Spiritual Religion and Historical Religion

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fert. 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.

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

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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.
The dilemma which Christians have always had to confront is that of understanding and relating the inward realm of the spirit to the outward dimension of history. Heresies have arisen when one of these has been emphasized at the expense of the other. Friends especially have been obsessed with this problem. It has been at the root of many of the Society's internal controversies over the years and continues to be a problem which needs clarification. The British Friend, Edward Grubb, expressed one aspect of it in his Swarthmore Lecture of 1914:

If the Society of Friends is to do its work in bearing witness to the world of the truth of God . . . (and) if it is to help the struggling souls, within and without its borders, into the sure anchorage of Christian faith, it must, in particular, seek for clearer light than it has yet attained on the connection between the direct experience of God in the soul and the revelation brought in history by Jesus of Nazareth; it must unite, more effectively than in the past, the Jesus of history with the living "Christ" of experience.

The two chief philosophical categories which need to be considered here are, first, the relationship of time and eternity (i.e., man's time versus God's time), and secondly, the relationship of body and spirit. In the Hebrew-Christian tradition time is believed to have objective reality in history. It is not a construction of the mind and thus illusory in terms of human experience and meaning. In contrast, to this the main stream of Greek thought held that mind superimposes itself upon nature and that time is the subjective or mental dividing up of the natural process in order to deal with it in meaningful and manageable form. For the Greeks, history was man's observation of the recurring processes of nature, symbolized by the cycle of the seasons. The Hebrew-Christian view, on the other hand, sees history as the objective realm of decisive action in a unique non-repeatable and irreversible order of events in which every event helps to shape subsequent history. This view may be symbolized by the straight line which implies direction, purpose, and fulfillment. A third kind of time is sometimes delineated, which may be symbolized by a point. Here eternity breaks into time in the moment, referred to by Thomas Kelly as "The Eternal Now."

Religion in the Bible roots in man's primordial impulses and social bonds, and that is why it is powerful . . . . Our tendency for some reason is to put the spiritual side of man on one side and the instinctive side of man on the other . . . . (In such a separation) we miss the full meaning of the incarnation . . . . Revelation and the grace of God are tied up inseparably with our "somatic" existence . . . with our fleshy—sensuous—body life with all its organic relationships, widening out as these do into the social, economic, and political spheres.

There are two fundamental Christian doctrines which from a theological perspective attempt to relate these two diverse and yet interdependent and indivisible realms of life. The first is the doctrine of Incarnation, according to which God was incarnate in the Jesus of history, and secondly, the doctrine of the sacraments, which declares that the physical symbol is an outward sign for an inward grace. Friends go even farther and look upon all of life, the entire visible world, as an incarnation of God's creative spirit and an outward manifestation of his spiritual reality. These two doctrines mean that neither realm can be separated from the other; they represent the two sides of the same metaphysical and religious coin. Here we find expressed a deep
and profound insight into the nature of life and existence. It was in the person of Jesus Christ that this was most completely expressed, namely, in the joining together of the Godman, who united the humanity of Jesus with the divinity of Christ.

FRIENDS “HISTORICALLY UNGRATEFUL”

Having set forth the underlying assumptions of this paper and having stated the philosophical nature of the problem, we now turn to an exposition of the problem as it relates to Quaker history and thought.

There are two types of religious expression among Friends today which, it seems to me, represent aberrations from the historic Quaker norm. One of these may be termed “pietistic spiritualism” (frequently taking the form of religious fundamentalism) and the other is “religious mysticism” (frequently taking the form of a vague religious liberalism). Both, in my judgment, are false representations of historic Quakerism with its emphasis upon man’s personal encounter with the living Christ within and its accompanying Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Both of these approaches to Quakerism cultivate and nourish a religious experience of good feeling and escapism which either consciously denies the outward historical dimension of life or unconsciously creates a false dualism between the outer and the inner aspects of the religious life. The early Quaker norm may be characterized by what I would call an authentic “religious existentialism.” This type of religious experience is grounded in a personal encounter with “Christ who has come to teach his people himself,” to use George Fox’s term. This encounter was apprehended by individuals in the concrete situations of life. Richard Ullmann says that Friends “... have known long before the existentialists that revelation ‘does not come as an abstract and universal truth out of history’ but ‘is always special, for it always comes to particular men in particular situations in history’.”

Baron Von Hügel once charged the Friends with being “historically ungrateful.” This strikes me as a valid criticism of Friends and one which we need to take seriously. There are two points in particular where we need to heed this charge, namely, at the point of the relationship of the historic Christ to the inward Christ, and secondly, at the point of the relationship of biblical revelation to the immediate guidance of the Spirit. In both cases we are dealing with a historical manifestation of religious truth and experience. H. G. Wood has written that “the great fabric of religious truth is being woven in history ...” and that the “inward light enables us to appreciate history, not to ignore it.” This is indeed wise counsel for Friends who have tended to overspiritualize their faith.

Quakerism must always emphasize the inwardsness of religion and the personal appropriation of it, which is what is intended when we speak of Quakerism as a religion of first-hand experience. On the other hand, the special plea which I wish to make is that we not lose sight of or de-emphasize the historical and outward dimension of this inward experience. Both “pietistic spiritualism” and “religious mysticism” run this danger. As Friends, we need to recover (or perhaps discover for the first time) a genuine sense of biblical religion which recognizes the importance and significance of historical events as means of God’s revelation to man. It is through these events in specific times and places that the living Word of God is spoken and mediated to man. It is doubtful whether there is any such thing as a “pure unmediated experience” of God. Even the one who experiences such mystical incursions is himself rooted in a particular historical context so that his religious “apperceptive mass” is conditioned thereby. This is why I suggest that we re-
evaluate our use of such terms as "religious experience" and "mystical experience" in favor of a Quaker religious existentialism which apprehends "moments of truth" through encounter with the concrete events of life. I am increasingly drawn to Peter Berger's paraphrasing of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, that "Christianity is not a religion: it is concerned with Jesus Christ" because Jesus Christ represents the supreme revelation of God to man in a concrete historical event. "Religious experience" as such may be vague, subjective, and the victim of pathological misinterpretation. In order to determine whether it is an authentic experience of revelation from God, one has to find some way of testing its validity by objective norms which, in so far as possible, avoid subjective distortions.

CORRECTIVE OF BIBLICAL RELIGION

As was already intimated, a chief point at which Friends have had special difficulty in relating the spiritual and historical dimensions of religion to each other has been in reconciling the Christ of experience with the Jesus of history. There has always been a certain indecision about this problem, coupled with a tendency to emphasize one side or the other at the expense of an integrated point of view. Richard Ullmann says:

We can observe, throughout Quaker history, a tidal movement between the Inner and the Historic Christ, sometimes emphasizing one, sometimes the other; but we also observe that for the great Quaker saints the identification of the two was not really difficult, though perhaps expressed less clearly in thought than in practice.9

Howard Brinton in a slightly different vein confirms the unitary relationship of the two when he writes:

Since the Light Within is God revealing Himself to man, Jesus of Nazareth was God revealing Himself in history. Without the historical revelation the inner revelation would be incomplete. Each revelation requires the other for its fulfillment. The timeless requires the temporal and the temporal requires the timeless.8

In spite of this encouraging word from Richard Ullmann and Howard Brinton, the fact still remains that in terms of both faith and practice Friends have been unable to develop an integral view of the spiritual and historical. If this is so we need to reflect with serious intensity upon those factors which may help to bring about a proper relationship between the two. The remainder of this paper suggests two possible approaches.

In the first place it is my judgment that the most basic thing for us to do is to rediscover the importance and relevance of biblical religion.8 Biblical religion is rooted in history and committed to the proposition that God and his spirit, his will, his judgment, and his love are to be known through the common and ordinary experiences of our personal and corporate history. In rediscovering this indispensable sourcebook of our faith—the Bible—we must be eternally vigilant not to mistake it for the Source itself but to recognize it for the medium which it is intended to be. There is a biblical literalism and legalism present among some Friends which is neither true to our Quaker heritage nor true to what I believe to be God's truth and the dynamic way in which he communicates it to us. But at the other extreme from Friends who use the Bible as a religious prop, there are the biblical illiterates who glory in the idea that they have been liberated from the religious forms and claims of the past. They have become obsessed with the philosophical and religious pragmatism of our day which looks upon the "free man" as one who has learned how to cut himself loose from the shibboleths of the past. Although the Friend of this persuasion may not accept such a judgment, it is the Hebrew-Christian view that the liberated free man is not the one who declares his independence of his past religious and social heritage but the one who discovers the pure stream of that heritage, often overlaid as it may be by the encrustations of man's misdeeds and mistakes. The free man, from the Hebrew-Christian point of view, is the one who finds his true identity (his true self) in becoming

*The writer is aware of the perennial debate whether there is any such thing as an underlying unity to the Bible. The assumption here is that such a unity is clearly discernible in spite of the plurality of religious expression set forth in the Bible.
reconciled to his Creator, who fashioned him in his own image. The man who declares his independence of this Source of life is by definition a sinner—one who has wilfully cut himself off from God. If one is dedicated to a religious life which owns rather than disowns God as revealed in Jesus Christ, the Lord and Redeemer of all life and history (which historically is the heritage of Friends), then I know of no better place to begin that life than with a serious study of the nature and meaning of biblical religion and its relevance to our needs today. It is contemporary in almost every sense of the word. It is existential in that it speaks to us here and now in the life situation in which we move and have our being. It is dynamic in that it has no place for static religion but is continually open to new revelations of God’s truth. If Friends can recover something of this, I believe, become the source of their renewal.

CORRECTIVE OF QUAKER THEOLOGICAL ENCOUNTER

A second thing which Friends can do to help bring about an integral relationship between the spiritual and the historical is that the various groups of Friends which stress one or the other of these should experience a real encounter with the other’s point of view. In the past hundred and fifty years American Quakerism has been characterized by three major theological motifs. There has been the Quietistic tradition which placed a high premium on the inwardness of religion and thus upon the Christ within. For many decades this view was espoused by the followers of Elias Hicks, though in its purest form it has been best represented in this century by the Conservative Friends. At the opposite extreme has been the strong emphasis of Joseph John Gurney and the Evangelical Friends upon the historic work of Christ and the Bible as the source of authority. This view has had its chief influence among the programmed-pastoral meetings of America, which today constitute between sixty and seventy percent of American Friends. The Evangelical contingent of this body of Friends has held steadfastly to this biblical and theological emphasis and has carried some aspects of it to an unfortunate extreme. The third point of view may be generally termed the Liberal approach. These Friends have emphasized a middle ground between the Quietistic and Evangelical poles of Quaker thought, undergirded by liberal theological presuppositions. They have looked upon the Inward Light more as a rational or “Logos” principle in man than a personal encounter with the living Christ within, or the inward baptism of the Holy Spirit. In biblical teaching they have given great weight to Jesus as teacher and example, which has resulted in their putting a major emphasis upon ethics.

The significant fact is that all of these Friends need each other because each holds an important aspect of Christian truth. Contemporary Quakerism should continue to emphasize spiritual inwardness as a vital manifestation of the dynamic working of the Holy Spirit. But there must be added to this the very important element of the historical dimension of biblical religion, free from literalism, legalism, and false pietyism. There is also the important emphasis of the Liberal view as well, namely, upon preserving an open mind which is not afraid of new interpretations of truth and the place of reason in religion, providing the use of reason is not allowed to become an end in itself by supplanting faith and revelation. Coupled with the Liberal recognition of the rightful place of reason is its concern with ethics as an important aspect of religious witness. But the concern for ethics must avoid religious moralism and the notion that man can by his own efforts alone extricate himself from his moral and social dilemmas. In these various emphases which respective groups of Friends make, it is incumbent upon the whole Society to recognize how much we have to learn from the particular heritage which each has sought to nurture, in the assumption that it was upholding “true” Quakerism. If we can rediscover and experience a real religious and theological encounter with each other, it will go a long way toward bridging the chasm between the inward and outward dimensions of our Christian faith. This encounter, however, must be something more than a tolerant appreciation of our diversities. Its purpose must be a common and decisive search for religious truth, based on the conviction that God has made it possible through special

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revelation of himself to know and experience this truth. From such an encounter there is bound to arise a new strength and power of life such as Friends have not experienced since their beginning.

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4. Quoted by Ullmann, op. cit., p. 61.
5. Ibid., p. 48.

The Relation of Quakerism to Its Own History

LEWIS BENSON

I wish to maintain that there is a view of history that belongs to Christianity and to Quakerism and that this view has largely disappeared from Quaker life. Before attempting to outline the view of history that belongs to Quakerism I will first briefly describe some varieties of both the non-historical and historical approaches to contemporary Quakerism.

SOME CURRENT TRENDS

Among those who see contemporary Quakerism as essentially unrelated to its history I will mention two types. One of these arrives at its position by identifying the essence of Quakerism with a mysticism that is akin to Eastern mysticisms. When understood in these terms Quakerism is seen as a timeless spiritual religion not tied to any historical events. From this viewpoint the essence of Quakerism is independent of its history. In this world of space-time, all religions must have an historical side but this is not the essential thing.

Another type of non-historical approach is found among those Quakers who are not mystics or exponents of spiritual religion but who believe that we ought to "enter afresh in each generation on the adventure of naked living." For these Friends Quakerism is, by definition, identical with the Quaker ideas and practices that prevail at the present moment and therefore we learn nothing about what Quakerism should be by studying what it has been. The past is dead and the present is living. The exploration of the past is a legitimate field of scientific study but the Quaker historian of Quakerism is not making any significant contribution to the ongoing life of the Society of Friends.

There is also to be found a variety of approaches among those who do see Quakerism as related to its own history—of the