

Answering That of God

By HENRY J. CADBURY, PH.D.

Presidential Address to the Friends' Historical Society, 1947

DO the classical positions of Quakerism form a logical and consistent system, developed from some central principle, or are they a congeries of independent tenets? The former alternative represents the usual answer. The central principle is mostly defined as the Inner Light, and then the theological and practical tenets of the Society of Friends are commonly demonstrated to be in the relation to it of source and inference, cause and effect.

Such an interpretation of a religion is quite usual. The interpreters are strong on theology and they tend to be interested in fitting phenomena into a theological system. Is it presumptuous to question whether religion itself develops that way? Is there not an alternative—priority of experience over theory—of unrelated phenomena preceding logical correlation? Conversely, is not experience itself often developed and interpreted in the light of some established theory?

Questions like these suggest that we might usefully look at some features of early Quakerism from a little different angle, and examine some of the material more from the historical than from the theological point of view. There is a phrase sometimes used in England: "Historical theology." I am not quite sure how it is used. I am thinking of it as applicable to the study of religious positions as based not so much on revelation or dogma as on practical experience and on logic.

It is the practical character of Quakerism that is much in the public eye today. Our Society seems to have a peculiar social conscience, and some noteworthy features of social technique. Of course in interchurch councils we are conspicuous for other reasons, the inconvenience with which our sheer existence prevents certain easy definitions of the nature of the church, worship, the sacraments, the means of grace, the formulation of faith, and so on. The curious lay observer of Quakerism has other questions

to ask. He wants to know what is the past and present connection between our personal religion, our corporate worship and the recurrent emergence among us of a radical social concern. Since Friends have differed from contemporary Christian groups (a) in their unprogrammed worship and (b) in their serious scruples about certain current practices, some connection is assumed between these two phenomena. Even apart from the supposed mystical roots of our social testimonies, there is much about their origin and character that even Friends, not to mention outsiders, probably fail to grasp.

The names for the supposed central principle of Friends are of rather baffling variety. By something of an accident one of them, the Light, has come to prevail. I am not denying that in the form "Light Within" it was fairly common, in the early period, even though it went out of style for a time. Yet it is only one of several scriptural terms. It is derived primarily from what their opponents called the Quakers' text (John 1, 9).¹ The term "Seed," which today seems so appropriate to our recognition of the genetic character of religion, was again probably due to a single biblical reference of quite different import, viz. the Seed of the Woman (Genesis 3, 15), used proleptically and messianically of Christ. Indeed both Christ and the Holy Spirit express frequently the same notion or inward principle. The early interchangeability of Christ and Light left the way open for the evangelical *vs.* anti-evangelical conflict of later times. A favourite self-depreciation by George Fox was expressed in his frequent statement that Christ had come or would come "to teach his people himself." Fox and his friends could only lead men to Christ their teacher and leave them there.

What Friends emphasized by these terms in theological controversy is quite familiar. They express the inward rather than the outward, the continuous rather than the historic, the experience rather than the doctrine. We might even describe it as mystical, if we are careful to recall the fact that mystical is a word that was not much used by Friends themselves until recently and would have been for them a term of reproach.

¹ Then was the true Light, even the Light which lighteth everyone coming into the world.

Every social action has both its subjective and its objective side. The Inner Light is undoubtedly regarded as working subjectively. If, as is sometimes said, the Puritans objected to bear-baiting not because it brought pain to the bear but pleasure to the spectators, so there is a sense in which the early Friends were moved by an inner impulse, to satisfy which they avoided bearing arms, taking oaths, holding slaves and the like. The effect of their actions on others they could hardly ignore but their own "clearness," to use a well-known Quaker term, was their impelling ambition. When a modern student speaks of Fox's Light Within as that which shows us what is evil¹ the insight is considered almost entirely from the subjective side. The leading is not consciously based on the implications of our acts, it is not sensibly motivated by the humanitarian results. It is often negative, but the practical ill effects of the other course are not primarily appealed to. We obey it not because we calculate the results of alternative courses, but by a kind of intuition and *noblesse oblige*.

This one sided character of the springs of Quaker action is what is meant by Clarkson when he says that the Friends act upon principles rather than upon consequences. For many Friends the leading seemed, I am sure, something entirely inward, something not deduced, something not even inherited—but immediate, detached, direct. They did not work it out into a mutual relationship, or estimate my duty to my neighbour in terms of his needs or wants, or of his duty to me. Possibly—indeed probably—such considerations were often in the back of their minds or were even adduced in corroboration, but they would deny the suggestion that social duty was a social contract, or that it was inappropriate for the individual to ascertain the divine leading for himself pretty much as in a vacuum.

This concentration on the subjective side of social action is not unusual in religion, nor unique to Quakerism. There is a good deal of it in historic Christianity. I have repeatedly had occasion to point it out in the Gospels. Jesus' advice is to the individual directly without much apparent thought of social consequences or of the relation of

¹ Rachel Hadley King, *George Fox and the Light Within*, 1940, Chapter IV.

one man's act to another's. It is unilateral, if I may use a more modern term. It is not contingent or calculated or reciprocal. It is subjective, in the sense in which I have been using the term. That accounts for the apparent emphasis on the results or rewards to the doer of good himself rather than on the benefit derived by his beneficiaries.

It fits this emphasis that when early Friends recommended social action they were not thinking of the Light within others, within the object or recipient of their enlightened behaviour, but within themselves. I know of no mention of the Light Within others as a motive for our own action. Modern thinkers commonly maintain that the Friends emphasized the sacredness of personality, the value of the individual and the equality of all men (including women), and they assume that recognition of the divine Light or Spirit or Seed in our neighbours will lead us to the appropriate conclusions for our own action. Logically it should do, yet in so far as Friends actually did maintain these principles, the principles appear to be independent of any such deduction.

Democracy in early Quakerism was clearly quite limited. Of course increased intimacy and the warmer fellowship of a small persecuted sect had their effects. Their enemies suspected the Friends of "levelling" beyond anything they ever were guilty of. Surprisingly, in economic affairs they did not go far towards communism. Biblical precedent, the trend in some contemporary groups, and the highly enthusiastic character of the movement would have made such an outcome natural.

Social distinctions were not forgotten. Any modern study of William Penn's social philosophy shows how far he himself was from egalitarianism. It was no Quaker who asked,

When Adam delved and Eve span
Who was then the gentleman ?¹

So the strong humanitarian trend in early Quakerism was much less motivated from without than one would anticipate. The Friend might well have been deterred from slave owning

¹ Said to have been quoted by John Ball at Blackheath, 12th June, 1381, to rebels in Wat Tyler's Insurrection.

or from soldiering by regard for the inner Light in the slave or in the enemy, but I think he was not. He may occasionally have quoted the Golden Rule or the phrase of Paul about "the brother for whom Christ died." More decisive for him was the direct sense of his own duty. He believed that he was forbidden to do such things, and he relied on this sense of duty at work in others as well as in himself as the basis for dealing with these and other social ills.

Pity and altruism are inevitably attributed to Friends, even though not mentioned. We may assume of the early Friends, what I have been told that we should assume of Jesus, namely that regard for others' comfort and happiness and life was taken for granted in what they preached even though it is not specifically appealed to in their recorded teaching.

We do not like the imputation that Friends have acted out of love of their own peace of mind. Yet that imputation is largely true. They suffered from an uneasy conscience until it drove them to do to others what they felt to be right. This often produced outward distress for them, persecution, financial loss, imprisonment, or scorn. A modern reproach against the religious pacifist is superficially true, viz. that he is so concerned to keep his own hands clean that he stands to one side when a dirty business like war is necessary. Such a critic of course assumes that war is necessary. He is as little conscious of the possible social value of the pacifist's attitude as in fact is the naïve Quaker himself. For, as I have said, the potential social effects of a Friend's abstention is not prominent in his own focus of attention.

Having said so much of the subjective character of Quaker initiative I have yet to mention an important external factor, for which I may use the classic phrase "that of God in everyone." When a non-Quaker modern writer uses a Quaker phrase he often appears to be ignorant of its origin. Thus I read in a recent book by a Baptist: "There is in man what is often described as 'that of God.'"¹ But the phrase has an unmistakable original. It is characteristic of George Fox. "That of God in everyone" occurs dozens of times in his writings and other dozens of times in

¹ H. H. Rowley, *The Relevance of the Bible*, 1942, p. 173.

slightly variant forms, like "the principle" or "the witness of God," or "the Truth in everyone."¹

The phrase, however, is almost invariably used with the verb "answer" as in the oft quoted passage:

Be patterns, be examples . . . that your carriage may preach among all sorts of people. Then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone.²

Without giving the evidence piece by piece let me summarize what this idiom seems to imply.

Fox is still speaking to Friends about their own conduct—both conduct within their own group, and conduct within the wider community. As he says he wants their lives to preach and he reminds them that if their conduct is suitable it will answer, that is, correspond to and appeal to an inner witness in other persons. This witness in others is beyond the individual whose conduct is under consideration; it provides not so much a motive or a sanction for his conduct as a corroboration.

Some quotations will illustrate both the variety of phrase and the variety of application. Writing to Friends in Ireland who might be buying Irish land in 1669, Fox says: "Keep to justice and equity, that you may answer that which is equal and just and true in every man and in yourselves." Writing to wider audiences he says: "Adorn the Truth in all things and answer truth and righteousness in everyone" (17, 131F); "be faithful that ye may answer that of God in everyone" (Ep. 117); "walk in the wisdom of God, answering that of God in everyone" (Ep. 143); "in pureness live over the deceit and answer the witness of the Lord God in everyone" (Ep. 134); "sound deep to the witness of God in every man" (Ep. 195). Referring to plainness of address and the use of a fixed price he says, "You come to answer that of God in all" (Ep. 251).

Sometimes the term is Light, but very often in the sense not of John 1, 9, but of the Matthean texts "Ye are the Light

¹ A partial list of occurrences in Fox's epistles is given by A. Neave Brayshaw in his *Personality of George Fox*, 1933, p. 18, note 2. The term in one form or another was used throughout the four decades of his writings, and was not confined chiefly to a single period as were some of his other favourite phrases, e.g. "the occasion of war."

² *Journal* (Bi-Cent.), I, 316.

of the world," "let your light so shine before men that they seeing your good works may glorify your Father which is in Heaven." "By your light shining," he writes to Friends in Carolina, "you may answer the Light in all men" (Ep. 371); and those in Holland he bids to "be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, to answer the light of Christ in all" (Ep. 374).

Of particular interest is Fox's use of this phrase in application to non-Christian peoples. Thus to Friends captive in Algiers he urges conduct that may answer the Spirit of God both in Turks and in Moors, and the rest of the captives [that is, white Europeans] (Ep. 366), or answering God's witness in the Turks, Jews, Moors and your patroons (Ep. 388). Speaking of the heathen in general he writes in 1656, "Be diligent answering the witness of God in all their consciences and . . . bring the truth over all the head of the heathen to the witness" (Swarth. MSS. ii, 90). In Pennsylvania he brackets the Indians and whites together, for Friends are by their behaviour to answer that which is good both in the people among you and in the Indians (Ep. 412), or to answer the truth in all the professors (i.e. nominal Christians) and the heathen (Ep. 404). So too with regard to Negroes "Let your light shine among the Indians and the blacks and the whites, that ye may answer the truth in them" (*Journal*, 1694, p. 610). "You may answer that which may be known of God in all both white and black and make them confess with that of God in them which they do transgress that God is in you of a truth" (12, 109F). Speaking in 1675 specifically of the slaves of the Quakers in Barbados, George Fox wrote, "You should preach Christ to the Ethiopians that are in your families, that so they may be free men indeed and be tender of and to them and walk in love, that ye may answer that of God in their hearts" (*Gospel Family Order*, 1701, p. 15).

In universalizing this responsive inner principle outside of Christendom the Friends were quite aware that they were going counter to current Christian doctrine. They were not satisfied to take it merely for granted as Fox did in writing to his fellow Quakers. It remains to indicate some logical conclusions and the efforts made to confirm by experience this wider revelation.

The Quaker doctrine of something of God shows itself

in their treatment of extra-canonical writings. They held that the scripture writers had no monopoly on revealed truth. They pointed out that the Bible did not include all the writings of prophets and apostles ; other books whether lost or extant deserved the same reverence. There are various references in early Quaker literature to Hermes Trismegistus, reputed to have been an Egyptian author some centuries before Moses. The Book of Enoch and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs would serve the same purpose, though only the latter work was then available. Samuel Fisher, the learned Kent Friend, mentions both of these, and the equally learned Thomas Lawson hoped some Friend in Holland could find Enoch's writings.

Quite outside the Biblical tradition the early Friends believed they found written evidence of an indigenous comprehension of truth. George Keith in his less evangelical days actually translated from the Latin a work by an Arabic philosopher that purported to be the life of Hai Ebn Yokdan, and Barclay, too, eagerly accepted its evidence in his *Apology*. Similar evidence from farther East was published by Friends in the pamphlets *The Upright Lives of the Heathen briefly noted : or Epistles and Discourses betwixt Alexander the Conqueror and Diudimus King of the Brachmans*, and *A Dialogue betwixt an East Indian Brachman and a Christian*.¹

Apart from literary evidence of that of God in the unevangelized heathen of the past, Friends believed that there were divine potentialities in the heathen about them. We little realize today how far the Friends penetrated not only in Christendom but outside of Christendom in the first decade of their history, more than 150 years before one commonly dates the era of Protestant foreign missions. While other white settlers in America were concerned for the Christianization of the Indian—I think largely on the basis that they were not really heathen, but Jews of the lost ten tribes, the Friends addressed themselves also to the peoples and rulers of Asia and Africa. The assumption behind this movement can be seen in the documents that Fox addressed to the Cham of Tartary, the Emperor of China, to the Great Turk or the Great Mogul and to the

¹ On all these compare my article on "Early Quakerism and Uncanonical Lore" in *Harvard Theological Review*, XL, 1947, pp. 177-205.

King of Suratt.¹ We are all familiar with the dramatic visit of Mary Fisher to the Sultan at Adrianople. There were other missionaries who at least tried to penetrate into Turkey, Palestine, Egypt and the East Indies.

The audience sought and found by Friends in these countries would scarcely be Christians. Yet in 1661 a Friend was back in England after three years' successful missionary work in the East Indies while several others were reported planning to go there.² One would like to find a copy of the pamphlets in Arabic that John Stubbs and Henry Fell distributed along with others in Hebrew and Latin in the city of Alexandria in 1661.³

No doubt the Friends had hopes of converting the Moors who took them captive to Algiers, Mequinez and Fez. As for their own captives, the Negro slaves, long before Friends had a conscience as slave owners or slave traders, they felt a deep concern for their conversion and George Fox's words were taken to heart and repeated. The first non-Quaker pamphlet on the subject, *The Negro's and Indian's Advocate*, by Morgan Goodwyn (1680), was inspired by a pamphlet which he does not name but which I have identified with George Fox's *To the Ministers, Teachers and Priests . . . in Barbados* (1672).

Perhaps the logic of the Quaker theory of that of God is seen best in connection with the American Indian. I do not doubt that wishful thinking entered their ideas about the inherent religion and morality of the aborigines. The Friends also wished to put the persecuting Christians to shame by contrast, just as sometimes the biblical writers contrasted outsiders with the chosen people, to the discredit of the latter. More than once the inhospitality of the white men to the Quaker missionaries is pointed up by

¹ See published pieces listed in Smith's *Catalogue of Friends' Books*, 1867, I, p. 661, and the unpublished pieces listed in my *Annual Catalogue of George Fox's Papers*, 1939, p. 77. The dates, 1660 and 1661, coincide with the height of the Quaker missionary impulse towards the East. Possibly "Sur Rat" meant the West Indian Montserrat as Fox's later endorsement implies, not the principality in Bombay, but I am not sure that in 1661 Fox knew the difference. As his broadside of 1660, *The Promise of God Proclaimed*, indicates he knew there were both "East and West Indies."

² Braithwaite, *Second Period of Quakerism*, p. 217; *Beginnings of Quakerism*, p. 418. John Swinton was believed to be intending for the same destination in 1670. *The Lauderdale Papers*, ii, p. 180.

³ Braithwaite, *Beginnings*, p. 430.

comparing the generosity of the Red Indians. George Bishop's *New England Judged* (1661) begins with a long and invidious recital to prove that the men and rulers of New England had behaved worse than all other religious groups and peoples, with examples from Jews, Turks, Mahometans and notably the American Indians.

The Friends endeavoured to support this theory of the Indians more positively. When Fox and others preached to them through an interpreter any friendly response was taken as evidence of an indigenous similar religious insight. Friends were extremely curious for this reason about the religion of the Indians. They pressed them into admitting some kind of inward prompting and interpreted their response as confirming the Quaker doctrine. Inevitably they did not wait for the groping approach of the Indians themselves but soon preached to them the full Christian content of Quakerism. Yet they cherished all the evidence they could secure to confirm their theory of a witness within the Indians' own hearts. This prompted the publication of *A True Account of the Dying Words of Ochanickon, an Indian King* (London, 1682) as reported from Burlington, New Jersey. John Richardson records that some Indians he met in Pennsylvania "smote their hands on their breasts" saying, "the good man here (meaning in their Hearts) told them what I said was all good."¹

Summarizing the response of Indians to the special Quaker teaching, the late Rayner Kelsey wrote:

The reference to the readiness with which the Indians assented to the doctrine of the Inward Light is mentioned many times by early Friends from the time of Fox's discourse with the Indians during his sojourn in America. The doctrine seemed to tally so well with the spiritual conceptions of the natives and their apprehension of the promptings of conscience that they seem readily to have attained what seemed to be common ground with Friends.²

I think one might well describe the tallying as the other way round. How far Friends inspired in the Indians the very theological emphasis which they later quote from them is I

¹ *Account of the Life of John Richardson*, 1783, pp. 138-9.

² R. W. Kelsey, *Friends and the Indians*, 1917, p. 29.

suspect indicated by a "Speech delivered by an Indian chief, in reply to a sermon, preached by a Swedish missionary, in order to convert the Indians to the Christian religion," stressing original sin and the need for a mediator. It is a strong plea for the validity of natural religion over against revealed religion, embarrassing to any ecclesiastical claimant of the necessity for salvation of written revelation. Though we are told that the speech was made at an Indian treaty held at Conestoga in Pennsylvania in or about the year 1710 and subsequently published in Sweden by the missionary, in Latin, together with his own sermon, its theological tenor and the fact that it was printed in English in Philadelphia makes me suspect its genuineness.¹

More authentic is the "Account of a Visit lately made to the People called Quakers in Philadelphia, by Papoonahal, an Indian Chief and several other Indians chiefly of the Minisink Tribe, with the substance of their conferences on that occasion," 1761. It was composed apparently by Anthony Benezet who was present and was circulated in manuscript. It appears in his recent biography.² It was, however, also published in London in the very year of its occurrence³ and may perhaps have had an influence in wider circles. There can be no doubt that the Quaker exploitation of the American Indian as confirming the Friends' own theory of man had its effect on the growth of the Romantic conception of the "Noble Savage", especially in circles where the "Good Quaker" himself was becoming something of a legend.

Various other examples could be given from early Quaker sources of the theological views of the Indians as agreeing with the Quaker views.⁴ Their moral standards including hospitality and religious toleration have also been attested by Friends eager to show that natural religion may be not inferior to revealed religion. Of special interest today is

¹ Robert Proud, *The History of Pennsylvania*, ii, 1798, 313-15. I have not traced its earlier publication, cf. Mayhew's claim of response to his theology from Indians of Martha's Vineyard.

² *Friend Anthony Benezet*, by George S. Brookes, 1939, pp. 479-92.

³ See Smith, *op. cit.* II, 462. It was also published in 1803 at Stanford, New York, by D. Lawrence. Brookes was evidently unaware of these earlier publications, as of several of the extant manuscript copies.

⁴ I mention, because it was first published lately, "John Farmer's First American Journey 1711-1714", *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, 53, 1944, pp. 79-95.

the Quaker claim of the pacific character of the Indians. They enjoyed no such reputation in general, and when badly treated they retaliated in kind; but Friends were glad to prove the harmlessness of an Indian when fairly treated. Friends acted on the assumption too, and collectively and individually they demonstrated their own immunity from harm. The Pennsylvania experience of the disarmed state is the best known example, but it is not the only one. It has also been controverted by those who believe that the Indians could not have been trusted. I will not say that the critics of the Quaker policy are arguing the universality of original sin, or the Quakers arguing universal grace. The Friends, however, believed that they had both practical vindication for their own pacific policy and experiential confirmation of something of God in the non-Christian savage to which their own conduct answered.

This is not the time to debate the old problems: Was the Quaker policy successful? Were the Delaware Indians less warlike than most Indians? Was not the view of the non-Friends more accurate that the only safe Indian was a dead one? One could refer to some interesting recent publications.¹ Anthropologists and historians still tend to substantiate much in the Quaker estimate of the American Indian.

More revelant are the present-day problems in relation to the Quaker doctrine. One hears again and again the charge that certain peoples or persons can understand no language except force. This mostly means that the person who makes the charge knows himself no other language and does not trust it if he does know it. The Quaker doctrine of that of God remains a standing challenge to such pessimism. It still calls on us to vindicate it by acting ourselves so as to answer, that is, to correspond, to the witness of God in others, even in others of whom it is the fashion of our contemporaries to despair. Of course we are still in danger of merely wishful thinking, but we have an opportunity also to illustrate and confirm the Quaker doctrine by logic and experience.

¹ Frank C. Speck, "The Delaware Indians as Women: Were the Original Pennsylvanians Politically Emasculated?" *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, LXX, 1946, 377-87. Ella Cara Deloria, "Dakota Treatment of Murderers," *Proceedings of American Philosophical Society*, vol. 88, 1944, pp. 368-371.