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articles underwent the fire of criticism at the time of its reading and by the editor, and since each was rewritten in view of these comments it does contain in its present form the benefits of group thinking.

The serious reader will find in these papers much wisdom and much to ponder upon. Everyone knows that the past cannot be taken over wholesale and made into the present—for better or worse we are persons of the latter half of the twentieth century, not of the seventeenth and even less of the first. On the other hand, we have arisen from the past and our foundations are laid in it. How, then, are we to draw from it its deepest meanings and values and allow it to speak its message? These questions are of great interest to us all; to them the authors have directed their best thought.

J. C. K.

Quakerism and the Historical Interpretation of Religion

CHRIS DOWNING

When all my hopes . . . in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could I tell what to do, then, oh, then, I heard a voice which said, "There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition," and when I heard it, my heart did leap for joy.

Then the Lord let me see why there was none upon the earth that could speak to my condition, namely, that I might give Him all the glory . . . Thus when God doth work, who shall hinder it? and this I knew experimentally.

And this I knew experimentally—that there is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition. What Fox brings together here suggests to me that he, too, contended with the very issue that confronts us: the relation between the historical and the spiritual elements of faith. Faith for him is certainly not a simple matter of an objective knowledge of fact and yet it is clearly faith in the God who speaks to man, who reveals himself in history, in Jesus Christ; it is not faith in man's own capacity for an historically unmediated relation with God. The bifurcation in American Quakerism (at its worst) marks a tearing asunder of what is here so naturally brought together—the Christ of history and the Light within—a disruption leading to an external objectivity or a self-confident subjectivity. Each makes faith too easy and too weak to grapple seriously with life as it confronts us in our so-called post-modern world.

QUAKERISM AND ITS RELATION TO ITS OWN HISTORY

Nor can we simply return to Fox's answer, though we do need to return to an understanding of it. We cannot put it as he did; for, though (as Rudolf Bultmann points out) our relation to revelation is always the same, our way of talking and thinking about it does change. What we look at may be the
same, but the historical standpoint from which we look is inevitably a changing one.

Our problem, the question of the relation of history to the present moment, is not exclusively a Quaker one, for outside Quakerism there are attempts to wrestle with it which we as Quakers should take into account, as I shall try to do in this paper. It is not a problem imposed on Quakerism from the outside but one that we live with and face, within Quakerism and within ourselves. I could not write of it—conscious as I am of my lack of knowledge of Quaker history and of my inability to provide a finally satisfying answer (much less the Quaker answer), and, more importantly, of a more basic kind of failing to live where the answer is to be found—were it not that I know the question, have lived with it, have had to stand with different answers, have had to learn again and again that the relation is not a logical one, that (as Cardinal Newman said) it is not to be solved by a syllogism. I am grateful to Quakerism because, even when it rises above its potherb and its dishwater tendencies, it still recognizes that there are no shortcuts, that each must find his own way.

So I do not know whether I write more as a spokesman for Quakerism or as a witness to it of what I think it neglects or ignores (to its own peril or only to my dissatisfaction?) not only in its own history but in a larger historical context as well. For I believe in the relevance of this larger context, believe that what we as Quakers have to say now and what we had to say in the past is part of a dialogue with the witness of other elements in the Christian church and also, but somehow secondly, with those outside that church. If to be an American means to think of the Pilgrim Fathers as our fathers, then to be a Quaker would mean to think of Fox and Penington and Penn and Woolman and a host of others as our fathers; including, I would submit, Rufus Jones. For we cannot understand who we are unless we understand ourselves in relation to all of our past, unless we realize how much the way we put things today is colored by our reaction to Rufus Jones and to his generation. I think also that Richard Niebuhr is correct in suggesting that if we limit our appropriation to our Quaker forefathers we remain in a sectarian frame of mind. I believe most of us would admit to having ancestors (and brothers) in the faith elsewhere as well, though we might not all find them in the same place.

An historical understanding of our own faith must mean that what Quakerism is called to be can be found only in relation to the past but not determined by it; that, in fact, the meaning of our past will itself be determined by our hope and vision for the future. Martin Heidegger's claim that the past is made by the future sounds strange and paradoxical. It is not wholly true; it seems to reflect some of the old liberal faith in man as his own maker, in history as the realm of freedom and not of necessity as well, but nevertheless it is suggestive. I wonder, is it reassuring to think that the ultimate meaning of early Quakerism depends partly on us?

SPIRITUAL AND HISTORICAL CONCEPTIONS OF RELIGION

The question of the relation of the historical and spiritual conceptions of religion might appear to be only a question of language, a legitimately individual choice of the symbols which seem most consonant with our experience, but we evade the issue if we discuss it at this level alone. The symbols are various—the Inner Light, Jesus Christ, the Self, the Cross, Now, the Word, the Eschatological Event—and they are not all simply equivalents for they imply very different understandings of our religion. The decision about language turns out to be a choice of an ultimate standpoint, a decision about the nature of the relationship between God and man and thus about the nature of man and of God. There is also a question whether God has really set all these symbols before us and said, pick the one that seems most appropriate to you.

The consummate mystical or spiritual experience is one of a loss of self, of a union with God; religious experience is felt to be private and ineffable. Although many words are used in trying to express the inexpressible, in the end all that seems to be possible for the mystic is to point or to exclaim or to resort to the neti, neti of negative theology. A rationalist metaphysic, by contrast, is not even in principle so silent: it seeks to describe God as he is in himself. Yet here, too, there is the presumption
of a kind of union with God—not through ecstasy but through thought coming to share his standpoint. In both cases, mystical as well as rationalistic, man attempts to abstract himself, to remove himself, from history.

The historical conception, on the other hand, recognizes that theology can only be done from the human standpoint, not from God's, for man is man and God is God. It insists that the only important knowledge of God for man is knowledge of his relation to us, his will in regard to us. We can know this will because God meets us in our own realm, in history. This is the conception we find in the Bible and it is one characteristic of biblical faith. History is not illusory because God does not create illusions. Man is not essentially a spirit or a rational mind only accidentally endowed with a time- and space-bound body; he is essentially historical, a unity of body and soul who becomes fully a person only in relationship with others. He finds himself "in a world with others"; this situation belongs to the God-man relation as the context of man's responsibility. Christianity, Newman says, tells us what God is by telling us what he has done—by the recital, as the current phrase has it, of God's mighty acts in history. This means not only the recital of the Gospel history but of what God has done and is doing for me, for I am involved in God's history, I am addressed by his word. Thus the confessions of an Augustine; thus also the journal of George Fox written that all might know the dealings of the Lord with him.

As we examine these various approaches, we are aware that the Quaker emphasis on a spiritual religion never meant mysticism in its extreme sense. The early Friends saw the relation to God in terms of communion, of obedience, not of mystical or metaphysical union; in terms of will, not of an almost bodiless spirit. Although Fox saw clearly that faith could not mean simply dogmatic adherence to a proposition about an event that had happened once in a long ago past, his own "break-through" experience implied precisely a new and living relation to the historical revelation, a realization that the one who spoke then speaks now, and that we know God only as we know ourselves to be known by him. No more than for Luther was religion for Fox something that happened "in a corner." It did not mean only the self alone before God (though it did mean that), but also the gathering of a community. If revelation meets us in history it meets us in the realm of encounter and response, of man with man, the realm of our responsibility for each other. God wishes to bring us to him not only as individuals but in that togetherness with one another which was intended for us by the very order of our creation. This recognition that faith implies community is an intrinsic element of the historical conception of faith. The community has a covenantal relationship with God, it witnesses for him, serves as a paradigm for his kingdom, and (as Luther stressed) is needed by us all at times.

What we mean by speaking of the Quaker emphasis on spiritual religion is, rather than mysticism, faith as trust in another, as a personal relation involving the whole man, not only his mind or spirit. To hold together such a conception of faith and an historical conception of revelation is always difficult: but when they fall apart it is more than tension that is lost. Faith then becomes not a relation to a person but a relation to the fact of something's once having happened, or else it becomes a personal relation with God for which the historical revelation in Christ is at most a paradigm. It becomes an intellectual conviction or a pietistic feeling, faith in spirit, in man's spirit, or faith in faith. Yet faith in history itself—the conviction that God's self-revelation can be identified with the progression of world-historical events—is just as immanentistic as faith in spirit, just as characteristic of nineteenth-century liberalism and just as impossible for us. I doubt that even the most optimistic of Quakers could today simply identify God's way through the world with the outward unfolding of history. Martin Buber's conviction that holy history is hidden history seems hardly questionable. The difficulty is that both history and spirit are ambiguous terms, that belief in either has proven illusory and that we do not know how to bring them back together again. By focussing on either alone, we lose the paradox—the difference between man and God and the mystery of the meeting between them.
THE MEANINGLESSNESS OF HISTORY

These questions about history face us with special poignancy today because the questions concerning the end or goal of history, of meaninglessness in history, and of there being no discernible realm of meaning beyond history, meet us in our newspapers day by day. The options seem to be either a realm of meaning completely dissociated from history (or particularly from public history, as witness the ‘retreat to the home’ of my generation) or chaos. It is not boredom or futility by which we feel threatened, but catastrophe. T. S. Eliot’s lines:

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper

now seem ironically premature.

Our situation now, the situation as felt from within as well as in its external aspect, has changed tremendously during the past decades—a different emphasis seems called for, an emphasis which I should think we as Quakers ought to feel called to make although I am not sure that we are really awake to the readiness in this hour for what we might say. Yet that the situation is different now, that a different emphasis is called for, is perceived by the very ones who helped to shape that earlier way of looking. Karl Barth who spoke then of the deity of God, of his infinite qualitative distance from man, speaks now of the humanity of God, the God who wills to be the God of man, the God who shows who and what he is in his togetherness with man, in the context of his history and dialogue with man. Karl Jaspers, who emphasized then the significance of the trans-rational elements in man’s existence, speaks now of the necessity for siding with reason in the midst of the fog of the irrational. Then it was too easy a faith in man, in his rationality, that was deployed—now it is too ready a despair. Then the protest was against an automatic equating of history and progress, against extravagant estimates of man’s freedom and self-sufficiency; now the plea is that nevertheless man should not despair and may not, cannot, retreat from history. If even Barth is not afraid to speak of universalism today, do not we with our testimony to a light that enlighteneth every man have something to say, something that can be said without denying our historical Christian witness? When we reject that witness, those of us who do, is it more because of our concern for those who have never heard the Gospel, or because we cannot accept our own need of a savior?

It seems to be true that we are of the “post-Nein” generation, that since Barth’s “No” at Barmen we cannot simply identify God and history. We all seem to share Karl Löwith’s conclusion to his book, Meaning in History, that there is no immanent meaning to history. The question then is, how is a transcendent meaning related to history? The Christian response is that the transcendent meaning does not negate history but transfigures it; that history is overcome by—history! that God comes into history.

FAITH AND THE PERCEPTION OF HISTORICAL MEANING

At first glance, to identify God’s revelation of himself with a particular historical event or series of events in the past would seem to deny that God is a living God who meets me here and now. But this, according to the modern philosophy of history as represented by a Dilthey, a Collingwood, or a Heidegger, is to misconstrue our relation to historical events. To ask a fundamentally historical question of revelation would be, precisely, to ask its meaning for us, its relevance to our present situation, to understand it as part of our own personal history, as qualifying our own present existence. An historical past is not simply a time that once was and will never be again; it is rather a moment whose meaning and significance continue to exist as a dimension of the present. The historical dimensions of past and future are inside us as well as out, as aspects of each historical moment. It is only as we recognize this, recognize how our present is qualified by the given-ness of the past and the potentialities of the future, that we really know ourselves as historical. This philosophical understanding of the living relation between history and ourselves is echoed by Buber:

If history is a dialogue between God and man, we can understand its meaning only when we are the ones who are addressed and only to the degree that we render ourselves receptive. This is history’s claim on me and so this is its meaning as far as I am concerned.

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Quaker Religious Thought, Vol. 6 [1961], Art. 2
The moment of revelation for Buber is not Sinai or the Cross, not a fixed dated point, but the moment when the individual perceives these as revelation; such perception is possible at any time.

Such an understanding differs from the objective knowledge of science in involving more than the rational faculty, in not being something that can be proven or simply passed on, in being like the relation between two persons rather than like the relation to a fact or thing. Newman called this kind of knowing the "illusive sense"; Buber speaks of the "I-Thou attitude." Luther called it faith and said that faith was the correlate of revelation, that revelation is revelation only to the believer. Reinhold Niebuhr says that the truth about God and man cannot be known as fact but only in faith and repentance. Fox was speaking of the same relationship when he said that the Scriptures could be understood only by being in the same life and power as those who brought them forth. That the historical relation is a personal relation means that in revelation God does not give us information about himself but that he himself comes to meet us.

The quest for the historical Jesus ended in failure not because it could not be proven that the man Jesus had lived but because there was no "objective" history about him available; the only relevant history was interpretation, kerygma. The idea that history is interpretation, that the conception of a purely objective history is a mixing of categories, is central to the existential understanding of history. The past is never closed, never finished; it is history only so long as it is a repeatable possibility which originated in the past. This implies that the future is the most important dimension since our interpretation of history will depend on our orientation toward the future. Yet to agree with Heidegger that the past is made by the future would be to ignore the Christian recognition that man (in Reinhold Niebuhr's phrase) is creature as well as creator of history; it would be to try again to escape from the paradox. Although the meaning of history for us depends on our perception and our standpoint, the objective factor cannot be dissolved. As Luther said, the Jews at least regarded Christ as a thief, we look upon him as only a fable. Yet it seems right to say with Bultmann that Christ addresses us now as a question about our future, and to say with Buber that God is always the God about to come, that he comes only as the living God.

We cannot minimize the tension between the relativity of our perspective and the absoluteness of our commitment which characterizes the historical understanding of faith, since this would be to minimize the difference between man and God. We can know God only as he has shown himself to us and yet we know him to be a trustworthy God. "His Word," says Luther, "cannot be different from his nature." Nevertheless our interpretive action should itself be understood in historical and not in purely personal, subjective terms. If revelation meets us in history, it meets us as we are in a world with others, in community. That the perspective of faith is the shared perspective of the community of faith was seen clearly by early Friends. We today know what it is to long for and seek after such a community and to despair sometimes of finding it in this centrifugal assemblage that Quakerism has become. We need to remember that it is part of the Christian scandalon that God speaks to man through man, that God can, if he will, speak through such imperfect instruments as Quakerism, such unprepared men as ourselves. We cannot decide that we are to be the chosen people nor that we are inadequate, but we can know ourselves responsible to him in this community where he has placed us, willing to leave the decision as to what is failure and what success in his hands.

**REVELATION IN HISTORY**

An historical conception of revelation cannot mean that God discloses himself equally clearly in all moments—there are mute times, times of eclipse as Buber feels ours to be, when (though we may still have faith that a word is being spoken to us) we have difficulty in hearing it, in discerning its meaning. Paul Tillich's conception of "theonomous" periods in history, of kairoi, times when eternity comes into time, may not have taken into sufficient account man's always ambiguous response, but even Reinhold Niebuhr admits that there are proximate
times, times when God and man draw closer. Revelation as historical cannot be revelation in general; it must always be particular and concrete, just as faith is not faith in general but faith at this time in this situation. Yet even Buber has come to see that a situational, individual ethic is not adequate to a realistic view of man as being still in history. He understands why Moses cannot accept Korah’s plea that, since the people are holy, commands from without are no longer necessary; he perceives that “without law, without any clearcut and transmissible line of demarcation between that which is pleasing and displeasing to God, there can be no historical continuity of divine rule upon earth.”

To find meaning in history seems to mean finding an interpretive center, a point at which it is more clear than elsewhere what history is, what the meaning of man’s existence is, what his relation to God is. For Christians it is Jesus Christ who meets us as such a midpoint of history. He comes to us as a new and necessary word, a word which clarifies God’s relation to us as no other word does, but which we could never have deduced, would never have expected to come this way. An historical understanding of man and God is one which speaks of both in terms of act, not being; in terms of encounter and response. Thus a consistently historical conception of Christ is not one that speaks of a metaphysical unity of divine and human essences but of an identity of will between God and Christ, of our conviction that in hearing this man it is God’s voice we hear. It means that the relation between God and man in Christ is not a static fact or image but itself an action, an event. The relation between God and man is that of dialogue. Christ has been called a dialogic event; in him God’s word and man’s response are one word. God is present in all his creation but in this event he shows us most clearly that which is most important for us to know—that he cares for us, comes to meet us, wills to be a father to us. That God reveals himself in history in itself tells us what he is like in regard to us; it shows that he is God, who, although he comes in a way that we could not have anticipated, does indeed will to come to meet us, and suffers for us, and forgives us.

And as Luther emphasizes, he comes to us in a way that lets us remain men. To wish for a vision of God outside history, with no reference to an historical past and an historical future, is to wish to be something other than a real man; it is to wish to be gods ourselves. “That there may be room for faith, all that is believed must be hidden, yet it is not hidden more deeply than under a contrary appearance.” That the death on the Cross is the triumphant center of history is true only for the believer; for him holy history is not hidden history. There is no attempt to hide the circularity; what is called for is more like a resolution than like a conclusion. This interpretive act implies a decision about ourselves as well: as about Jesus Christ; revelation is not understood until we know that it includes us, that it is not only addressed to us but is about us, about our relation to God. That God came to man in Jesus Christ means that he is a God who comes to man, who comes to us. That God is such a God is never a fact of the past, never something we already know; it is always still a question of faith.

Nor is everything clear even when we believe, believe through our returning doubt that it could be so. For even the most historically-minded of us it is difficult to believe that history is really so important, that the singular event is truly unique, that God actually meets us fully as a person. And an essential mystery remains—a mystery which is perhaps deepest at the very point where God reveals himself most clearly—that God should be a God who reveals himself—to us—in history. To understand, says Buber, is not to be able to explain but to be ready for personal encounter.

There is still the question of the meaning of history in another sense, the sense of its end rather than its center. The question is whether the tension is that of a Here and a Beyond, or of an Already and a Not-Yet. In a way it must be both, so long as we remember with Jaspers that “there is no way around history, but only a way through history.”

If God really meets us in history, then he does not “fix it from the yonder side,” for the relation between God and man is more like two parts of a conversation than like cause and ef-
fect. This means that history is not predetermined, that it is genuinely open, that God has left something for man to do, that we are responsible. It is a paradoxical fact that for us who do not believe in predestination it becomes most difficult to act, at least after we have come to see the ambiguity in ourselves and all the situations which confront us. There is no doubt that the way of history is the way of risk. Here our Quaker understanding of man as one who can respond to God's call has relevance: our faith can give us courage to live and act in history.

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4. Martin Buber, Moses. Harper and Brothers, 1958, p. 188.

Spiritual Religion and Historical Religion

WILMER A. COOPER

A fundamental fact about the life of man is that he is paradoxically a citizen of two worlds—the world of spirit, which is the realm of freedom and universality, and the world of physical reality, which is the realm of necessity, structure, and particularity. History combines these two worlds in a time sequence which is irreversible and non-repeatable. From the vantage-point of the Hebrew-Christian faith, the space-time world of history is not an illusion but has objective and concrete reality. Unlike Eastern religions, Christianity and its predecessor, Judaism, place great emphasis upon the events of history as media for God's revelation of his will and purpose to man. Both Christianity and Judaism affirm rather than deny the value of life in this world. For this reason, the emphasis upon life in the here-and-now carries with it ethical concern and social responsibility, both of which are largely lacking in Eastern thought. At the same time, the events of history are believed to be of primary significance in relating the inward subjective realm of spirit to the outward objective world of physical reality. It is with this relationship between inner and outer, between spirit and objective world, that this paper deals.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is an underlying assumption of this paper that Quakerism is rooted in and inextricably bound up with Christian history. A century ago it would not have been necessary to assert this, but we are required to do so in the light of the growing tendency among some Friends to disclaim their Christian heritage and realign their religious loyalties.