

# **Quakerism Of The Future**

Mystical, Prophetic & Evangelical

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR** John Yungblut is a graduate of Harvard College. He received his theological training at the Harvard Divinity School and the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. After serving for twenty years in the ministry of the Episcopal Church, during most of which time he was a member of the Wider Quaker Fellowship, he became a member of the Religious Society of Friends in 1960. In 1959-60 he was director of a "Mission to Isolated Liberals" in Mississippi and Louisiana for the American Friends Service Committee. He was director of Quaker House, a civil rights and peace program in Atlanta, from 1960 to 1968, working in close cooperation with Martin Luther King, Jr. From 1968 to 1972 he was director of the International Student House in Washington, DC. Currently he and his wife, June, are on the teaching staff at Pendle Hill.

As an undergraduate he was drawn to a study of the mystics by Rufus M. Jones, and studied the New Testament under Henry J. Cadbury at the Harvard Divinity School. He was therefore particularly pleased at the invitation of the **Friends Journal** to deliver the Henry J. Cadbury Lecture on March 27, 1974, thereby sharing with Friends of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting his convictions regarding the Quakerism of the future. The following essay is the published version of that lecture.

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Perhaps I should begin this essay by pointing out that I am not here casting myself in the role of clairvoyant and predicting that the Quakerism of the future will be mystical, prophetic, and evangelical. I am doing something even more presumptuous: I am saying that in my judgment the only Quakerism that can survive in the future will have to be mystical, prophetic, and evangelical. These are the qualities that, taken together and in the senses I shall presently define, are the very best elements in our tradition. They constitute what, it seems to me, we should want to survive. If I could be sure that they would be better preserved in the future by some other fellowship of believers, I, for one, would not hesitate to join others in a dedicated dissolution of the Society of Friends.

It is not our cherished Quaker institutions of Monthly, Quarterly and Yearly Meetings that matter most in the end, though our way of doing business under the aspect of the eternal is of great importance to us and remains, inevitably, part of our ethos. It is the vital energy for which our institutions have provided reasonably effective conductors that is most precious to us.

This energy or power, I am suggesting, has been a product of the peculiar Quaker blend of the mystical, the prophetic and the evangelical during those periods when we have been most ourselves.

### **The Mystical**

Let us therefore begin with the first ingredient: the mystical. This is the most crucial, because in the end, as we shall see, it provides sustained motivation both for the prophetic involvement and the evangelical spirit.

E. Herman began her splendid book, entitled **The Meaning and Value of Mysticism**, printed as long ago as 1915, with this penetrating observation, poetically expressed:

Beneath the currents which by action and reaction have gone to shape Christian thought there sounds, like the fabled sunken bell, the strains of Mysticism. Thrust down by victorious institutional, rational and moralistic forces, the mystic note floats up from the depths – now muffled, now clear. Every now and again the penalty of success overtakes the ruling system, and Christian men, disillusioned of a hollow civilization and an externalized church, listen to the submerged melody and find it a song of deliverance, and out of such moments of reaction are born the great spiritual movements, whether explicitly mystical or only showing deep affinities with Mysticism!<sup>1</sup>

Rufus Jones saw Quakerism as one of these spiritual movements and, in a sense, dedicated his life and ministry to interpreting it in this light. The writing and teaching of Howard Brinton was in essential concurrence with this conclusion. Indeed all the great researchers into the meaning and value of mysticism over the last century, including such non-Quakers as Baron Von Hugel, Evelyn Underhill, Dean Inge, and Rudolph Otto, have agreed that Quakerism stands in this historical succession.

Nevertheless, there is within the Society of Friends a growing group of those who would have us disclaim this heritage. Unfortunately they tend to identify as mysticism only those forms of the mystical tradition which Albert Schweitzer designated as life-negating. They steadfastly refuse to recognize as having equal claim to be called mystical the life-affirming religion of Jesus, Paul, and John in the New Testament. As well might we limit the word religion to refer only to those unworthy forms of religion with which history confronts us. As well debase the word love and reject any further use of it to symbolize the greatest human emotion because, in our impoverishment of words, we use it also for aberrant, crippling, and perverse emotions.

It is perfectly true that no word in our religious vocabulary has had such varying and conflicting connotations, nor been more abused than this word, "mysticism." Nevertheless, we have no other word by which to name a particular type of religious experience that all the researchers I have mentioned confidently appraise as the greatest, the richest, the most profound. "Contemplation" comes closest because it is also sometimes used of the peak of the mystical experience, but it is not inclusive enough. "Spiritualism" certainly won't do, because it has acquired the technical meaning of the purported communication between the living and the dead. There is no other word that will do adequate service, and it were a feckless exercise to coin a new one since we cannot at this juncture rewrite all the devotional, fictional, and theological literature that has made dedicated use of "mysticism" to designate that very form of religious experience we continue to value most.

But of course we shall have to define as carefully as we can what we are going to mean by this word. It is much easier to say what mysticism is not, than what it is. The essence of the mystical experience has nothing to do with the occult, the esoteric, extra-sensory perception, spiritualism, hearing voices or seeing visions, with all of which it is sometimes confused in the popular mind. The most that can be said is that mystics are sometimes the kind of persons who may also be psychics and who may hear voices or see visions. But some of the greatest of the mystics have not experienced any distractions in these directions, and others, like John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, have been very wary of the messages so received.

It is harder to describe the characteristic mystical experience. Eastern sages have set a good example in another area of inquiry. In response to any attempt to describe the absolute, they have said: "Neti, Neti," Not this, Not that! There is also wisdom in the familiar observation about the

mystical experience: “he who says what it is doesn’t know, and he who knows doesn’t say.” Reticence is clearly indicated. There is general consensus, however, among students of the phenomenon, that the mystical experience can be likened to a new form of consciousness. Dean Inge, for example, thinks of it as “an extension of the frontier of consciousness” and writes:

Mysticism arises when we try to bring this higher consciousness into relation with the other contents of our minds. Religious mysticism may be defined as the attempt to realize the presence of the living God in the soul and in nature, or more generally as *the attempt to realize, in thought and feeling, the immanence of the temporal in the eternal, and of the eternal in the temporal.*<sup>2</sup>

I should want to add simply that I believe the mystic characteristically experiences some measure of identification, whether with objects in nature, music, and other forms of art, other persons, or with God, and tends to perceive relatedness where others see only separate and disparate objects.

We must acknowledge that a number of the experiences George Fox shares with us in his *Journal* must, in the light of what we have been saying, be described as psychical rather than mystical. The experience to which he attributed his conversion did involve the hearing of a voice, but what makes it indisputably mystical is the immediate, immanent, personal presence for him of God in the Christ within.

When all my hopes in men were going, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could I tell what to do, then, O then, I heard a voice which said, There is one, even Christ Jesus that can speak to Thy condition; and when I heard it my

heart did leap for joy. I knew experimentally that Jesus Christ enlightens, gives grace and faith and power. I now know God by revelation, as He who hath the key did open.<sup>3</sup>

The crucial words are “I knew experimentally that Jesus Christ enlightens” and “I now knew God by revelation,” by which he meant, of course, not scriptural revelation but the personal revelation of present mystical experience.

We are indebted to Elizabeth Gray Vining’s Pendle Hill Pamphlet, *William Penn: Mystic*, for bringing together the evidence of the vital mystical element in the religion of this early Friend. In writing a physician in the city of Emden in 1671, Penn lamented: “Oh how many profess God and Christ according to the historical knowledge of both but never come to the mystical and experimental knowledge of them.”<sup>4</sup> There is in Penn little of the psychical experience characteristic of Fox’s *Journal*. He would appear not to have been so precariously strung, psychically, as Fox, reflecting a more robust and sustained mental health. His mystical experience was more likely to take the form of a strong and comforting sense of the immanent presence of God.

In his book, *No Cross, No Crown*, he advocates waiting upon God in the stillness:

Wherefore stand still in thy mind, wait to feel something that is divine to prepare and dispose thee to worship God truly and acceptably. And this taking up the cross and shutting the doors and windows of the soul against everything that would interrupt this attendance upon God, how pleasant so ever the object be in itself, how lawful or needful at another season, the power of the Almighty will break in, his spirit will work and prepare the heart, that it may offer up an acceptable sacrifice.<sup>5</sup>

This emphasis upon the contemplative is the more impressive in Penn because it was happily integrated with an extremely active life in public service.

James Naylor's experience of a direct call has about it at once the ring of the prophetic and of the mystical:

I was at the plough, meditating on the things of God, and suddenly I heard a Voice saying unto me, "Get thee out from thy kindred and from thy Father's house." I did exceedingly rejoice that I had heard the Voice of God which I had professed.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately Naylor wandered for a season from the narrow way into the neurotic, even paranoid behavior that has afflicted some of the mystics. But after recovering his psychic balance, he repented and both in writing and in public witness exercised an effective ministry.

In his study of Robert Barclay, Elton Trueblood concludes: "Barclay did not see Quakerism as a species of mysticism, though he could not deny the validity of some conceptions normally associated with the mystical heritage. What he valued was the mysticism of the New Testament."<sup>7</sup> Trueblood does make further concession: "There was certainly a mystical aspect of Barclay's thinking because the heart of all mysticism is a sense of the insufficiency of a merely historical faith."<sup>8</sup> And he is prepared to admit that "much of his [Barclay's] emphasis [in his treatment of the Light of Christ] is consistent with what Rufus Jones interpreted as mysticism, i.e. emphasis on first hand religious experience."<sup>9</sup> He quotes Barclay in illustration:

Spiritual minded men . . . hear God inwardly speaking in their souls words truly divine and heavenly, full of virtue and divine life; and they savour the taste of divine things, and do as it were handle them with the hands of their souls.

Unfortunately, Barclay's mystical experience and his theology are not happily wedded. As Rufus Jones points out, in his introduction to "The Second Period of Quakerism" reprinted in *Quakerism: A Spiritual Movement*,<sup>10</sup> Barclay holds that natural man is "miserable," "depraved" and "unspiritual" — "without capacity for salvation." "Man by nature, man as he is man, is corrupt and fallen." "No real good proceedeth from his nature as he is man." "A seed of sin is transmitted to all men from Adam." These statements are drawn from the Apology.<sup>11</sup>

One of the differences between Barclay's theology and Calvinism is the idea that Christ, by his death, "purchased for man a universal Light or Divine Seed." But he also makes clear that this Light, purchased for man by Christ's death, has nothing to do with man's own nature and is a "distinct, separate thing from man's soul and all the faculties of it."<sup>12</sup>

Rufus Jones has convincingly traced the devastating passiveness of the Quietistic period in Quaker history, at least in part, to Barclay's despair of the natural man. Not that there were not great exceptions in genuine mystics like John Woolman. But the dynamic, positive mysticism of the earlier period modulated into the more passive form of Quietism. The mysticism of Fox, Penn and Penington had not denied the presence in man of a proclivity to sin that was of the devil, but, on balance, they believed that when one responded to the Light, the sea of darkness could be overpowered and man was capable of moving toward perfection through obedience. The Light was an inalienable part of man's own nature, not something implanted there by the process of election, foreign to man's soul. Barclay had said:

Man is wholly unable of himself to work with the grace, neither can he move one step out of his natural condition, until the grace lay hold upon him; so it is possible for him to be passive and not

to resist it. So we say, the grace of God works in and upon man's nature, which though of itself wholly corrupted and defiled and prone to evil, yet is capable to be wrought upon by the grace of God.<sup>13</sup>

The only part man can play is to remain quite passive, not to resist, if he has been so chosen by God's grace. This is of course the central teaching of Quietism. There is another danger involved. How does one know whether the inward movement on a given occasion is of God or not? Barclay did not allow the tests of reason or experience because they are both of the natural man. A great gulf is fixed between the divine and the human. And how, one might ask, can one "walk cheerfully over the earth, answering to that of God in every man" when the Light is operative only in some men and in them quite apart from their own natures?

So great was Barclay's influence on Quakerism that even during the period of controversies within the Society all the parties took for granted the depravity of the natural man, disagreeing only on how this state under God could be superseded. The presuppositions remained unquestioned. In making this point Rufus Jones did not blame Barclay because Barclay was simply using the framework of the psychology and metaphysics that lay at hand. But he did regret that the mystical theology of the spiritual reformers had not more profoundly reached and influenced Barclay, and he did feel that the record of Friends would have been more creative in this two-hundred year span, had some Friend articulated a genuinely mystical theology as influential as Barclay's Apology has been.

Many of us long for a recrudescence of the kind of mystical experience that characterized early Friends, with its impressive by-products of prophetic action and evangelical ministry of the Word, but without commitment to Barclay's theology. It has been maintained that Rufus

Jones was mistaken in suggesting that George Fox was influenced by certain European mystics. Fox was no student, save of the Bible. But mysticism of the variety we have described is a hardy perennial and can spring up anywhere, since its roots are in man, not merely in certain theological traditions arising among men at certain places in certain periods. In so far as Fox experienced the form of consciousness we have described as mystical, in any one of its infinite varieties, he did not need to have learned this from anyone else. The mystical faculty, whether developed or not, resides in all men and women by virtue of our shared humanity. It is, I believe, the evolving edge in man. Advance in evolution has always been marked by ever greater complexity in the presence of ever more extraordinary unity, realizing its present apex in the integration achieved in human personality at its highest. In the ascent, we can trace ever higher forms of consciousness, greater awareness of ever expanding horizons of reality, reaching upward into the values we cherish most: gentleness, compassion, love.

We cannot say, "Go to, we will have a mystical experience," for this heaven is not taken by storm, despite the presence of the faculty in all men. The mystical experience comes by grace. But we can at least engage in that first classic step on the steep ascent, the process of purging. We can, by an effort of the will, resolve to move toward the simple life in which we are not encumbered with possessions nor driven by an over-scheduled daily program. In Paul's great phrase we can deliberately "study to be quiet," and strive for what he called the "simplicity that was in Christ," seeking regular periods of solitude, informed by the writings of the mystics. We can have a concern for physical fitness, and pursue the quest of self-knowledge with the guidance of the depth-psychological insights to which we have so recently become heir. We can examine ourselves to see if moral duplicity in any of its many forms currently precludes the movement of the spirit in mystical experience.

We can't make the wind blow. For all our effort, it will continue to blow precisely when and where it "listeth." But we can as individuals try to keep our little boat ship-shape and hoist our sail by watching and praying in the manner Jesus prescribed. Meantime the prayer of the Breton fisherman must inevitably be ours: "O God, thy sea is so vast and my boat is so small." But we can trust that when the wind of the Spirit does blow we will not be without an unfailing inward mariner who can keep us on course. And we shall together, in Meetings for Worship, await the self-same movement of the Spirit in our midst, making itself known in what we have come to recognize as the marks of a gathered or covered Meeting.

### **The Prophetic**

Meantime, as we brood over the writings of the mystics, beginning with Paul and John, we will learn privately to celebrate the mystical experiences that have already been vouchsafed us as individuals. We shall learn evermore to obey the Word of God which continues to speak to us through the still small voice of the mystical consciousness. When we are reminded that George Fox said this, Margaret Fell something else, John Woolman yet another word, and the imperious question comes, "but what canst thou say?" we shall not find ourselves tongue-tied, nor wanting in readiness for involvement in social action. When we have experienced identification with persons in the mass of suffering humanity, as did Woolman, we will find ourselves involved in modern counterparts of the historic testimonies. The mystical identification which Paul vividly demonstrated to us by his words, "Who is weak and I am not weak, who is offended and I burn not" is the only sustained motivation that can keep us from growing weary in well-doing.

As we should maintain that Jesus was a Jewish mystic, on the basis of the nature of mystical consciousness as we

have defined it, so we must now hold that he was also prophet, precisely because of the intensity of his mystical consciousness of the Kingdom as a present reality as well as an anticipated eschatological event. I believe he thought of himself as the greatest in the long succession of Hebrew prophets because he was the prophet of this present Kingdom and he acknowledged no peer in his capacity to interpret it.

To be able to perceive and to enter into the inheritance of this Kingdom involved a “consciousness-raising” in the disciples which he developed through his preaching and parables. To live within this Kingdom, as he lived in it, meant a quickening of mystical consciousness which took the characteristic forms of experiencing identification and perceiving relatedness. And from this mystical consciousness springs the ethical insights and the moral judgments of the Sermon on the Mount.

In his paper, “Christ the Prophet,” Lewis Benson says:

In Fox’s preaching about Christ the prophet he identifies himself and the Quaker movement with the Hebrew prophetic tradition and he regards his oppressors as standing in the priestly tradition . . . For Fox, Jesus’ death on the cross is not just the death of a prophet, but the death of the prophet of the end-time — who was sent to end the succession of prophets and to be the living head of God’s people in the New Covenant. Fox’s mission was to restore prophecy to the central place in the life of the Church, and he saw that this would involve a head-on clash with the priestly establishment.<sup>14</sup>

Lewis Benson points out that the revolutionary gospel which Fox preached made this central claim for Christ as prophet: “Christ has come to teach his people himself.”<sup>15</sup> I shall want to say more presently about whether we are able

any longer to identify Jesus and the Christ in this exclusive sense in which George Fox and Lewis Benson do, but his point is nevertheless well taken. It was this consciousness of the immediate presence of Jesus as the Christ and Prophet that lies behind the prophetic role of early Friends in their witness both against false teaching in the established Church and against the social evils of their time.

Personally I see this awareness of the presence of the living Christ in the midst as profoundly mystical in a way Lewis Benson would not allow. But the point I am stressing here is that the mystical consciousness of Jesus' presence in the gathered company, and of his immediate, prophetic utterance through the spoken ministry of one of its members, chosen by him for the purpose, lay at the heart of the Quaker prophetic testimonies. Quakers would never have been motivated for their extraordinarily fearless social action without the enabling power of this recurring consciousness. On the strength of it they could fling down the gauntlet to the establishment both in Church and State. They courted excommunication, imprisonment, even loss of life, with the same passionate conviction that characterized the apostolic Church.

In the long drought of quietism which afflicted Friends, the accepted theological position of man's inherent depravity and of the Inner Light as an element divinely infused but foreign to man's nature, tended to condition Friends against genuine mystical experience and against recognizing and trusting its imperious, prophetic demands when it was forthcoming. Only in persons in whom the mystical consciousness of identification with suffering humanity was highly developed to the point of overriding traditional theological concepts, as in John Woolman, did it issue in prophetic utterance and action.

It is no accident, I believe, that the prophetic emphasis was recovered in contemporary Quakerism largely through

men like Rufus Jones and Clarence Pickett, in whom the mystical consciousness had been profoundly awakened and developed. Prophetic action issuing from mystical identification gave birth to the American Friends Service Committee. How justly proud we are of this renewal of the early Quaker passion for testimony! But alas, with this institution, as with the Society of Friends as a whole, we must join the lament expressed by General Booth to his wife after the first period of the Salvation Army: "Why is it that God cannot keep a movement pure for more than one generation?"

The white heat of early Quaker testimony cooled when the mystical consciousness that supported it died down. In the same way, institutionalized good deeds in the form of service, no matter how well-intentioned and dedicated, are not capable, themselves, of rekindling the fire of this same mystical consciousness. All those engaged in institutionalized service must harken to the poignant admonition of St. Vincent de Paul to the young women he trained as volunteer nurses for the slums of Paris: "Always remember that only your love will enable the poor to forgive you the bread you give them."

I am suggesting of course that there is an inherent danger in severing the fruits from the roots, however more extensive and efficient the service may be by reason of organization. We have noted how the want of a genuinely mystical theology tended to reduce the incidence not only of mystical experience but of the passion for social protest among Friends before the close of the seventeenth century. By the same token, we dare not expect that our beloved A.F.S.C. can of itself generate the experience from which fearless and selfless prophetic testimony springs when it cannot, for expedient as well as practical reasons, propagate the very faith which gave it birth. Only a continuously reborn Society of Friends can infuse this life-blood into it through individuals in whom the mystical consciousness glows.

Happily, over the past two decades, the Society has been blessed with many persons, especially young men and women, who, because they have experienced in some measure mystical identification with those who suffer, were able to face danger and endure hardship in the civil rights and peace movements. I believe that some of the best energies of Young Friends at the present time, supported by this consciousness, are directed to creating small communes or life centers, intent on recovering the long-neglected testimony of simplicity of life.

There is something providential, bearing the unmistakable marks of the Spirit, about the rise of this new movement among Young Friends just at this time. The opportunity of the sixties, to serve the cause of civil rights under the inspired leadership of the contemplative revolutionary, Martin Luther King, Jr., has gone by, and no amount of nostalgia can bring it back. We have also watched the early ardor and comparative purity of the peace movement in the mid-sixties disintegrate before our eyes into profanity and sporadic violence, while the Gandhian principles with which it began gave way to strategies of disruption and anarchy. When one looked in vain for movements reflecting the same idealism that earlier had motivated the civil rights and peace efforts — except for Caesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers — suddenly, quietly, without fanfare or benefit of mass media, there began to spring up from the very earth these communal experiments, like the tender shoots of the crocuses that in the spring press their way through the nearly frozen ground in search of the sun.

Of course, they are marginal and precarious. True community, to which they are committed, is produced as much by grace as by dedicated effort, and must be recovered afresh every day. Yes, I know. All intentional communities, at a given moment for a given participant, are in process of becoming either the blessed community or a disaster area!

But, at their best, these life centers are potential training cells which do at least insulate individuals for a season from much in our contemporary society that conditions them against the cultivation of mystical consciousness. Here the historic testimonies against racism, chauvinism, violence, cruelty, and greed, in their many forms, may be rehearsed and renewed within the context of an all-encompassing life-style of simplicity. Those of us who cling to our luxuries and securities can only wistfully applaud from a distance.

### **The Evangelical**

Now I come to the point where I anticipate some instinctive reaction and resistance. You will recollect that I have said that the Quakerism of the future must not only be mystical and prophetic, but also evangelical. I suspect that the very word may initially provoke some unfriendly response. Before jumping to conclusions, however, let us consider one by one the definitions given by *Webster's New World Dictionary* of 1956. The first is "in, of, or according to the gospels in the New Testament." Whether one thinks of the Society of Friends as a sect, or a church, or a movement, we must agree that it has sprung historically from the phylum of Christianity. Early Friends attached to the Scriptures, particularly the gospels in the New Testament, an importance second only to the revelation imparted by their own present mystical experience of Jesus as the Christ. Indeed, they believed that the revolutionary gospel they were called to preach was the gospel of the New Testament in its primitive form, recovered, after centuries of apostasy, by their own divinely inspired, prophetic commission.

But those of us who are members of Meetings within the Friends General Conference know how far individuals and Meetings have wandered from a sense of close organic relationship to the Scriptures, including the gospels. The

Bible is rarely quoted in some Meetings for worship. Friends no longer generally meditate on the Scriptures in solitude, confidently waiting for the Word of God to rise from the printed page and speak inwardly to their condition. Many of us have become Biblically illiterate. The good news for us is not so much the Evangel, the good news of the Gospels, as it is a vague reassurance that “I’m O.K. and you’re O.K.” because we possess an Inner Light whose guidance we can discover in silence together, provided we are sufficiently attentive.

The tacit understanding is that the less theology that intervenes, the better. Hugh Doncaster shared with other Friends at the London Yearly Meeting for Sufferings in 1969<sup>16</sup> his concern lest this process of cutting ourselves off from our roots should ultimately end in a condition that could be described by the comment: “Any Friend can believe anything, and the Society of Friends stands for nothing.” When this happens we might be an ethical culture society, but it would be impossible to believe that early Friends would own us as their direct descendants.

When I suggest therefore that Quakerism in the future must be evangelical, if it is to survive, it is first of all because I believe that only this recognized organic connection with our tap root can prevent our withering in time, like any other cut flower. Part of the charisma of all the great living religions springs from having a dimension of depth in history and of remaining in vital contact with the sources. No eclectic amalgam of bits and pieces, borrowed from a number of different religious traditions, can constitute a viable basis for an ongoing religious community. To have survival value I believe the Society of Friends must be evangelical in the sense of preserving a faith that is demonstrably and organically related to the gospels in the New Testament.

The second meaning assigned by Webster to the word “evangelical” is a technical one that has developed in the

last few centuries: “of those Protestant churches, as the Methodist and Baptist, that emphasize salvation by faith in the atonement of Jesus.” Included within this definition would of course be the Friends Evangelical Alliance and individual Friends in other groupings. It was my good fortune to be present at St. Louis in the Fall of 1970, when Friends of all groupings gathered by the invitation of a committee of evangelical Friends which bore the name “Concerned Friends for Renewal.” The statement that issued the call read:

Believing that God is calling the Friends Church today to move forward; believing that Jesus Christ is divine Lord and Savior; believing that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the Friends Church can and should be a greater and more vital force in the world; believing that the Friends Church must minister to the total needs of man, both social and spiritual,

The Committee of Concerned Friends for Renewal calls for a national conference to seek, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, a workable, challenging and cooperative means whereby the Friends Church can be an active, enthusiastic, Christ-centered, and Spirit-directed force in this day of revolution.<sup>17</sup>

Some Friends came to this conference with considerable anxiety about a possible hidden agenda that might have as its objective such a realignment of Monthly Meetings as would enable a new Friends Church to emerge from all present groupings. I feel that the consensus of those present, constituting as they did the most proportionately representative group of Friends to gather in America since the major divisions of the nineteenth century, was that the invitation to enter into theological dialogue was entirely genuine and without any ulterior motive. A spirit of gracious

listening and hearing prevailed on that occasion, I believe. The central issues discussed were salvation through the atonement of Jesus and the authority of the Scriptures.

There has ensued continuing dialogue under the auspices of the Friends World Committee, through a representative panel and regional conference on Faith and Life. I believe that this development is an historic opportunity. Within our own fellowship of the Society of Friends we can engage, in microcosm, in exploration of the theological issues that concern the macrocosm of Christendom. I do not look for consensus or organic unity in the foreseeable future. But I do believe that the new openness for communication could deepen into communion. And, as a member of the liberal side of the spectrum, I feel that being challenged in this manner by other members of our own household of faith is a very salutary experience. I am grateful to our evangelical brothers for taking the initiative and pressing upon us consideration of the issues central to them. I feel that we who have so long neglected theological reflection and articulation stand to benefit a great deal from recollecting whence we have come, and considering where we are and whither we intend to go.

For example, it has made me ask myself, "Have I any claim to be evangelical in this sense of putting emphasis upon salvation by faith in the atonement of Jesus?" I cannot answer this question for myself without careful discrimination. If faith in the atonement of Jesus is to be understood only in the sense that Jesus purchased salvation for me by his death on the cross, to use the language of Barclay, which would reflect the conviction of evangelical Friends, then I certainly do not qualify. To atone means "to make amends" or "to expiate". I do not believe that all men inherit a fallen state from a mythical Adam and that Jesus' death on the cross has reconciled God to man by vicarious suffering.

I understand my personal salvation in terms of being made whole, a process of achieving identity and moving

toward genuine integrity in which I may be at one with myself and with God. This kind of at-one-ment was realized in Jesus' own life. He became at one with himself and with God. I believe my salvation has everything to do with my inward recognition and affirmation of the way, the truth and the life I perceive in Jesus of Nazareth. To the extent that I myself embark on the Royal Way of the Holy Cross as the open secret of Jesus' life, not merely the manner of his death, I feel I am moving toward salvation and learning how to live presently in the Kingdom. Hence I do aspire to be Jesus-centered in that I want to be a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth, and to learn of him both to live and to die.

But I also believe that our only recently acquired evolutionary and depth-psychological perspectives, representing highly important continuing revelation, require that I henceforth distinguish between the Jesus of history and the evolving Christ myth. I am using the word "myth" here not in the connotations of legend or poetic fiction, but in a third sense defined by the Webster *Dictionary* of 1960: "a fabulous narrative founded on some event, especially in the early existence of a people, and embodying their ideas as to their origin, their gods, natural phenomena, etc." Myth is the only language religion can use to speak of the ultimate truths it perceives.

From its earliest associations with the Messiah myth in the Old Testament, the Christ myth has always had a life of its own. I see Jesus as the greatest of the Jewish mystics and prophets. But the Christ for me is God in man, "the Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world." The Christ is the Son of Man in the new sense of man's successor, the new man that is to be. The Christ is the archetypal image of perfect manhood; the Christ is the Inward Light. This Christ is neither male nor female as God is neither male nor female. This Christ for me shone forth in Jesus of Nazareth more brilliantly than in any person of

whom I have any knowledge in the past or present. All other images and perceptions of the Christ must for me be trued up to the Christ I perceive in the Jesus of the gospels.

This Christ is that of God in you and me and we can equate this Christ with the Holy Spirit and with the Light and the Seed and other metaphors for indwelling divinity. But though this Christ was revealed most fully in Jesus, we must not think any longer of Jesus and the Christ as identical and coextensive and coterminous.

The Christ myth must be allowed to evolve to meet the demands of our new perspectives. I can be Christ-centered as well as Jesus-centered, if I may be allowed to interpret Christ in this way as the Logos, the Word, God who indwells all men. I want to become increasingly attentive to this Christ who is in me and in some mysterious sense is me. It is not Jesus who lives in me but the Christ who lived in Jesus and also lives in me.

In order to retain the core of the Christ myth I must be allowed to remythologize. I need to keep my world one. It was not Jesus who was pre-existent, but the Christ or Logos in him — that is, God. Jesus' birth was natural. He was born of man and woman. The incarnation is vastly more wonderful than we had ever dreamed. God has indwelt matter from the beginning of time and has been present in the continuing creation of evolution all the way up from the beginning of life on this planet. Jesus did not have two separate and distinct natures, one human and one divine. He had one nature, human, the very core of which is divine. Salvation can no longer be understood as an atonement in the traditional sense. It can only be understood in terms of the at-one-ment Jesus himself experienced in obedience to the will of God by developing the Royal Way of the Holy Cross as a life style. Jesus can be our Savior individually if we become his disciples and learn to walk in his way and presently to live in the Kingdom he revealed. There was no

flesh and bones resurrection for Jesus, but there was a mystical experience of resurrection in which the Christ the disciples had known in Jesus was recognized as present in their midst. I do not look for Jesus to return in a second coming to earth. But since the Christ, the Logos, the Word lives in all men, I shall expect to continue to meet this Christ over and over again in countless “second comings” in men and women on this earth.

By any fair application of the word evangelical in this second sense, it is clear I do not qualify. But I should want evangelical Friends to know that I believe my personal salvation, in terms of achieving wholeness and integrity, depends upon my obedience to the way, the truth, and the life I perceive in Jesus.

But evangelical has also a third meaning in Webster: “evangelistic.” As in the case of the first meaning, “according to the gospels in the New Testament,” I have as much right to this ancient word as evangelical Christians. Inherent in Christianity from the beginning has been the passion to spread the good news. Early Quakers were as zealous evangelists as the world has ever known. They believed they could prove worthy of the special revelation to them of the revolutionary gospel (which they saw as the primitive gospel) only if they tirelessly made it known to their fellows.

Indeed if one has been visited by a direct sense of inward presence, he is driven to tell everyone who will listen to him. Strange and unendurable irony — that Friends who speak so much about the Inward Light should so timidly hide their own light under a bushel! The time has come to preach the faith we have resolved to practice. If we have good news for our brothers, and I believe we do, let us shout it from the housetops! Let us learn to be publishers of truth about our faith as well as our social concerns.

To recapitulate, we are the inheritors of a mystical faith. And we are, all of us, born mystics, whether or not we have

yet been concerned to cultivate the faculty that God has given us, the faculty that constitutes in us his continuing creation, even its evolving edge in man. God grant that we may aspire to become contemplatives right where we are, here “where one stands,” you and I!

In proportion as the mystical faculty is nourished and given scope in our lives we shall be driven to prophetic action in many areas of social concern because of our deep, sustained, interior identification with suffering humanity. And because we shall be tapping the source, the springs of our energy shall not fail. We shall become fearless again, and learn anew the “wisdom of insecurity.”

And our growing, mystical consciousness shall transform us into evangelical Christians, bursting to share what we have learned about living in the Kingdom from Jesus of Nazareth, through the gospels, and from our personal discovery of the Christ within — a Christ who is not limited to Jesus and can therefore be good news to men and women of other living religions and to countless humanists who in being true to themselves and their own sense of honesty and wholeness will never be able to accept the Christ myth in its traditional form.

Do I hear someone protesting that George Fox accepted the Christ myth in its traditional form? The truth is that he revised its contemporary form in significant ways, in keeping with his world view and his personal revelation. We are being more true to the spirit that was in Fox by adapting the myth to meet the demands of the revealed truths of evolution and depth-psychology than by attempting to return to his theology in all details, a theology which was limited by the knowledge and insights of his time.

It is not Quakerism that must survive, but a Christian faith with the characteristics we have described. Kenneth Boulding suggests in his Pendle Hill pamphlet, *The Evolutionary Potential of Quakerism*, that our élan vital is

not yet spent, and that at our best we have much still to contribute to society. I share this conviction. And until some other community of believers emerges more fit for survival in these terms I shall continue to hope that the Society of Friends will become increasingly mystical, prophetic, and evangelical.

### Notes

1. E. Herman, *The Meaning and Value of Mysticism* (James Clarke & Co.: London, 1915), p. 3.
2. W. R. Inge, *Christian Mysticism*.
3. George Fox, *Journal*, Bicentennial Edition, 1: 11-12.
4. William Penn, *Works*, I (J. Sowle, London, 1726) 155.
5. William Penn, *No Cross, No Crown*, *Works*, I, 298-299.
6. James Naylor, *A Collection of Sundry Books, Epistles and Papers* (J. Sowle: London, 1716), p. 12.
7. Elton Trueblood, *Robert Barclay* (Harper & Bros.: N.Y., 1968), p. 167.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
10. (Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1963).
11. Robert Barclay, *Apology*, published in Latin (Amsterdam, 1676), in English (London, 1678), Prop. IV.
12. *Ibid.*, Prop. V. & VI. Section 11.
13. *Ibid.*, Prop. V and VI, section 17.
14. "Christ the Prophet," p. 10.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
16. Lorton Heusel speaks of this in his address at St. Louis in 1970, "A Call to Prophetic Vision" (Friends World Committee, American Section, 1970), p. 6.
17. *Ibid.*, p. vi.





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