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George Fox’s Teaching about Christ

LEWIS BENSON

The message that George Fox proclaimed was a revolutionary message, not only in the sense that it contained elements that were upsetting to some long-established Christian beliefs and practices, but in the more radical sense that the gospel he preached sprang from a revolutionary understanding of who Christ is and how he saves men. What he preached about Christ was new to his hearers. His hearers were mostly baptised Christians who were joined in profession of religion with other Christians, but when they were convinced by Fox’s preaching they came out of all other Christian traditions and fellowships and became gathered into a new community.

The truth that the First Publishers of Truth were publishing was concerned with Christ. The people who flocked to these early Quaker publishers were hearing something about Christ that they had not heard in their own churches. The Quakers became one of the most distinctive of all communities that call themselves Christian because at the heart of their original message was an understanding of Christ that was radically different from the orthodox teaching of the so-called “great churches.”

I. CHRIST THE PROPHET

Any attempt to summarize Fox’s teaching about Christ will include much concerning Christ the prophet. This is the part of his teaching that gives it its distinctive character, but it is only one part of his whole teaching about Christ.

Fox’s teaching about Christ can be divided into three parts, which could be called the A, B, and C of his Christology. In the first place, Fox affirmed that Christ is alive. This, by itself, is an affirmation with which most Christians would concur. But this Christ who is universally affirmed to be alive can also be believed to be “alive but absent.” To the orthodox Christians of his day Fox declared, “Some of you say, [Christ] is gone, and will be no more seen, till doomsday,” and he asked those who affirmed that Christ is the head of the church: “How then is he absent?”

The second part of Fox’s teaching about Christ was his affirmation that Christ is alive and present in the midst of his new covenant people in all his offices. Fox called this the rock and foundation on which everything else must be built. When he said, “The foundation is being laid again,” this was the foundation that he was talking about. He expressed his desire that all Friends might be “settled in Christ Jesus, who was dead and is alive again, and lives for evermore, a prophet, counsellor, priest, bishop and shepherd, a living rock and foundation for evermore, the beginning and ending, the first and last, the Amen.”

Fox’s Christology is a functional Christology.

In the third part of Fox’s teaching about Christ he dealt with the messianic offices of prophet, priest, and king. These three offices were erected by Calvin into the doctrine of the threefold office of Christ. The threefold office of Christ had been a part of church tradition for centuries, but Calvin was responsible for introducing it as a tenet of dogmatic theology. Fox recognized the special messianic character of these three offices, but he rejected the idea that there are only three offices. Although Calvin introduced the prophetic office of Christ into dogmatic theology, he made no theological use of it. For Calvin, Jesus’ messiahship was determined by his priestly and kingly offices. When Calvin thought of Jesus the Messiah he thought of a priestly and kingly figure, and in so doing he was conforming to the main tradition in the church from the second century onward. Unlike Calvin, Fox gave full theological weight to the office of Christ as prophet. When he thought of Jesus the Messiah and saviour, he was thinking of a figure who was as much a prophet as he was a priest and king. He was fully aware that in his teaching about “Christ the prophet” he was inaugurating a revolution in the way people understand
who Christ is and how he saves men. He knew that he was building on a very early apostolic tradition; and he knew his teaching about Christ would bring with it a need to challenge the accepted traditional meanings of salvation, saviour, gospel, belief, faith, new covenant, the righteousness of Christ, and the nature of the church of Christ.

Fox was the leader of a great revolution. He was not a reformer building on a foundation that was already laid. "As for the gospel foundation," he said, "it is to be laid again in all the world. Ye never were on it, since the man of sin set up his forms without power." To Princess Elizabeth of the Palatinate he wrote: "This work of the Lord is beginning again, as it was in the apostles' days.... For the Lord God and his Son Jesus Christ, is come to teach his people, and to bring them from all the world's ways, to Christ.... who is the spiritual and heavenly rock and foundation for all God's people to build upon." He said that the "gospel hath been lost.... for many generations. But that gospel again is to be preached." In 1555, when addressing a large assembly for three hours, he told them how "there had been a night of apostacy since the apostles' days; but that now the everlasting gospel was preached again.... and Christ was come to teach his people himself." Thirty years later in a memorable meeting at Gracechurch Street he declared, "Now this gospel is preached again; and all people now are to hear Christ the prophet, in this his gospel of the new covenant. For Moses said, 'Like unto me will God raise up a prophet....' so, said I, this prophet, Christ, is come, and all.... are to hear Christ in his gospel.... and new covenant."* Fox frequently used the phrase, "The everlasting gospel is now preached again" (italics mine).*

In many passages where he asserted that the gospel was now being preached again he added: "After the long night of apostacy." Fox's teaching about the "long night of apostacy" is one of the most conspicuous parts of his message. He believed that there had been an apostacy "since the apostles' days." In the years since Fox's death there seems to have been very little curiosity among the Quakers concerning Fox's claim that he was preaching the gospel "again" after 1600 years of "apostacy." But from Fox's viewpoint, if there had been no apostacy, there would have been no need to preach the gospel again. It will help us to understand the nature of this gospel that he was preaching "again" if we understand what he meant by the "apostacy since the apostles' days."

This "apostacy" resulted from the failure of the churches to preach Christ in a way that caused people to experience the full power of the gospel, and, as a result, much of what Christ came to bring men had been lost. These losses, said Fox, could not be recovered by any strategy of reformation; the gospel foundation must be laid again. So, he declared, "The Quakers are risen up in the night of apostacy and discover you all — what you are in, and what you went from, and what hath been lost since the days of the apostles."

Fox stated that there were two principal areas of loss resulting from the apostasy. First, he claimed that in apostasy the churches' doctrine of salvation gave Christ less power to save than God intended: "There is one faith.... which giveth victory over all that which hath separated man from God,.... this is the true church faith, which hath been apostatized and degenerated from, since the apostles' days, by the generality of Christendom." The prevailing belief in Fox's day was that faith in Christ brings salvation from the consequences of sin and relief from the oppressive guilt of sin. But this faith does not keep a man from sinning or give victory over sin during this life. This kind of faith Fox called a false faith, for, he said, "Where there is true faith there is victory." Of his Puritan opponents he said, "They deny the faith that giveth the victory and the belief that overcomes the world." and so, he said, "The true faith hath been lost since the apostles' days."

If the world-overcoming faith had been lost, it meant that somehow Christ's power to save had been separated from his power to make holy. Fox said, "Righteousness hath been lost," and "sanctification hath been lost," and "the sanctifying belief hath been lost since the apostles' days;... he that

*Quaker Religious Thought, Vol. 39 [1975], Art. 3

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believes, overcomes the world. And if there be no overcoming on this side of the grave, . . . then there is no true believing on this side of the grave. . . . So from this sanctifying belief you are all erred since the apostles' days.†8

The second great area of loss was that the true fellowship had been lost and "in the apostacy . . . the gospel order was lost amongst them, and the government of Christ, and his worship."†9

Fox maintained that the great churches had vastly underestimated the power of the living Christ to gather, order, and govern a community of disciples. He felt that, because the gospel had been lost, the gospel order had been lost. Fox preached that Christ is alive and present in the midst of God's people in all his offices, including the office of prophet. He believed that the preaching of this gospel would lead inevitably to the formation of an ordered community that belongs to this gospel.

Modern Quaker historians have been puzzled as to why Fox delayed his emphasis on "gospel order" until about ten years after the first great ingathering. Fox told us exactly why there was a need for this delay. He said God sent him forth "first to declare his everlasting Gospel, and then after people received the gospel, I was moved to go through the nation to advise them to set up . . . meetings . . . And this was the end, that all who had received Christ Jesus might . . . possess . . . his government . . . and so . . . being heirs of Christ they are heirs of his government . . . heirs of the order of the gospel . . . "†10 And so he labored that they "who had received the gospel . . . might come into the order of the gospel."*11

If the gospel order and fellowship had been lost, they could not be recovered again until the gospel, which had also been lost, was preached again.

Fox claimed to be preaching a gospel which had gone into eclipse "since the apostles' days." What was this gospel? How did this gospel restore the righteousness and the gospel order that had been lost in the night of apostasy? We cannot answer these questions unless we know what Fox was teaching about "Christ the prophet."

The gospel that Fox preached and which was received by many thousands was, in its briefest form: "Christ has come to teach his people himself." The word teach is the key word here. His hearers were familiar with the offices of Christ as priest and king and had been taught to think of his sacerdotal office in terms of his priestly act of sacrifice on the cross. But when Fox told them that Christ is also saviour as he is teacher and prophet, they were hearing something they had not heard before. Fox did not have a common gospel foundation with his Christian contemporaries. The gospel foundation that he was laying was not the same as the foundation on which the great structure of Christendom had been erected. Fox was preaching that Jesus is also saviour as he is revealer, and he was giving full weight to the importance of the knowledge of Christ as he is present in the midst of his people in all his offices. Fox's gospel preaching was not merely an addition to what was already held and believed by the churches. It was not an appendix to orthodox belief. His teaching about Christ the prophet comprehended much that is found in Christian orthodoxy, but it put everything in new perspective. He was, in fact, laying a new gospel foundation. When this is clearly perceived it becomes plain that Fox cannot be numbered among the great reformers of the church. The Quaker movement that he started was a revolutionary movement. He said, "The Quakers have revolted from you apostates."

Fox was fully cognizant that the gospel he was preaching about "Christ the prophet" was not original with him. He repeatedly asserted that it was preached in apostolic times. He was also aware that Calvin had made a place for Christ's prophetic office in his systematic theology. What made Fox's message about "Christ the prophet" so revolutionary is that he saw that, when full weight is given to the soteriological and messianic significance of the prophetic office of Christ, it calls for a radical revision of our whole understanding of who Christ is and how he saves men.

In the case of Calvin and his successors the messianic office of prophet was assigned to Christ without in any way altering...
the existing theological structure. Calvinistic theology did not need the office of Christ as prophet, and if it were totally removed the rest of the structure would remain intact. However, this was not the case with Fox. Fox's functional Christology, in which his teaching about Christ the prophet played so large a part, compelled him to build a whole new structure on this new foundation. As a result, Fox found himself in revolt against the Christianity of his day on almost every front.

The great new fact of Fox's revolutionary Christianity is that Christ is alive and present in the midst of his people in all his offices, including the office of prophet. Fox asserted that the recovery of the gospel that had been lost from the apostolic times would lead to the recovery of the righteousness and the Christ-governed community that had been lost "since the apostles' days." And so we must ask: How did the gospel message, "Christ has come to teach his people himself," bring about the restoration of what had been lost?

To begin with, we must note that the proclamation that "Christ has come to teach his people himself" is a kind of symbol or abridgment for a gospel that was many times spelled out at length and amplified. Fox's sermon on Firbank Fell is a good example of the amplified version of the gospel he preached. In the two versions of this three-hour sermon that we have from Fox's hand, the central core of the sermon is the teaching about the offices of Christ (his functional Christology), which is the "rock and foundation" of his whole teaching. The new covenant people of God emerges in history as a unique God-given community because Christ is present in the midst of his people in all his offices and because Christ bestows on all his disciples a wide variety of ministries. The church which is in God, of which Christ is the head, and which is ordered by the order that belongs to the gospel, is not a man-made religious institution. Fox's aim, after preaching the gospel "again," was to seek to realize the community that belongs to this gospel. His public mission was twofold: first he preached the gospel; then he labored to advise those who had received this gospel to be gathered into the order of the gospel. These two activities filled his whole life from the time that the Lord called him and sent him forth into the world until his death.

The nature of Fox's message demanded that he present it in the form of a challenge to the churches of his day. He was calling men from man-made ecclesiastical structures to the church in God that Christ orders and governs by being present in all his offices.

Fox's mission demanded that he also challenge the churches on the ground that their faith did not generate moral power and did not lead men to the righteousness that is a fruit of true faith. He claimed that the gospel he preached led to the true faith that was productive of true righteousness. His early vision of a great people to be gathered was a vision of a people in white raiment. This white raiment signifies the righteousness that comes from Christ. He declared that those who profess faith in Christ must wear the badge and livery of Christ, which is the righteousness of Christ. He claimed that his gospel would lead men to know Christ as the giver of righteousness. This claim has substance only as we see it in relation to his preaching concerning the office of Christ as prophet.

The great churches held that Christ is saviour as he is priest and king. Salvation by Christ was understood as primarily something that Christ does in his office as priest. In the gospel that Fox preached the prophetic office of Christ plays a part in his saviourhood which is not subordinate to his priestly and kingly offices. The general proclamation, "Christ has come to teach his people himself," contains a message about Christ the prophet like Moses, who is to be heard and obeyed in all things. This is the gospel that had been "lost" since the apostles' days and which was now being preached again.

This message, which Fox's critics called his "new gospel," makes it possible to know Christ as saviour in the context of the call of God for obedience in righteousness. It brings Christ the saviour into a positive relationship with God's call for righteousness in the Old Testament through Moses and the prophets.

The people who first received this revolutionary gospel came to know Christ in a different way from the professing
Christians of their day. Hostile critics claimed that the object of the Quakers' faith was "the Quakers' new Christ."23 Fox's gospel was the starting point for a revolutionary conception of Christianity. At no point was his teaching more revolutionary than in his doctrine of salvation and in his doctrine of the new covenant. At least from the fifth century onward the church had been teaching a doctrine of "justification by grace" and representing the new covenant as a "covenant of grace." The doctrine of "justification by grace" defined the human problem as: How can a person be found innocent before the bar of God's final judgment? Fox defined the human problem as: How can a person know and do the will of God in this life? He preached Christ as the teacher and prophet who saves us from captivity to sin and not as a saviour who saves us while we remain under the power of sin. He called Christ the "teacher that bringeth salvation."

In its conception of how Christ saves men Fox's gospel message was in sharp conflict with the teaching of Calvinistic Puritanism. Most of his controversy with the Christians of Puritan England was on this point. It is because Fox proclaimed that Christ is saviour as he is revealer, that he interpreted salvation by Christ in a way that was radically different from the churches of the Reformation.

The term most frequently used by Fox for the new covenant was "covenant of light." When he used the term "covenant of grace," as he sometimes did, it meant for him a covenant relationship to God that includes hearing and obeying God by hearing and obeying him whom God sent. In the history and tradition of Israel God did not "send" priests and kings, but he did "send" prophets. Jesus is the prophet like Moses, whom God "sent," who is to be heard and obeyed in all things.

Christ the light is the new covenant of light, and they who hear Christ the light and obey him and walk in the light become the children of the light and children of the new covenant.

In Fox's preaching about "Christ the prophet" he identified himself and the Quaker movement with the Hebrew prophetic tradition, and he regarded his opponents as standing in the priestly tradition. In taking this position he was following closely the witness of Peter and Stephen, who were the only New Testament figures who explicitly named Jesus as the prophet like Moses who was foretold in Deuteronomy. Peter and Stephen were saying that the same anti-prophetic forces which persecuted the prophets were responsible for Jesus' death. Both Peter and Stephen asserted that the eschatological prophet "like Moses" and the suffering servant of Deutero-Isaiah were one and the same.24 For Fox, Jesus' death on the cross was not just the death of a prophet, but the death of the prophet of the end-time who was sent to end the succession of prophets and to be the living head of God's people in the new covenant. Fox's mission was to restore prophecy to the central place in the life of the church, and he saw that this would involve a head-on clash with the priestly establishment. He said, "The chief priests and elders... now persecute them that believe in the word,... which the prophets shewed the coming of, and the apostles were witnesses of;... and now do not the chief priests incense the multitude against them that witness Christ the word?"25 At Firbank Fell he declared, "The teachers and priests now are found in the steps... of the false prophets, chief priests, scribes and Pharisees, such as both the prophets, Christ, and his apostles cried against."26

Fox maintained that prophecy and cross-bearing were no longer to be found in the empirical church, and he argued that "here began the apostacy;... when they... apostatized from the true cross, the power of God."27

Fox said the symbol of the cross had become a "lying sign"28 and no longer reminded Christians of the power by which the saints become crucified to the world.29 He confronted his orthodox contemporaries with the challenge: "If Christ died for you, then why do you not put... on Christ and live to him and own him to be your teacher and your prophet, shepherd and bishop and priest to open to you, to feed and oversee you, and you to live to Christ and not to yourselves?"30

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II. The Decline of Revolutionary Quakerism

The first wave of Quaker missionaries believed that the Quaker community had been raised up by God to preach a revolutionary gospel and to end the long night of apostasy. The "great people" that had come into existence through the preaching of this revolutionary gospel was evidence to them that a new day had dawned in Christian history. They called themselves "the children of the light and children of the day of Christ."

As I read Quaker history, I am convinced that with the birth of the Quaker movement a new day did dawn; but there is no escaping the historical fact that this dawn did not prove to be the herald of a new era in Christian history, as the first Quakers expected that it would. We know that the Quaker movement was beginning to cool off before the end of the seventeenth century, and we know that it has never again appeared as a revolutionary movement. It can be argued that there are many reasons for the rather abrupt disappearance of the revolutionary spirit among the Quakers. Sociologists and religious sociologists can supply some of them.

I wish to maintain that there was one principal reason for the abrupt shift of emphasis that neutralized the revolutionary character of the Quaker cause and Quaker mission, and that this reason overshadowed all the others. This reason needs to be seen in relation to the changing internal situation in the Quaker community in the late seventeenth century. The extraordinary success of the original mission had produced a large and widely scattered body of people calling themselves Quakers. The leadership of the second period of Quakerism was very largely concerned with the problem of consolidating the gains already made and strengthening the internal life of the fellowship. By this time one Englishman in every hundred was a Quaker. These Quakers were all practicing a form of Christian worship that had scarcely any connection with the worship traditions of British Christianity. The Quakers were gathered into a church order and discipline the like of which had never been seen in England, and they were being constantly challenged to give an explanation for all this singularity.

The apologetic literature that was produced to meet this need was therefore more of an explanation and vindication of the empirical Quaker community than it was a reasoned defense of the revolutionary gospel that was the cause of the first great ingathering. By the time the apologetic Quaker era had come to a close, the original Quaker gospel about Jesus Christ and how he saves men had been lost. It has never been recovered.

In early Quaker apologetics everything proceeded from one central principle, and that principle was "the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world." This was in tune with Fox's teaching and with the earliest Quaker preaching. But in the writings of the apologists the Quaker understanding of "the light" became increasingly separated from Fox's teaching about Christ the prophet. Fox was careful to make clear that the light to which he bore witness was experienced as the sound of a voice which is the voice of Christ the great prophet and teacher. Fox said, "Christ the prophet is to be heard in all things by his children, who enlightens every one that cometh into the world; that in the light they might see him, and hear him," and he spoke of "the prophet that Moses saw, that the people should hear, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." Margaret Fell said, "The Prophet, Christ Jesus, him by whom the World was made, who lighteth every Man that cometh into the World, ... saith Learn of me.... And he that heareth not this Prophet, he heareth not the Light, which he is lighted withal, that cometh from the Prophet." These seventeenth-century Quaker apologists were the first of a long succession who regarded the "Inner Light" as the central distinguishing principle of the Quakers. This Quaker doctrine of the "Inner Light" seemed to be always evolving into a theory of religion which was increasingly remote from the Christian revelation and the witness of the Bible. Soon after Fox's death there was a total cessation of the preaching that "Christ has come to teach his people himself." Fox's whole functional Christology went into eclipse. From the beginning of the eighteenth century onward we hear nothing more about...
Christ the prophet. The Quakers began to think of their whole faith and practice as having one center and one starting point — the doctrine of the “Inner Light.” This doctrine was not thought of as a gospel that was being preached again after a long night of apostasy since the apostles’ days, but was rather thought of as “our central principle” — an essentially sectarian concept. The Quakers became a sect and lost all consciousness of universal mission to preach a revolutionary gospel.

This trend toward “Inner Light Quakerism” has manifested itself in different forms, some more extreme than others. I am convinced that the beginnings of this trend are to be found in the apologetic Quaker writings of the seventeenth century. Already in the seventeenth century this trend was greeted with disapproval in some quarters. George Keith was the first to sound the alarm. He asserted that, especially in America, the Inner Light and not Christ had become the center of the Quakers’ faith. Keith had accompanied Fox on missionary journeys, and he knew the gospel that Fox had been preaching, but he made no attempt to bring Friends back to Fox’s revolutionary teaching about Christ. Instead, he panicked and backed slid into an orthodoxy that was akin to that of his earlier years before he became a Quaker.

Keith’s crusade was the first of many crusades to bring the Quakers and Quakerism back to a Christian foundation. All of these crusades have one thing in common with Keith’s: they are more concerned to bring Quakerism into line with mainstream orthodoxy than they are concerned to revive Fox’s revolutionary teaching about who Jesus Christ is and how he saves men. The result is that, in their conception of gospel preaching, their worship, and their church polity, the Christ-centered Quakers have tended to conform to patterns of evangelical orthodoxy. They have not been the bearers of Fox’s revolutionary and challenging message about Christ. The Christ-centered Quakerism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries owed very little to Fox, and this remains true of the Christ-centered Quakerism of our own day.

The Quaker revolution will not be revived unless there are people who are convinced that the gospel foundation must be laid again and that the revolutionary gospel must be preached again.

Those who take up again the revolutionary task that was begun by the first Quakers will have to learn to fulfill this task in a world that has vastly changed since Fox’s day. But some things have not changed. The churches have not learned anything new about who Christ is and how he saves men. The gospel of power has not been recovered; the righteousness of Christ has not been recovered; the gospel order and government of Christ have not been recovered and restored; the churches have not become churches of the cross.

The churches are still preaching a Christ who has less power to save than God intended. The gospel, which is the power of God, is still “lost,” but the big difference now is that there are so many people outside the official church bodies who are in search of a gospel of power. The saving word that needs to be spoken now is not forthcoming either from the great churches or from the Quakers.

Fox’s teaching about Christ the prophet is part of his whole teaching about Christ, and his revolutionary teaching about Christ is the cornerstone and foundation of all the rest of his teaching. The recovery of this teaching will surely mark the reapparance of the Quaker revolution that went into eclipse nearly three centuries ago.

III. BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF FOX’S TEACHING

In the New Testament there is a substratum of early tradition concerning Jesus, which goes back to the time when Peter and James were the principal leaders of the Christian community. In this early view Jesus was seen as the prophet of the end-time, who would redeem Israel and fulfill the words of Deuteronomy 18:15 (KJV): “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; and unto him ye shall hearken.” This primitive tradition soon became submerged but it came to the surface in various parts of the New Testament.

In recent years biblical scholarship has been making an extensive study of this strand of tradition in the New Testa-
We now know more about this early view of Christ than any generation since the second century, but this knowledge has not resulted in any revision of the churches' thinking about Christ. Through the centuries the church has made almost no use of this tradition in its witness for Christ.

It is this neglected and all but forgotten witness for Christ in the New Testament to which Fox turned in his quest for a gospel of power. He saw that, if this element of the apostolic witness could be recovered, it would restore the moral power and fellowship-forming power that was lacking in the churches that he knew.

I will attempt here to review some parts of the New Testament that influenced Fox's teaching about Christ, beginning with the Acts of the Apostles.

In the first part of Acts Luke was dealing with an early Palestinian view of Christ. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the speeches that he put into the mouth of Peter. In Acts 3:22 Peter identified Jesus as the fulfiller of the words in Deut. 18 foretelling the coming of a prophet like Moses who was to be heard and obeyed in all things. From this account we learn that Peter attached messianic significance to Deut. 18. It is a notable fact that the church has not followed Peter in this respect.

Fox took this Petrine teaching concerning the messianic office of Christ as "a prophet like Moses" with complete seriousness. It is the basis of what is most distinctive in his teaching about Christ. It is the foundation for his gospel preaching: "Christ has come to teach his people himself." It is important to note here that these speeches of Peter's contain not only a witness to Christ as the expected Mosaic prophet but also a witness that tells us this Mosaic prophet and the messianic "servant" of Deutero-Isaiah belong together and are to be understood as both fulfilled in Jesus. Cullmann suggests that, for Peter, "servant" was a title for Jesus comparable to the title "Christ." This connection between the suffering servant of Deutero-Isaiah and the prophet like Moses in Deuteronomy was duly noted by Fox and Margaret Fell, as can be seen in the following passages:

"God doth draw people from their unrighteousness and unholiness, to Christ, the righteous and holy One, the great Prophet in his New Covenant, ... whom Moses in the Old Covenant ... said, God would raise up, like unto him, and whom people should 'hear in all things.'" And Margaret Fell said: "Moses ... writ of Christ, and said, A Prophet would the Lord raise like unto me, who spake to God face to face, and the Prophets prophesied of Christ, of the coming of the Just One, and of his Sufferings, how he should be led as a Sheep to the Slaughter, and how he should be as a Lamb dumb before his Shearers." Fox and Margaret Fell were strongly influenced by the speeches of Peter and Stephen; this is one reason why they understood the suffering servant mainly as a prophetic figure like Moses. In this they were not following the church tradition which saw Jesus the suffering servant as a priestly figure or a priestly and kingly figure.

The speeches of Peter and Stephen are the principal sources of Fox's teaching that Jesus, who combines the role of eschatological prophet and suffering servant, is accessible to us while he occupies his exalted position on the right hand of God. The risen Christ, said Fox, "remains in heaven at the right hand of God until the restitution of all things; ... if you believe in the light you come to receive him that all the prophets, Moses, and Gabriel spoke of, who is the Prophet that is to be heard." And this is the prophet like unto Moses, that God hath raised up, whom we do hear and see, as Stephen did, and have seen the heavens open, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.

The Epistle to the Hebrews is generally regarded as that part of the New Testament that exalted the office of Christ as high priest. However in Hebrews Fox found a great deal that helped him in his understanding of Christ as prophet. The opening chapter of Hebrews announced that God who formerly spoke to the fathers by the prophets is now speaking through his son. Fox saw the "son" of Heb. 1:2 as a prophetic figure, as can be seen from the following passages:

"Who hath any thing to say against our ... Prophet, whom God hath raised up that we may hear, and whom we must
hear in all things?... Man commands, and would force us to hear the hirelings, who plead for sin and the body of death to the grave;... and we resolve to hear the Son, and in hearing the Son we hear the Father also.... For the author to the Hebrews says, 'God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.' For Fox, the son in Heb. 1:2 is "the Prophet whom God raised up... whom we must hear in all things." Again and again he made a positive identification between the son and the prophet, e.g.: "God now speaks to his people by his son; and all are to hear him, the great prophet."" Come to Christ God's righteousness, and hear the Son, the prophet Moses spoke of, that: God should raise up."" Saith God, this is my beloved Son, hear ye him, him that Moses said God would raise up,.... who heareth this voice... hears the Son; in these last days God hath spoken to us by his Son, who is heir of all things."" The Lord saith, 'This is my beloved Son, hear ye him;' this is the prophet which Moses saith, 'Like unto him that God would raise up, whom the people should hear, whom we do hear... God spake to the fathers by the prophets, but now in these last days hath spoken to us by his Son, which is the heir of all things."" God caused the prophets to speak to the fathers, calling them to righteousness; and the son who now speaks to us, as one whom God has anointed with the oil of gladness, is one who hates iniquity and loves righteousness." The righteousness that God called for in the Old Testament through the prophets is now accessible to us through the son. "Now is the day of [God's] Son," said Fox, "whose sceptre is gone forth, and righteousness shall shine throughout the world."" "The son" in Heb. 1:2 is a speaker, and Fox never lets us forget that he is a speaker who is to be heard. He frequently linked Heb. 1:2 to Heb. 12:25 (KJV): "See that you refuse not him that speaketh"; and he identified "him that speaketh from heaven" with the living Christ who speaks to his people in the new covenant. "God," he said, "hath spoken to us by his son," as in Heb. 1:1;... and doth he not now speak from heaven?"... "And therefore hear the Son of God in the new covenant, and ye shall live.... Hear him that speaks from heaven." In chapter three of Hebrews we find the admonition, "Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Fox identified this "voice" with the prophet who is the son, as can be seen in the following passage: "The Holy Ghost saith 'to-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.' Heb. iii. But you may see whose voice we must hear, the voice of Christ, the voice of this prophet, whom God hath raised up;... Christ the Son of God,... and they that do not hear his voice, harden their hearts." The story of the transfiguration in the synoptic gospels is a third major source of Fox's prophet Christology. Here the "voice from the cloud" seemed to be quoting Deut. 18, and both the author of this prophecy and the first apostle to apply it to Christ were reported to be present on this strange occasion. The following passages show how Fox linked the transfiguration story to the speeches of Peter in Acts and the testimony of the author of Hebrews: "The Lord saith, 'This is my beloved Son, hear ye him;' this is the prophet [of] which Moses saith, 'Like unto him that God would raise up, whom the people should hear, whom we do hear, that speaks from heaven....' God spake to the fathers by the prophets, but now in these last days hath spoken to us by his Son, which is the heir of all things."" And the prophet saith, 'like unto me will God raise up a prophet, him shall you hear in all things;' so here you are all invited to hear the Son;... and when the Son of God was come, and God had sent him into the world, he said,... 'this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him.'" "Christ,... the prophet that Moses saw, that the people should hear, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.... Doth not God say this is my beloved Son, hear you him in all things?" The parable of the wicked husbandmen with its Afterpiece concerning the cornerstone, quoted from Psalm 118, was understood by Fox to direct attention to Christ the prophet. As
G. H. Dodd has pointed out, the appearance of the “beloved son” and “heir” in this parable is “the climax of a historic series of prophetic appeals.”18 Fox saw the “beloved son” and “heir” as a prophetic figure. He called Jesus “the Top and Cornerstone who is to be heard in all things,”4 and of the wicked husbandmen he said that they “neither knew the Father, nor the prophet that he had raised up, which Moses spoke of.”5 Among those who heard this parable were scribes, Pharisees, and chief priests, and they rightly perceived that the parable was spoken against them. They sought to lay violent hands on Jesus but were afraid to do so because the multitude regarded Jesus as a prophet. Margaret Fell wrote to rejecters of this cornerstone: “Ye are in their steps, who killed the Prophets, who beat the Servant, and would also kill the Heir.”6 “Christ... is the Corner-Stone, and... the great Prophet that everyone must hear;... this is my beloved Son, hear ye him, saith the Lord.”7

The “heir” of Heb. 1:2 and the “beloved son” of the transfiguration story are speakers who must be heard. In sending this “son” and “heir” God has now climaxd a long series of prophetic encounters in a way that produces a crisis situation for the husbandmen of God’s vineyard. The leaders of Israel have, all along, rejected the prophets and their message. If they now refuse to receive the Son, who is the cornerstone, the vineyard will be taken from them.

Fox and Margaret Fell maintained that this stone which the builders of Israel had “set at nought” had also been “set at nought” by the builders of the New Israel. “And here,” said Margaret Fell, “do all the Builders... of this Age stumble, who know not the Light... they disallow, and set at nought the Corner Stone, Christ Jesus the Light... For Moses said... A Prophet shall the Lord raise up unto you... And now is this Prophet risen,... and he is teaching his People, by his Light.”8 “This is the sure Teacher that layeth a true Foundation, on which Prophets and Apostles are built, the Cornerstone, which all the wise Builders have disallowed and set at nought, which is now become the Head of our Corner.”9

The story of the Samaritan woman in the Fourth Gospel is the only place where Jesus called himself the Messiah unequivocally. It is surely significant that he chose to make this declaration to a Samaritan, for the Samaritans had no scriptures but their version of the Pentateuch and no expectation of a “coming one” but the prophet who is referred to in Deut. 18. Most scholars think it is doubtful that the Samaritan woman used the words “Christ” or “Messiah,” since their scriptures do not contain these words. The Samaritans were not looking for a Messiah in the sense that the Jews were. The only versions of the Samaritan Pentateuch known to us incorporate the words about the coming “prophet like Moses” into the decalogue itself. They expected a Moses-like figure who would “tell them all things.” The Jerome Commentary suggests that this woman, who had already recognized Jesus as a prophet, began to surmise that he might be the prophet of Deut. 18.9 So she put the question to him. His answer sent her back to her people, to whom she said, “Come and see a man who told me all that ever I did. Can this be the Christ?” If the word “Christ” was used in this question, it seems to have been used in a Samaritan sense, i.e., as a “Messiah” who is a prophetic figure.

In his brief summary account of the Quaker campaign to enter every “steepelhouse” in England and confront priest and people with the Quaker message, Fox drew heavily on the language that we find in Jesus’ conversation with the woman at the well. He said there were “few in England but friends were moved to go to them... to tell them where their true teacher was, and a great people there was convinced, and brought to their teacher and out of the false worships to worship God in the Spirit and Truth;... and came to own the light of Christ Jesus... which let them see all the evil deeds they had done;... and that was the light which Christ had enlightened them withal which is Christ the great Prophet, which tells every one all that ever they have done.”10

Fox’s teaching about Christ, the prophet, is closely related...
to his understanding of the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel. He
taught that Christ the great prophet is the word and the light.
In coming to this part of Fox's teaching we are entering
the area around which most Christian controversy has centered.
It has been asserted that "in a certain sense it may be said that
the entire history of the Christ dogma is the history of this
Biblical pronouncement: The Word became flesh."65
I have not found the word "incarnation" anywhere in Fox's
writings, but he had a lot to say about the word that became
flesh, and what he had to say is very closely related to his
teaching about Christ, the great prophet.
The Prologue tells us that the life that is in the primal
creative word is "the light of men." In turning people from
darkness to light Fox believed he was turning them to the
word by which all things were made and created. The dark-
ness that we are to turn from is an "acquired" darkness.
"Darkness," Fox said, "came into man by transgression."65 He
repeatedly stated that the light was before darkness.66 The
cure for the misery of disobedient and darkened man is to
turn again and hear and obey the word of the creator. Salva-
tion, the turning from darkness to light, comes by hearing and
obeying that word.
For Fox, the word that became flesh is the same word that
came to Abraham; he said, "This was the word that made
all the prophets to prophesy,"67 and "By the word did the
prophets speak forth divine things."68 This was the word that
was a lamp to David's feet, "for by this word he saw Christ,
and called him Lord."69 He mentioned the prophets by name
and said that it was this word of God by which they were all
made prophets. Of Moses he said, "This was the word that
made Moses a prophet, who prophesied of Christ, and said,
'like unto him God would raise up a prophet, him should
they hear in all things.' Mark! In all things; we are to be
ordered both inward and outward, through hearing Christ, by
whom all things were made."70 Finally, he declared, "This
was the word by which John the evangelist saw Christ, who
cloth enlighten every man that cometh into the world, and saw
how he became flesh."71 This word "which all the prophets
spoke from;... this is the word that became flesh and dwelt
among us,... the substance of all figures types and shadows."72
Fox made a positive identification between Christ "the
prophet that Moses saw" and the word that became flesh.
"Him that Moses said God would raise up," he said, "this is
the word";73 and, "Again, here you may see where the word is
that Moses declared who wrote of Christ, who said, 'Like unto
me will God raise up a prophet, him shall you hear'; which
prophet is the word."74
Margaret Fell wrote to the Jews: "Now is the Prophet
speaking unto you in the Spirit, which is Light.... And now,
if ye will hear, and believe in this Prophet, this is the Word
which Moses said, was nigh, in the Heart.... The Word (and
the Prophet) is very nigh, in thy Heart, that thou may'st hear
it, and do it. Here thou must find the Prophet that the Lord
promised unto Moses,... if ever thou find him.... And to
this Word and Prophet must all the ends of the Earth look,
that are saved."75
Fox claimed that in the message the Quakers were preach-
ing the true prophetic understanding of John's Prologue was
being restored. He said, "The falling away from the word of
God was before the apostles' decease, and the world is since
gone after... them that are fallen away.... But now are
people coming to the light, and so to the word Christ Jesus,
him by whom the world was made; from you apostates, to
the word and the apostles, are we come."76
After 1678 Fox often repeated the phrase, "the light, which
is the life in Christ the word, by whom all things were made
and created."77 By his frequent use of this phrase he is telling
us that the light to which he is turning people is the light of
John's Prologue, which comes from the word of the creator.
He said, "The light... comes from the word."78 In his Short
Journal he said, "I believed them that the light that John spoke
of was spiritual and not created; for it was the word and the
word was God."79
IV. CONCLUSION

In what has been set forth here I have tried to show that Fox’s teaching about Christ was not appropriated from his religious environment but was a fresh and distinctive view of Christ, which he proclaimed in the form of a challenge to the teaching of the churches. In the third section I have indicated some of the principal scriptural sources from whose doctrine of Christ was drawn. He believed that he had recovered important parts of the New Testament witness that had been neglected or ignored by the churches. If we are to recover this long-lost teaching of Fox today, it is most important for us to see, as Fox did, that his teaching about Christ is not an appendix to the orthodox teaching of the churches that merely increases our knowledge of Christ by a process of simple addition. Fox’s fresh insights brought him to a greatly expanded view of Christ’s power to lead men to a new-founded righteous-ness and a new-founded community. The recovery and re-proclamation of the gospel that he preached will surely have revolutionary consequences for those who have ears to hear it and the grace to receive it.

References

3. Ibid., VIII, 153.
4. They are all traditionally associated with an initial capital.
5. John Frederick Jansen says, “Calvin... does not make of teaching a separate messianic work alongside of the two-fold work of redemption.” Calvin’s Doctrine of the Work of Christ (London: James Clarke & Co., 1876), p. 146.
8. Works (1831), VIII, 566.
10. Ibid., II, 364.
11. I have noted 12 instances where he used this phrase.
12. That is, reveal or expose.
15. Ibid., VII, 297.
16. Headley Misc., p. 13, Cat. No. 8, 56F.
17. Works (1831), VII, 522.
18. Ibid., VII, 527-528. Additional reference: “The righteousness within and sanctification within have been lost since the days of the apostles in the apostasy.” Ibid., III, 292. “All you professors... that say, there is no victory here, while you are on this side of the grave; you may as well say, there is no faith here on this side the grave.” Henry J. Cadbury, ed., Annual Catalogue of George Fox’s Papers (Philadelphia: Friends Book Store; London: Friends Book Centre, 1939), p. 52, Cat. No. 505. Hereinafter referred to as Annual Catalogue (1939).
19. Works (1831), VIII, 60.
20. Richardson Misc., transcript transcript, p. 58.
23. Ibid., V, 191, 200, 201, 202, 268, 269.
24. Ibid., VII, 237.
25. Gerhard von Rad points out the strong possibility that the suffering servant is to be understood as a prophetic figure and especially in connection with the prophecy of Deut. 18, The Message of the Prophet’s Transliteration: D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 227, 228.
Benson: George Fox's Teaching about Christ


57. Works (1831), IV, 51.

58. Fell, Works, p. 127.

59. Ibid., p. 516.

60. Ibid., p. 518.

61. Ibid., pp. 176-177.

62. Ibid., pp. 258-259.


64. [George Fox, The Short Journal and Bibliary Journals of George Fox, ed. Norman Penney (Cambridge: At the University Press, Philadelphia: Friends Book Store, 1930), p. 31, spelling modernized; see also Works (1831), IV, 218: "Feel your teacher that tells you all that even you have done."


68. Works (1831), VII, 396-397.

69. Ibid., VIII, 288.

70. Ibid., VIII, 286.

71. Ibid., VIII, 289.

72. Ibid., VIII, 289.


74. Works (1831), IV, 149.

75. Ibid., IV, 92.

76. Fell, Works, pp. 175-176.

77. Works (1831), III, 123.

78. Ibid., V, 599-604; VI, 14, 211, 220, 311, 512, 576, 102; VIII, 197, 210; Ms. bound with Annual Cat. (London), p. 171, Cat. No. 15, 30G.

79. Works (1831), VII, 135; also IV, 201.

80. p. 55, spelling modernized.