Quaker Perspectives on the Nature of Man

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Ever since the dawn of human consciousness man has been inquisitive about himself. A modern parable of this insatiable desire of man to understand himself is expressed in the story of an insane person who was found rushing about the house frantically looking in all the cupboards and clothespresses and crawling under beds in search of something. When asked what he was looking for, he answered, "I am trying to find myself."

Human nature is an enigma and a mystery, and the ways in which it has been appraised have helped to determine the character of the major political and social philosophies of history, and subsequently, the institutions of society. The issue of man is just as alive today as ever, for what man may become individually and collectively depends upon the kind of beings we are.

The discussion of man which follows will take place within the framework of Quaker thought, relating something of both the historic (chiefly seventeenth century) and the contemporary views held by Friends. At the same time an effort will be made to formulate an adequate view of man which is consistent with the central Christian beliefs and testimonies of Friends. The topic will be dealt with under three major headings: (1) Man as created in the image of God; (2) Man as sinner; and (3) Man's hope of victory over sin and death.

MAN AS CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

Christian thought holds that the universe to which man belongs is not a product of chance or purely mechanical factors but was created by God out of nothing (creatio ex nihilo). Since God is believed to be supremely good, his activities and all that he has created are held to be good. Man himself, as part of that creation, was good in his original nature as it came from the "hand of God." In Genesis 1:26 it is stated that man was created in the very "image" and "likeness" of God. This concept of the imago Dei sets forth the fundamental Hebrew-Christian affirmation about man and his relationship to God. Although man in creation was good, he did not remain so, for the "fall of man" impaired his original state of perfection. Exactly how the fall is to be understood is a very difficult problem, but embodied in this concept is a clue to the origin of man's predicament. Many contemporary theologians do not think of the fall as an historical event in the ancestry of mankind, but as something which every man experiences in his personal history. In this respect, every man is good in creation, but like Adam, he invariably falls into a state of separation from God, which is sin. This means that the original image with which he was created is defaced or destroyed so that the only means of its recovery is through the redemptive process of God's action through Christ, the new Adam.

Turning to the thinking of early Friends, we discover that George Fox held a clear conviction about the condition of man before the fall. Camby Jones in his study of George Fox describes the views of the founder of the Quaker movement in this way:

He believed first in man's original righteousness... He believed that God created man in His own image, and clothed him with righteousness and holiness. Man lived then in a blessed, happy and innocent state. He was perfect and God gave him dominion over all the works of his hands. "Here was a blessed concord and unity. Man was blessed, and so was woman, and all things blessed unto them. Man was perfect. God is perfect. All that he made was perfect."

Isaac Penington, another first generation Friend, was also convinced that man was originally perfect as made in the image of God and that in the fall the image was completely lost. He says that man's true relationship with God is one of "life" and "blessedness."

Robert Barclay, the most systematic thinker of the early Quaker period, seemed reluctant to speculate about man's primitive state. He said that he would not attempt "... to dive into the many curious notions which many have concerning the condition of man before the fall..." Yet Barclay agreed with Fox and Penington that what Adam lost in the fall was "that true fellowship and communion he had with God." We may con-
clude, therefore, from these and other similar references that, according to the belief of early Friends, man as created in the image of God was thought to enjoy a life of perfect fellowship with God.

Even though early Friends had a very clear notion of the condition of man before the fall, they have never indulged in excessive speculation about such matters. Indeed, their main concern has been with the actual condition of man and what can be done to effect his redemption from sin. Therefore, in considering Friends’ views of the *imago Dei*, or the divine, God-given endowments available to man in creation, it is very important to turn our attention to the Quaker concepts of the Light, Christ, the Seed and other similar terms. It is particularly at this point that Friends have had a more exalted view of man than many other groups in the Christian tradition.

Friends have always been noted for their special preference for the Gospel of John, which declares that a universal Light lights every man that comes into the world (John 1:9). Fox and the early Quakers did not believe that this Light was a natural endowment of man, as many contemporary Quakers hold. They regarded it as a divine Light because it comes from Christ. Students of Fox such as Rachel King and Canby Jones agree that when Fox speaks of the Light he means both that the *Light is Christ* and that it is *from Christ*. Most of the terms which Fox uses, including Holy Spirit, the Seed, and the Measure, carry much the same meaning. They reflect the grace of God available to man through the living, inward Christ. One may picture these gifts of God’s grace in a dynamic sense, available to enable man to recover his true relationship with God and yet never the property of man as such. It is important to grasp this understanding for it places Friends in the mainstream of Christian thinking about the *imago Dei*. More and more this Christian concept of man has come to mean a dynamic and reciprocal *relationship* of responsibility-in-love and of fellowship-in-love between God and man, rather than an innate human faculty, capacity, or substantial quality such as is reason, freedom, creativity, moral responsibility, or religious capacity. Sometimes the *imago* is symbolized by a mirror in which man, when he is in proper relationship to God, reflects the will and purposes of God.

If he is not in this proper relationship, he fails to reflect God’s will and stands then in a relationship of sin.

In any Quaker discussion of God’s gifts of Christ, the Light, or the Seed, the question arises, to what extent are these *inherent* in man’s native capacities, or to what extent are they fresh *gifts* of God’s Holy Spirit to man in every moment of existence? Is it proper to say that man “possesses” certain capacities and potentialities by virtue of his existence as man? Even more pertinent, to what extent may we say that man *has a nature*? What is the nature of this nature, or of the *self*, and does it possess a given set of qualities which constitute a person’s identity and character? These are questions which were pertinent in the early Quaker discussion of what was “natural” to man and what was not, and they are pertinent also to the contemporary discussion of the nature of the self.

It has been customary to think of man as possessing a self which has a substantive nature in a metaphysical sense. The self so conceived constitutes a soul which possesses worth and independence by virtue of its continuity with the Being of God. In attempting to enlarge upon this idea we need to keep in mind two heritages in our past. One is the Greek philosophical tradition which placed emphasis on timeless and eternal being, on spiritual essences, and on the substantive and metaphysical nature of things. The second is the Hebrew tradition which placed greater emphasis on the objective and existential reality of time, on the dynamic will of God, and on human decisions and historical events. In the former tradition man was thought to possess a soul grounded in the order of Being and endowed with an independent worth of its own. The Hebrew view, on the other hand, not only saw man in relationship to God, but declared that man’s worth and dignity are always derived from and are dependent upon this personal relationship. Man in this context does not have a nature so much as he has a *history* constituted by the past which has made him what he is. Man is a creature of decision, of will, and of freedom so that he both *has* a history and also *makes* history. As Gordon Kaufman points out, man’s uniqueness lies in the fact that he is “radically historical.” Imo far as he has a nature it is the capacity to possess a history, to have freedom, and to make decisions.
The early Quaker view of man has a strong resemblance to the latter, Hebrew, interpretation, namely, that man stands in a dynamic and responsive relationship to a God who speaks and commands through the medium of his Holy Spirit. Man has a self and a nature only as it is constantly sustained by God and as it constantly interacts with God in divine-human encounter. Furthermore, man in response to God and other men makes specific decisions, which means that he is a history-making creature.

Much of contemporary Quakerism, on the other hand, has inclined toward the Greek, as opposed to the Hebrew, view of man in this respect. Both liberal and fundamentalist tendencies among Friends have looked upon man as having a substantive nature or soul which comes from God and, because of its immortal character, returns to God. Liberal Quakerism has made much of the phrase, "that of God in every man"—a term taken from George Fox but greatly misused in the twentieth century. As Canby Jones points out in his dissertation on Fox, this term had a meaning parallel to that of Christ within, the Light within, or the Seed, and did not mean that it represented a capacity which inheres in man. It referred, rather, to a dynamic concept of God working in and through the life of man. Insofar as "that of God in every man" signifies a basic worth or dignity in man, this worth is derived from God and not from man's nature as such. A twentieth-century Quaker "heresy" has been that of misusing the term "that of God in every man" in such a way as not only to imply that man's worth and dignity derive from an inherent goodness or divine spark, but also this use of the phrase has been instrumental in developing a rationale for a Quaker humanism which declares that God is parceled out in all men so that each man possesses "a piece" of the Divine. The result of this misuse is that God is no longer considered transcendent, dwelling in his own being above all, but has become wholly immanent. A radical immanence of this type can easily become pantheism from a metaphysical point of view, or a self-sustained humanism from an anthropological point of view. This means that God is no longer necessary to man. At the same time, it sidesteps the whole problem of evil in the world. The assumption is that every man comes into the world possessing latent God-like qualities, which constitute a kind of "standard equipment" for him. Such a view of man makes prayer and worship irrelevant. This is probably the reason that the son of a prominent Quaker has remarked, "I don't believe Daddy believes in prayer anymore." When asked why, he replied, "Because I don't think Daddy believes in God." For such a person, Stoic resolve takes the place of prayer, and meditative illumination takes the place of worship.

Although the fundamentalist Friend at the other extreme has a strong "Christology" which assumes the helplessness of man to save himself, and his need of Christ, there is a tendency in him to adopt a Platonic view of the dualistic nature of man. Man is thought to have a soul which comes from God and is intended to return to God upon death, unless it merits eternal damnation. Thus the soul is believed to be that immortal part of man which exists beyond death, and has the capacity to inhabit places. This seems to be largely a Greek or Gnostic view, whereas the Hebrew-Christian concept is that man is animated by, or has breathed into him, a soul. This latter idea of the soul is best interpreted as breath, life, self, or perhaps personality. At the same time this soul is possessed for the Christian by a higher spirit, namely, the Spirit of God or Christ.

From whatever Quaker vantage point we may attempt to judge the nature of man there has been much of contemporary Quaker religious thought, both liberal and conservative, which has not only misunderstood the central biblical view of man but has deviated from early Quaker interpretations in favor of Greek influences, especially those of Stoicism on liberal Quakerism and of Platonic dualism on conservative Quaker thought.

We must now leave behind our discussion of the Quaker view of the image of God in man. Certainly, Friends have always had a high view of the imago, believing that it is sufficient in man to enable him to overcome sin and become that which he is intended to become. Friends have had little interest in theorizing about an abstract state of "original perfection." Rather, their interest is in the goal of Christian perfection for man. The imago Dei is not for them a theological abstraction but should be considered from a functional and operational point of view, namely, that of the grace and power of love of God working in
and through the life of man and society to transform and perfect them.

MAN AS SINNER

There is a common notion abroad that Friends do not take sin and evil seriously, or perhaps that they do not even believe in them. Insofar as this is true the misconception has arisen in part from certain twentieth-century reinterpretations of historical Quakerism. The assumption has been made that the real spiritual forerunners of Fox and the early Quakers were the continental mystics and humanists. Coupled with this has been a repudiation of the metaphysical distinction between God and his world, taken for granted by early Friends, and in its place has come a philosophical Idealism which has so emphasized the immanence of God as virtually to lose sight of his transcendent. Such a view negates any real doctrine of creation and is not equipped to take sin and evil seriously. Consequently, it has no need for a thorough-going doctrine of redemption.

There is a sense in which any religious faith which stresses the inwardness of religion, or which emphasizes the image of God in man, or which places a premium on the Light within tends to play down emphasis upon sin, and thus lessens the need for a Messiah or Savior. But in spite of certain innovations in Quaker thought during the past generation, there is no question that early Friends had a thorough-going doctrine of sin and evil. To try to give any other interpretation than this is to do violence to historical facts.

In Fox's own conversion experience he declared, "For all are concluded under sin, and shut up in unbelief as I had been . . ." Fox believed that through the disobedience of the first man, Adam, all men lost their "original righteousness." Both Adam and Eve fell "from the purity, holiness, innocency, pure and good estate, in which God placed them. So Adam died, and Eve died; and all died—in Adam."

A third seventeenth-century Quaker, Robert Barclay, was no less certain of man's sinful propensities when he states:

Although Barclay had a very deep sense of sin, he resembled the Scholastics in making a distinction between the Light and Seed on the one hand, and man's natural capacity for reason on the other. He said that we look upon reason as fit to order and rule man in things natural. For as God gave the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; so hath he given man the light of his Son, a spiritual divine light, to rule him in things spiritual, and the light of reason to rule him in things natural.

Fox, Penington, and Barclay all concurred that sin is man's willful disobedience or rebellion against God's will. However, they differed about sin as an inherited condition. For Fox and Penington it was not only a condition of man but also an act of disobedience. Because of Barclay's great concern not to condemn infants to damnation he refused to ascribe Adam's guilt to any man until that person had made Adam's sin his own by
an act of disobedience. Thus infants who are not yet accountable have not transgressed God's will until they consciously sin.

Turning from the early Quaker view of man as sinner, we shall now look at some contemporary Quaker points of view. In the twentieth century Rufus Jones has probably had more influence on Quaker thought and practice than any other one person. It is at the point of his analysis of sin that he differed markedly from his Quaker forebears. He held that the origin of sin stems from man's struggle to emerge from the biological processes of nature. At some point in man's emergence "instinct" and "moral insight" collide and conscience is born. Man gains in knowledge of good and evil. At this conscious level we no longer need to be governed by the unreflective push of instinct. Rather, we enter upon a stage of struggle between the lower impulses and the ideals and aspirations which are striving to guide and shape our life. Sin results when man's will, i.e., his whole self, surrenders to the impulses and drives of his "lower nature" as opposed to the values and ideals which represent the pull of his "higher nature."

Rufus Jones believed that there is a cumulative effect of sin in terms of its consequences. Sinful acts produce a "set of the nature" and the only way to overcome it is to get a new man, which means to undo his habit of sinning and develop in its place a pattern of good behavior. Rufus Jones did not regard man as originally and fundamentally bad or depraved. If he exercises his rational nature to master his lower impulses, then he is on his way to spiritual health. If one learns to love goodness and feel an attraction to it, then he will naturally choose the good as over against evil. Jones says:

To apologize for sin as though it belonged to man's nature, to assume that he is a worm in the dust and necessarily evil is contrary to the entire idea of the Quaker. Fallen he may be, a stubborn sinner and degraded being, but that is because he is not what he was meant to be.

The philosophical roots of Rufus Jones' view of sin are basically Platonic in origin. Sin arises out of a conflict between the spiritual and physical realms. Seldom is sin regarded as a personal affront against God or a defiance of his will. In the Hebrew-Christian tradition sin has always been highly personal--an act of disobedience against God and his will. In the Platonic tra-

dition evil is the absence of the good, and sin is to be equated with error or misjudgment. If the passions of the lower self disturb the rational calculations of the higher self, then mistakes will follow. But there is no sin committed in a personal sense.

Douglas Steere, who follows in the same spiritual heritage as Rufus Jones, would seem to diverge from his views as can be seen in enlightening references which he has made to sin as dealt with in St. Augustine's Confessions. The following quotation gives evidence of his sense of the depth and seriousness of sin from a Christian point of view:

In the light of this I begin to see what is meant by this heretofore God-cursed "original sin," which is so prominent in the treatises of Augustine. I begin to see that he is only writing a commentary upon Jesus' holding up as the object of his most bitter invective not the sins of the body but the sins of pride, of selfishness, of hardness of heart, of self-righteousness. And in this emphasis of Jesus and Augustine there seems to be a major cleavage with Greek thought as expressed in such a mind as Plato. For in Plato there is no talk of sin of the mind such as pride, that may keep man from blessedness. For Plato, mind does not block or blind itself. It is matter that keeps the mind in darkness. It is the unruly seeds of the body and its lustful appetites that are opposed to the character of the mind. It is the biological that reards the psychological, and if the mind could dominate all, if by proper education the psychological could assume supremacy over the biological, for Plato all would be well.

Douglas Steere presents the warning about Augustine's doctrine of sin that apart from his Confessions, "it remains a pre-Christian legalistic formula, a forbidding and vicious dogma."

Another contemporary Quaker, Elton Trueblood, is also less optimistic about man than was Jones and has referred to the "chronic" and "indigenous" nature of sin. He declares:

The point is that man is, qua man, a sinner, even in his virtue. He may be able to overcome or to hold in check the sins of the flesh, but his temptations will not end thereby. In fact all agree that the sins of the spirit are far more terrible than are the sins of the flesh... Of all the sins that of spiritual pride is probably the worst and the most damaging. It is thus that Paradise is lost.

Elton Trueblood injects a warning, however, for those who would overemphasize the "indigenous" character of sin. He says that "a philosophy which would cut the nerve of moral effort is an evil philosophy and this is what is evil in either sheer optimism or sheer pessimism."

Moreover, he points out that the doctrine of man as sinner never describes the "whole truth"
about man. It is the gospel which teaches "... that God reaches out to every man and this we need to know far more vividly."22

In the face of two world wars and so much tragedy in our time, much of the optimistic temperament about the nature of man which prevailed earlier has now been superceded by a more realistic view of man. In addition to the quotations drawn from Douglas Steere and Elton Trueblood, other Quaker documentation of this could be given. At the same time a large segment of American Friends who identify themselves as Evangelicals have always retained a strong doctrine of sin. Arthur Roberts, writing as one of these, has stated, "Friends recognize that man is depraved, in that he cannot of his own power or inclination find salvation. Quakers are not so much optimistic about man as they are optimistic about the power of Christ to save man."23

There is another dimension of sin, however, which has become of major concern to us in the twentieth century, namely, the social nature and consequences of sin. The Social Gospel movement popularized a liberal version of the idea that men are caught in a net of social evil, much of which they have inherited. The contemporary version of this idea has been dramatized by Reinhold Niebuhr, whose impact upon social thought has not gone unnoticed by the Friends, though they have been slow to understand the real nature and relevance of his argument. Cecil Hinshaw says that although early Quakers did not subscribe to any utopian view of the world, he doubts whether they understood as well as we do today "... the extent to which man in his corporate relationship in society normally engages in evil that far transcends personal sin."24 He states further:

Our vision of a new world and culture must never blind us to the hard fact that even good men are caught up in the magnetism of corporate sin and held by a power of attraction difficult even for psychologists to explain.

The real crux of the problem for Friends is that few of them make any distinction between personal ethics and social ethics. Quakerism in both its conservative and liberal varieties is today highly individualistic, carrying with it a personal ethic which is supposed to be applicable not only to the personal affairs of the individual but to all the corporate decisions of society. The Third World Conference of Friends held at Oxford, England in 1952 declared: "We call upon people every-

where to ... behave as nations with the same decency as they would behave as men and brothers, to substitute the institutions of peace for the institutions of war."25 One could cite many Quaker statements of this type. It seems very difficult for Friends to comprehend the complexity of group behavior and group decisions, and to understand why organizational and national affairs cannot be conducted on the same personal basis of love as those of the family and small community. Kenneth Boulding has quite rightly pointed out that "... only small organizations can be personal."26 In the same reference he says that "a good deal of harm has been done by interpreting the moral ideal of the 'brotherhood of man' ... to mean that all human organization must be like a family, in its looseness of organization and its complexity of personal interaction."

Douglas Steere has taken sharp issue with what he calls the "collectivist theologians" of our time who have attempted to give a theological rationale for a valid and relevant contemporary social ethic. Although he recognizes the service they have performed in their study and analysis of group sin, his general criticism of this point of view sounds much like George Fox's charge against the Calvinists of his time, that they "preached up sin to the grave." Douglas Steere's main interest is with the saint, who he believes is able to bridge the gulf between personal and group ethical behavior and to demonstrate the way of human brotherhood in human relations. In championing the saint as an antithode to the "socio-theological pessimism" of our time, he states:

The saint does not arrive at his ethical insight from a study of the power ethic of mass-groups. He arrives at it from a firsthand knowledge of the power of the I, the Me, and the Mine in the heart of man and of the expulsive power of God's love to melt them down and to allow brotherhood to emerge. Group egoism, group pride, and group sin are all intense realities for the saint, and he knows them as a lump that is hard to reduce. But he would not let the lump-like nature of group sin intimidate him into accepting it as an ultimate and irreducible surd. God has faced lumps of corporate sin before, even lumps that were in their surroundings more coherent and more defiant than those of our day, and He has softened them up and often dissolved them. The saint knows that he does not work alone.27

These quotations and references serve to illustrate the fact that although Quakers are noted for their social concern and

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their attempt to demonstrate a living faith which has as its product a vital social ethic, their approach continues to be strongly personal. They place such a premium on the individual that even in their own groups they manifest a lack of understanding of the corporate complexities and ambiguities which are inherent in social intercourse. It seems difficult for Friends to realize that where groups of people are involved there is a multiplicity of claims to be considered for every choice made and that clear black and white decisions are very uncommon. Because Friends, too, have to live with these situations all the time, they are often obsessed with guilt feelings about the fact that decisions in this life are not always clearcut.

Another insight, arising chiefly from depth psychology, which has not been completely accepted by Friends, is that concerning the irrational aspect of man’s life at the deep levels of the self. This is what some theologians would call the “demonic element” in man’s life, both in terms of his personal and his corporate life. For example, Rufus Jones once deplored the fact that man in his “insane folly” “wrecked” the world between 1914-18. But in his analysis of the situation he shows little recognition that man’s behavior is not always governed by reason, and that irrational and demonic elements frequently predominate. To recognize the ugly and evil side of man in terms of the irrational drives which undergird much of his life is not to degrade him, but should be a sign of moral and spiritual maturity.

There is a sense in which the public’s view that Friends do not take sin seriously is correct. Whether liberal or conservative, Friends have a dogged assurance that man, if he does what he is supposed to do, will come out all right. If Friends are to be honest with themselves and to avoid superficiality in their understanding of man, they must re-evaluate their view of man as a sinner. If we believe that man’s image is most clearly reflected when he is doing the will of God, then we must surely know that sin is present in a very real sense when man disobeys God’s will. But just as the image relationship may become a condition in man, so sin may become a condition. Sin is something which man both does and is. Because man is endowed with freedom he makes choices against God’s will. Then he becomes a victim of his own sin and is in bondage. In this state he is not completely free to find saving solutions to his predicament. Man is a “radically historical” creature in that all of his past choices condition those of the present. Sin is man’s creation of a distorted history for himself. As the early Quakers knew so well, man’s only hope under these circumstances lies in the “power of the Lord” to break this enslaved condition of man and give him a new freedom from the distorted past that he has created. It is to this hope for man’s life we now turn.

VICTORY OVER SIN AND DEATH

It is impossible from the Christian perspective to discuss the doctrine of man without at the same time discussing the doctrine of God. Man is ultimately a “theonomous being,” which is to say that his life derives from God. Without the intervening grace of God he cannot expect to achieve victory over sin and death. Neither can man expect to live the life of holy obedience apart from the sustaining power and grace of God.

If there was anything characteristic of the early Quakers, it was their conviction of man’s dependence upon God. Geoffrey Nuttall has pointed out that the most characteristic phrase of Fox was “the power of the Lord was over all.” This implied that man had access to this power and that it was this power which would enable him to overcome sin. The early Friends had just as deep a sense of the sin of man as did the Calvinists of their day, but they differed from them by insisting that God’s grace and power were sufficient to overcome sin, and that this could happen for all men, not just for the elect. As necessary as it is to face up to the reality of sin and evil, it would be a pagan rather than a Christian view of man which failed to find in God’s redemptive love and grace the answer to man’s deep-going sin. It was certainly something of this which Fox felt when he wrote: “I saw... there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love which flowed over the ocean of darkness. In that also I saw the infinite love of God. ..”

A major characteristic of early Friends was their belief that a life of Christian perfection and holiness was literally possible. They believed that whereas all men died through the disobedience of Adam, all men shall be made alive through the obedi-
ence of the Perfect One—Christ. In Fox’s own conversion experience he said:

Now was I come up in spirit through the flaming sword into the paradise of God. All things were new, and all the creation gave another smell unto me than before, beyond what words can utter. I knew nothing but presence, and innocence, and righteousness, being renewed up into the image of God by Christ Jesus, so that I say I was come up to the state of Adam which he was in before he fell.81

Fox did not hold that man could sin no more, but that as he remained obedient to the Light of Christ he would continue in the life of perfection. Although Isaac Penington did not write extensively about the doctrine of Christian perfection, he nevertheless agreed with Fox and the other seventeenth-century Friends when he said, “Is it not the will of Christ that his disciples should be perfect, as their heavenly Father is perfect? . . . Will God dwell in an unholy temple? Will he dwell where sin dwells?”82

Robert Barclay in his Apology devotes an entire Proposition to the subject of perfection. We excerpt a few of his statements in order to present the main theme of his argument.

We do believe, that . . . to those in whom Christ comes to be formed, and the new man brought forth, and born of the incorruptible seed, as that birth, and man in union therewith, naturally doth the will of God, it is possible so far to keep to it, as not to be found daily transgressors of the law of God.83

Even though he believed thoroughly in the possibility of Christian perfection Barclay is also clear that the life of Christian perfection does “admit of growth.” We are not expected to reach the holiness and perfection of God “but only a perfection proportionable and answerable to man’s measure . . . and [which] enables to answer what he [God] requires of us.”84 There is also the possibility that those who “. . . do not diligently attend to that of God in the heart” will lose this state of perfection. “And we doubt not,” says Barclay, “but many good and holy men, who have arrived to everlasting life, have had divers ebings and flowings of this kind.”85 On the other hand he declares, “. . . I will not affirm that a state is not attainable in this life, in which to do righteousness may be so natural to the regenerate soul, that in the stability of that condition he cannot sin.”86 Barclay adds a personal note to confess that he never arrived at such a state himself.

Although we have implied that for early Friends man’s chief hope is to live a life of Christian perfection in which the life of sin is blotted out, this needs further examination. The term Christian perfection carries with it too strong an implication that man’s primary and only responsibility is ethical. Even though early Friends were very certain that Christian perfection required a high level of behavior, they were first of all concerned with a life of purity and holiness in relationship to God, believing that such a life would in turn show forth the fruits of Christ-like behavior. Arthur Roberts in his research on George Fox has suggested that the key relationship Friends sought was one of holiness. The word “holy” as used in the Old Testament, would fit very well the meaning Arthur Roberts intends. Where-as sin is that which separates man from God, the holy is that which brings him into a closer relationship with God. Coupled with this was the idea that no one could come near the greatness and goodness of God without being pure, so the term “holy” gradually took on ethical implications, that one’s life must be free from actual sins in order to be accepted by God.

Although Cecil Hinshaw and other Friends have written extensively on Christian perfectionism as the key to early Quakerism, it would seem to this writer that the term used by Thomas Kelly, “holy obedience,” indicates most clearly what the Quaker objective really is. Such a term incorporates the emphasis which Arthur Roberts has so well restated, namely, the primary importance of man’s right spiritual relationship to God, and secondly, the idea of Friends continuing concern for right moral behavior. The first is to be found in the word “holy” and the latter in the word “obedience.” Moreover, it definitely provides for a God-centered ethic, and not a humanly contrived moral code or standard of conduct. It also establishes the right relationship between religion (or theology) and ethics, namely, the primacy of the former over the latter. From a Christian point of view ethics is never autonomous but derives its authority from man’s relationship to God.

There is one further consideration which must be given brief attention, namely, the redemption or salvation of man. From what has been said before there was no question in the

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minds of early Friends that man stood in need of the redemptive action of God through Christ to effect his final justification and reconciliation. Today among Friends there still exists a conservative theology which holds as strongly as ever to man’s need for the atoning work of Christ to make possible man’s salvation. Liberal Friends, on the other hand, have so emphasized “that of God in every man” as an inherent “built-in” quality of goodness that man is believed to be able through self-discipline and self-improvement to achieve the abundant life. It is recognized that man is not what he ought to be, but he does not stand in need of a Redeemer. If he resolves to follow the teachings of Jesus, he can do so. Christian nurture in place of Christian redemption is emphasized, rather than Christian redemption and then Christian nurture to enable growth toward a life of holy obedience.

Since in a subsequent issue of Quaker Religious Thought it is planned to devote an entire number to the work of Christ, it would be out of place to deal extensively with the subject here. The writer wishes to state his belief, however, that within the context of historic Quakerism there cannot be developed an adequate doctrine of man without a corresponding doctrine of God’s redemptive action through Jesus Christ. Moreover, from an empirical point of view it does not seem to the writer that man is able to extricate himself from his sinful predicament without the assistance of divine action.

Passing reference should be made to a point of view expressed by several contemporary students of Quakerism, especially Lewis Benson, that for early Friends the redemptive process was no less a corporate experience than it was an individual experience. Great emphasis is placed on Fox’s idea of the “gathered church” as a redemptive community, within the context of which community man’s salvation is worked out. The writer would think that both aspects of redemption must be stressed. Man was created for fellowship with God and his fellowmen, and it is only reasonable that he work out his salvation in the redemptive community of Christ. But it is also important for each individual to appropriate the new life to himself, and to do so he must repent, overcome his love for sin, and rededicate himself to the will and purposes of God.

Finally, from the Christian point of view, the redemptive action of God must not only help man to win victory over sin but over death as well. The Christian hope for man does not terminate with historical time, but holds that there is a dimension of God’s Time into which man may enter. Just as God creates body, mind, and spirit in the beginning, so he recreates a new spiritual body at the end for those whose lives have been dedicated to him. Friends historically have held to the view that God can and will sustain the faithful in both life and death. Therefore, a life of holy obedience here and now, which Friends declare is possible, is only preliminary to the life of victory over death promised to all who would be gathered unto the Father.

In summary, one may say that Friends have always held a high view of man. Although they are not inclined to measure the image of God in terms of an “original perfection,” it is quite clear that Friends believe that man as created by God is not only precious in his sight but is able to respond to the Light of Christ working within to transform and perfect his God-given potentialities. Although Friends throughout their history have been willing to recognize the sin of man, both as an act of will and as a condition of the self, still their chief preoccupation has not been with sin but with the availability of the power and grace of God to recreate the human situation in all its dimensions, personal as well as social. Moreover, Friends hold that if man is faithful to his God he will be victor over sin and death. This victory can be known as a life of holy obedience to God here and now, and it carries with it a hope for man in the total economy of God’s purposes.

Friends, therefore, not only have a high view of man, but they also expect a great deal of him. Against the Christian background out of which Quakerism sprang, they hold Jesus Christ to be not only God’s revelation of himself but the standard of Christian perfection toward which man is intended to grow and mature. But man is never left alone in this venture. His hope lies in the fact that he stands in a divine-human relationship and action in which God is always ready to restore man to his rightful relationship if he will only respond in faith and obedience.
References


11. Ibid., I, p. 448.

12. Ibid.

13. Barclay, op. cit., Prop. IV.

14. Ibid., Prop. V and VI, Sec. XVI.

15. Ibid., Prop. IV, Sec. II.


21. Ibid., p. 60.

22. Ibid., p. 65.


25. Ibid., p. 22.


32. Penington, op. cit., IV, p. 566.


34. Ibid., Prop. VIII, Part I, Paragraph 2.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

Comments

A. BURNS CHALMERS

When Reinhold Niebuhr was beginning to write his famous Gifford Lectures on "The Nature and Destiny of Man" he told a small group that he knew what his first sentence (slightly changed in its final form) would be: "Man has always been troubled about himself." It is this simple disquiet and question which has been the persistent background of the most careful analyses of man's nature and destiny. It is the more profound levels of man's relation to God, the "primary relationship," which Wilmer Cooper examines. He has given us a concise, accurate, and well-reasoned statement.

In commenting on this essay it will be convenient to consider in succession the three categories under which he views man: image of God, sinner, and victory over sin and death. Each is thoughtfully related to both the historic and contemporary views of Friends.

I

It is one of the strengths of Wilmer Cooper's discussion of man as made in the image of God that he so clearly states the Hebrew position which regards man as a "history-making creature," in whom the characteristics of decision, will and freedom take such a prominent part. He takes issue with the Greek tradition and, in effect, rejects it. He inveighs against Friends for misunderstanding the central biblical view of man and succumbing to what we might call "creeping Hellenism." This danger is vividly seen in what is termed the twentieth-century heresy of misusing the phrase "that of God in every man" to develop a rationale for a "Quaker humanism." The result is to veer toward a radical immanence with the pitfall of pantheism too close for comfort.

With the main contention here set forth I agree. Man is not "innately good" in Rousseau's sense or in the sense usually