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A QUAKER UNDERSTANDING OF JESUS CHRIST

ARTHUR O. ROBERTS

Adapted from a paper read at the Quaker Theological Discussion Group, Orlando, Florida, November 21, 1998, and responses to it.

INTRODUCTION: In this paper I first state five assumptions about truth basic to theological expressions by seventeenth-century Quaker leaders. Then under twelve headings I summarize what early Friends believed about Christ, supported by citations. After this I identify seven contemporary cultural barriers to acceptance of these early Quaker beliefs about Christ. I then summarize certain points at issue and suggest lines of resolution.

A. BASIC QUAKER ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE NATURE OF TRUTH

1. God reveals truth.
2. Christianity is based upon revealed truth.
3. Revealed truth is transformational, and not just cognitive.
4. Truth is fully comprehended through obedience.
5. Christian truth claims are experientially and rationally credible.

B. WHAT EARLY FRIENDS BELIEVED ABOUT CHRIST

1. There is unity in the Christ as historically revealed and as spiritually received.

This is very clear to anyone who reads early Quaker writings. It is also apparent that seventeenth-century Friends shared with other Christians a firm belief in the unique, messianic nature of Jesus of Nazareth. What Quakers labored against was a prevalent unbelief in the immediate presence of Christ. They labored to show that the universality of Christ is coherent with the particular historical incarnation, that Christ was not encapsulated within priestly ritual nor within the Scriptures that testified of him.

My friend the late John H. McCandless, in a presentation to the New Foundation Fellowship, Fernbrook PA 12/31/88 (cited in New Foundation Papers, No. 60), stated:

It is important that we recognize the unity between the inward and the outward teachings; this explains why early Quakers never had any trouble accepting New Testament teaching and ethical precepts. If they were guided inwardly by the same Jesus Christ who had spoken outwardly in Scripture, then they did not expect that there could be any sort of contradiction between scriptural teachings and the inward guidance that came to them.

William Penn stoutly defended Quakers against the accusation that they deny Christ to be God. He called this charge “a most untrue and unreasonable censure,” and, citing John 1:9 and 8:12, declared that the “great and characteristic principle” of the Quakers is that Christ as the Divine Word enlightens everyone. Penn also defended Quakers against the accusation that they deny the human nature of Christ. “We never taught, said, or held so gross a thing,” wrote Penn, who further affirmed the manhood of Christ Jesus—“of the seed of Abraham and David after the flesh and therefore truly and properly man, like us in all things, and once subject to all things for our sakes, sin only excepted.” (*The Key*, sections VI and VII)

2. The Bible authentically defines the person and work of Christ.

Robert Barclay stated it plainly: “We believe that everything which is recorded in the holy scriptures concerning the birth, life, miracles, suffering, resurrection, and ascension of Christ actually happened.” (*Apol* Prop. 5, xv, Fr. Ed. p. 88. See also Prop. 3 on Scripture) To get a feel for how Barclay actually drew upon Scriptures as the “true and faithful record” one only has to scan the pages of his *Catechism*. An example:

Q. Was Jesus Christ really crucified and raised again? A. For I delivered unto you first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures: and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day, according to the scriptures. I Cor. 15. 3, 4. (Philadelphia n.d. 16)

George Fox quibbled with Baptists over the term *word of God*; they wanted to use it as a synonym for the Bible, whereas Fox insist-

ed the term denotes Jesus Christ. Fox buttressed his arguments from the Scriptures themselves, which, said Fox, are the “words of God.” In many similar phrases, Fox exhorted people to read the Scriptures “sitting down in him who is the author and end of them.” (*Journal*, Nichols, pp. 32ff., 145ff., and *ad passim*) That Quakers held an inclusive view of revelation did not discredit the Bible, but elevated its importance as an outward test and spiritual guide.

In the Letter to the Governor of Barbados Fox wrote:

We believe that the Holy Scriptures are the words of God; for it is said, in Ex. xx. 1, “God spake all these words, saying,” etc., meaning the ten commandments given forth upon Mount Sinai. And in Rev. xxii. 18, saith John, “I testify to every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book: if any man addeth unto these, and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy” (not the word,) etc. So in Luke i. 20, “Because thou believest not my words.” And in John v. 47; xv. 7; xiv. 23; and xii. 47. So that we call the Holy Scriptures, as Christ and the apostles called them, and holy men of God called them, viz., the words of God. [from “Some of the Mysteries of God’s Kingdom Glanced At,” 1663]

3. Christ’s resurrection occurred, signifying spiritual renewal and life after death.

A contemporary Friend, Gusten Lutter, Jr. asks “How can people deny the resurrection and still claim that Christ has come to teach his people himself?” Lutter writes:

Jesus’ Resurrection fuses the Incarnation. It is a claim that God is (now) connected in an intimate (physical) way with Creation, perhaps in a way that was not before. Jesus raised was not a spirit untouched by thirty years in a mortal coil. The marks of his life were upon him, and (promise to be) with him eternally. Jesus’ resurrected body promises us that our lives are real, even from the standpoint of a Creator who could unmake us at will. When we ask, “Was the Resurrection an historical event?” we are asking “Was it real?” Real to us, material, available to the senses. At the same time, when we say, “God raised Jesus from the dead,” we are giving what we saw (through the eyes of the disciples) in three dimensions greater depth. The three dimensional surface of Jesus’ body becomes transparent to the eyes of

the spirit, and we see God in and through him. The incarnation & resurrection make claims about the world without which the New Testament (the books of the New Covenant of God with God's People) is [merely] a nice story.

(To: friends-theology@xc.org "Gusten Lutter, Jr." gusten-too@uswest.net Wed, 08 Jul 1998 14:28:39 -0600)

4. Christ's life, death, and resurrection is the procuring cause of human salvation.

For George Fox it was central to "the people of God called Quakers" to let everyone know, whether Jews, Turks, Christians, or heathens, that "there is no salvation in any other name under heaven, whereby they must be saved but in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, crucified and raised from the dead." (*Works* 5, 87) Early Friends did not use scholastic atonement theories but used a variety of biblical metaphors to affirm causality. To the question: How doth Christ convey life? Isaac Penington wrote:

As the living Word; as the promised seed. He soweth the seed of the kingdom in the heart, in which is life: and as he maketh way for this to spread and grow up in and leaven the vessel, even so he quickeneth and gathereth into his life.

Again, he is the enlightening word, the quickening word, the word of wisdom, the word of power, the word of love and reconciliation, whose voice worketh mightily towards the destroying of sin, and saving of the soul from it.

Job Scott, at the end of the eighteenth century, stressed the outer-inner meaning of Jesus' death in a plenary rather than substitutionary mode. He speaks for the conservative Quaker tradition:

Christ...has shown us plainly that nothing will do, short of real death *in us*. That the death must be *in man*; that we must die to all creaturely corruption, as he died to the creaturely life. "In that he died, he died unto sin once," says the apostle, "and in that he liveth, he liveth unto God." Though he was sinless, yet he died unto sin; he died to the very first risings and motions of evil; for "he was in all things tempted as we are." In yielding to these temptations, lust would have been so conceived as to have brought forth sin, but in dying, instantly, the death of the holy cross, to every motion whose tendency was unto sin, he is properly said to have died unto sin. And herein, as well as in his

death on the cross outwardly to the life of the creature, he has powerfully taught us the necessity of dying with him unto all sin. He that will lose his life for his sake, shall save a divine and eternal life with and in him. But he that will save his life, will not die with him unto sin, must and shall lose it. He that will reign with him, must suffer with him; and he that will rise with him in the newness of the divine life, must first be buried with him in that baptism which is into real death unto all sin, even the baptism by which the floor of the heart is thoroughly cleansed. [from *Essays on Salvation by Christ*. ca. 1793, pp. 40-44 in the QHP edition]

William Bacon Evans, a weighty Philadelphia Friend during the first part of our century, blessed his generation with religious verse. One of his sonnets, “The Gospel,” speaks to the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

Best of Good News! which science ne’er contrived,
 Nor charlatan devised, nor sibyl saw—
 Whose swelling words the undiscerning draw
 Toward panaceas idle and short lived—
 O prodigy of Grace in Heaven prepared!
 Strong in the might of all-embracing law;
 Love without bound, outreaching to withdraw
 From toils of hell and death the sin-ensnared;
 Thou son of God and Son of man in one!
 Who bare our loads of sin upon the tree,
 With empty hands of need we come to Thee!
 Salvation promised, preached in everyone;
 For us Thou tasted vinegar and gall,
 O miracle of Love encircling all!

—10th, IV, 1942

5. The indwelling Christ is a reality distinct from persons indwelled.

George Fox frequently referred to Christ as the substance, fulfilling the types and shadows of the past, offering a greater reality, one subordinated to God the creator, not to man the created. Christ has come, he said, “to redeem, translate, convert, and regenerate man...out of all the true types, figures, and shadows, and out of death and darkness, up into the light, and life, and image, and likeness of

God again as man and woman were in before they fell.” (Nichols ed. *Journal*, p. 367)

Friends such as Stephen Crisp repeatedly emphasized a spirituality that even in its fullness retains a lowliness of spirit before the indwelling Christ. No one can become smug about the Light of Christ. Immediate revelation increases rather than decreases awe before the Lord. Indeed, Crisp warned that Satan deceptively comes as an angel of light to draw away from the “simplicity of the Truth” those who haven’t fully died to self. Such persons are beguiled into “libertinism.” In their carnal reasoning they put their trust in uncertainties and neglect weighty matters; or they decide hell is only in one’s conscience, or that death annihilates one anyway so why struggle, or that if one falls short of righteousness now they can make it up in other bodies in the hereafter. (“A Faithful Warning” in *Gospel Labours and Writings*. Philadelphia: 1822, pp. 340-1)

6. Personal and corporate experiences of Christ constitute valid knowledge.

Robert Barclay asserted that divine inward revelations are integral to true faith, and that they “possess their own clarity and serve as their own evidence,” and cohere with right reason (“well-disposed mind”) and “common principles of natural truths.” (*Apol.* Freiday ed., Prop. 2, p. 16) Isaac Pennington defended the sensible understanding of the trinity of God:

Now consider seriously, if a man from his heart believe thus concerning the eternal power and Godhead; that the Father is God, the Word God, the Holy Spirit God; and that these are one eternal God, waiting so to know God, and to be subject to him accordingly; is not this man in a right frame of heart towards the Lord in this respect? Indeed friends, we do know God sensibly and experimentally to be a Father, Word, and Spirit, and we worship the Father in the Son by his own Spirit, and here meet with the seal of acceptance with him. (*Works* iv:360, QHP ed.)

7. The universality of Christ the Light is affirmed by the particularity of Jesus.

When early Friends used the term *light* they referred to Jesus Christ, to the historical, redemptive, event, not just to an inner spiritual qual-

ity. To know Christ as the Light eternal means “as he was yesterday, is today, and will be forever,” wrote Isaac Pennington. He drew parallels with the rejection of Jesus Christ inwardly by establishment religion in his day and rejection of Christ historically by the Jewish leaders. The stone which builders rejected, is nonetheless, the cornerstone. Professing believers acknowledge Christ as the rock in words but miss doing so in substance. For the early Friends, after a night of apostasy, the rejected stone was again, in England, reaffirmed. (See Works, *Selections* and *Letters*. Philadelphia, 1818, pp. 80ff.)

8. There is no “natural light” of conscience separate from the Light of Christ.

Robert Barclay asserted that the power to determine right from wrong, although sometimes described as “the law of nature” in reality is not distinct from the Light of Christ. For Barclay it is a “universal evangelical principle...that the salvation of Christ is shown to every man, whether Jew or Gentile, Scythian or Barbarian, of whatever country or kindred.” Which is why, he adds, “God has raised faithful witnesses and evangelists in our age to help all become aware of the light within themselves and to know Christ in them.” (*Apol.* Prop. VI, XXVIII, Freiday, pp. 123ff.) The early Friends did not denigrate nature but sought to recover a biblical unity between God as creator and God as redeemer. This unity they envisioned as divine election through an accessible logos, Christ, rather than through a limited, predestined, redemption.

9. God’s Spirit is intrinsically linked to Christ (filioque).

Early Friends referenced their usage of the term *Spirit* to Jesus Christ. This was the case whether they used the term *Christ*, or metaphors such as *Light* and *Seed*, or the word *Spirit*. In short, they had a Christocentric doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This doctrine conveyed an understanding of the universal and saving light graciously available to all persons. It was clearly linked to the spiritual nature of baptism. Of the Pentecostal experience recorded in the Acts George Fox wrote, “Baptized by one spirit into one body...is the answer of a good conscience toward God by the resurrection of Jesus Christ....Christ is the substance, whereby we are baptized into his death.” Fox quotes Paul

approvingly, “those that are baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Gal. 3:27) (*Saul’s Errand to Damascus*, cited in EQW, p. 258)

10. Christ’s presence in the world does not foreclose a fuller future coming.

In his often-reprinted *Apology*, Barclay refutes accusations that their emphasis upon the contemporary presence of the Kingdom implies no belief in a future life. The Quaker insistence upon accepting judgment of the Light now doesn’t imply disbelief in a final judgment, or in heaven or hell. Just talking about the outward life of Christ, he wrote, won’t redeem or justify people; they must know “Christ resurrected in them.” If people partake of the first resurrection, i.e., inward redemption from sin, they are better able to judge the second resurrection. We are called, he said, to be the first fruits of those who serve and worship Christ not “in the oldness of the letter but in the newness of the Spirit” until “all the kingdoms of the earth become the kingdom of Christ Jesus.” (*Apol*, Freiday ed., p. 439. See also Barclay’s *Catechism*, Chap. XIV, cited in EQW, p. 348)

11. The church, as the body of Christ, witnesses to God’s kingdom.

Writes Fox: “Now Christ is the heavenly, living, spiritual head of these his heavenly, living, spiritual members: and he that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one....So here you may see the unity and the love that is betwixt Christ and his church, which is his body, which he is the head of.” (*Works V.*, p. 306)

12. Christ is real both in and outside of time.

A citation from Job Scott speaks to this mystical blending of time and eternity:

It may be thought by many, that Christ is not the son of any but God, and the virgin Mary; but Christ himself positively declares, he that doeth the will of his Father, “the same is his mother, and sister, and brother.” Shall we suppose he only meant that they were dearly beloved by him, and owned “as if” they were his nearest relations? By such glosses and interpretations, is the true meaning of many of his deep, and deeply instructive sayings qualified away. But, verily, he meant as he said; and had he not

carefully confined his words to a strict meaning, he might have called such his father too. But in the spiritual sense in which he was speaking, no man can possibly be his father, but God. It is true that we read of his father David. In regard to his outward genealogy and descent, David was his forefather; but in regard to his birth in man, none can be Christ's father but God only. And in order to hold this forth to mankind, even his body that was born of the virgin, was conceived by the overshadowing efficacy of the holy ghost, without the agency of any other immediate father but God. Thus the outward holds a lively analogy with the inward. But though, speaking of the inward, no man can be his father, yet man can and must be, his "mother," as well as "sister and brother," if ever he comes to be truly regenerated and born of the "incorruptible seed and word of God." This new birth is ever produced by the overshadowing of the holy ghost upon the souls of men. [from *Essays on Salvation by Christ*, ca. 1793, pp. 40-44 in QHP edition]

C. CURRENT CULTURAL BARRIERS TO ACCEPTING EARLY QUAKER BELIEFS ABOUT CHRIST

1. Scientific method questions the credibility of revealed truth.

This is particularly so in respect to empirically unverifiable claims, such as miracles, the resurrection of Jesus, the mystical presence of Christ within believers and in the church, and the afterlife. A scientific rejection of the supernatural erodes the Christological assumptions that formed the basis for the Quaker awakening. These assumptions affirmed a revelatory unity between God acting in creation and in redemption.

2. A predilection for psychological explanations makes theological ones seem archaic.

According to this worldview, inner feelings and subjective states can be empirically explained without reference to salvation language—to "God talk"—and altered without the need of divine agency. Television confessionals and talk shows reveal the pervasiveness of psychological explanations in our culture. This stance weakens the force of the seventeenth-century movement by implying that

theological language, e.g. “there is one Christ Jesus, who can speak to thy condition,” is a prescientific way of describing events that are now more credibly understood, and dealt with, in psychological terms.

3. A mind-set that the self is sovereign.

This mind-set blunts the early Quaker experience of the Light coming as terror and judgment before bringing assurance and peace. This enthronement of self-esteem makes penitence, discernment, submission to authority, covenant commitments, and acceptance of external discipline difficult. Furthermore it facilitates self-justified conduct. This mind-set is considerably at variance with the normative Quaker emphasis upon self-denial.

4. An assumption that cultural pluralism entails religious and ethical relativism.

This produces a penchant for diversity that prizes inclusiveness as the highest form of tolerance, that delights aesthetically in discovering peripheral religious views. This position attracts religious seekers unhappy with dogma or organizational structure, but it weakens central Christian doctrines of creation, incarnation, and atonement, and it diminishes awe before the Lord God almighty. When truth is considered disparate rather than coherent, unified actions become difficult to achieve, resulting in an inordinate preoccupation with process, including modes of worship, moral discipline, and decision-making. As settled convictions become fewer, ethical options multiply and biblical/covenantal authority weakens. For Quakers this means that in meetings “gathered for business” consensus becomes rather than reflects “the mind of Christ.”

5. A rejection of any foundational universe of discourse.

All systems of thought accordingly are viewed as provisional products of human thought. In rejecting foundational concepts of any sort (Platonic, biblical, or enlightenment, or blends thereof) post-modernist epistemology challenges Quaker assumptions about the nature of truth. From a reductionist perspective such an epistemology reduces Quakerism to instructive sociological phenomena—a museum exhibit of human religious behavior. From a pluralistic perspective such an epistemology releases Quaker, or other religious truth claims,

from a burden of empirical proof. Neither a disparagement of religious claims nor their exclusion from canons of rationality accords well with the passionately unified spiritual, rational, and moral convictions of the first “Publishers of Truth.”

6. *A flirtation with neo-animism.*

To replace abandoned mystery (“Christ in you the hope of glory”), or from a sense of unfulfilled spirituality, some Quakers have turned to neo-animistic paganism, in forms such as goddess or new age religions. These approaches substitute myth-making for theological reflection and naturalistic ethics for biblical morality. Fox’s vision on that ancient haunt of demons, Pendle Hill (“a people in white raiment to be gathered to the Lord”), may be better understood by Friends (Latino, African, Inuit) more recently freed from animistic fears and priest-burdened religion than by modern neo-animists who bask in the socio-cultural benefits of a culture leavened by reason while rejecting its theological foundation.

7. *The substitution of “notional” theology for spiritual experience.*

Although normatively anathema, “notional” religion assails Friends along the whole theological spectrum, from fundamentalist to humanistic theologies. The word *credo* simply means “I believe.” The negative connotation of *creedalism* refers to the substitution of propositional for experiential truth, of head knowledge for heart knowledge. The current cultural animus against *religious* dogma is more severe now than in the seventeenth century, and may be numb to the forces of secular dogma. Nevertheless, William Penn’s warning against “superfining” (prooftexting) Scripture texts is still relevant, although more diversely applicable. Penn wrote:

Men are too apt to let their heads outrun their hearts, and their notion exceed their obedience, and their passion support their conceits; instead of a daily cross, a constant watch, and an holy practice. The despised Quakers desire this may be their care, and the text their creed in this, as in all other points; preferring self-denial to opinion, and charity to knowledge, according to that great Christian doctrine, 1 Cor. Xiii. (*Key*, Section V)

D. CERTAIN POINTS AT ISSUE AND POSSIBLE RESOLUTION

1. What reality informs the metaphor? A leading Quaker metaphor is “light.” Is its ground a rational construct, a universal idea such as love, a non-embodied world spirit; or is its reality Jesus Christ, the incarnate, risen Lord? Early Friends would say the latter. So do I. The same goes for other key metaphors, such as Seed, Truth, etc. A *definiens* entails a *definiendum*, otherwise there is no meaningful discourse, no existential import. Gnostic answers seem to relieve some Friends from a cultural burden they find awkward, namely, affirming an incarnated spiritual reality. But such answers betray the ethos of the seventeenth-century Quaker awakening of the Church and are at variance with its apologetic, prophetic, and devotional literature. Such answers generally fix upon a substitute reality, e.g. Platonic, Hindu, or Buddhist conceptualizations, which have their own ontological problems.

I suggest a better resolution: to affirm the unity of Christ in history and in the heart. And to do so confidently and devoutly. This has been a major Quaker witness. It should be so again. By affirming both the particularity and the universality of Christ, in word and deed, Quaker testimony is as relevant in our pluralistic culture as it was in the seventeenth century. We engage in religious dialogue with integrity when we speak from the strength of this conviction. Quaker belief in the universal and saving light affirms a Gospel that is unique and central without being exclusive. I think this message will speak to persons who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who want to affirm the Good News of Christ within a global culture.

2. Is *Christ* one term in a series of culturally-based synonyms or a unique and essential referent for these linguistic variables? Do advances in human knowledge through the sciences and through global cultural and technological interaction require Friends to subsume their story to a larger one? If so, would that larger story be ecumenically Christian or ecumenically religious? Can one with integrity assert that early Friends “were on the right track” to a larger religious vision but were restrained by the boundaries of a now outmoded worldview? I think not. Such a judgment strikes me as parochial in making contemporary Western culture the test of truth. Such a judgment seems both narrow and elitist. It denies the “scandal of particularity” which is Jesus Christ, the Word of God for all persons for all time. To resolve the problem requires a patience with how people use

culturally variable synonyms to signify the spiritual reality that is Jesus Christ. As Augustine said, God is greater in our thoughts than in our words and greater in reality than in our thoughts. But we can also firmly resolve fully to affirm the referent of such linguistic signs—the Word made flesh, who dwelt among us, whose glory we, too, have witnessed.

3. What is phenomenal and what is epiphenomenal? Does a reality affirmed by scientific reason and logic carry the Gospel reality on its back, as it were, or is the Word spoken in Jesus Christ the reality that carries reason and logic? To use a Venn diagram, which circle encloses other manifestations of reality: revelation or science? To use another metaphor, which is text and which is commentary? The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, said the psalmist. So said the early Friends. So say I. To stand in awe before a transcendent God may require of Quakers a needed poverty of spirit, which in Jesus' list constitutes the first step toward the virtues of peacemaking and holiness.

4. Is the early Quaker view of the Bible, as the inspired words of God, central or peripheral to Quaker understandings about spiritual reality? Some critics have claimed the Gospels were written to rationalize the failure of Jesus. Some Friends eagerly embrace the views of the Jesus seminar people who deny historicity to the accounts of Jesus, particularly the miraculous claims about nativity and resurrection. Are we to replace Barclay with Borg? Can we sustain a Christian understanding of the Spirit while rejecting the outward authority of the Scriptures which our fore-parents stoutly declared were given forth by the Spirit? No. We may quibble about interpretation, and we shall continue to seek guidance of the Spirit in discernment, but Friends cannot, without squandering their theological inheritance, deny the Scriptures as providing “clear testimony to the essentials of the Christian faith” and the “only proper outward judge of controversy among Christians.” (Barclay III, VI). I ask Bible scholars and ministers to approach the text with reverence befitting the “words of God” lest notional religious activity erode the work of the Holy Spirit, lest Bible study become a trade and not prayerful inquiry into the will of God.

Last year on the internet occurred an extended discussion of George Fox's “Letter to the Governor of Barbados.” It is well known that some Friends are uncomfortable with it, claiming that such propositional orthodoxy was contrived for prudential reasons. A Friend from Spain, however, discounted the issue of political

correctness. He writes of this document: “We can see the first ideas of Friends referring to Jesus and the Bible. They were not humanistic, secular or philosophical ideas. They were really biblical. What was most characteristic in a Quaker was to be biblical! We have walked a long way from then to now and I think that the way has been not the best. In Jesus, César Vidal.”

David Johns sent the following quotation, which shows the Barbados letter to be consistent with other testimony. George Fox wrote from Worchester prison, “Something in answer to all such as falsely say, the Quakers are no Christians....” (Andrew Sowle, 1682)

We believe concerning God the Father, Son and Spirit, according to the testimony of the holy Scripture, which we receive and embrace as the most authentic and perfect Declaration of Christian Faith, being indited by the holy Spirit of God that never errs. 1st that there is one God and Father, of whom are all things. 2ndly, that there is one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom all things were made (John 1; 17) Who was glorified with the Father before the World began, who is God over all blessed forever (John 14). [3rdly] That there is one holy Spirit, the Promise of the Father and the Son, and Leader, and Sanctifier, and Comforter of his people (I John 5)...[Christ] exercises his Prophetical, Kingly and Priestly office now in his Church, and also his Offices, as a Counselor and Leader, Bishop, Shepherd and Mediator, he (to wit) the Son of God, he exercises these Offices in his Household of Faith, whose House we are, that are believers in the Light, & by faith ingrafted into Christ, the Word, by whom all things were made; and so are Heirs of eternal Life, being elected in him before the World began....Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? we say with Philip, “Come and see.”

CONCLUSION

David Finke, a Friend from Illinois Yearly Meeting, raised an evocative question about cultural barriers to modern Friends accepting early Quaker theology:

What makes it so hard for us to say with George Fox that “There is one, even Christ Jesus, who can speak to [our] condition,” or that “Christ has come to teach his people himself”?

In my increasing travels among Friends in recent years, I've found this as a joyous proclamation—in deed as well as word—among Friends for whom it is absolutely obvious that what makes us Quakers is our encounter with the Living Christ, the Presence in our Midst, the Friend who transcends the power of death. (printed in Winter '97-'98 issue, "Among Friends")

Many years ago, a British Friend, Maurice Creasey, disturbed by non-Christian trends within the Society of Friends, wrote the following:

Whatever else may be learned from a study of our origins, this much at least is clear: that the early Quaker teaching concerning "the universal and divine light of Christ" was a message concerning the action of God rather than the nature of man....Friends were united in the certainty that the same power, wisdom, and grace of God which had ever been seeking to save man from his futile desire for autonomy, and which had been concretely revealed and expressed in Jesus Christ, was now available to lead into all truth those who trusted and obeyed it. (*Christ in Early Quakerism*. Philadelphia: The Tract Association of Friends, undated)