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## REVIEW OF ROSEMARY MOORE'S *THE LIGHT IN THEIR CONSCIENCES*

COREY BEALS

*Modern Quakers in search of their roots make pilgrimage to the "1652 Country," to the southeast of the English Lake District where George Fox climbed Pendle Hill to "sound the day of the Lord," and saw a vision of "a great people"... [There are] many sites of Quaker interest in the area, but it is not the true Quaker birthplace....1*

So begins Rosemary Moore's *The Light in Their Consciences: The Early Quakers in Britain, 1646-1666*. As the title suggests, this work is a historical treatment of the early years of Quakerism in Britain. Moore's assertion that the birthplace of Quakerism is not the "1652 Country" is accompanied by her claim that the birth year of Quakerism is not 1652. Having recently made a pilgrimage to the "1652 Country," I found these to be interesting propositions. They are not the only proposals made in the book, however, which challenge Quaker tradition—in fact, there are many such proposals.

Moore's thorough analysis of early source material makes this a very rich resource and the presence of so many original claims makes this a fascinating account of the genesis of Quakerism. Due to the scope of her treatment and her careful and scholarly attention to detail, no review could be a satisfactory substitute for actually reading this fine work. However, to give some idea of the claims made in this work, I have identified and selected two dozen of the proposals made in the first half of the book.<sup>2</sup> I have grouped these according to seven different themes, in order to highlight certain patterns of thought and argumentation. After listing these propositions below, I will offer an analysis of Moore's methodology in order to examine how certain methodological presuppositions may have influenced her conclusions.

### MOORE'S PROPOSALS

In *The Light in Their Consciences*, I have identified the following seven themes which capture most of the proposals included in the first half of

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the book: Quakerism before Quakerism, hierarchy among early Friends, organizational strategies of early Quakers, repressed sexuality in early Quakers, political reactions of early Quakers, polemical influences on early Quakers, and finally, theological “rationalizations” of early Quakers. I have tried to use direct quotes, where possible, to represent a summary of the respective proposal.

*I. Quakerism before Quakerism (i.e. Quakerism predating George Fox’s account of the birth of Quakerism as occurring in 1652)*

1. *Birthplace and Date of Quakerism* (p. 3): “Modern Quakers... make pilgrimage to the ‘1652 Country’” (English Lake District, Pendle Hill, Firbank Fell, etc), but this is not the “true birthplace” of Quakerism. Rather, the “movement that became Quakerism first appeared in the East Midlands of England some six or eight years earlier.”

2. *Influence of Continental Thinkers* (e.g. Nicholas of Cusa) (p. 4): “During the twenty years before the Civil Wars, a number of continental theological books, teaching spiritual religion and direct contact with God, and emphasizing the divine rather than the human Christ, were translated into English. The influence of continental ideas on the English sectaries is uncertain, but the similarities, to Quakers in particular, were remarked on frequently in the anti-Quaker literature that was published from 1653 onward.”

3. *Elizabeth Hooten* (p. 6): “it is probable that Elizabeth Hooten was more important in the history of Quaker beginnings than [Fox’s] *Journal* indicates.”

4. *Pre-Fox Quakers* (pp. 11-15): There were other groups or individuals “which may be described as ‘proto-Quaker’ in their ideas, though there is no record of any ‘quaking,’” e.g.

—Margaret Fell “was probably another of those who, like Farnworth, Dewsbury, and Nayler, had virtually arrived at a Quaker position before meeting Fox” (p. 15).

—Thomas Aldam was “strongly antagonistic to the established church.”

—Richard Farnworth early on saw that in preparation for communion “it was not the body and blood of the Lord but a carnal invention” (p. 11).

—William Dewsbury heard from the Lord to “put up thy sword into thy scabbard,” and so he left the army, which was unique compared to other Quakers of the 1650s who were proud of their army service (p. 12).

—James Nayler “was highly intelligent, literate and articulate, and rapidly became a leader of the Quaker movement” and was considered by many contemporaries to be “joint leader with Fox” (p. 12).

—Margaret Fell’s “administrative ability, the shelter of her house and the use of her fortune proved indispensable to the success of the Quaker movement” (p. 15).

## *II. Hierarchy among Early Quakers*

5. *Some More Equal than Others* (p. 19): “Fox was treated with considerable respect by the others with the exception of Nayler, who addressed Fox as an equal colleague.”

6. *Hierarchy Established* (after the 1654 meeting) (pp. 30-33):

—Fox and Nayler were seen by insiders and outsiders as either equal or with Fox having slight prominence (p. 30).

—Fell continued to be “the chief organizer” (p. 31).

—In “1656, Fox, Fell, Nayler, and Farnworth were still the Friends who had responsibility for the movement as a whole” but the leaders of the South (Bishop, Fisher, Curtis, Crook, and Lilburne) were growing in importance (p. 33). “Financial support was still largely provided by the Northern Friends, but already there were signs that the balance of power was shifting to the South” (p. 33).

7. *Power Struggle* (p. 41): There had probably been tension between Fox and Nayler (Nayler being more well known in London—compared to Fox who was “odd in of behavior and appearance” and besides was in prison much of the time that Nayler was in London leading the meeting there. There was debate on whether or not to reinstate Nayler, which Fox did only grudgingly.

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*III. Organizational Strategies of Early Quakers*

8. *Strategic Roles* (as of 1653) (pp. 23-25): The explosion of Quakerism was made possible as certain individuals took on key roles within the movement.

—Fox was the “father” and “ringleader” of the Quakers (p. 23).

—Nayler was the main spokesperson and troubleshooter (p. 23).

—Fell was the “chief organizer” (p. 31) and liaison to the social elite (p. 24).

—Farnworth did much traveling, preaching, and pamphleteering (and was the marketer?) (p. 25).

9. *Method of the Mission* (pp. 25-28):

—They went in pairs—usually one older and one younger (p. 25).

—They often spoke in parish churches after the sermon (which was legal then, but soon changed because of Quaker practices). They also spoke in the open air when no one would receive them.

—They soon discovered the possibilities/effectiveness of the press. In order to keep some degree of consistency in the messages of the pamphlets, Fox viewed all books before they were printed. The pamphlets reflected, therefore, the views of the “inner group” (Fox, Nayler, Hubberthorne, Farnworth, Burrough and Howgill) (p. 26).

—There was a wide network established in letter-writing—many, but not all, of the letters going to Fox or Fell. This helped establish the “hierarchy” as Moore puts it (p. 27).

—Fox directed much of the mission, and would “lie it upon” some to go to certain places, while limiting the circulation of others. But Friends “did not usually ‘lie’ things upon George Fox” (p. 28).

10. *Organizational Uniformity* (pp. 28-29): The leadership at the General Meeting at Swannington in Leicestershire in December 1654, tried to increase order. Possible agenda items included:

—regional organization,

—disciplinary procedures,

- publications policy,
- a reporting system,
- matters of faith, and
- the name of the movement (replaced “Quakers” with “Children of the Light”) (p. 29).

11. *Strategic Roles* (as of 1655) (pp. 34-36):

- Fox had a vision, a powerful personality and a grasp of organization (p. 34).
- Fell provided a base of operations (Swarthmoor Hall), finances and was a “chief of staff” without which Fox could not have functioned (p. 34).
- Nayler was the most effective in theological argumentation, which was not Fox’s strength (p. 34).
- Burrough, Howgill, Camm, and Audland all had regional responsibilities (p. 34).

*IV. Repressed<sup>3</sup> Sexuality in Early Quakers*

12. *Slipping in Freud* (p. 77): This unity with Christ also extended to unity with other members, as is expressed especially in the greetings given in letters between Quakers. Moore describes these greetings as “ecstatic” and “rapturous.” Moore explains these expressions of intimacy as follows: “today one notes a sexual connotation, and indeed, an unexpressed sexuality was probably at the root of other such letters by early Friends.”

*V. Political Reactions of Early Quakers*

13. *Political Relevance* (p. 61): The Quaker movement was closely connected with contemporary politics, and “its success was to a considerable extent the result of its political relevance.”

14. *Kingdom Building* (p. 66): Moore suggests that the Quakers (along with others) were putting their hopes in the Cromwellian government to establish a “kingdom on earth” and that when they realized these expectations would not be met (e.g. when in 1654, the Cromwell Parliament failed to repeal the mandatory tithes), the Quakers turned

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elsewhere. “[I]t is not unlikely that the Quaker national mission of 1654 had its roots in the failure of the Nominated Parliament the previous autumn. If the Kingdom of the Lord could not be established by Parliamentary action, then the Quakers had an alternative.”

15. *Quaker Kingdom* (p. 66): “During 1654, the Quaker proclamation shifted away from the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth, toward emphasizing their belief that the Kingdom was to an extent already realized among Quakers, the sons and daughters of God.” The Quakers had three degrees of emphasis in what “the Kingdom of God” meant (p. 68);

- a. The expectation of the imminent coming of the Day of the Lord (*Not Yet*).
- b. “The Kingdom is come and coming” (*Already/Not Yet*).
- c. The Kingdom of God had already come in fullness—in the community of the Quakers (*Already*).

#### *VI. Polemical Influences on Early Quakers*

16. *Anti-Quaker Writing* (p. 89): Of the early books that were directed against the Quakers, most of them fall into four main categories:

- a. “Comments and appeals from church leaders” (like Richard Baxter, who petitioned the Parliament regarding the organization of local ministry—he saw Quakers as Papists in disguise and a threat to the established church)
- b. “Gossip and scurrilous attacks” (as in the case of John Gilpin—an unstable person, attracted to the meetings, who gave extraordinary tales of what he saw there and told stories of witchcraft, of Quakers as crypto-Catholics trying to subvert the English faithful, of immorality, etc.)
- c. “Reports of public debates”
- d. “Serious theological criticism.”

17. *Quaker Controversy* (p. 87): “Blasphemous claims of union with God, a mysterious ‘light,’ and assertions of sinlessness. It was not surprising that Quakers found themselves attacked from all sides. The resulting controversies are described in the next two chapters, when Quaker theology had to develop rapidly to defend Quaker ideas and practices against criticism.”

18. *Polemics Force the Quaker Hand* (p. 59): As polemics became more central, texts used became more narrow, and especially John 1:9 was used (“That was the true light that lightens every man coming into the world”)—to such an extent that it came to be known as “the Quakers’ text.”

VII. *Theological “Rationalizations” of Early Quakers*

19. *Theology used to rationalize what happened to them* (p. 75): Their emphasis upon “the present and spiritual Kingdom of the Lord, described in the previous chapter, represented one method of *rationalizing what had happened to them.*” (emphasis mine)

20. *Christology* (p. 103): Farnworth stressed the necessity of the historical Christ more than others, but he, like many Quakers, “found it difficult to explain how the necessity of the cross could be reconciled with the Quaker idea of a light available to all.”

21. *Unity with Christ and/or Jesus?* (p. 105): “The Quakers’ intense experience of Christ, or the light of Christ, which led them to blur the distinction between Christ and themselves, was difficult to reconcile with a belief in Jesus as man.”

22. *Fox’s Focus* (p. 109): “Belief in a real union with Christ, however expressed, remained the keystone of Fox’s theology.”

23. *Dehumanizing Divinity* (p. 110): “They took to extremes the tendency derived from continental writers, which was noted in chapter 1, to emphasize the *divine eternal Christ at the expense of the human*, and the contemporary accusation, that Quakers did not believe in a human Jesus, had much evidence to support it.” (emphasis mine)

24. *How Many Lights?* (p. 103): The early Quakers were charged with having a confused Christology—in regard to both the nature and works of Christ—which led to belief in justification by works and to ideas about sinlessness. They were also charged with using the theological concept of “the light” inconsistently, such that they rarely spoke of the Holy Spirit, and were unclear about its relation to Christ. Others accused them of confusing “light” with “conscience.” Every serious writer who contended with the Quakers picked up this point of the light saying that the Bible depicts *two* lights—the “light” of Romans 1:18—2:16 was a natural inbuilt conscience that is distinct from the

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spirit of Christ described later in the same epistle. But in response, the Quakers held that John 1:9 suggests ONE light, namely Christ.

## METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

Having outlined some of the key proposals in Moore's book, it is probably clear that any one of these proposals could generate much interesting reflection and dialogue. There are many approaches one could take in reviewing this excellent historical work, but since my training is not as a historian, I will not engage it on the level of the accuracy of Moore's historical treatment of the subject. Rather, as a philosopher, I will offer an analysis of the methodology she uses in arriving at her conclusions. More specifically, I will focus on the philosophical assumptions underlying her methodology and the way that these assumptions affect her conclusions about Quaker thought. After all, Moore stated in the second appendix, "the object of the study was to throw light on Quaker thought rather than on historical detail."<sup>4</sup> Given Moore's emphasis on Quaker thought rather than on historical detail, it seems fitting that I direct my assessment of this work accordingly.

In *The Light in Their Consciences*, Moore covers territory previously treated by Hugh Barbour's *The Quakers in Puritan England*<sup>5</sup>—a classic work on the topic of theological thought of British Quakerism from 1652 to 1665. Perhaps it would be helpful to begin by comparing Moore's methodology to that of Barbour's. In Barbour's preface, he identifies three approaches to understanding accounts of early Quaker religious experience. First, "the unreflective, earnest seeker, wanting to know God as directly as did early Friends, may make their experience into a model for his own faith. But this is hard for most moderns, to whom the actions and emotionalism of the first Quakers seem strange." Second, "In reaction, one may notice and study the social and psychological backgrounds that pressed upon pioneer Quakers and shaped their experience. This second approach is that of the alert observer, the historian of religion, avoiding theological assertions. But such a method may imply that God's power definitely was not at work in early Quaker experience." And finally, "The effort to combine these two outlooks may lead to a third: the attempt to distinguish the purely human or cultural elements in early Quakerism from whatever is universal or divine. This, however, may lead one to identify the universal factors with experiences like one's own."<sup>6</sup>

So which of these three approaches does Moore employ? Reflection on the above list of proposals from *The Light in Their Consciences* seems to imply that she adopts the second point of view—that of a “detached” observer who looks primarily to social and psychological backgrounds and influences to account for what the early Quakers perceived as religious experience. Let us call this approach the *detached observer method*<sup>7</sup> since a key feature of this method is that it claims a detached view of the subject matter—a detachment, that is, from any presuppositions<sup>8</sup> or commitments that might taint one’s neutrality and thus bias the conclusions.

Barbour warns that the consequence of this type of methodology is that it “may imply that God’s power definitely was not at work in early Quaker experience.”<sup>9</sup> Is that the case with Moore’s account? While her account does not explicitly *exclude* the possibility of divine activity in and through these early Quakers, neither does it explicitly *include* such a possibility. All of her explanations for the genesis of Quakerism (such as political influences, unconscious sexual influences, naturalistic motives, etc.) are laid out without once acknowledging divine activity in the world.

One might object to my claim that there is an absence of divine explanation in her work by pointing to the theological discussions (see especially proposals 19-24 above). In response to this objection, I acknowledge that there is indeed a fair amount of theology in this historical treatment, and I would add that I found it enlightening. But notice how she qualifies these theological discussions—she writes that these theological explanations described how the early Quakers “*rationalized what happened to them.*” To say, “this is how they understood what happened to them” is not to credit such understanding with any amount of authenticity.<sup>10</sup> We can safely say that this book does not attribute the birth of Quakerism to any divine activity in the world.

## POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF MOORE’S METHODOLOGY

Since it seems that Moore includes no divine causation in her explanatory accounts as a consequence of the “detached observer method” she employs, I will now look more closely at that methodology, and its underlying presuppositions. I must emphasize that there can be a difference between the presuppositions of one’s methodology and the presuppositions of the scholar using it. While I cannot identify Moore’s

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presuppositions, I can, based on patterns in her work and on some of her comments, identify the methodology she uses, as well as the presuppositions it assumes.

A central presupposition of what I am calling the “detached observer method,” is the *Principle of Parsimony*<sup>11</sup> (or *Ockham’s Razor*) which says that explanations should not be multiplied unnecessarily. In other words, one ought not propose more explanations of an event than are necessary. It is hard to disagree with the desirability of eliminating unnecessary explanations, but the important question becomes, “*What types of explanations does one consider unnecessary?*” The way in which the principle of parsimony is employed often reflects unproven assumptions on the part of the user. It usually is applied with an empirical bias that views measurable, mechanistic causes as necessary, while viewing theological or teleological<sup>12</sup> causes as unnecessary. If, for example, there are two explanations of an event—one measurable by scientific observation, the other *not* measurable by scientific observation—then the parsimonious scholar will choose the former explanation and reject the latter explanation as unnecessary. Since it is possible to measure external causes (such as political influences, social influences, etc.) and difficult or impossible to measure divine or teleological causes, the principle of parsimony often leads to a denial of divine causes.

*a. Denial of divine activity?*

As mentioned earlier, Moore does not explicitly deny divine agency in the events she describes, but she does not acknowledge it either. Why is that? Whether or not she believes that divine causes are necessary for a complete explanation of an event, her methodology requires that she treat them as unnecessary, and thus her account reads as if it were written by someone who thought divine causes were unnecessary. For example, there are multiple possible explanations for why George Fox gathered people together to discuss how to further their mission. One could propose that he was fulfilling his purpose by being obedient to his divine calling which was a part of God’s greater plan (let us call this the “Divine Calling” explanation). One could also say that Fox was influenced by political social forces of his day which required organization for the group in order for it to survive (let us call that the “Political Survival” explanation). Applied here, the principle of parsimony assumes divine or teleological causes are unnecessary and thus it requires that the “Divine Calling” explanation be omitted, or qualified in such a way that it be treated as a deceptive or self-deceptive interpretation, on Fox’s part, of the true causes of his actions. The “Political

Survival” explanation, however, is not rendered unnecessary by the principle of parsimony and thus it could be inferred that the only true account of the events described is the “Political Survival” account.

What rationale is offered for permitting one type of explanation while excluding another type? The reason provided usually includes some appeal to neutrality. Accounts that view theological or teleological explanations as unnecessary are thought to be neutral while accounts that view such explanations as necessary are thought to be biased. But is this really the case? The perception of impartiality with which the detached observer method has been associated for several hundred years has followed from the assumption that the scientist or scholar could approach subject matter without any particular perspective, offering a neutral observation, free of any preconceived notions that might bias the results. Moore implies a claim to such neutrality when she writes, “I therefore attempted to design a survey that would not impose any preconceived notions on the material.”<sup>13</sup>

We have to ask, however, whether such neutrality is possible. On the question of whether divine explanations are necessary, it cannot be proven either that they are or that they are not necessary. Why then, should the view that they *are* necessary be branded as biased while the view that they *are not* necessary be admired as a neutral position?

Again, Moore may not hold to the view that divine causes are unnecessary; she may simply be writing according to the standards of her discipline. But should Quakers accept these standards? Why should someone who thinks divine causes are necessary be forced, for the sake of academic acceptability, to write as if they were not? This is like asking an atheist to write history in such a way that treats divine explanations as necessary. The point is as simple as this: neither view is free of presuppositions; thus, neither view is neutral. Every view requires a commitment to premises that are unproven, and unprovable.

*b. Denial of human telos?*

While the bias against including divine causes in historical accounts is not explicit in *The Light in Their Consciences*, and is only detected by noticing omissions, Moore’s suspicion of human teleology<sup>14</sup> is more explicit. She faults Fox’s journal and other similar sources as being written with preconceived notions which discredit his accounts of the events he describes therein. She concludes about Fox’s later writings that they “would have to be treated as suspect.”<sup>15</sup> Moore writes in her preface that “Contemporary sources were used almost exclusively in

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this study, because material from the later part of the century, notably George Fox's *Journal*, is liable to be misleading when dealing with the thoughts and feelings, and to some extent the history, of the early period."<sup>16</sup> This reveals her suspicion of first-person testimony as unreliable in depicting not only historical events, but even one's own thoughts and feelings. This is not to suggest that she dismisses Fox's first-hand testimony as unhelpful—but rather that such sources are distorted accounts of what really happened and what really was felt or thought.

To better understand Moore's suspicion of first-person testimony, we can turn to the first of her appendices, in which she addresses more fully the topic of her sources. Here she accuses Fox of editing his accounts of early Quakerism, "softening passages likely to offend," "playing down the role of Elizabeth Hooten," and describing "a number of healings that he performed" for which there is "little contemporary evidence."<sup>17</sup> Other manuscripts edited by Fox are charged with unreliability as well since there is sure to be a "bias in letters connected with Swarthmoor, certainly a bias toward George Fox and Margaret Fell, and probably a bias against Nayler."<sup>18</sup> Why this distrust of first-person testimony?

To be more precise, Moore is not suspicious of *all* first-hand testimony,<sup>19</sup> but of first-hand testimony that is given after a period of reflection. She favors the reports that were written closest in time to the events, rather than Fox's reports that occurred *later*. This preference for early accounts actually amounts to another bias hidden in the detached observer method. Later accounts are not as reliable, it is argued, because they are more likely to be tainted by the purposes and intentions of the person writing about the events (or by the effects of memories being changed over time), while the account closest in time to the event supposedly has the advantage of being most neutral, and free of bias. There is one glaring and oft-ignored problem with this preference for early accounts, however. Put bluntly, if nearness to time of the historical event is the best gauge of reliability, then the book that is the most recent on the topic is, by those standards, the least reliable. If nearness to the event is the mark of reliability of those accounts, we would be right in thinking that something written three and a half days after the event is more reliable than something written three and a half decades later, but it would also follow from this logic that a historical account written three and a half centuries later is even *less* reliable. I would not recommend either of these conclusions, and I doubt that Moore would recommend them either, so let us look a little closer for

the true cause of this paleo-bias inherent in her methodology. For comparison, let us consider three possible perspectives—one written three and a half days after the events, another written three and a half decades after the events, and yet another written three and a half centuries after the events. Moore is supposing that the earliest account is more neutral and reliable, and that her latest account is neutral and reliable, but that the middle account is neither neutral nor reliable. Is this a true assessment of neutrality?

If proximity in time to the event were the true reason for preferring some accounts to others, then the preference of a recent account over Fox's account would violate this principle. So there must be some other reason for this preference. I suggest that what is really causing this suspicion of Fox's later account is not so much a distrust of later accounts as it is a distrust of human *telos* (purpose). The detached observer method presupposes the reducibility of a human *telos* to other more basic explanations, and as such human *telos* (like divine agency) is labeled as an unnecessary explanation. Suppose a person comes to understand upon reflection that her whole life has had some purpose, that her life cohered around that purpose, and that it explains why she lived her life the way she lived it. The detached observer method does not rule out such a teleological understanding of life—it simply deems it an unnecessary explanation, since the way she lives her life can supposedly be explained in ways that require no talk of purpose. This method presupposes that the events in a person's life are just a series of events, one after another, with no overarching internal purpose. There is nothing but the force of nature, the story goes, and the drive to survive is the only explanatory cause. Any other way of trying to describe the events as leading to some other purpose beyond survival is simply seen as a self-deceptive way of misunderstanding that we are all just fighting for our own survival. Therefore, it is no surprise that this method accepts a "Political Survival" account, while directly or tacitly dismissing a "Divine Calling" account. To say that a person sees the events in her life as organized around a response to God's call must be a misunderstanding of one's own true motives and thus be held in suspicion. The weakness of this method is that it presupposes its conclusions, and then declares that these conclusions are the result of a neutral, presuppositionless method.

*c. Is neutrality possible?*

Beyond the fact that this particular method of "neutrality" is not neutral, a consensus is growing around the claim of philosopher Hans

Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), who argued that neutrality in one's method of observation is impossible,<sup>20</sup> and that in fact, each person has a perspective from which they can never entirely escape. Detachment from one's perspective is impossible. It is true, Gadamer would say, that Fox had a perspective that affected what he chose to tell and how he told it. But that is also true of those writing three and a half days after the events, and those writing three and a half centuries later. Each account is influenced by the perspective from which it is told. But as Gadamer emphasized, this is not much of a problem as we may think it is. The detached observer method, which predominates the academy, has tried to deny the influence of the observer's perspective, since it is thought to impede our access to truth, but Gadamer suggests that the perspectives (pre-judgments) often *aid* our access to the truth.<sup>21</sup> Of course, it would be naïve to think that any of these perspectives is complete and without limit. Each has its own limitations, so it is best to recognize the limitations, rather than pretending to have a limitless, neutral perspective. Gadamer would say Moore is right to take into consideration the limitations of Fox's perspective, as when she writes, "The inbuilt bias, that the [later] publications reflect the views of the Quaker establishment and of the more articulate Quakers, mostly men, is not a critical defect *provided one is aware of it.*"<sup>22</sup> However, the same point should be extended to the earlier accounts and to her own account—and to my account, as well. The best way to deal with the limitations of each particular perspective is not to *deny* that it has limitations, but to be *aware* of them.

If, therefore, each perspective has advantages and limitations, then what are those for each of our three sample perspectives? An advantage of accounts written within days is that fading or inaccurate memory is less of a problem in getting at the facts. A limitation of these accounts, however, is that they may fail to understand the significance of many events since they are so close to the events, and they will not know which of the many details turn out to be important and which of them turn out to be trivial.

Accounts written within decades, however, have the advantage that enough time has passed that one can begin to distinguish between historically significant and insignificant details. This comes as one has had the time to reflect on the events, and perhaps it is aided by seeing the events working toward some *telos*. Such accounts will have the advantage of not obscuring the story with inconsequential details. A disadvantage of this type of perspective, of course, is that not every detail will

be mentioned, and the account will appear more orderly than perhaps it was actually experienced.

What then are the advantages and disadvantages of an account given centuries after the fact? If the methodology used in giving such an account is the detached observer method, then the disadvantages are that it will presuppose the absence of God interacting in the world, and the absence of human *telos* (or at least the fact that these explanations are unnecessary). If, in fact, God did call George Fox and speak to his condition, and if in fact the events at the time were partly caused by Fox correctly understanding himself to be called, then an account using the detached observer method is going to leave out some important and necessary parts of the story.

By now, I have written so much about the weaknesses of this methodology that it may appear as if I see no advantages to the methodology Moore used and perhaps have a low estimation of her work. On the contrary, I think that Moore's careful historical work has yielded some excellent results, and it is to these strengths I shall now turn.

## BENEFITS OF MOORE'S METHODOLOGY

Moore's observations seem to me to be those of an alert, careful scholar. She describes her project as follows, "My book is the result of an attempt to impose some order on this mass of material by the use of a computer database, listing practically all the printed pamphlets and several hundred manuscripts, and analyzing them with respect to date, to authors and other persons mentioned, and to subject matter."<sup>23</sup> Compiling this database was an enormous project, and the process of cataloguing the hundreds of documents was surely a tedious one to execute thoroughly. The fruits of this labor have benefited me and enriched my understanding of my own theological and historical roots, and I imagine it will do likewise for countless others in decades to come.

This work provides a helpful counter-weight for those who lean only toward hagiographical or purely spiritualized interpretations of early Quaker leaders. Just as it is possible to say that the "Political Survival" account is the only necessary explanation for the genesis of Quakerism, some can go to the other extreme and imply that these spiritual leaders were not affected by their surroundings or peers. Moore's work shows

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us that none of us is self-made and that not even George Fox was capable of self-generation—he did not simply pull his spirituality out of his thumb. Like Fox, we are all deeply affected by those around us, and we all have Elizabeth Hootens in our lives—intellectual and spiritual ancestors who influence us greatly, even though we may not fully recognize it or always remember to acknowledge them.

Moore's study also shows that these early Quaker leaders were human and were influenced by their political environment and the crises of their times, just as we are surely affected by current crises on the national and international levels. It shows us that they too had to face organizational challenges, and that in addition to praying and worshipping together, it was necessary for them to think practically about how best to deliver their testimonies truthfully and effectively. They, too, had to seek egalitarianism without ignoring real differences in gifts. They, too, were faced with people who did not understand them and who subjected them to lengthy, sometimes disrespectful attacks upon their beliefs and persons. And they, too, had to struggle over difficult theological matters such as how and why it was necessary that Christ was both human and divine. Moore's analysis of this early period in Quaker history helps prevent us from forgetting the very ordinary and complex human struggles that played a role in the birth of Quakerism.

As long as one recognizes that this work uses the detached observer method and as long as one is aware of the limitations and presuppositions of such a method, this work should prove quite helpful. The organization of this source material is bound to aid current and future students and scholars who hope to learn more about this period in Quaker history.

## PARTING WORDS

My criticism of this book's methodology may seem sharp, but if one reads this work as just one perspective on these events which, like all other accounts, is not neutral, but shaped by a particular set of presuppositions, then it can be appreciated as a significant contribution to the field of Quaker history. In conclusion, I highly recommend a careful reading of *The Light in Their Consciences*, but I would suggest that one read it with Fox's *Journal* in the other hand. When, in the course of reading in this double-fisted manner, one arrives at apparent contradictions between the accounts where a multiplicity of possible explanations

occur, I would suggest that we not allow the principle of parsimony to force us to choose one or the other.

## NOTES

1. Rosemary Moore, *The Light in Their Consciences: Early Quakers in Britain, 1646-1666* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 3.
2. These proposals are only drawn from the first half of the book, since I was asked to review that portion; Stephen Angell was asked to review the second half. Of the twenty-four claims Moore made, some were extensively qualified and were merely presented as possibilities or suggestions. Others come with less qualification and were closer to assertions, but regardless of the strength with which they are offered, I will refer to them all as “proposals.”
3. As Moore indicated in a response to this review, the term she uses is “unexpressed” rather than “repressed” but regardless of which term is used, the point remains the same.
4. *Ibid.*, 240.
5. Hugh Barbour, *The Quakers in Puritan England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964).
6. *Ibid.*, ix-xii.
7. “Detached observer method” is the term I shall use in this paper, even though it may not be a commonly used way of referring to this type of methodology. This method is perhaps more often called the “scientific method” but since various academic disciplines in the humanities—such as history and philosophy—also have adopted features of this method, I have chosen a term that does not suggest a scope limited merely to the sciences. I refer to it as a method, but as I will argue, the method is more than just a way of collecting data—in this case, the method includes presuppositions about the relative value of different types of data.
8. By “presupposition” I mean that which is assumed without proof or justification. Often presuppositions are unstated, and are premises or principles that are argued *from* but not argued *for*.
9. Barbour, *The Quakers in Puritan England*, x.
10. In her response to my review, Moore backs away from the psychological jargon of “rationalization,” but whether or not this particular term is used is not the issue. What matters is that her subjects’ self-understanding is presented in a way that calls into question the necessity of these explanations for providing a causal account of the events.
11. As Moore mentioned in a response to this review, this principle also goes by the name of “Ockham’s Razor.” This moniker alludes to the medieval philosopher William of Ockham (1280-1347), who is sometimes credited with originating the principle, even though it can be seen in writings as early as those of Aristotle (384-322 B.C.). It should be noted that the principle has been applied in varying degrees, some drawing the circle much smaller as to what counts as “necessary.” None applied the principle so vigorously as the logical positivists of the early 20th century (effectively dismissing all of metaphysics and theology as not only unnecessary, but as nothing but nonsense), and it is perhaps the influence of this movement that has affected how the principle still gets applied today in many academic circles. It is this later application of the principle, rather than the way that Aristotle or even Ockham used it, which I have mainly in sight in this discussion.

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12. By “teleological” cause, I mean any explanation of an event in terms of an agent being goal-directed (*telos* “goal,” “purpose,” or “end”). Some, like Aristotle, applied this goal-directedness even to non-intentional natures (for example, the *telos* of an acorn is to become an oak tree, and part of the answer to the question, “why did it grow to be a tree?” would be, “because that is its *telos* or final cause”). Aristotle defined a teleological cause as an explanation that tells us “that sort for the sake of which.” Such explanations, which played an important role in ancient and medieval metaphysics, were rejected as superfluous and unnecessary by key figures of the scientific revolution such as Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton, and this view has persisted as a central tenet of the scientific method (and what I am calling the “detached observer method”). An important challenge to this view has been offered by Alistair MacIntyre, and many are now beginning to question the rejection of teleological causes. See Alistair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).
13. Moore, *The Light in Their Consciences: Early Quakers in Britain, 1646-1666*, 236.
14. By “human teleology” I mean the concept of teleology (see note 12) applied to humans. To endorse a teleological view of humans would be to say that the goals of a human (whether realized or not) provide a necessary part of the explanation of human activity, and that this goal-directedness cannot be reduced to any other sort of explanation. One example of human teleology is found in Aristotle, who described the human *telos* as the pursuit of happiness (Nicomachean Ethics, 1095a17). Another example of human *telos* is found in the Westminster Shorter Catechism which says that ‘Man’s chief end [*telos*] is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.’ Robert Barclay wrote that “sanctification and holiness is the great and chief end [*telos*] among true Christians” (*Anarchy of the Ranters...*, Sect. IV).
15. Moore, *The Light in Their Consciences: Early Quakers in Britain, 1646-1666*, 236.
16. *Ibid.*, xii.
17. *Ibid.*, 230.
18. *Ibid.*, 235.
19. In my original paper presented at the Quaker Theological Discussion Group (Denver: November 2001), I suggested that Moore was suspicious of first-hand testimony and did not qualify this further. She responded saying that she was not suspicious of first-hand testimony, but that she, in fact used much of it in her work. Thus, some of what follows in the next few paragraphs is meant to say more specifically what type of testimony her methodology treats with suspicion.
20. Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Truth and Method” (New York: Continuum, 1995).
21. Arguing that prejudice is not always detrimental to scholarship, Gadamer writes, “What appears to be a limiting prejudice from the absolute self-construction of reason in fact belongs to historical reality itself. If we want to do justice to [the human individual’s] finite, historical mode of being, it is necessary to fundamentally rehabilitate the concept of prejudice and acknowledge the fact that there are legitimate prejudices.” *Ibid.*, 277.
22. Moore, *The Light in Their Consciences: Early Quakers in Britain, 1646-1666*, 236. Emphasis mine.
23. *Ibid.*, xi-xii.