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Author's Response to Reviewers

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Thank you all for your generous positive evaluations of my book. I appreciate the gift of your time to read and review it, and the spirit in which you responded to my holiness thesis. I was particularly gratified by the manner in which all of you restated in your own words some of my conclusions in ways that made my work seem fresh and meaningful to me once again. As all of you who have labored over a book know, the intensity and at times drudgery of the editing and publishing process can soon drain the life and excitement out of a manuscript. But to hear your fresh perspectives on my work—and some of the ways you might see it as significant—was a renewing experience for me. So thank you!

**ANGELL: THE QUESTION OF “ORTHODOXY” AND HOLINESS**

Both Angell and Abbott wonder about how necessary a claim of orthodoxy is to the centrality of holiness. Whether the earliest forms of Quaker writings fall within the bounds of “orthodox Christian theology” and/or maintain core Christian doctrines remains a debated question. While early Quakers had a much more mystical view of Scripture, of the indwelling Christ, of being “of one spirit with him,” of a mystical baptism and communion, and of a mystical understanding of perfection in this life, such views are not outside of what I would call the “generous boundaries” of Christian orthodoxy. Spiritual renewal movements such as the early Quakers, with their emphasis on inner experience, will inevitably conflict with institutional and external forms of Christian orthodoxy.

Clearly, those opposed to Quaker ideas were busy labeling the new movement as a heresy. The 1653 *Saul’s Errand to Damascus*, with its emphasis on inner experience as true holiness, however, was one of many pamphlets written to defend the orthodoxy of Quakerism. Angell treats this work as an example of a questionable orthodox text, and finds the Quakerism of Fox and Nayler in this document to be Manichean and Gnostic. I contend, however, that Fox and
Nayler were explaining statements that had been misunderstood, or misinterpreted by their opponents, and that they were attempting to provide explanations that were within the bounds of orthodoxy.

One specific example of heresy that Angell offers from Saul’s Errand is that of Fox rejecting “imputed Righteousness.” The meaning of “imputed righteousness” is not, of course, a settled issue within Christianity. It is the traditional understanding of justification in the Reformed tradition following Calvin and Luther, which see justification in a totally forensic manner. Roman Catholics and Orthodox believers see it somewhat differently. Fox does not explain in Saul’s Errand why he rejects imputed righteousness, but I shall contend that he is rejecting the Protestant forensic view in favor of an equally biblical account. For Fox, righteousness is not imputed, but a righteous person is one whose conduct is righteous because of God’s indwelling. Debate has recently emerged among evangelicals today around the imputed, forensic understanding of justification. So, Fox and the early Quakers were addressing an issue far ahead of their time.

In addition, I would add that Robert Barclay also rejected imputed righteousness, arguing, “the imputed righteousness of Christ is never found in the Bible.” While most evangelicals continue to accept “imputed righteousness,” Quaker evangelicals true to Barclay would not characterize justification in that way. Early Quakers, like most mystics, have a dialectical relationship with institutional orthodoxy; they are both revolutionary and conservative at the same time. They try to convey a more mystical and inward sense of the tradition—to rediscover the original revelation grounding the source of the tradition. Thus, they defend their sense of place within the tradition, in hopes of deepening and renewing the original vision (which Quakers such as Penn called “Primitive Christianity revived”).

17TH CENTURY DEVELOPMENTS AND QUAKER NORMATIVITY

The issue of theological development moves us to a second and related perennial question—just what is normative Quakerism? Is it the loosely organized emergent young radicals of the nascent stage of the 1640s and 1650s, or the formative, clarifying and consolidating stage of the 1670s and 1680s? Did Fox change theological course, or did he become more mature and sophisticated theologically? After all,
in the period up to the publication of Sauls’ Errand in 1653, Fox was still under 30 years of age! How many of us have retained all of our beliefs from our 20s into our 50s?

No doubt there were some “gnostic” and “ranter” tendencies in the early period. However, the church historian will also remember that there were Manichean and Gnostic tendencies in Origen, Augustine, and a number of the early Church fathers, whom we nevertheless call the “fathers of orthodoxy.” Therefore, understandings of “orthodoxy” are always in need of ongoing clarification.

The Nayler incident of 1656, however, as Angell notes, is the catalyst for the shift. Holiness, the divine life manifested in Christ, becomes understood as being embodied, not only by the individual, but the individual within the community—the body of Christ. This shift, I would suggest, is the beginning of what becomes normative Quakerism.

I shall not, however, argue for the complete “orthodoxy” of the period prior to or during the Civil War—the formative stage of Quakerism. Undoubtedly, Fox revised and modified some of his earlier views as he grew into his leadership role and became more theologically mature. I posit the Post-restoration period as the beginning of normative Quakerism, when loose communities of enthusiasts were formed into an organized structure—which became the Quaker church (and incidentally the term “church” is used in this period)—with a developing body of common beliefs, practices and forms of worship.

ABBOTT: HICKS AND THE QUESTION OF CONVERSIONS

I appreciate Marge Abbott’s attention to the matter of Hicks’ Christology, and I anticipate the publication of new research by Paul Buckley on Hicks. It is quite possible that Hicks flirted with Gnostic, docetic and other understandings of Christ, and ultimately rejected them. But Hicks does make some provocative statements that sound like he seriously challenges some core Christian beliefs, such as Christ’s divinity, and the incarnation. I will await new research, and I shall be open to the possibility of revising my labeling of Hicks as Gnostic; more evidence, though, is required.

The other issue Abbott brings up is the matter of conversions, which I cast as one of the essential elements of Quaker holiness. I base
this on the prominent theme of being born anew, or “transformed,” that I found in early Quaker writings. While I would agree with Abbott that dramatic conversion experiences are much less common among birthright friends, I would not equate conversion with gentle struggles over obedience, or conversion as experiencing the light as a principle. A visitation of grace may be an 18th century description of a conversion experience, and how this is described in different cultural contexts is a valid point. The experience behind the phrase “visitation of grace,” however, could hold a world of meaning beyond what we might ever know.

The devotion of rapture so common to 17th century Friends is greatly muted in the 18th century, and if conversions are described more ecstatically, it is generally by those coming from outside of Friends. I would agree with Abbott that 17th century Friends rarely spoke of Jesus in the intimate personal way of modern evangelicals, but 17th century Quakers definitely described conversion as a heart-felt, Christocentric, mystical experience. Therefore, the “conversion” that initiated perfection became a continuous process of deeper and deeper intimacy with God, so much so that it might be called a continuous conversion.

Quaker holiness is not tied to a formulaic experience of conversion—a strong tendency of later revival holiness. However, conversion inaugurates the new Christ-nature, or divine life. This is the holiness that permeates the individual, like leaven permeates bread, to restore the Imago Dei.

**Le Shana: Gurney and Modernism**

Jim Le Shana highlights my discussion of Joel Bean and his opposition to the revival fires, and notes my conclusion that Bean takes Gurneyite ecumenism into a modernist/universalist trajectory, an inevitable spiritual offshoot of Gurneyite orthodoxy. This conclusion may need further clarification. I did not mean to imply that Bean’s position was the only natural outcome. Gurneyite Orthodoxy took two trajectories, one the way of Bean and other early liberal friends, and the other the way of Evangelical rationalism.

Both Friends United Meeting and Evangelical Friends are built on the foundation of Gurneyite Orthodoxy. Gurney could be called the father of both ecumenical inclusive Quakerism, and Evangelical
Quaker exclusivism. His enlightenment rationalism is an element of both branches. Gurney is generally held close to the heart of Evangelicals, but I wanted to show in my study of holiness that Gurney, because he clearly shifted from the mystical Barclayan understanding of perfection and holiness, must also be given responsibility (or credit) for modernists branches such as Bean created, as well.

THE 19TH CENTURY HOLINESS MOVEMENT

Le Shana notes that in discussing the holiness revival of the 19th century, I do not give much attention to other factors (social, cultural, economic) which played a role in the holiness revival renewing a large portion of Quakerism. He points out several: it’s being a lay movement, the leadership of women, and the role of evangelism. All of which are significant factors I didn’t address in great detail, but have explored in other articles. The role of women in the Quaker holiness movement has long been a particular interest of mine. I am glad that LaShana has highlighted these other factors, but I did not feel that space allowed me to explore them adequately in this book.

Admittedly, a more in-depth analysis of evangelism (one of the eight essential elements of holiness) as it appeared in the 19th century revival context, would have strengthened my thesis.

REFLECTIONS ON THE SELECTION OF PERSONS IN THE BOOK

The decisions about which individuals to choose in representing each era was at least in part somewhat subjective. Available primary sources which would give access into their theological perspectives were necessary criteria. I chose persons who were compelling case studies—who put real flesh onto the “spare bones” of holiness, as Angell so aptly put it. The fact that they appear to be “centrist” in Angell’s terms, may well reflect my own “centrist” bias, but may also support the claim that those who embody holiness in its most balanced ethical and mystical forms are firmly located in the center of core Quakerism.

To conclude, I’d like to refer to Le Shana’s restatement of my conclusions, where he suggests that “evangelicals live toward the heart of what it means to be a Friend and liberals land near the periphery,
not the other way around.” I would not divide Quakers, nor would I contrast them in quite that way, because such a statement will only further divide us as Friends. My goal is to find what unifies us and to build a dialogue upon that common ground. I would rather be quoted as saying that among both evangelicals and liberals are Quakers who live toward the heart of holiness, and plenty of both evangelicals and liberals live on the periphery.

ENDNOTES

1 The Quaker view, based on other biblical texts, unknowingly favors a more Catholic view, maintaining that the formal cause of justification does not consist in an exterior imputation of the justice of Christ, but rather it is a real, interior sanctification effected by grace, which makes a person holy, and enables them to overcome sin and do righteous acts.