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RESPONSE TO VAIL PALMER

JOHN BECK

Tvail Palmer's article [*QRT* #92] "Some Issues from Nineteenth-Century Quakerism" covers considerable ground. I respond to two of the issues.

1. Palmer challenges the holiness apologists for selectively reading Fox, yet he seems to do the same. He writes, "My own studies of how early Friends used the Bible strongly suggest just this. They took the Bible with utmost seriousness. But for them the Bible was not an external, propositional authority." (p. 35) I concur that they took the Bible with "utmost seriousness" but they also saw it as an "external, propositional authority." George Fox punctuated his writing with scriptural support. For an example of how scripture was used to exert external control look at what the Second-day Morning Meeting of Ministers wrote in the preface to Fox's epistles. Fox, they said, advised Friends "to keep to scripture language, terms, words, and doctrines, as taught by the Holy Ghost, in matters of faith, religion, controversy and conversation, and not to be imposed upon and drawn into unscriptural terms, invented by men in their human wisdom."

The culture of Fox's day assumed the authority of scripture. They argued over them, but the argument was about interpretation not authority. For Fox "Christ as teacher" called others to unity above interpretative debate. Today biblical authority is questioned by culture, making teaching about its authority more important.

2. I have never found this oft-mentioned belief that Fox thought everyone is a minister. He did believe everyone is involved in ministry. But someone who traveled in the ministry, a "Minister of Jesus Christ," was special. The minister's uniqueness is seen in the following:

- Fox functioned as an authority by teaching and persuading through writing and speaking.
- He instructed local meetings to include traveling ministers in their business meetings.
- He originally set up the yearly meeting to include a Meeting of Ministers to plan outreach and review the work of elders.

- Fox planned for the Second-day Morning Meeting of Ministers to assume the leadership role of the Friends movement.

Fox clearly saw no conflict in one being a minister of Jesus Christ and the idea that Christ came to teach his people. It seems to me that Reedwood Friends' vision would be closer to Fox if it was "A Christ-centered Quaker community in ministry" instead of "A Christ-centered Quaker community of ministers."