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## Comments on "Holiness and Christian Renewal"

Eugene L. Collins

Cecil E. Hinshaw

Dan Wilson

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## Comments

EUGENE L. COLLINS

It may be that Quakers can make a valuable contribution to Christian renewal simply because they have not developed a rigid or systematic articulation of the concept of holiness. Such flexibility could, however, lend itself to spiritual inertia, if Quaker theological pluralism made articulation of such a doctrine impossible. Holiness as an experience for the Christian believer has often been rendered ineffectual by attempts to define it as a strict chronological progression, thus denying the Holy Spirit the latitude obviously afforded Him in Scripture. The ambiguity of words has also created the impression in some hungry seekers that holiness is beyond their reach, resulting therefore in guilt complexes and defeat. Thus Arthur Roberts is correct in suggesting that unbiblical concepts such as "Christian perfection" or "second definite work of grace" should be eliminated.

But it must also be suggested that any concept of sanctification or holiness that centers on man rather than on the Spirit is likewise unbiblical and unrealistic. Such a humanistic approach reduces the regenerative-redemptive acts of God to a broad and indefinable synergism in which man seeks by demonstration of inherent capacity to develop holiness independently of God.

This has of course happened in Quakerism, a fact to which Arthur Roberts refers in differentiating between humanistic perfectionism and experiential perfectionism. This is further amplified by Lewis Benson (*Quaker Religious Thought*, Spring 1959, p. 13). He distinguishes "two main streams of religious thought and experience" in Quakerism. These are the "Hebrew-Prophetic-Personal" and the "Greek-Philosophical-Impersonal." I should like to point out that the former tends toward a Bible-centered, Christocentric theological concept in which clarity is

given to doctrines labeled as "Evangelical." The latter, by virtue of Hellenistic origin, is philosophical, tending toward a religious faith which is less concerned with "Evangelical" doctrines. While the one is theological, the other is speculative; the first is concerned to point up the depravity of man who needs a Savior, while the other postulates the inward goodness of man and expresses greater social concern. Holiness, however, only finds its meaning in contrast to the unholy. Salvation becomes meaningful only if there is something from which to be saved. The redemptive acts of God in Christ have meaning only in contrast to man's inability to redeem himself. Since a holy God requests holiness of his followers, since salvation comes in response to man's need for forgiveness, and since God would not require of Christ an act which man himself could perform, it follows that spiritual accomplishments originating outside the grace of God in Christ are inadequate and superfluous.

Holiness, it follows, comes not from within, but by exposing our inward selves to the power of the Holy Spirit, whose functions, as Arthur Roberts has pointed out, are multiple. Holiness is not the acquisition by faith of some "stuff" given as a package. If one studies I Cor. 1:30, he will see that sanctification is only one of Paul's metaphors for salvation. Hence, too great an emphasis on an act subsequent to regeneration imprisons the Holy Spirit in His acts, while making the redemptive work of Christ only a step toward the fulfillment of holiness. It should be emphasized that the freedom of the Holy Spirit to fill, to empower, is limited only by his own wishes. There are Christians who are living below the level of their calling (I Cor. 2 and 3) solely because they limit the Spirit of God by refusing to grow in the Christian life.

I am not very critical of Arthur Roberts' article because I find myself generally in agreement with his position.

But his article has stimulated me to pose five observations as a basis for interpreting holiness in Quakerism as a means to Christian renewal.

1. I would question whether there can be a cleansing experience of the Holy Spirit without a well-defined Christology.

The work of the Holy Spirit prior to the experience of regeneration would therefore be prevenient in nature.

2. Contrary to Arthur Roberts' view, I believe I Cor. 2 and 3 do have a real bearing upon our concept of holiness. By that I mean that the spiritual maturity of some of the Corinthians (I Cor. 3:1) placed them on the level of the carnal, a level which it appears was to Paul neither *psukikos* (natural) nor *pneumatikos* (spiritual). I think that this interpretation lends strength to Arthur Roberts' idea that "carnality stands essentially in self-will and not in some sort of substantive chunk." Some exegesis of Romans 12:1-2, especially verse 2, would be helpful here.

3. Any Christian renewal through holiness should further research what constitutes unholiness as opposed to unfaith. Here we must deal with the definition of sin both as principle and act. Sin, as "the conscious transgression of a known law of God," can also become facade behind which uncritical proponents of holiness can hide.

4. Romans 6 must be scrutinized and become a tool of holiness advocates to expose the relationship of holiness to justification. We must ask the question, "Is not sanctification implicit in verses 2, 6, 12, 14-16, and 22, and does this not also imply a participation of the will of the justified?"

5. I would further plead for a concept of holiness as a Christian attribute, one of the many ministries of the Holy Spirit upon and through the life of the believer. To me, Christian renewal *is* holiness.

CECIL E. HINSHAW

To one reared in a part of Quakerism dominated by the Wesleyan doctrine of "sanctification," or "perfection," or "the baptism of the Holy Spirit" as a second definite work of grace, chronologically and experientially separate from conversion or "justification," and to one, like myself, who also revolted against what was perceived often as sterility, if one spoke kindly, and as hypocrisy, if one spoke harshly, the reading of Arthur Roberts' paper has been a pleasing and stimulating experience.

There are certainly differences between his interpretation and my own, as a comparison with my Pendle Hill pamphlet, *Apology for Perfection*, will make clear, but the differences are less than I expected would be the case and some of them may be in part semantic, needing a more complete dialogue.

In part because I do not choose to put the emphasis upon Biblical terminology that Arthur Roberts does, and because I distrust attempts to use either Biblical language or concepts as absolutely normative, I cannot always be sure whether the differences in our views are perhaps subtle and not too important or are possibly fundamental. But on the whole, I rather think the common ground is considerable in content of thought, apart from the language differences. Perhaps I should add that my experience appears to be different from Arthur Roberts' as far as Biblical terminology being helpful in communicating accurately with other people, both Friends and non-Friends. So much emotion is built up for many people around personal interpretations of Biblical terms that I believe I can sometimes convey meaning more accurately by the use of other words and phrases. Nor do I believe that content *requires* Biblical phraseology. Rather, as one learns to convey thought in a totally different language (e.g., Finnish, which has not a single word in common with English) without any reliance on one's native tongue, so should the great truths of the Bible be capable of being expressed accurately and meaningfully in many different ways. For those who wish to receive the truths of faith in the vessels of Biblical terms, I do not object, however. I seek only the understanding that other words and phrases need not necessarily indicate a fundamentally different direction. And I might add that the history of the Christian Church is continuing evidence that extraordinarily bitter and unfortunate disagreements and misunderstandings may occur among those who seek to share completely the concepts and expressions of our Biblical heritage.

My first specific question to raise is why Arthur Roberts divides modern perfectionist groups of tendencies into "humanistic," and "experiential," though he does earlier qualify this division somewhat. Any genuine and significant approach,

harmonious with earlier Quakerism and with the early Church, must necessarily see that both adjectives are required to describe a robust and viable expression of ethical perfectibility. But I rather think this is one of the places where we might find ourselves in considerable agreement if we pursued the matter further.

Much attention is rightly paid in Arthur Roberts' paper to the nature of "sanctification" and its relation to "justification." Beyond doubt early Quakers saw no division between these two and insisted on a unitary process and experience. It might be gradual — they were only concerned really about *whether* it happened. *How* it happened, they appeared to believe, depended upon the individual — his background and his relationship to the working of the Spirit within him.

Perhaps the best and most considered comment I can make on this part of Arthur Roberts' paper is to quote from a doctoral thesis I wrote twenty-four years ago. This rather long quotation, written before Arthur Roberts did his basic study, bears directly upon this question of the nature of the "baptism of the Spirit" or "sanctification," and I quote it because it still represents the analysis I make of this crucial aspect of Quakerism:

The paradox of the Quaker position on perfectionism is that at times absolute dominion and victory is claimed in the most complete manner and at other times gradual development and growth by degrees is admitted. When Fox was charged with preaching a perfection that came gradually, he was ready to answer, "...the seed destroys death and him that hath the power of it, which is the devil; and where this is known the fulness is known which is *above degrees, that which degrees end in.*"<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, when he wrote to his followers, those who professed to be in the light and theoretically should have achieved perfection, he uses a different tone. Thus he finds it advisable to write to a Quarterly Meeting at York,

Now, dear friends, let there be no strife in all your meetings, nor vain janglings nor disputings;

but let all that tends to strife be ended out of your meetings...<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the two volumes (seven and eight) of the epistles to Friends Meetings, this curious intermingling of an assumption that they have achieved perfection, and a recognition that they are still striving toward it, is to be found.

Although Fox uses drastic terms to suggest that the tempter will be thoroughly destroyed in the person who comes to the light,<sup>3</sup> his usual tendency is to recognize that the tempter is always present — he cannot be put out so completely that he cannot come back. This does not mean that he recognizes the ever-present nature of temptation. So he writes to Friends at Kendal,

... and keep all that is bad, down and out with the light, which condemns all ungodliness; so keep all that out, which is for condemnation...<sup>4</sup>

Actually, Fox is never very clear on just what he expects to take place. His theory is absolutistic in its demand that there must come a time when the victory is complete; his words to his followers assume at all times that they must still guard against the wiles of the devil.

Penington is willing to speak in terms of an absolute victory,<sup>5</sup> but to a far greater extent than Fox he recognizes the necessity for a continued moral struggle against the tempter. Because it expresses this attitude of his, and also because it shows a beautiful spirit of humility, a letter which he wrote to George Fox from Aylesbury jail is worth quoting. It is significant that this was written ten years after he had joined the Quakers.

I feel the tender mercy of the Lord, and some portion of that brokenness, fear and humility which I have long waited for, and breathed after. ... I entreat thy prayers, in faith and assurance that the Lord hears thee, that I may be yet more broken, that I may be yet poorer and humbler before the Lord, and may walk in perfect humility and tenderness of spirit before him... Be helpful to me in tender love, that I may feel settlement and

stability in the truth; and perfect separation from, and dominion in the Lord over, all that is contrary thereto.<sup>6</sup>

The spirit here is one of aspiration for growth; yet Penington wrote elsewhere of being converted in a single day.<sup>7</sup> The only answer can be that to a greater extent than Fox he recognized that the beginning was only a beginning, and from there he was to go on to perfection.<sup>8</sup>

Penington recognized that the conquering of the flesh would be only by degrees<sup>9</sup> and that it would be a long struggle before victory could be achieved.<sup>10</sup> In the meantime we are to be "... daily weakened in that part which lived before."<sup>11</sup> This means that winning of perfection is a long travail<sup>12</sup> and that it can not be won without a process of growth being experienced. So Penington will say explicitly what Fox was probably never willing to say:

... a state of perfection doth not exclude degrees.<sup>13</sup>

Barclay agrees with this concept of a perfectionism that is gradually achieved, a perfection which still admits of growth.<sup>14</sup> He uses the examples of a growing child and of Jesus growing, even though he was pure, to buttress his argument.<sup>15</sup> In a beautiful passage Penington takes the concept of Christ as the seed and suggests that it grows more and more unto a perfect life.<sup>16</sup> Penn accepts perfectionism, but "... not in fulness of wisdom and glory..."<sup>17</sup> This is in harmony with the views of Barclay of a:

... perfection proportionable and answerable to man's measure, whereby we are kept from transgressing the law of God, and enabled to answer what he requires of us...<sup>18</sup>

This should suffice to indicate that, so far as I can interpret through our different phraseologies, I rather think we have moved in a much more common direction than most people might suppose. I believe I am aware of the dangers of a shallow and poorly-rooted goal of perfectibility, dangers that Arthur Roberts clearly sees. And I believe he is aware of the danger of talking overmuch about personal achievement of perfection, a road that all too easily leads to hypocrisy. Also, I think

Arthur Roberts sees the need for a robust encounter with a whole range of the most practical problems, especially in the area of social concerns such as war, racial problems, and economic injustice. I could wish that he had dealt with some of these applications of the "baptism of the Spirit," but I think further dialogue might well bring us close to each other on these questions. I am deeply convinced that grappling with tough human problems tempers mere sentimentality and drives the devotee to greater humility and deeper reliance on the indwelling spirit.

As the years have passed, I am far more concerned about a simple commitment of obedience to God, with a healthy realization of the essential limitations of the human spirit. I know of no way of avoiding tension between our ideals, as God gives us to see them, and our weakness as mortals. In fact, I think such tension is essential. But our glory, as children of God, remains our capacity to have our weakness transformed by Divine power into strength, our hate into love, our selfishness into self-giving. I stand in judgment over no one else. I only know this is our heritage, a gift that rests on our acceptance and obedience, not on our knowledge, theological or otherwise.

#### References

1. George Fox, *The Works of George Fox*. Philadelphia: Marcus T. C. Gould, 1831, 8 volumes; Vol. III, p. 447. Emphasis is mine.
2. *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, p. 229.
3. *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 429.
4. *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 29.
5. Isaac Penington, *The Works of Isaac Penington*, 4th Edition. Sherwoods, N. Y.: David Heston, 1861, 4 volumes; Vol. I, p. 529.
6. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 535.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 185 and 241.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, p. 471.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 392.
14. Robert Barclay, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity*. Philadelphia: Friends Book Store, 1908, p. 233.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 235.
16. Penington, Vol. IV, p. 392.
17. William Penn, *The Rise, Progress and Key of the People Called Quakers*. Philadelphia: Friends Book Store, no date; Book II, p. 11.
18. Barclay, pp. 234-235.

It is a joy to share so fully Arthur Roberts' faith in human regeneration through the power of the Holy Spirit. I am grateful for some background in Biblical theology that makes it possible to follow his paper. It is my experience that the repetition of Biblical theology, alone, in today's environment is not an adequate evangelizing medium. No medium has its meaning or existence alone, but only in constant interplay with all the other known, relevant media. Is not the Bible itself such an interaction? Any presentation or treatment of Biblical theology must of necessity be linear-logical — but the Bible itself is not! Herein lies what seems to me to be the frailty of theology. Fortunately, the message of Arthur Roberts' paper comes through the limitations of language, which for me are as great as those of other kinds of phraseology he warns against.

Some of us have found indispensable in today's world the contribution of "secular" philosophies and other religions to the reshaping and renewal of Christianity. No one faith ever stands in isolated purity from the other living faiths of mankind. Each is affected by the others. Some Zen Buddhist sects are experiencing renewal through their encounter with Quaker Christians. Gandhi's Hinduism was Christianized. Martin Buber's witness to "hallowing the everyday" and to "I and Thou" has inspired many a Christian to renewal of faith in holiness. The Quaker doctrine of perfection has more in common with many "non-sectarian" and non-Christian disciples of the Holy Spirit than it has with "the more strongly Calvinistic ranks of the [Christian] churches."

Enough of that. It is far more important to underline and amplify Arthur Roberts' good news about the implications of renewal by the Holy Spirit!

Why so little, in a paper on the Holy Spirit's action in our lives, about the direct and immediate, yes, unmediated experience of His presence? It is the Presence of the Holy Spirit so much more than rational argument that brings us back to Christ as norm, over and over again. It is the Presence

that judges and renews every thought and feeling. It is the Presence that initiates creative impulse and intuition; that corrects conscience and purifies longings; that makes one of flesh and spirit. It is the Presence that transforms the "evil urge" of self-centeredness into love. It is the Presence, as pure gift, not as some personal quality to be commanded. It is the Presence that opens us to the true freedom above the law in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It witnesses to the omnipresence of the Holy Spirit, more than articulate theology, that is, often unknowingly, sought even by inveterate rationalists... "spiritually hungry people who desire neither the refinement of ritual nor intricate mazes of theological double-speak." I am so grateful this paper walks the narrow ridge between the two. Some of the author's joy shows through the carefully presented "Biblical overview"!