

9-2018

## Response to Anderson, Ward, and Randazzo

Jeffrey Dudiak  
*The King's University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/qrt>



Part of the [Christian Denominations and Sects Commons](#), and the [Christianity Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Dudiak, Jeffrey (2018) "Response to Anderson, Ward, and Randazzo," *Quaker Religious Thought*. Vol. 131 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/qrt/vol131/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Quaker Religious Thought by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact [arolfe@georgefox.edu](mailto:arolfe@georgefox.edu).

# RESPONSE TO ANDERSON, WARD, AND RANDAZZO

JEFFREY DUDIAK

In this issue we have been gifted with three credible, nay expert, expositors of three interpretations of Quakerism in historical perspective: Penn's interpretation of Quakerism as "primitive Christianity revived," Barclay's evolving interpretation of Quakerism's "inward Light" as *vehiculum dei*, and his speculation on a corresponding spiritual sense, and the twentieth century development of Quaker understandings of Christianity and universalism—mutually excluding or complementary?—traced across the prestigious Swarthmore Lectures.

If, as Paul maintains across his careful exegetical summary of *No Cross, No Crown*, Penn's late Seventeenth Century reading of early Quakerism still carries weight as the richer context for many of our later, less comprehensive interpretations, if at the extremes, as Madeleine keenly shows us, Elton Trueblood interpreted Robert Barclay's theologizing interpretation of Quakerism as the consolidator and the cornerstone of a rationally transmissible Quakerism, while Rufus Jones understood Barclay as the betrayer of early Quakerism, if across the ebb and flow of the Twentieth Century liberal Quakerism has alternatively understood Christianity as assumed, then as accidental, then central but not hegemonic, to true Quakerism, as DanChristy has wonderfully highlighted for us, ... in each case these discourses highlight a *conflict of interpretations*, which raises the obvious question: which one is *correct*? Which is the *true* interpretation, the reading that gets Quakerism, original Quakerism, historical Quakerism, *right*? For such arguments always have a sting at the end: the tacit, if not explicit, assumption that this genuine reading of Quakerism, once established, will be normative for Quakerism going forth. Such arguments are as ubiquitous as they are interminable, both among the scholars and among Quakers on the benches or pews, in part because what we recognize as evidence in such debates is to some significant degree overdetermined by the position for which we are advocating—a circle (vicious or productive?) the consideration of which I shall return to shortly.

But by posing the question in this way—as our “modernist” sensibilities induce us to do reflexively and thereby almost inevitably, regardless of the “side” of the issues on which we find ourselves—perhaps we are thinking about the matter in a less than maximally felicitous way, in a way, I will suggest, that structurally quenches the spirit we are, in such projects, attempting to summon forth. Perhaps there is promise in not attempting to *resolve* these conflicts of interpretation, as if the question of the true in the sense of the correct, in the sense of getting Quakerism right, governed the field of play at play in such matters, but *to be in them* in a different way. To this end, I would like to reflect briefly upon two of the notions I have already obliquely raised here, and that I think might help us illuminate this space differently: truth, and spirit.

The English word “truth” has as part of its ancestry the now largely disregarded, though still instructive, word “troth.” Those amongst us with as much grey in their hair as I have will have heard this term employed on the occasion of a marriage; “I pledge you my troth” one used to say at the moment of solemnization (and—I have heard rumors—one used to mean it, too). Troth, or truth, in this context, has to do not with what is the case—our usual understanding of the notion of truth today—but with what is being promised, with what is *not* the case, or at least not yet the case. It means: *I will be true to you*. Promises do not name, but create, reality. Troth, or truth, here, has to do not principally with *facts*, but with *faithfulness*, a sense of truth that has left its marks upon our language in phrases such as a “true friend,” or being “true to your school.” While I do not have time to fully make the case here, I want to suggest that faithfulness, rather than factuality, is the deepest and primary sense of truth—that is, that facts are considered true not because truth has principally to do with facts, but because facts are one kind of truth, one kind of faithfulness, the faithfulness of some proposition to some state of affairs. In our modern world, increasingly over the past three or four centuries (another yarn too long to spin in this forum), truth has become almost entirely equated with factuality, rather than factuality being recognized as one limited form of truth which, if it is to be more truly true, more faithful, requires as its context a broader understanding of truth, of truth as faithfulness in all of its variant and rich facets. As I have suggested elsewhere, to the question, “how many Jews can be fit into a cattle car?,” there is a *technically correct* answer, but there can never be a *true* answer. When we reduce the true to the correct, to getting things right, we live a lie, betray faithfulness, violate troth.

And it is this deeper sense of truth as faithfulness that we need, or so I am hinting at here, if we are to evaluate the truth of a religious tradition, or an interpretation of such a tradition.

So you can see where I am going here. What if the question of the truth of an historical or contemporary interpretation of Quakerism had first to do not with the identification and naming of some essence of Quakerism, of locating what Quakerism is, in fact, at its core really all about, of providing a correct interpretation that can be upheld over against false ones, but with faithfulness? But does this not just push the question of essence back a step, the issue of what Quakerism really is reasserting itself across the obvious rejoinder: But faithfulness to what?

But here we must be careful, as the answer to this question cannot be: Quakerism. Ironically, we cannot be *faithfully in* the tradition by being *faithful to* the tradition. For traditions are not that to which we are called to be faithful; to believe that they are leaves us with a stiff and arid traditionalism. Rather, traditions themselves delineate trans-generational, communal attempts to be faithful to something that lies beyond the tradition itself. We do not belong to a tradition by being faithful to the tradition, but by committing ourselves to responding to that to which the tradition is itself a response in a manner that is consistent with, that resonates with, the trajectory traced out across the tradition itself.

That is, to be faithful within a religious tradition is not principally to be faithful *to* the tradition, but to join in the tradition as itself a tradition of faithfulness. We become Quaker, or remain Quaker, because we find in this way of being religious both the reality and the promise of a faithful response to that to which we as a community seek to be faithful, and I become or remain Quaker because I find my own ability to be faithful to that to which I am called clarified and supported and augmented by my association with the Society. True Quakerism is not in the first instance qualified by some essential core teaching or practice—Christian or universalist, mystical or theological, primitive or progressive—rather, each of these are interpretative attempts to articulate what faithfulness means for those who identify with the Quaker manner of response in some context or another. Truth here—and I would suggest this is not only the fundamental meaning of religious truth, but the fundamental meaning of truth *per se*—is neither a noun nor an adjective (neither the naming of some state of affairs, nor the qualifying of some proposition corresponding

to such a state of affairs), but an adverb: a matter living truly, living faithfully—something which underwrites all matters of fact, as when we guarantee the statements we make in a letter by undersigning it with our personal guarantee of fidelity: “Yours truly,” which is to say, “Yours faithfully.”

But does not the articulation of that to which the tradition is a response give us the essence of the tradition, albeit an essence that lies outside of the tradition itself? Perhaps, except that that “something beyond” is only articulated across the tradition itself, and thus needs to be perpetually re-generated across the trans-generational commitment to faithfulness that constitutes the tradition. A tradition, as itself a response, can never encompass that to which it is a response within the response that it remains, even if the ability of the tradition to gauge its faithfulness requires an articulation of that to which it is an attempt to be faithful. Giving articulation to that to which our tradition is a response is therefore an *ongoing*, communal project. Which is why it is crucial to the continued existence of our Society that we provide opportunities and fora—and jobs—to our fine, young theologians, for whom this task constitutes their principal vocation, some of whom are represented in this journal (sorry Paul).

But to articulate that to which the tradition is a response across the response that is the tradition itself, to realize that which calls for response within the response itself—such a project creates a circle that *is* vicious if the goal is truth in the sense of the correct, in the sense of getting it right, but a circle that is *productive* if we allow our participation in it to draw us into the realm of the spirit. Indeed, it is in this restless circulation between the ever emerging exigencies of historical change and the trajectory already set out across the tradition that the “spirit” takes on its most concrete manifestation, whatever mysterious or mystical senses the term rightly retains, the tradition answering to always new situational demands, and our understanding and assessment of those demands answering to the insight and wisdom embedded in the tradition—the systole and diastole of the beating heart of a living tradition. A tradition not perpetually reinventing itself in the face of constantly shifting realities is dead; a community no longer addressing those realities out of its historically accumulated resources is no longer part of the tradition in question.

That is, when the demands of the times, and of the sub-groups of which we are a part, govern our readings of the tradition—determining for us which parts of the tradition are essential and which accidental,

in a way that excludes or overpowers a reciprocal emphasis on the tradition informing and giving critical shape to our reading of these same demands—we depart from the tradition, merely picking and choosing pieces that we fashion into something blindly subservient to our times, just as we are unfaithful to the tradition in insisting upon “traditional” formulations which eclipse our hearing, and stunt our answering to, the demands of the times in ways that challenge the standard articulations of the tradition upon which we rely to address them. In this realm of the spirit, in this domain of active truth, we are beyond a prevailing concern with what is correct, and enter into the domain of discernment, here understood as being led by the same spirit that is progressively taking shape across our articulations of that to which we are always already responding.

And it is this process that I understand to be already profoundly underway in the three excellent expositions in these articles.