

**Two Trends
In Modern Quaker Thought
A Statement Of Belief**

Albert Fowler



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR Albert Fowler first heard of the Society of Friends as a student at Haverford College in the middle 'twenties. He was impressed by the peace testimony, and four years of Quaker meetings every Thursday during the college term with Rufus Jones and William Wistar Comfort in attendance drew him toward the Society. He became a Friend in Syracuse, New York, at the time of the Second World War, coming to Friends from a long heritage of liberal Presbyterianism. He now is a member of Radnor Friends Meeting near Philadelphia, where he has served more than a decade on Radnor's Committee on Ministry. He is also a member of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's Continuing Committee on Worship and Ministry. He and his wife and son spent a year in residence at Pendle Hill in 1946-47. Albert and Helen Fowler are managing editors of the literary quarterly *Approach*.

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In this extrovert age we are apt to forget that men's deeds can rise no higher than their belief. What they do is conditioned and circumscribed by their faith. Jesus made this plain to his followers when he told the woman who had touched his garment, "Your faith has made you well." He emphasized the point in asking the two blind men who begged him to restore their sight, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" When they answered, "Yes," he touched their eyes saying, "According to your faith be it done to you." The author of Acts reports that Paul, looking intently at the cripple of Lystra and seeing that he had faith to be made well, told him to stand on his feet and he stood up and walked.

So it behooves Quakers today with their great concern for works of healing and mercy to look into their faith and see how far it enables them to receive God's word and share it with others.

There are in modern Quakerism two distinct varieties of belief, one that may be called the universal, the other the particular. Each is set in a matrix of emotional attitudes that are as important to understand as the belief itself. The universal variety accepts Christianity in its Quaker interpretation as but one religion among many, all good and sufficient expressions of God's purpose. It accepts this Christianity in a comparative and critical sense, and examines Christian experience in the light of other religions and the experience of other religions in the light of Christianity to illuminate the higher truth that all great religions are supposed to reveal. To a degree the universal variety of belief stands apart from all the religions and looks at them from the outside with an appraising eye and a mind that weighs the advantages and disadvantages of each.

The particular variety, on the other hand, is inseparable from the faith it professes. It is unable to look at its religion from the outside or consider it as a thing apart, because its religion and its life are one and

indivisible. The particular variety of belief accepts Christianity in its Quaker interpretation as the one divine life that is reproducing in the individual the character of the historic person, Jesus Christ. While this is something far deeper than any definition of His person, it is for Christians the final manifestation of the character of God Himself.

The position of the writer, which is a religious loyalty to the Christian basis of Quakerism (called the “particular variety of belief” in this discussion,) will set this presentation of two trends in Quaker thought in a definite perspective.

A Matter For All Christians

What is being discussed here primarily concerns certain segments of Quakerism, but it is also a matter of great importance to individual Christians outside the Society of Friends as well as to Christianity as a whole. Many people call themselves Christians for a variety of cultural reasons that have little to do with religion, and the traditional creeds and sacraments protect them from facing the problem of these two varieties of belief as easily as Quakers can face them.

The universal and the particular varieties are each the center of emotional viewpoints and convictions which need to be understood. The universal is supported by liberals who think of themselves in the forefront of scientific discovery. Liberal Quakers, like liberal Christians generally, consider themselves tolerant, broadminded, open always to new truths and willing to abandon old superstitions, and the mindset of the present day accepts them as such. The term *liberal* has only the finest connotations for the intelligent modern.

The particular is supported by those whose lives are rooted in a common Christian experience and in the

doctrines of Christianity which interpret the fundamental facts of that experience. They too consider themselves tolerant and broadminded, ready to welcome new information and insight, but Christianity to them can never be regarded as a comparative revelation or one revelation among many others of equal value. Those who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior think of themselves as orthodox and conservative in the positive sense of these terms, but the mind-set of the present tends to emphasize the derogatory meaning of both.

The Words, Orthodox And Conservative

Webster defines the word *orthodox* as sound in opinion or doctrine, especially religious doctrine. With the gradual weakening of church ties beginning in the seventeenth century and continuing on into the Enlightenment and the period of scientific discovery and industrial technology, the term orthodox underwent a change until in the present post-Christian era it has taken on in popular usage the derogatory connotation of reactionary and conventional. Along with this change in the term, its opposites — *heretical* and *heterodox* — have lost much of their unfavorable meaning, and in some circles have even attained a measure of acclaim.

In the same way the word *conservative* has changed from a positive to a negative term, from the definition of being able to preserve safely to the definition of being opposed to all innovation. There is often the aura of narrow-minded arrogance and provincialism about the word as it is commonly used today. These altered meanings brought about by an increasing emphasis on individual freedom and a corresponding impatience with restraint should be kept in mind in a discussion of the universal and particular varieties of Quaker belief.

The universal variety is perhaps more evident as an element in modern Quakerism than in most of modern Christianity by reason of the fact that contemporary Quakerism with its wide tolerance for all shades of belief has welcomed a larger share of those who have rebelled against real or imagined rigidities of doctrine and dogma. There is in Quakerism today what Douglas Steere calls a refugee psychology, and this acts to push the Society of Friends away from the traditional Christian viewpoint.

Non-Christians As Members?

Not long ago Arthur Morgan¹ addressed the Blue River Quarterly Meeting in Urbana, Illinois, on the question whether the Society of Friends should receive non-Christians into membership, and his talk went so thoroughly into the details of the universal variety of belief that it can well be used as a summary.

The first part of his discussion centers in a criticism of Christianity, and this is typical of much of the thinking among those who accept the universal variety of belief. "The inner feeling that the Christian faith is uniquely true, and is in a class by itself, different from all other religions," he declares, "is not a harmless error. It is a powerful cause of division and conflict among men." He quotes Gandhi's opinion that this feeling among Christians is "perhaps the greatest impediment to the world's progress toward peace." The major part of Christian theology, he believes, does not come from a disinterested attempt to find the truth but from an emotional feeling that it is important to find one's own doctrine to be true. This is the case not only with Christianity but with all other religions, and constitutes the fallacy of provincialism. What should be done is to seek out the great truth underlying all religions, not the small truth in each of them.

Arthur Morgan stresses the point that Christianity like the other higher religions grew out of an earlier background and is itself a synthesis of many borrowings. The story of the shepherds, the elements of communion, the ascension into heaven, have their counterparts in Mithraism, and the account of Jesus' miraculous birth is similar to the myths of Buddha's birth five centuries earlier. The miracles of raising men from the dead, of turning water into wine, are almost a stock repertory of one religion after another.

"The point I make," he says, "is that the Christian religion, like other great religions, is a human product, an accumulation from many sources." He believes that the Christian religion should come to see itself, not as *the* great spiritual tradition, but as one of the great, but fallible traditions.

He is convinced the time is coming when these relatively provincial mythologies will have had their day. His question is not whether there will be a new pattern of outlook, belief and conduct, but rather what its characteristics will be. Now that the world has shrunk so remarkably in size that people of all faiths come into contact with each other constantly, the Quaker form of Christianity finds itself queried by the deepest levels of Buddhism, or Hinduism, or sometimes by Islam. "These religions are asking Quakerism," says Douglas Steere, "whether it is universal and inclusive, and therefore able to respect their worship and practice."

Arthur Morgan mourns the many centuries when Christianity had little respect for other faiths and sent out its missionaries to convert foreign people to its provincial message. He laments that non-Christians generally see Christian nations as imperialists, exploiters and invaders, though where missionaries have gone in a spirit of mutual respect and helpfulness, without trying to proselytize, they

have been welcomed. Non-Christians, he believes, look at the Christian attitude of representing the one true faith as part of this pattern of exploitation, as spiritual imperialism, bigotry and arrogance. Resentment of this sort is growing so strong that in his opinion it seems entirely possible that within a decade or two Christian missionaries will be largely eliminated.

How different the situation in the world might be now, he says, if instead of going among non-Christian people bearing the gift of the one true faith to the benighted, Christians had gone as sincere seekers of the truth to share in a common search. Such a spirit may yet save the world from much antagonism, distrust and conflict. The times are calling for a more universal vision of religious truth which, Arthur Morgan believes, Quakers can help bring into focus.

He finds no need for weakening or watering down the Quaker testimony to meet the world's problems, though he would divorce it from what will not stand the test of free inquiry. He sees Quakerism from its inception as a religion of experiment and personal experience, valid for all times and places. The belief in the inner light led Friends to give their best consideration to a problem and then let it rest in the expectation that an opening would occur which might be a disclosure of truth. This method is now being recognized as characteristic also of scientific thinking of the first order, Arthur Morgan asserts, and it may be in part because of their method that Friends' membership in the Royal Scientific Society has been so enormously large in proportion to their numbers in England.

If the claim that Christianity is the one true faith is not sound, and if the effort to proselytize the world on that basis is a source of great practical loss and evil, then, Arthur Morgan asks, should Friends not feel an ethical and religious obligation to depart from attitudes and practices

based on that assumption? If committed persons of other faiths should join the Friends, it seems possible to him that they might have a stronger interest in what they find in the Society than do many who are born in that tradition, and the lives of all concerned might be enlarged and refined. A Quaker, Horace Alexander, speaking of worship in India with Hindus and Muslims, wrote: "For myself I can say that I know no experience so rich as the communion that comes of common worship with men of many faiths."

To contribute to an interfaith fellowship of fallible men trying to find a good way of life together is something Arthur Morgan believes Friends can do, not only for the sake of world peace, but also for a deeper and more inclusive religious outlook. Friends have to a peculiar degree kept the emotional tradition of fellowship, brotherhood, and warmth of personal affection and aspiration necessary for such an endeavor. They have something to give in addition to the spirit of intellectual freedom. "They have found their head without losing their heart."

Several years ago Arthur Morgan suggested the following addition to the Discipline of the Indiana Yearly Meeting (General Conference):

We recognize that many men and women of many faiths have shared in the search for truth and human brotherhood, and that different faiths have helped their sincere followers in that search. In love and in a spirit of unity we desire fellowship with all such sincere and concerned seekers. We welcome into membership in our Society, and to our meetings, all whose purposes and way of life, and whose ethical standards and practices, are compatible with our own.

This summary of the arguments for the universal variety of Quaker belief speaks particularly to those who

have worked abroad with Quaker agencies and who have joined the Society of Friends as a result of that work and association. It speaks very powerfully also to the disaffected from other Christian denominations who have found a refuge in Quakerism. But it does not explore the whole range of the universal variety of Quaker belief, and certain untouched portions of it need to be considered to round out the picture.

Nowhere in his discussion does Arthur Morgan touch on the wide divergence of thought about the nature of God which is so characteristic of the universal variety. Belief in God the Father as Jesus portrays him in the Gospels, God ministering to his children through the mediation of his Son, God for whose help Jesus taught his disciples to pray in the terms of the Lord's prayer, is seldom found here. The universal variety of Quaker faith conceives God principally as an impersonal force, a prime mover, a first cause. The concept of a personal God dealing directly with men in an intimate I-Thou relationship is largely ruled out, and in some cases the existence of any kind of God is abandoned completely. The idea of God taking a hand in the affairs of men as he does continuously throughout the Old and New Testaments is distasteful to many who hold the universal variety of belief because to them it implies an anthropomorphic God, a God created in man's likeness, an invention of man to comfort himself in his hours of trial, an outworn myth no longer suited to the present state of enlightenment.

Arthur Morgan also leaves out of his discussion the extreme eclecticism that is a prominent feature of the universal variety of belief. This eclecticism is the combination of intellectual skepticism and an emphasis on individual experience and it has flowered in a group of people who pick and choose over a vast area for the ingredients of their personal faiths. There are those who,

in a rigorous, disciplined and scholarly search for truth, include in their own religious faith vital elements from a variety of sources, eliminating with intellectual honesty any elements they feel to be false or mistaken. But there is also the danger of selecting from the great religions only those bits which suit one's own taste and need. This danger is further heightened by the reaction against church authority among the refugees from other Christian denominations who have found shelter in Quakerism.

Under the heading of eclecticism should also be placed the religion of pure personal experience, a stream of consciousness expressed through an interior monologue unrelated to any external facts or situations. Here also should be considered the estrangement from all religion, the exile from the words and lives that testify to the reality of the spiritual. In this world of spoiled words a religious anti-intellectualism flourishes, a formalism established by those who deny all creeds and do away with all opinions.

It is not personal experience that is important in the religious life. The important element is what is experienced. In George Fox's statement, "and this I knew experimentally," he puts the emphasis on what is known. Quakers have always stressed the importance of meeting God face to face, but the universal variety of belief allows an almost infinite number of different kinds of God one can meet in the silence, from God the Father Almighty to a theoretical abstraction emanating from man's mind.

As soon as the discussion turns to the particular variety of belief the importance of meeting God face to face and the nature of the God to be met are inseparable. The particular variety of Quaker faith centers in the Christian gospel as Friends have interpreted it. It came to them from the mainstream of Christianity, and they stripped it of dogma and outward sacrament to free the Spirit that founded the church of the apostles so that it could speak with equal authority in a later time.

A Resurgence Of Interest

There is a resurgence of interest in the particular variety of belief, Paul Lacey² in his *Friends Journal* article refers to people for whom the ultimate worth of Quakerism rests on its capacity to substantiate the claim that “there is one, even Christ Jesus, who can speak to thy condition” and the promise that “where two or three are gathered together, there am I.” Members of the Society of Friends are increasingly disturbed by the comment that Quaker Meeting is a fine place for seeking, but one must go elsewhere if one’s object is finding.

One of the evidences of this renewed interest in the particular variety of Quaker belief is a talk given recently by John McCandless³ to the Lehigh Valley Monthly Meeting in Allentown, Pennsylvania. As an introduction he quoted the following statement from the London Yearly Meeting Discipline of 1922. This is the oldest continuously existing body of Friends, uninterrupted by serious schism since its earliest days.

The doctrines of Christianity are in our judgment intended to interpret the fundamental facts of Christian experience — the objective facts of the person and work of Jesus Christ, handed down to us by some of those who knew them at first hand; and the subjective facts (both individual and collective) of redemption from sin and communion with God through Him. ... To us (the unity of Christians) consists in the one Divine life that is reproducing in them the character of the historic Person, Jesus Christ; which, while it is something far deeper than any definition of His Person, is for Christians the final manifestation of the character of God Himself.

What John McCandless said in his talk expresses so well the convictions of many who hold to this variety of Quaker faith that it is worth while to present it in some detail. It seems clear to him that the authors of the London Discipline of 1922 would find it well-nigh impossible to conceive a Society of Friends "made up to a considerable extent of a collection of notions and doctrines which in many cases are not even related to Christian experience and are frequently antithetical to it." They would be startled to find this confused state of affairs defended in many quarters as somehow natural, or even essential, to the Quaker view of truth. This situation represents to him a widespread and unparalleled disloyalty to Jesus Christ, not in the sense of theological understanding but in the meaning of Christ's appeal, "If any man would be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me."

The modern, tolerant, scientific, and undogmatic view of Christianity as *one* of the outstanding religions of the world and of Quakerism as a notable variety of the Christian tradition is untenable to John McCandless, because he finds it impossible to know religious truth from the outside. He quotes the London Discipline: faith is "the response of a man's whole being to the love and grace of God when this is inwardly revealed to him. It is not only a belief in truth but a surrender to truth." Because in the present world man rather than God is considered the measure of all things the modern tendency of Quakerism is to think of religion in general and Christianity in particular as human products which can be altered at will. Thus man becomes in the religious sphere the prime mover and actor, while God is relegated to the object of man's search.

"If we insist," says John McCandless, "that religion be tolerant, then surely tolerance is our religion. If God is to be judged by an abstract standard of liberalism, we worship not God but liberalism. To reject this or that statement or

action of one of His prophets, or of Jesus Christ, is surely to set up ourselves and our own fallible understandings as the judge of these prophets and of the God who acts through them. Eventually, such a 'progressive' view seems to lead only to a practical atheism."

During the past century three intellectual disciplines have conquered vast areas of the world and of man's mind. They are the Newtonian concept of a universe ruled by natural law, with its Darwinian corollary of evolutionary development; the theory of unconscious mind set forth by Freud and Jung; and the sociological method and attitudes exemplified by Marx and other theorists. As intellectual disciplines they can prove very helpful, but as philosophies of life or parts of a scientific philosophy John McCandless maintains they are powerful rivals to the Christian and Quaker understanding of truth. Has not modern man, Martin Buber asks, "lost the reality of creation in his concept of 'evolution,' that of revelation in the theory of the 'unconscious,' and that of redemption in the setting up of social or national goals?"

John McCandless insists that modern man, to the extent that he is aware of the problem, does not have doubts about Christian truth because of his scientific cast of mind. Modern man maintains and nurtures the scientific attitude in areas where it is not valid, and to degrees which are not warranted, in order to indulge these doubts that prevent him from coming to terms with Christ's demands upon him. "It is not religion which needs to be brought into line with contemporary, transient, scientific achievement," he says; "It is the scientific view of life itself which must find its ultimate meaning in God revealed in Jesus Christ."

What is today referred to as Quakerism was to the first Friends the way, the truth and the life spoken of in the New Testament but forsaken and forgotten by churches more interested in worldly power and prestige than in lives

lived in humble obedience to Jesus. These early Friends believed the original vision had been newly revealed to them, and that it was their responsibility to publish and demonstrate it to all men.

Quakerism, John McCandless asserts, is not rooted in some beautiful, ineffable and uncommunicable experience of what God is, but in the simple, communicable and compelling vision of what God wants man to be and to do. "If Quakerism is, as early Friends believed, Truth, then it is universal and inescapable; if it is not Truth, it ought to be laid down."

The Inherent Risks

In this talk John McCandless does not mention the risks inherent in the particular variety of Quaker belief for which he speaks, and some mention of them is needed to round out the picture. There is first and foremost the danger of a rigid formalism, a narrow fundamentalism, and a reliance on the past as the source of inspiration and achievement. This danger is the occupational disease of the Christian church at large, and it has been very real in certain periods of Quaker history. There is the temptation to join with other Christian denominations in an ecumenicity which would almost extinguish the unique and vital quality of the Quaker witness. The element of churchmanship involved in this temptation cannot be ignored.

But the gravest danger in taking John McCandless' defense of the particular variety of Quaker belief seriously and trying to live it out in every day life is that one steps out of the popular current of religious thinking and takes a stand against the tide. The deeply committed Christian runs the same risk today in any denomination, but he does not stand out so prominently from the average church-goer as

he does from the average Quaker. The burden of standing up for the religious belief that is out of fashion will become heavier and heavier as the post-Christian period advances, and this fact must be reckoned with as part of the danger.

From this consideration of the two distinct varieties of Quaker belief, the universal and the particular, certain clear distinctions can be seen between them, certain unmistakable differences are evident. The universal puts its emphasis on the seekers and the search while the particular puts its emphasis on what has been found. One is mainly looking for something new and the other is centered in something eternal. For one the choice is always open and for the other the important choice has already been made. The universal attitude leaves the individual free to arrange his beliefs to suit his concept of truth, and the particular attitude commits the individual to a certain well-defined faith. The universal is eclectic and permits a synthesis of religions and philosophies among which the Christian religion is but one of many. The particular is the Quaker interpretation of Christianity. To the universal, love is a general concept unconstrained by specific detail. To the particular, love is illustrated and exemplified and delineated in the life and teachings of Jesus and in his relations with God.

The Clear Distinction

One often hears the remark made in Friends' circles, "I'm so glad I'm a Quaker because I can believe what I want to believe instead of being told what I have to believe." No clearer distinction could be drawn between the two varieties of belief. For the universal attitude religious authority resides in the individual, in man, in the finite, while for the particular attitude religious authority resides in Christ, in God, in the infinite. For the universal, Jesus is but one

among many prophets, and for the particular, Jesus is the unique revelation of the divine. For one, Quakerism connotes experiment with any and every religious form. For the other it is the experience of the Christian faith. In the universal there is unlimited diversity of belief. In the particular there is the unity of a single belief.

Freedom to the universal means a lack of constraint in doing what he chooses. Freedom to the particular means a lack of constraint in doing what God chooses. This difference is well stated by William Penn. Christ's liberty, he says, "is from sin, not to sin; to do his will and not our own." The universal's ideal of the continuing search appears to the particular as evidence of a hesitance to find, a reluctance to discover the kind of truth which demands lifelong and wholehearted obedience.

A Third Group

Although these differences between the two contrasted varieties of Quaker belief are clear and distinct, although they define mutually exclusive types of religious loyalty, they are seldom seen in such bold relief as is presented here. There is a third group in modern Quakerism which acts to blur and blunt the distinguishing features and to keep the two varieties of belief from clashing with each other. So vivid is the memory of schism in the minds of American Friends that they prefer to have the present division between universal and particular implicit rather than explicit, out of sight rather than in the open.

Standing between the two, this third group works to hold them together and mitigate their differences. To a large extent it includes the leaders of the Society of Friends because most of them feel the need to avoid a break in the ranks and to soften the impact of one side on the other. This is especially true in those Yearly Meetings which

suffered the historic split between Hicksite and Orthodox. In a very real sense the differences cannot be reconciled, but they can be restrained so that the two sides are able to worship and work together.

This third group is not to be thought of only in terms of a buffer. It is a sincere and earnest combination of both the universal and the particular, drawing resources and inspiration from each. It accepts the widespread popularity of the universal variety of Quaker belief as one of the given elements in the Society of Friends today, and tries to meet its needs in every possible way. The third group also accepts the fact that in the present post-Christian era the particular variety of Quaker belief is becoming more and more isolated, and sees as part of its mission the reinterpretation of the Christian gospel in modern terms. Though sometimes it presents Jesus as an Elder Brother rather than as Christ, the roots of the third group are deep in the Christian tradition and the figure on the cross towers above all others. This group sees in a Quakerism without creedal or sacramental requirements a reconciling power between Christianity and the other great world religions, and looks forward to leading the Society of Friends to the task of healing religious antagonisms.

The third group is not entirely unique in Quakerism, but has its counterparts throughout much of modern Christianity. It reaches out constantly to the uncommitted in its efforts to breathe Christian meaning into wide areas of mythology, psychology and psychiatry, and to discover Christian traits in alien philosophies and even in writers hostile to the Church.

Modern Quakerism is thus proclaiming two quite different beliefs at the same time, with a third group trying to draw them together. These beliefs are expounded primarily to members of the Society of Friends, but they are also being presented to the world at large. There is

confusion in both spheres as a result, but the confusion within the membership is the greater and the inner tension becomes very severe at certain times and places because the problem is kept beneath the surface and is not openly acknowledged.

It has been easier to bring the two together on a basis of common work, and the success of the American Friends Service Committee in getting Quakers together in a common endeavor for human welfare is a notable achievement. Many of the new recruits to Quakerism are coming from the reservoir of people attracted to the Service Committee projects, and this growth in the Society through its relief and reconstruction efforts emphasizes the prominence of good works in relation to faith, an imbalance caused by the continuing difficulty Quakers are experiencing in the area of belief.

Much has been made of the argument that the universal variety of Quaker belief is the growing edge of the Society of Friends. Large numbers of convinced Friends have come in through this door. That the universal may also be the dying edge of the Society is seldom mentioned, but many would-be Friends turn away when they find the Christian ties of a Meeting no longer binding and the drift toward what John McCandless calls practical atheism running strong. Paul Lacey tells of people he has talked with who have found the Society of Friends a kind of incubator where they can develop just enough to realize that the real conditions of life and worship lie outside it. Many of these people, having looked to the Quaker Meeting as a source of inspiration and deepened faith, pass beyond it to find fuller meaning elsewhere.

A Continuing Conversation

Beneath the surface the universal and particular varieties of Quaker belief carry on a continuing conver-

sation and discussion and argument. Occasionally this breaks through the superficial harmony into the business sessions of a Monthly Meeting or a committee, but for the most part it is relegated to individuals conversing outside the organized framework of the Society. Thus one of the most important problems facing modern Quakerism is left to the mercy of personal debate instead of being considered soberly in public with concern for the sense of the Meeting and a Minute to record it.

From the universal side of the conversation comes the claim that it is more important for a man to be religious than for him to be religious in any specific way. It is more important for him to be a religious man than to be a Christian. The claim is pressed that in this day when Christian symbolism and doctrine are being eroded and eaten away, and when the Church gathered in Christ's name is frequently unworthy of him, the figure of Christ as the way, the truth and the life is often a stumbling block to the man who is seeking a religious faith and an anchor for his belief. Where this is so, it is more important to remove the stumbling block than to obstruct the man's religious search. It is better to allow him to choose among the great spiritual figures of the world and the great revelations of God than to insist on Christ as the one, true Savior.

Another claim from the same source is that because Quakerism is uniquely fitted to foster the religious life without forcing it into any set pattern, the Society of Friends may discover its modern mission in appealing to those outside the Christian Church, to the Gentiles of today, the rebels against ecclesiasticism and priestly hierarchy and authority who find no shelter in most Christian denominations. Like Paul carrying the gospel to the Greek and Roman world against strong Jewish and Christian opposition, the Society of Friends is reaching and nourishing the religious life of the unchurched against strong opposition within its own ranks.

The universal variety of belief sometimes goes a step farther and claims that if in this age of spiritual bewilderment one of the Quaker testimonies presents a stumbling block to the sincere seeker, it is more important to set aside the apparent obstacle for the time being in the hope that he will grow into an acceptance of it in the future than to turn the seeker away from membership in the Society of Friends. It is better not to insist on adherence to a testimony and to trust that its truth will gradually appear in a new and persuasive way. Even if the historic Quaker concept of God as Father and Creator presents a stumbling block to the seeker, the claim is that it is more important to set the concept aside for the time being with regard to this particular individual than to offend his religious sensibility.

Henry Cadbury and other Quaker leaders have pointed out that either the differences or the similarities between Quakerism and traditional Christianity can be stressed, and modern Quaker opinion holds that the wise thing is to stress the differences in order to keep the Society of Friends from being swallowed up in the Church as just another sect. This habit of emphasizing their separate identity as a group with a unique interpretation of the Christian message has been a powerful influence pushing Friends away from the central core of Christian belief. It is in line with this emphasis on difference that the universal variety of Quaker belief is now experimenting with a world religion beyond the confines of Christianity, a synthesis of all higher religions freed from the unique qualities of any one of them.

Another claim from the universal side is that the importance of the sayings of Jesus depends solely on their undoubted truth and not an iota on the person who set them forth. It is arrogant and boastful, runs the argument, for any religion to say that its Lord and Savior is the Son of God. It was blasphemy in the eyes of his contemporary Jews

for Jesus to call himself divine, and it appears close to blasphemy to the universal variety of belief today to say that Jesus is the Christ.

An Anti-Christian Attitude

This modern pull away from the particular variety of Quaker belief toward the universal appears to the present writer to be part of the anti-Christian attitude so evident in western civilization today. There is much surface logic in some of the claims advanced for the universal variety, but the motive behind this whole body of thinking seems to be a compulsive desire to be free of the Christian dispensation and discipline. In this sense the arguments and reasons given for the universal viewpoint seem to be rationalizations of an anti-Christian or a non-Christian sentiment and their validity may be only apparent.

What these claims may show is that men and women are abandoning their historic faith not according to a reasoned course of thinking but under pressure from the great storm of secularism which has been brewing for almost two centuries and is now breaking with intense force on the Christian community of the west. People of deep religious insight are not being spared the brunt of the storm, and many of them are not able to hold on to their Christian beliefs in the face of the powerful and widespread attack on Christianity. Their giving way in this place or that is not so much evidence of their weakness but evidence of the almost overwhelming force they are called on to meet.

The most persuasive and most misleading form this anti-Christian attack is taking today is the claim that the Christian gospel must be tailored to fit the modern mind, to suit the modern temper, to cover the needs and demands of today. The great revelations recorded in the gospel accounts, of the life of Jesus, his birth, his temptations,

his ministry of healing, his crucifixion and resurrection, are one by one argued out of existence for the sake of cutting the Christian garment to clothe twentieth century man. Once the shears start snipping at the seamless robe they do not stop till it is reduced to rags.

The fact that this drift from the particular to the universal variety of Quaker belief is not made the subject of public discussion but is allowed to go on beneath the illusion of a superficial harmony seems to indicate that those who are giving way under the pressure of secularism are trying to hide what they are doing not only from others but from themselves as well. They do not want, apparently, to face the reality that under cover of rationalized argument they are betraying the figure on the cross. What they want to believe and what they are able to persuade themselves is true is that they are breathing new life and new vitality into a religion which has somehow lost its appeal to the present generation.

One of the prominent characteristics of the modern mind under the impact of the anti-Christian and anti-intellectual storm now breaking over the West is to dispense with exact terminology and precise definition in dealing with ideas and beliefs. This appeals to the Society of Friends which has throughout its history tended to avoid exactitude and precision in the matter of belief. But there is a vast difference between the Quaker of today and the Quaker of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who knew and held to Barclay's detailed interpretation of an inward acceptance of the Christian gospel without the outward sacraments and creeds. Now that Barclay's interpretation has been abandoned under the pressure of secularism, Quakers are free to indulge the modern bent toward imprecision to the full, and are thus much more open to anti-Christian attack than are members of other denominations which are protected to some degree by creed

and litany and sacrament. Arguments advanced against any attempt to revive the Barclay statement of historic Quaker faith — that it was set forth originally to oppose a Calvinism which no longer threatens the Society of Friends, or that it plays into the hands of rigid fundamentalists — appear to be further rationalizations of the compulsive desire to be free from the beleaguered Christian dispensation.

Butterfield's Summary

There is encouragement to be found in the view of Christianity taken by the contemporary English historian, Herbert Butterfield.⁴ As an outstanding scholar in all that term implies to the academic world today, he has had to meet the skepticism of his colleagues on the subject of revealed religion, and the statement of belief which emerges from this encounter has much in common with Barclay's position. It may throw some light on the present discussion to examine Butterfield's summary of what the modern Christian under the impact of secular criticism can still cleave to in traditional Christianity.

Herbert Butterfield defends the view that the screen between God and man was torn and broken in the person of Jesus Christ, and that the divine, always apparent to the religious mind in human history, stepped straight onto the stage and into the story. God is all that personality means and more still, and the revelation of God to man had to be in the form of a person, a human being more human than man, one whose humanity was genuine and authentic, whose flesh was real flesh that hurt and bled. Butterfield feels strongly that Jesus was a human being under human conditions, so limited in his knowledge at the beginning that even his consciousness of his mission came only gradually, in a groping way at first. The temptations which he suffered must be regarded as having been real to him and not merely shadow-show.

For Herbert Butterfield the Christian religion comes with a geographical location, with a place in the historical scheme of things, and with many of its truths condensed into historical events. Its central idea is that divinity is made incarnate in a personality more human than the human one. Thus Christians are not left with a religion of nebulous love and mere sentimental good-fellowship, and they are not asked to grope hazily for an unidentifiable God, shapeless as vapor and without any specific qualities. The light of eternity, which would blind man if it came full in his face, is broken and refracted in a piece of historical narrative.

Christianity by its fundamental assumptions insists upon a God who stretches out his arms to human beings presumed to be groping in grave distress and bewilderment. In the Butterfield view there can be no room for an absentee God who leaves mankind at the mercy of chance in a bleak world of whirling atoms. A real drama, a real conflict between good and evil is taking place, and something eternal is being achieved irrespective of man's apparent success or failure.

Butterfield does not believe that the entire body of dogma of Christianity could be easily accepted except under medieval conditions when people generally were credulous about the supernatural. He strips Christianity of the more elaborate theology much as Friends did, but retains the historical basis of the life of Jesus Christ. On the other hand he makes it clear that if the basic Christian beliefs seem out of keeping with the thought of the twentieth century, there is good ground for saying they must have been almost equally anomalous to the highly civilized Roman Empire.

He points out that the Gospels belong to the class of historical writing in which the facts are wrapped up in their interpretation and the story embedded in a view of life. A whole synthesis is presented to historical analysis and to

the entire personality of the reader. One's attitude toward the facts depends on one's decision in regard to the interpretation. It is, as Dora Wilson argued in her Pendle Hill pamphlet on the gospels, total history, or one's appropriation of the whole human drama, that is in question.

Christians make a mistake, Herbert Butterfield maintains, if they are afraid of scholarship or if they are credulous about its infallibility and competence. Christianity could not have persisted in its traditional form if scholarship had been able to demonstrate that Christ should be regarded as a mythical figure.

Butterfield cannot accept the ecclesiastical interpretation of history any more than the Quakers can. He has grave misgivings about these mundane justifications of Christianity which are really attempts to justify churchmen and church systems. One of the terrible elements in history for him is the fact that the Church began a cruel policy of persecution from the earliest moment when it was in a position and had the power to do so. The sequence of this policy was just as terrible when both Catholic and Protestant churches fought to the last point of cruelty not merely to maintain their persecuting power but fought a separate war for each separate weapon of persecution that was being taken from them.

All this, he is careful to point out, is not in any sense an argument against Christianity itself, but presents a serious comment on human nature even as it appears in ecclesiastical history. Sometimes, as in the case of freedom of conscience, the Church fought the world bitterly when the world stood for the cause now regarded as the right one by the clergy themselves.

Many of the things the twentieth century prizes may have been born of Christian charity in the last analysis,

but they often established their footing in history as anti-Christian movements and against the dominant voice in the Church. By its alliance with power for over fifteen hundred years since Constantine the Church was on the whole the cement of society, the buttress of whatever was the existing order, and the defender of the status quo. From the early days of that alliance one can hardly read the story without the most serious misgivings.

Butterfield wonders how many generations it will take to heal the deep-seated and understandable resentments against ecclesiastical authorities and systems. He confesses he has felt in reading history that Christianity can be an unattractive and almost intolerable religion in some of its cultural manifestations when not accompanied by humility and charity.

But when he returns from the political and ecclesiastical history to the intimate life of the Church throughout the ages and to the spiritual labors of humble men, he finds the most moving spectacle that history has to offer and realizes anew how the spread of Christian belief has meant a growth in charity.

Secularism's Advance

The perspective in which this discussion of the two varieties of Quaker faith has been set cannot be properly understood without some attempt to explain the advance of secularism in western civilization and the change now being made to a post-Christian era. No finer statement of the situation has been attempted than that of C. S. Lewis⁵ in a talk he gave a few years ago at Cambridge University. He contends that the greatest change ever to occur in the history of the West, greater than the fall of Rome, the barbarian invasions, or the Christianizing of Europe, has

just taken place, and that an enormous chasm has opened up to divide the present from all the centuries since antiquity. It may be well to quote a brief passage from his talk.

Of course the unchristening of Europe in our time is not complete; neither was her christening in the Dark Ages. But roughly speaking we may say that whereas all history was for our ancestors divided into two periods, the pre-Christian and the Christian, and two only, for us it falls into three — the pre-Christian, the Christian, and what may reasonably be called the post-Christian. This surely must make a momentous difference. I am not here considering either the christening or the unchristening from a theological point of view. I am considering them simply as cultural changes. When I do that, it appears to me that the second change is even more radical than the first. Christians and Pagans had much more in common with each other than either has with a post-Christian. The gap between those who worship different gods is not so wide as that between those who worship and those who do not. ... A post-Christian man is not a pagan; you might as well think that a married woman recovers her virginity by divorce. The post-Christian is cut off from the Christian past and therefore doubly from the Pagan past.

Lewis is quick to add there are a great many Christians in the world today just as there were a great many skeptics in the past. It is the presumption about them that has changed. In the past some kind of religious belief and practice was the norm. Today he believes it is the exception,

in spite of the Church's large nominal membership, and extensive physical resources. This change does not mean that those believers who comprise the exception may not have a better and deeper faith than their ancestors. It does mean that committed Christians today are in a minority and on the defensive in a way and to a degree unknown for over a millennium and a half.

Openness To Truth

This unchristening of the West which has probably not yet reached its peak underlines the need of the Society of Friends to bring the conversation between the universal and particular varieties of Quaker belief out into the open and discuss its differing claims and arguments frankly and seriously. The openness to Truth, the search for Truth, necessitates the discussion. The question whether there is Truth is a central part of the problem. Despite the desire to hide from themselves what is becoming of their historic faith, most Friends want to have a voice in shaping the future of Quakerism. If it is to be an experiment in synthesizing and reconciling the enduring elements of all the great world religions instead of a new experience in living out a specifically Christian revelation, they want to have it grow from the common concern of the Society as a whole after the question has been explored openly and at length.

The risk of another schism in the Society of Friends is not so great that it should prevent Quakers from considering a matter of this importance, for there are always ways of discussing a subject with restraint and dignity. If the future of the Society proves to be too touchy to deal with in the open, then it must be a very uninviting future to contemplate.

Notes

1. Arthur Morgan of Yellow Springs, Ohio, engineer, sociologist and former director of the Tennessee Valley Authority, is a Friend. His talk, "Should the Society of Friends Receive Non-Christians Into Membership?" is available from him in Yellow Springs in mimeographed form.
2. Paul Lacey, a Friend who teaches English at Earlham College, will become a member of the Pendle Hill staff in September, 1961. "Feed My Sheep" appeared in the *Friends Journal*, May 7, 1960. It was taken from a Mid-Winter Institute talk which is available from Pendle Hill in mimeographed form.
3. John H. McCandless, a Friend, printer, publisher and poet, operates the Hemlock Press at Alburtis, Pennsylvania.
4. Herbert Butterfield, professor of Modern History in the University of Cambridge, is a Yorkshire Methodist. His *Christianity and History* was published in the U.S.A. by Scribners in 1949.
5. C. S. Lewis, professor of English Literature at Cambridge and author of the famous *Screwtape Letters*, is a member of the Church of England. The gist of his lecture, *De Descriptione Temporum* (Ages of Western Man), Cambridge University Press, 1955 (now out of print), is contained in Albert Fowler's article "The Lost Relevance of Religion" in *Approach*, Summer, 1959, available in reprint.