

III. Friends and Religious Authority

What do Friends believe about religious authority? Is it an inner experience or an outward revelation? Many are concerned about the seeming contradiction between a subjective personal experience and an objective revealed religion. Friends have historically found a wholesome synthesis of what appears to be two divergent points of view.

Early Quakers emphasized a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ through the light of the Holy Spirit and the instruction of the Holy Scriptures. This is well illustrated in the experience of George Fox. He sought for personal faith through all the regular outward means of his day.

Although he went to many church services, talked with many priests, he found that the services and sacraments, the preaching and the counseling did not bring him peace. While seeking, Fox turned from all these to reading and studying his Bible for himself. Then later he testified, "I heard a voice which said, 'There is one, even Christ Jesus that can speak to thy condition', and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy. . . . And this I knew experimentally."¹

Friends have believed "That God, through Christ, hath placed a principle in every man, to inform him of his duty, and to enable him to do it, and those that live up to this principle are the people of God, and those that live in disobedience to it are not God's people, whatever name they bear or profession they may make of religion."²

This principle they called "the light of Christ with-

¹*The Journal of George Fox, A Revised Edition by John L. Nickalls, Cambridge, 1952, p. 11.*

²Penn, William, *Primitive Christianity Revived*, Phila. 1877, p. 9.

in" or other scriptural terms but never the current im-
personal expression "inner light".

Concerning the Holy Scriptures, Friends were care-
ful to point out that one's inward experience and per-
sonal leadings of the Holy Spirit must agree with the
Holy Scriptures which they universally acknowledged as
having been given by divine inspiration of the Holy
Spirit.

Robert Barclay, the Quaker theologian of the 17th
century, said, ". . . we do look upon them (Scriptures)
as the only fit outward judge of controversies among
Christians; and whatever doctrine is contrary unto their
testimony may therefore justly be rejected as false. . . .
We shall also be willing to admit it as a positive cer-
tain maxim, That whatsoever any do, pretending to the
Spirit, which is contrary to the Scriptures, be accounted
and reckoned a delusion of the devil."³

Friends believe that the indwelling Spirit guides
and controls the surrendered life, and the Christian's
constant and supreme business is obedience to Him. But
while the importance of individual guidance and obed-
ience is thus emphasized, this fact gives no ground for
license; the sanctified conclusions of the Church are
above the judgment of a single individual.

Therefore, relative to religious authority, Friends
have the safeguard of the double-check: the inward
personal experience of God through Christ taught in and
corroborated by the Holy Scriptures. Relying upon per-
sonal experience alone may lead to error or fanaticism.
Reliance upon the Scriptures alone may lead to dogmat-
ism or formalism. The truths of the Bible may be known
in Christian experience and the experience of Christ
within may be verified by God's revelation in the Bible.

³*An Apology For The True Christian Divinity*, Phila. 1908,
p. 89.

IV. Friends and The Person of Christ

“We believe in one Holy, almighty, all-wise, and everlasting God, the Father, the Creator and preserver of all things; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, by whom all things were made, and by whom all things consist; and in one Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son, the Reprover of the World, the Witness for Christ and the Teacher, Guide, and Sanctifier of the people of God; and that these three are one in the eternal Godhead; to whom be honor, praise, and thanksgiving, now and forever.”¹

The Declaration of Faith then continues to give a fine though brief statement about the person of Christ, His Deity, humanity, His atonement, our redemption and His Lordship in the church. To be informed about Friends beliefs, this Declaration is indispensable.

From the earliest days, Friends have clearly professed their belief in the perfect Deity and humanity and in the absolute Saviourhood and Lordship of Jesus Christ. This faith was made clear by their personal testimonies and their public declarations of faith.

Since Friends used only scriptural terms rather than the current theological or philosophical ones, they were frequently thought to be heretical. When Friends, including George Fox, were to visit the island of Barbadoes, Fox wrote to the governor and council affirming their orthodoxy and showing that Friends believe in the essentials of Christianity. Most of this letter dealt with their belief in Christ and His redeeming grace, just as other Christians do, rather than their distinctive Quaker tenets. Thus they declared their fundamentally Christian faith in refutation of charges of heretical belief.²

¹*Proceedings, Including Declaration of Christian Doctrine of the General Conference of Friends*, Richmond, 1887, p. 25. See also *Faith and Practice*, California Yearly Meeting, 1959, p. 19.

²See *Faith and Practice*, pp. 16-18.

In summary, Friends believe in Jesus Christ, the beloved and only-begotten Son of God, conceived of the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary; He was true God and perfect man. In Him we have redemption by our faith in His atoning death and victorious resurrection; He is our present Lord and coming King.

V. Friends and Conversion

From the beginning Friends have relied upon the Holy Scriptures for religious information and instruction. In them they have observed the description of the fall of man and his consequent need of transformation, which descriptions also corresponded with their personal experiences. "As the children of the fallen Adam, all mankind bears his image. They partake of his nature, and are involved in the consequences of his fall. To every member of every successive generation, the words of the Redeemer are alike applicable, 'Ye must be born again' (John 3:7)."¹

On another occasion Jesus said, "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Mt.18:3). Frequently Friends, in their writing and speaking, referred to "convincement" by which they apparently included all of the ideas usually thought of in the term "conversion", plus that of agreeing with the Friends' interpretation of Christianity.

The fifth of the general queries of Friends asks this searching question: "Do you seek the conversion and spiritual development of your young people?"² Too often among Friends Christian experience has become a matter of tradition and heritage rather than a personal experience of salvation through Christ by the Holy Spirit. In some areas, a tendency has developed minimizing the need of conversion, or the new birth, and substituting a false belief in the so-called progress of humanity. Thereby, the membership roles of many monthly meetings have been filled with "birthright" Quakers who never have been "born again" as Christians.

¹*Faith and Practice*, p. 25.

²*ibid.*, p. 42.

D. Elton Trueblood, the Quaker philosopher of Earlham College, when writing about the need of "Conversion Within the Church", observed: "In all honesty we have to say that there are many churches going along today with apparent success, but with real failure, because the new births within the memberships are so rare. It is relatively easy to carry on a successful church with little or no new life. . . . It is far easier to set up brick walls than to stir up new life in members. Likewise, it is easier to get a crowd than it is to secure real conversions."³

Conversion basically means, "to turn around"; "to turn back"; "to return." In Christian experience it includes man's turning from sin, which is called repentance; and turning to Christ, known as faith (Acts 20:21). God responds to this repentance and faith with forgiveness (I Jn. 1:9) and new spiritual life known as regeneration or the new birth (John 3:6,7).

Psychologically, conversion involves a person's intellect, emotions and volition. He is *convicted* of sin; *confesses* his need to God; *believes* in Christ the Redeemer of mankind; and then experiences the *witness* of the Holy Spirit to the fact that he is now a child of God (Rm. 8:16). He now lives a new life. Benjamin Field described this change of attitudes and goals as follows: ". . . the faith by which the new life is sustained gives them the victory over the world (I Jn. 5:4,5). They neither seek the company, nor fear the frowns, nor conform to the practices, nor delight in the pleasures, nor adopt the maxims of the world."⁴ "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold all things are become new" (II Cor. 5:17).

³*The Yoke of Christ*, p. 51.

⁴*Handbook of Christian Theology*, p. 217.

VI. Friends and Baptism

The question of ordinances has been with the Friends Church since its founding. This discussion is a perennial one because of those who join the Friends Church and are not familiar with its teaching, because each new generation of Quakers needs instruction, and also, because of the nearly universal practice of ordinances (or sacraments) by other denominations.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that there are seven sacraments; Friends believe that the Scriptures teach that none are necessary. Between these two extremes are many shades of thought, all contending that their respective positions are Scriptural and have Divine approval.

Most evangelical churches agree that baptism with water is not a requirement for salvation. The entrance of the Thief on the Cross to Paradise without water baptism is evidence of this fact (Luke 23:39-43). Many of the evangelical churches believe that Jesus' reference to being born of water in John, chapter three, refers to physical birth rather than water baptism. Friends have been led one step further in believing that water baptism was never ordained by God nor commanded by Christ for the Church age.

"Baptize" is a dyer's word and signifies to *dip so as to color* as in Revelation 19:13.¹ But the Bible often uses a word in a different shade of meaning from its classical or common use. In Mark 7:4 the same word is translated "wash" or "purify."

The English word "baptism" comes directly from the Greek word "*baptisma*" or its variants. In the New Testament it had four different meanings: 1) Baptism with water (John 1:33); 2) Baptism with the Holy

¹Girdlestone, R. B., *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, Eerdmans, 1948, p. 153.

Spirit (Matthew 3:11); 3) Baptism into suffering; and 4) Baptism into the teaching or leadership of another (1 Cor. 10:2).²

Water baptism is an Old Testament ordinance practiced in varying forms before Christ established the Church. John the Baptist baptized as an Old Testament prophet; not as a New Testament Apostle. This same John was very specific in differentiating his baptism (with water) from that of Jesus Christ (with the Holy Spirit.) And the Gospel writers were all impressed with this distinction and felt they must record it in their writings: Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16 and John 1:33. "I baptize you with water . . . but . . . He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit . . ." (Matt. 3:11).

Among the last words of Jesus are these in Acts 1:5: "For John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (RSV). Here is the contrast between the old and the new, the physical and the spiritual, the age of law and the dispensation of grace, the ministry of John and the ministry of Jesus.

But some say that baptism is commanded by Jesus quoting the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." Here many readers automatically presume that to baptize means "*in water*", but Jesus did *not* say "*in water*" at all (see also I Cor. 12:13, 27; Rom. 6:3,4). In fact the word "baptizing" is *not* the principal word of the command, but a participle modifying "go teach." Teaching or indoctrination, the fourth meaning of the term, is evidently the meaning here. Baptize or saturate them in the teaching about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Also, if we are to follow the example of Christ, He

²Beals, Charles A., *The Essential Baptism*, p. 3f., gives an excellent discussion of this subject.

said upon being baptized of John that it was "to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15), and Jesus Himself never practiced water baptism (John 4:2).

The apostles in Acts 15, when deciding upon the essentials for Gentiles, entering the church, did not mention water baptism. Paul spoke of "one baptism," and surely that could only refer to Christ's baptism with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:5).

Friends *do* believe in "baptism." They believe that baptism with the Holy Spirit is fully commanded and essential for salvation. As J. J. Gurney, noted Quaker wrote in his *Observations*: "It is our belief that we have been led out of the practice of these rites by the Spirit of Truth; that we could not recur to them without grieving our heavenly Monitor; and that, in fact, they are not in accordance with the entire spirituality of the Gospel dispensation."³

³*Observations on the Distinguishing Views and Practices of the Society of Friends*, second American edition, New York, 1880, p. 68.

VII. Friends and Communion

Most Christian denominations practice an ordinance which is called "The Lord's Supper." Friends do not observe this ordinance because they do not believe that either Christ or the apostles commanded or instituted it.

A careful investigation of the Scriptures reveals *only the smallest sanction* of the practice which has become *almost a universal tradition* in the church. This authority rests upon the fact that Jesus ate a supper with his disciples the night before the crucifixion (Mt. 26:26-29; Mk. 14:22-25; and Luke 22:17-20). Though the synoptic Gospels each report it, the Gospel of John merely mentions the incident without giving any detail (Jn. 13:2).

The fact that John did not record the Passover supper (or the so-called "Lord's Supper") really is very important. John's gospel is the most spiritual of the gospels, was written last, and (under the Holy Spirit's guidance) preserves what John remembered as being of the greatest significance in our Lord's life and teaching. He did record in considerable detail the washing of the disciples' feet which took place the same evening (Jn. 13:2-17). Of this Christ said, "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you" (Jn. 13:14-15). Just as most Christians believe Jesus' foot-washing and His comments concerning it were symbolical of the humble service all Christians should render, Friends also believe that the outward acts of the Passover and baptism were equally intended to be understood in their spiritual meaning. It seems that there is equally as much or more reason to observe the practice of foot-washing as the other ordinances if one is to interpret these practices literally rather than spiritually.

In none of the three Gospel references is there any

command that can be construed as instituting a ritual or ordinance to be observed henceforth and forever. These Gospels clearly state that the supper Christ and his disciples were eating was the Old Testament Passover (Mt. 26:19; Mk. 14:16; Lk. 22:13,15). The reference in Luke reads: “. . . they made ready the passover . . . and He said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.”

The Passover had always had the historic reference to the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt under Moses. It also was typical of “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world” (Jn. 1:29). Jesus explained that this typology was being fulfilled. “A new age was being ushered in with the sacrifice of the true Lamb of God. Thereafter on the recurrence of the Jewish festival, the Christians should consider it as commemorative of Him.”¹ So as they ate the Passover, He said, “This is my body” . . . ; “This is my blood of the new testament which is shed for many” (Mk. 14:22,24).

The Passover for the Jews which had so much historic and prophetic significance was explicitly described and unmistakably commanded in the book of Exodus, chapters twelve and thirteen. But nowhere in the whole New Testament are specific instructions given concerning “the supper”! Nor are these questions about “the Lord's Supper” answered: How often? The elements to be used? How much taken? Position of communicants? Who is eligible to officiate? Who is eligible to partake? With the fulfillment of the Passover symbol by his own life and death, Jesus surely would have given specific instructions for any new ordinance or ritual which He intended for His disciples to observe henceforth. Jesus' teaching at the last supper concerned its significance rather than its perpetuation.

Jesus put great emphasis upon the spiritual signifi-

¹Carey, Gervas, *Friends and the Ordinances*, p. 10.

cance of His teaching. After performing the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, He gave His discourse on "the Bread of Life" (Jn. 6:25-59). Here the true partaking of the body and blood of the Lord is described by Jesus as follows: "Except ye eat of the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you" (Jn. 6:53). These words were spoken several months before the last supper and it is clear that they had no symbolic reference to partaking of His flesh and blood by bread and wine.

Jesus' teaching, as in the parables or washing the disciples' feet (Jn. 13:14), was often in symbols and ought to be so received. When the disciples said "This is a hard saying" (Jn. 6:60), Jesus pointed out that He was giving a spiritual truth by replying: "It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (Jn. 6:63 R.S.V.).

The two New Testament passages which some suggest to be commands are Luke 22:19 and I Corinthians 11:23-26. In Luke, as observed above, the reference is to the Passover. Also, many of the best Greek manuscripts of Luke do not contain this "so-called" command: "This do in remembrance of me". While these words are printed in the American Standard Version, a marginal note states that many of the ancient authorities omit the passage beginning, "which is given for you" in verse 19 through verse 20. The scholars who translated the Revised Standard Version believed that the evidence in favor of retaining the passage "This do in remembrance of me," was so insufficient that they omitted it from the text and placed it in a footnote.

Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church shows that the church there had perpetuated the Passover supper, and along with many other practices had to be rebuked for their improper conduct (I Cor. 11:20-22). In verses 23-26, Paul tells about the significance of the Passover supper which Jesus fulfilled.

As Gervas Carey recommends, "If George Fox had been a reader of the Greek New Testament, he doubtless would have made this quotation of I Cor. 11-26 even more emphatic. . . . This verse contains the conditional particle 'ean', the full significance of which does not appear in any of our translations. It is used to denote 'in case that', 'provided that,' 'if', etc. Hence a literal rendering . . . may be . . . 'for as often as, in case that ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show forth the Lord's death till He come'. Thus it appears that Paul, like Jesus, placed the emphasis upon significance rather than perpetuation. A new meaning should be attached to an old Jewish institution so long as it should be continued."²

Though Friends do not practice the ordinance of "the Lord's Supper," *they do believe in communion*. Communion means, "a sharing; . . . participation; . . . an intimate spiritual relationship."³ "The eating of His body and drinking of His blood cannot be an outward act. They truly partake of them who habitually rest upon the sufferings and death of their Lord as their only hope, and to whom the indwelling Spirit gives to drink of the fullness that is in Christ. It is this inward and spiritual partaking that is the true supper of the Lord."⁴

To His disciples Jesus promised both a spiritual and a physical return. Concerning the physical, He said He would come again at the close of the age after preparing a place for them (Jn. 14:1-3). Regarding the spiritual return, He promised to pray the Father to send the Holy Spirit to dwell within them; therefore He said, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (Jn. 14:16-18).

²*ibid.*, p. 11.

³*Webster's New World Dictionary*.

⁴*Faith and Practice*, p. 30.

Thus spiritual and true communion depends upon the receiving of the Lord Jesus Christ and the presence of His Spirit in the believer's heart and life. Jesus said: "Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will eat with him and he with me" (Rev. 3: 20, R.S.V.). Christ also promised that His Spirit would guide his believers and would glorify their Lord (Jn. 16: 13-15).

Communion with God through the Lord Jesus Christ is an act of faith and love. It does not depend upon outward ritual or physical symbol; it is inward and spiritual. "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin" (I Jn. 1:7).

VIII. Friends and The Peace Testimony

Quakerism is a practical interpretation (the doctrines) and application (the testimonies) of the Gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord. Friends principles may, therefore, be divided into doctrines and testimonies. These testimonies about the Christian's conduct relate to simplicity, sincerity, integrity, liberty, worship, oaths, war, etc. Some have mistakenly made pacifism the cardinal doctrine of Friends rather than a spiritual testimony of Christians.

When George Fox was asked to become a soldier after a six months' imprisonment, he reported that "they would have had me to be a captain of them and the soldiers cried they would have none but me. . . . But I told them that I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion from whence all wars did rise, from the lust according to James' doctrine."¹

The historic position of Friends has been a *Christian peace testimony* and not a *humanitarian view point* based upon philosophical, political, or social considerations. Friends in troubled England were caught in "great stirs in the nation, the minds of people were being unsettled and much plotting and contriving there was by the several factions to carry on their several interests."² To warn and instruct both the young and all Friends, George Fox wrote to them in 1659: ". . . All Friends everywhere, this I charge you, which is the word of the Lord God unto you all, live in peace, in Christ, the way of peace, and therein seek the peace of all men and no man's hurt. . . ." ³

Friends maintained a good reputation as loyal, peaceloving citizens who refused both to go to war or

¹*The Journal of George Fox*, p. 65.

²*ibid.*, p. 356.

³*ibid.*, p. 357.

to engage in alliances with others who sought to overthrow the government. William Sewell made this clear in his preface to *The History of the Quakers*, first published in 1722: “. . . to be subject to magistracy hath always been one of their principles; and that they were really dutiful subjects, they have shown at all times, by paying obedience to the higher power, in all they could do with a good conscience. And when anything was required of them, which from a reverential respect to God they durst not do, or omit, they have shown their obedience by suffering, without making any resistance, or joining with others who were inclined thereto.”⁴

The early Friends were greatly concerned that it should be understood that their pacifism was motivated by a Christian conscience and that they were still loyal to their government. Their reason for refusing to swear to an oath of allegiance was their opposition to oaths which implied a double standard of truthfulness rather than any disloyalty to the king. George Whitehead, a contemporary of George Fox, left no doubt on this point: “We conscientiously . . . fear to take that oath, as we do all oaths, viz because it is an oath; not because of the declaration therein contained, of such duty and allegiance as every true and well-affected subject ought to bear to the king; . . . And we also believe, that in good conscience we are bound to demean ourselves honestly, and to live as peaceable minded Christians and true protestant subjects under the king and his government, giving to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.”⁵

When persecution came in 1660 and 1661 Friends with others were imprisoned by the hundreds. Then George Fox and eleven other Quakers sent to Charles II

⁴Sewell, William, *The History of the Rise, Increase and Progress of the Christian People Called Quakers*, p. xiv.

⁵*Memoirs of George Whitehead, A Minister of the Gospel in the Society of Friends*, Phila., 1832, Vol. 11, pp. 38, 39.

“A Declaration from the harmless and innocent people of God called Quakers, against all plotters and fighters in the world,”⁶ stating their position thus: “All bloody principles and practices, we . . . do utterly deny, with all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end or under any pretence whatsoever. And this is our testimony to the whole world. . . . We who were never found plotters against any power or man upon the earth since we knew the life and power of Jesus Christ manifested in us, Who hath redeemed us from the world, and all works of darkness, and plotters that be in it, by which we know our election before the world began. So we say the Lord have mercy upon our enemies and forgive them, for that they have done unto us.”⁷ After this declaration the king ordered that Friends should be set at liberty without paying fees (or fines).

While the testimony of Friends has always been against war, there are many problems involved because the governments of this world are not governed by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and the spirits of many men seemed to be ruled by the evil one. A warless world, therefore, before the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ is but an ideal.

Some members, being realists, have not felt they could be absolute pacifists. Friends, therefore, believing strongly in the right of conscience, have seldom disowned those who have felt it their duty to enter their country's military service. In this they have followed Fox's principle in replying to William Penn when he asked if he could wear his sword and be a Quaker, to which George Fox responded: “Wear it as long as thou canst.”⁸ Soon Penn's conscience caused him to voluntarily give up his sword.

⁶*The Journal of George Fox*, p. 398.

⁷*ibid.*, pp. 399, 403.

⁸Quoted by Brinton, Howard H., *Sources of the Quaker Peace Testimony*, p. 15.