

To the Refreshing of the Children of the Light

by
Geoffrey F. Nuttall



Pendle Hill Pamphlet 101

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Pendle Hill Publications
338 Plush Mill Road
Wallingford, PA 19086-6023
Email: publications@pendlehill.org

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*The lord raised him up to bear a publick & Living
testimony ... to the Refreshing of the Children of Light.
The First Publishers of Truth,
ed. N. Penney, p. 147.*

Foreword

For one who is not a member of the Society of Friends to put out something like an Open Letter to the Society may seem presumptuous. I am an English Congregational minister who from associations with Friends since my

schooldays has learned to love Friends and to share many Quaker convictions. To help Friends to be better Friends and to contribute their own insights more effectively to our common vision of God is my wish. The purpose of these studies is both to recall Friends to some things most surely believed and to invite them to consider afresh certain issues near Quakerism's heart.

Friends have been generous in inviting me to address them. Much of what follows is new; but part was given in 1957 to the Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting Easter Settlement, or to the Purley Autumnal School, in England, and part in 1958 to Bucks Quarterly Meeting, or during the Spring Term at Pendle Hill, in Pennsylvania. If anything here speaks home to them I hope Friends will take it seriously; all else will they overlook?

For myself, the pamphlet will always stir memories of the openhearted affection with which for several months my wife and I were received, especially into the family at Pendle Hill.

Geoffrey F. Nuttall
Pendle Hill
Wallingford, Pennsylvania
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Children of Light

Light is come into the world; and men chose darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. It is a function of light to expose, as when the spring sunshine

reveals the accumulated dust. But the sunshine also provides the light in which to clear away the dust. In George Fox's familiar words to Lady Claypole, 'whatever temptations, distractions, confusions, the light doth make manifest and discover, do not look at these temptations, confusions, corruptions; but look at the light, which discovers them, and makes them manifest; and with the same light you may feel over them, to receive power to stand against them.'

The light shines in the darkness; and the darkness has not overcome it. This too is true. In itself the darkness can never put out the feeblest candlelight. This also Fox realized in his vision of the two oceans, of light and love and of darkness and death, when he saw that the ocean of light 'flowed over' the ocean of darkness. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer! I have overcome the world. And he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

The dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. The first Christians were so sure that in Jesus light had come to them and to all the world, that they could speak of one another as the children of light. The phrase is in fact used in four distinct places in the New Testament. Its reappearance in the writings of early Friends is no coincidence. It is a natural expression of Friends' belief that in them primitive Christianity was being revived. It was not a new name, it was a New Testament name.

For a time it seemed as if Friends were going to adopt it as their regular appellation. In 1655 four London Friends issued *A Declaration from the Children of Light (who are by the world scornfully called Quakers) against several false reports*, in which the phrase is used repeatedly; in 1656 a meeting of Elders at Balby in Yorkshire issued an epistle ‘to the Children of Light’; and in 1660 James Nayler and Richard Hubberthorne published *An Account from the Children of Light*. After this the name fell into desuetude¹; but it was not repudiated. As late as 1686 three Nottingham Friends wrote to London to bear witness against a contrary claim, affirming that ‘we never heard the name of the Children of Light given to us before the coming of George Fox amongst us’ but only ‘when George Fox preached the Light of Christ unto us as the Guide to eternal life from whence it came, to all that was willing to follow it,’ and adding ‘we now are in a blessed fellowship with dear George Fox and all the Children of Light.’ That Fox was accustomed to use the phrase in his early preaching appears from those first pages of his *Journal* which are not extant in manuscript but which are preserved in Thomas Ellwood’s edition of it; for here we find such a phrase as ‘that they might believe in it, and become the children of light, and so have the light of life, and not come into condemnation’; and again, a few pages later, ‘I saw it shine through all; and that they that believed in it came out of condemnation to the light of life, and became the children of it.’ On Firbank Fell he describes his declaration of truth as ‘turning the people to the spirit of God, and from the darkness to the light, that they might believe in it and become children of the light’; and at Ulverston we can call Margaret Fell to

witness that he said ‘Art thou a child of Light, and hast thou walked in the Light, and what thou speakest, is it inwardly from God?’

There is thus no doubt that the name ‘Children of Light’ came into Friends’ vocabulary at the very beginning of the new movement, and that, like so much else in early Quakerism, it was found first on the lips of George Fox. At the same time Fox could make no claim to be alone in the use of it. Rufus M. Jones and William Charles Braithwaite combine in providing references to other radical Puritans in whose writings it is to be found, men such as John Goodwin, Gerrard Winstanley, Giles Randall and Sir Harry Vane. It was also used by the Continental Anabaptists. As Rufus Jones writes, ‘It was plainly a term current at the time’; but ‘for a Christian who put the emphasis on inward life and personal experience’? This, without further elucidation, may be misleading; it is not exactly the connotation which the tracts mentioned and the passages quoted above would most naturally suggest. It may be useful to investigate more closely what the name signifies in those New Testament passages from which early Friends took it. We may in this way hope to recover some of the convictions which animated Friends when they used it.

Two of these passages are in the Epistles, and two are in the Gospels. We may consider the former first. In *Ephesians* 5:8 foll. we read: ‘you were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord: as children of light walk; ... and have no part in the fruitless things done in the dark; but rather expose them, for it is by light that everything which is exposed is made manifest.’ The *motiv* here is ethical: as

so often, light is used as an image of righteousness, holiness, over against the darkness which stands for what is evil and wrong. Those whose lives remain a prey to gross carnal or overreaching sins have no lot or place in Christ's kingdom: be ye holy, for I am holy. The children of light here are the saints, whose good deeds men see, and seeing give glory to God, the source of their light and their goodness.

In *I Thessalonians* 5:2 foll. the intention of the phrase is somewhat different. Here we read: 'the day of the Lord comes like a thief in the night; but you, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should come upon you like a thief; for all you are children of light and of day: we are not of night or darkness. So let us not sleep like the rest of mankind, but let us watch and be sober.' Here the emphasis is eschatological. The day of the Lord, the return of Christ, in judgment and mercy, to divide the sheep from the goats, is to be awaited and watched for with a fearful eagerness. Ye know not on what day the Lord cometh. All that can be done is to be expectant, and to keep awake: as those most naturally may, and most properly should, who are already claimed by Him. The phrase 'children of ...' or 'sons of ...' is a common Hebraic idiom which is repeated throughout the Old Testament far more frequently than any English translation is likely to reveal. Commonly it refers back to what is a source or inspiration. It may, however, be used proleptically, looking forward, as when Lucifer, the morning star, literally the beginner, is termed 'son of the morning' which it heralds, or as in *Psalms* 102:21, where the Lord is spoken of as releasing 'the children of death.'

Death is in the future, but has already claimed them and gained possession of them. So here, the day of the Lord is in the future; but in Christ light is already come into the world, and those who have received Him have become children of God and of the light, and in His light they will watch.

This analysis makes a little less puzzling the conclusion of Jesus' parable in *Luke* 16:8, where 'the Lord praised the unjust steward because he had shown common sense; for the children of this world show more sense towards one another than do the children of light.' The parable, which is a difficult one, in itself hardly elucidates the phrase, 'children of light,' which at first seems here hardly more than an equivalent to the current phrase 'on the side of the angels.' The word usually translated 'wiser' really means 'showing more common sense': the Hebrews had a healthy respect for practical sense, and this is not the only occasion when Jesus shows some impatience with the starry-eyed. It is relevant to note that in other places, as in the parable of the 'wise' virgins, the word is used of those who are expecting, and watching for, one to come; and this link with the eschatological use of 'children of light' in *I Thessalonians* is strengthened by the fact that elsewhere 'this age' is contrasted with 'the age to come': the 'children of light' are the same as those also called the 'children of the resurrection.'

The passage which remains to be considered is in *John* 12:35 foll. Here we read: 'Yet a little while the light is among you; walk while you have the light, that darkness do not come upon you; while you have the light, believe in the

light, that you may become children of light.’ This passage also is clearly eschatological but is more directly related to Jesus Himself, as the Light which is among men. The characteristically Johannine phrase ‘believe in the light’ reveals a source of the first two passages quoted above from Fox’s *Journal*. These verses Professor C. H. Dodd interprets as ‘a grave warning that for a brief space they are in the presence of the Light and have the opportunity of entering into the knowledge of God through faith—the implication being that [their] efforts to put the matter on the plane of academic debate are an evasion: the truth is before them if they will acknowledge it. Shortly, since the Son of Man is to be “lifted up,” the moment of opportunity will have passed. It is the moment of decision.’² Elsewhere Professor Dodd expresses himself thus: ‘The manifestation of the light brings into view the ultimate distinction between truth and falsehood and between good and evil’: ‘Christ’s coming into the world is ... the coming of light, and light judges, inevitably. It judges, in the sense that men pass judgment on themselves by their response to Christ.’³

I find these sentences remarkably close to George Fox and his *Journal*: as redolent of his mind and purpose as of those of the writer of the Fourth Gospel, from the springs of whose inspiration Fox drew so richly. The ethical emphasis is there, in the sensitiveness to righteousness and truth from which came Friends’ corporate testimonies and especially in what I have called Fox’s principle of loving forbearance if so be he might win the wrongdoer. The light of God’s glory which he had seen in the face of Jesus made new creations of Fox and his friends, living stones built up in a

spiritual house, proclaiming the gracious dealings of Him who had called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. ‘They were changed men before they went about to change others.’

The eschatological emphasis is here too, even if we tend to overlook it, just as we do in the New Testament also. ‘The day of the Lord’ is a phrase often on Fox’s lips, and an understanding of this alleviates somewhat our discomfort at the frequency of his references to divine judgment, his readiness both to foretell it and to record it: ‘light judges, inevitably.’ And if we find it puzzling that for Fox the day of the Lord, while often future, is sometimes present or even past, he is only reflecting the tension of the ‘now’ and the ‘not yet,’ the ‘Thy kingdom come’ and the ‘Thine is the kingdom,’ which runs throughout the New Testament, and which in contemporary jargon has been named ‘realized eschatology.’ The sense of being under judgment is not lost but heightened in the assurance that ‘Christ is come to teach his people himself.’ ‘It is the moment of decision’; and ‘men pass judgment on themselves by their response to Christ.’ So Fox’s reiterated exhortation to answer that of God in every man included the yearning so to speak, and so to live, in the light of Christ, that men might rightly respond and be set free from the shades of their prison house. ‘The witness started up in him and made him blush’: ‘the truth came so over him that he grew loving’: light is made manifest by light.

This, rather than an ‘emphasis on inward life and personal experience’ and rather than any equation of the Light with reason or conscience, is the context of faith and experience

in which Friends' use of the name 'Children of Light' can best be understood. It is a New Testament context, and an expression of what we may call Fox's marching orders, namely 'to bring people off from all their own ways, to Christ, the new and living way.' Light awakens, reveals, exposes, liberates and enlivens: it is not surprising that it is a symbol for deity in most ancient religious traditions. George Fox's religious tradition was the Christian; and his untutored seizing on the phrase 'Children of Light' as summing up much that is most essential to the tradition is another example of his genius. 'This theme,' Dr. E. G. Selwyn has written, 'formed part of the Church's regular baptismal teaching at a very early date.' We have in it 'a glimpse of "realized eschatology" in the making. Christians belong already to the light and the day, not the light and the darkness.' 'The behaviour inculcated on Christians is governed not by the fear of an imminent Judgment, but by the experience of a new spiritual order already begun.' 'What is enjoined is a serious and purposeful approach to life, and the self-discipline that such an approach requires.'⁴ Anyone acquainted with early Quakerism will be familiar with these characteristics in the seventeenth-century 'Children of Light.'

Friends & Forms

Nearly three hundred years ago, on 24 August 1662, the Act of Uniformity came into force, by which all ministers in livings in England and Wales were required to have been ordained by a bishop and to have declared their unfeigned consent and assent to everything contained within the Prayer Book; and by the Acts which quickly followed it.

Friends' meetings for worship, like any other form of worship not according to the Prayer Book, were made illegal. 'We are the people above all others that must stand in the gap,' said William Penn in 1678, lifting a phrase from *Ezekiel*, and Friends took their place in the long struggle against uniformity and for nonconformity: for freedom, that is, not to conform to the form of worship ordained by secular authority when conscience directs otherwise. It was a long struggle; but conscience and courage won the day. After three centuries we have come to see that within Christian worship there is room for many forms: more than this, that insistence on uniformity does not strengthen but weakens the Church.

So far Friends took, and take, common ground with Nonconformists generally. They do so, further, in their suspicion of formality in worship. Friends have their own formalities: such as the tidy straight lines in which they sit; and in the handshaking to break up meeting. To set the chairs informally without any order would not help worship; and the handshaking is not an occasion for expressing whatever personal friendliness may well exist. Where things are done in right ordering, there will often be in fact an element of formality; but in worship itself the less formality the better. It is our Father we are to approach; and at no time would formality seem the natural word to use of relations within a family.

Worship according to the Prayer Book was already much less formal than worship according to the Roman Missal; but to Nonconformists it still seemed too formal, too much a vain repetition of others' prayers, with no place for prayer

inspired by God's Spirit present and at work in the worshipping group, prayer which might express the group's condition and be expressed in words fitted to the occasion. Friends felt this too; but Friends felt further that Nonconformist worship itself still consisted largely of coned and gathered stuff, with which the preacher so battered men's minds that they had little opportunity to be still and to know that the Lord Almighty was God. Among Nonconformists the normal, non-sacramental, worship consists, in the main, of four forms: the reading of the Bible; vocal prayer; the preaching of a sermon; and the singing of psalms or hymns: with freedom to vary their order and interrelation within a service. Friends, however, refrain from any pre-arrangement of these forms of worship, other than in the provision of the form of silence as an all-inclusive context, out of which any form may issue and into which it will die away again; and only *may* issue: any one, or even all, of the four forms may be absent from any meeting for worship. Friends furthermore discard any sacramental form of worship.

By Christians of other communions, to whom forms of worship mean so much, Quakerism is sometimes supposed to be a very negative form of Christianity; if (it is thought) it can be called Christianity at all, when so much has been discarded. Yet Nonconformists at least should not find it difficult to understand Friends' distrust of forms in worship. Forms do tend to become uniform; types do become stereotyped; waistcoats strait-waistcoats; so that unless at times there is a breaking out, a breaking free, the change and variety which life and growth demand are

crushed or choked. The Spirit of God is a Spirit of life and creativeness, unpredictable and uncontrollable; and Friends' way of worship is one (not the only) form of worship which takes seriously the immediate dependence on God's Spirit present and active in the worshipping group by every member of the group, so that each meeting is a fresh venture, an adventure of faith. It is still, however, a form. There can be no conjoint worship without one.

There is thus a strange ambiguity, or ambivalence, about forms, as about so much in life. All forms are dangerous; yet some form is necessary. This dual character which forms possess may become clearer if for a moment we leave the sphere of worship and consider their place in the sphere of thought and in the sphere of the appreciation of beauty.

Anyone who attempts to do any thinking knows that he must pay close and sustained attention to the forms of his thinking. He must be exact in the use of language; and he must be careful in the application of logical reasoning. The power of clear and persuasive argument comes only after patient study and practice of the forms of language and thought: it is the language of the idiot which is formless. On occasion, ideas appear to spring up and to offer themselves with the apparent immediacy of perceptions, intuitions as we call them if they are mental, when we seem to *see* that something is true, immediately, without the intervening steps of logical argument; but even then, if we are to carry the conviction that what we have seen is *true* to others to whom our moment of vision has not been granted, we have to depend largely upon the normal forms of logical

presentation. Yet at the same time, whether we know it or not, the forms in which we think, and which we use to express our ideas, are to a considerable extent shaped and controlled by our environment: both by the time in which we live and by the country to which we belong. A study of the history of thought quickly reveals that its forms change with the changing centuries and that there are no 'absolute' thought-forms. There is thus nothing sacrosanct about these forms. We can but use the best we have. But we must use *some* forms, if we are to think at all.

If we turn to the sphere of the appreciation of beauty, the situation is not dissimilar. Most of us have known a feeling of dismay at what appears to be the imprisonment of beauty within forms, coupled with a mystical desire to get beyond these. Yet every artist, like every thinker, knows that, though he may discard the traditional forms, he must find, accept and attend to *some* form if he is to be able to express with any effectiveness what is given to him. For the painter the canvas is not a hindrance, or for the poet the sonnet-form; it is recognized by him as the condition permitting him to achieve expression. For man creation is possible only when he accepts limitation. Once more, to him who delights in beauty much of the beauty lies in its very forms: the perfection of every flower is in its form, its own form and no other's. Yet, because it is living, its form is changing and will pass. Flowers dried and pressed may retain their form, but the life is gone; their interest may still be great, but they have no beauty that we should desire them. Forms in themselves may thus be dead; yet there is no life given without them.

To return now to the sphere of worship. Friends will do well not to say that they have no form of worship but to study the inner articulation, the purpose and the significance of what forms of worship they have; and also to set themselves with renewed devotion to the inner discipline necessary if their worship is to be living. They are then more likely to be protected from a fascination with the ‘symbols’ of psychology, which fill the vacuum left by the absence of sacramental worship but leave them in a worse state than at the first, and from openness to the charge that ‘the denial of mediation must logically lead to the denial of the mediator.’⁵ They are also more likely to reach a sympathetic understanding of the forms of worship used by other Christians and to persuade other Christians of the nonnecessity of any *particular* form, *their own included*. This principle, which now seems largely entrusted to Friends to preserve and present, is a Reformation principle proclaimed tersely and tellingly by Ulrich Zwingli. The Spirit of God is a free Spirit, able to reveal Himself without perceptible mediation and not confined to any form; and when man has become chained to forms of worship from which the life is fled, the Spirit creates new forms, which to conservative contemporaries seem as strange as did Protestant worship four hundred, Quaker worship three hundred, Methodist worship two hundred years ago. Yet in every case there *were* forms; new forms; and the forms have continued. Worship of which formlessness could genuinely be predicated would be not only so casual as to be ineffectual; in the last analysis it would be both meaningless for man and lacking in reverence towards God.

Friends' proper, if exaggerated, mistrust of forms appears at many points other than Meeting for Worship. Friends have always, for instance, sought to avoid excluding from the outreach of God's love both those who lived before Jesus was born and those who have not yet had the gospel preached to them. In a community so limited in its appeal as Friends have been, such universalism might appear ludicrous; but, if all men will be saved whether or not they hear the Gospel, there is clearly the less urgency to take any message beyond the borders of the Society as at present existing. Friends' discomfort at the thought that any may be 'shut out' has something noble about it and reflects the Christian compassion which has placed Friends so often in the forefront of the relief of suffering. Universalism, however, is as untrue to the facts of life as is uniformity. If everyone were willing to be uniform, it would be convenient, if dull; but it is not so. And if everyone were born at the same time and place, with the same opportunities, life would be fair, if spiceless; but it is not so. Life is not like that. God has set men within many variations and limitations: the variations and limitations of time and space which we call history; and the variations and limitations of individuality which we call personality. We cannot get outside these if we would.

Moreover, if we are persuaded of the Christian Gospel, we shall not seek to get outside them. We shall accept them in humble reverence. For the Gospel is that God comes to meet us where we are, and as we are: in our own time and place within the process of history: and in the mystery of our own personalities. The Gospel is, further, that He also

makes Himself known to men in and through the personalities of other men and women, in all the variations and limitations of their being just who they are and no one else, and living just when and where they do and at no other time and place. The Gospel is that in fact He *has* done this, notably in and through the personalities of those of whom we read in the Bible, and supremely and uniquely in Jesus. God is not tied to forms: we do not limit the illimitable; but of His own free love He deigns to use these forms, earthen vessels though they be, for the revealing of His treasure. Comparatively speaking, or in themselves, the vessels may often be of little or no importance; but we cannot have the treasure without the vessels.

In the seventeenth century, Friends were shielded from the excessive repudiation of forms to which their longing for immediacy and directness in relation to God constantly drew them by the common sense and wisdom of George Fox. Fox can be seen battling with this tendency on several fronts at once and gradually, by his great personal and moral authority, winning the day. What Alexander Gordon justly calls the ranter swell, what Fox calls running out into imaginations, what Nayler calls running up into the air, what Penn calls getting exalted above measure, was regularly associated with the endeavour to be 'above all created things' and so above all forms. No one was clearer than Fox that much in the Old Testament is abrogated in the New; but no one judged more severely the impatience of the Ranters who 'never came through the Prophets nor Moses' house' but 'start up to be as Gods.' Fox somehow perceived that the type of person who objected to the form

of removing the hat during vocal prayer, as a sign of reverence to God, might have logic on his side, since God stood in no need of it, but would also be the type of person who would object to the form of divine revelation in the Bible or in Jesus as limiting, and must therefore be guarded against if the infant Society was not to break down in an unattached vague mysticism.

Fox also contributed immeasurably by providing the forms of discipline, self-government and mutual aid, which have stood the test of time so remarkably, holding Friends together and enabling Friends to be a Society instead of an unrelated congeries of individuals and individualists. These forms also Friends will do well to treasure, to study, to use and to renew: it is no coincidence that now, as in the seventeenth century, it is often those Friends who will break loose from the forms of the Christian Gospel, who will also sit light to the responsibilities of membership in a Society with its own corporate testimonies and Christian Discipline. If Friends will recover a sense of what they have gained through the possession and use of *these* forms, the forms of their creative living and outgoing concerns, they may come to be more understanding of the place of forms in religion generally. All forms are dangerous; but some there must be.

Joy to Make Mention

Dangerous it were for the feeble brain of man to wade far into the doings of the most high: whom though to know be life, and joy to make mention of his name; yet our soundest knowledge is to know that we know him

not as indeed he is, neither can know him; and our safest eloquence is our silence, wherein we confess without confession that his glory is inexplicable, his greatness above our capacity and reach: he is above and we are upon earth; wherefore it behoveth our words to be wary and few.

This passage from near the beginning of Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity* Friends find deeply sympathetic. Our safest eloquence is our silence. It behoveth our words to be wary and few. Let all the earth keep silence before him. Friends understand this well. But it is also joy to make mention of his name. How beautiful are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace: thy watchmen lift up their voice, they sing for joy. Early Friends rejoiced to be publishers of truth: to be great in declaration.

The overflowing heart and mind, overflowing in part into words, are so evidently a mark of primitive Christianity that it would be strange if they did not reappear in any endeavour after 'primitive Christianity revived.' The overflow in large measure comes about because something has *happened*. We *cannot but* speak the things which we have seen and heard. Whenever something has happened which affects men's lives deeply, transforms their personalities, possesses their imagination, they will speak of it.

And the Christian overflow was in words that might bring others to share in the joy of what had happened. That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us. I seek not yours, but you. It

was an expression of the divine compassion with which Jesus saw men as sheep without a shepherd, as leaves blown, as children lost in the wood, a great people to be gathered and cared for and brought home to the Lord. Jesus' life-purpose was made up of seeking and saving, seeking those who were being lost and saving those who were wasting themselves away: of helping, serving, and ministering. Such a life-purpose can know no bounds other than need: hence the ethic of the Christian extra inspiring the Sermon on the Mount.

When men see what in the memorial to Emily Bishop Harvey read in the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of 1958 was called radiant outreach, they know it and they know it as something distinctively Christian. All men with unclouded vision recognize the centrality in Christianity of service. Friends have adopted the word in the Friends Service Council and the American Friends Service Committee, and not without justification. It is a keyword in the New Testament, and is used both for the relief sent to Jerusalem and for the *ministration* to poor widows. But the commonest use of the word, which has its origin in the menial service of *waiting at table* (Luke 22:27), is to denote simply *ministry* in all its manifold forms. Friends suffer an impoverishment unnecessary and unwise if they so concentrate on relief that they neglect ministry, and especially vocal ministry in meeting for worship. Language, like other divine gifts, can be abused; but its being one of the greatest of gifts, with its mystery of communicating the heart of man, led to the use of the Word of God as a natural image, alongside the image of the

Spirit, for the divine self-giving. So Jesus used words as a prime mode of His ministry, and expected His disciples to do so, including those who might not join the little band. Go home and *tell* them what great things the Lord hath done for thee, in having compassion on thee. And as the message spread, freedom of speech, boldness of utterance, spread with it. Though commanded not to speak, the apostles ceased not to teach and to preach; and the book of *Acts* closes with Paul under house arrest, maybe, but preaching and teaching with a bold freedom which no man could check. The power of the Lord was over all.

George Fox, though on occasion he could be silent for three hours to famish men from words, well knew the use of words and could also, as on Firbank Fell, speak for three hours. The man who at Launceston, in competition with the Judge, and successfully, ‘still cried to have my mittimus read’ would be no more quenchable in vocal ministry than the Apostle Paul. In this Penn tells us that Fox gave men not only that which was his own experience but that which he had received of Christ. So of ‘these experimental preachers of glad tidings,’ as Penn calls Friends in general, he says that they could not ‘preach when they pleased, but as Christ their Redeemer prepared and moved them by his own blessed Spirit, for which they waited in their services and meetings, and spoke as that gave them utterance.’ It is unfortunate when Friends retain the experimental emphasis but not the reference to a higher control. Friends who are content to tell their experiences would receive from Fox short shrift, along with the priest who ‘said he could tell his experiences as well as I: I told him experience was one

thing, but to go with a message and a word from the Lord, as the prophets and apostles had and did, and as I had done to them, this was another thing.’

Here, as often, Fox consciously and effectually speaks from a position in spiritual continuity with the New Testament. Throughout the religion of the Bible, indeed, mission, being sent, with a word from the Lord, a witness, a testimony to bear is a prime and continuing element. The prophets, who speak forth for God, are those whom Jeremiah pictures God as daily rising up early and sending. Jesus opens His ministry by reading from *Isaiah*, ‘the Spirit of the Lord is upon me ... to preach the gospel, for he hath sent me.’ The name *apostles* means the missionaries, the sent ones; the name *martyrs* means the witnesses; and to more Christians than those who bear their testimony by their blood the Lord says ‘Ye shall be my witnesses.’ It is a matter of obligation; those who are to minister, to do service, do it not as unto men but unto the Lord. As servants, they have a Master. They are to do the will of God from the heart as the servants of Christ. It is of those who are slaves in the literal sense that this is said; but ministry, including vocal ministry, is of a piece with it. The eagerness of Christians to be of service in ministry has its source in their glad service of Christ, whom they both know and preach as Lord.

All Christians, as Friends have always insisted, have certain testimonies to bear; and of some of these, such as the testimony to the way, and power, of reconciliation, their lives may speak. For others words are needed and a vocal ministry, and while Fox calls to all Friends who have

known God's power, life, and presence among them to let it be their joy to hear or see the springs of life break forth in any; for more regular and sustained vocal ministry it is evident, whether in the first century, the seventeenth or the twentieth, that only some are called and given the requisite gifts. Alongside the use of so unlikely a *motiv* as slaves' waiting at table, the other element essential to ministry in the New Testament is the charismatic, the impossibility of such ministry except as a gift of the Holy Spirit. Neither conception proved easy to sustain after the first days of enthusiasm: just as the humble servant in time became *the* 'person' of the village or even a 'lord' bishop, so the ministry of gifts degenerated into a ministry only of function and then of status or profession. Friends' rejection of a separated, ordained, fulltime and paid ministry was a revolutionary action with secular sanctions, which arose from the contemporary situation, as well as with theological, but in the main it was due to their determination to depend once more on a ministry genuinely and solely charismatic; it was, once again, part of 'primitive Christianity revived.'

The 'recording' of ministers, which obtained through the greater part of the Society's history, had this advantage, that it bore witness to the Society's belief in ministry in this sense. Doubtless it had its disadvantages or dangers; and the desire to encourage in a meeting the sharing of responsibility more widely is a laudable one. But the desire to distribute responsibility for vocal ministry as *widely as possible* betrays secular influence, or at least a misunderstanding of this ministry as God-given; according

as *He* has distributed to every man. For the plain truth is that He does *not* give to every man of it in equal measure: one man may, like Fox, have an extraordinary gift in opening the Scriptures; another like Robert Widder, may be ‘a thundering man,’ yet ‘not very great in declaration.’ The practice of recording ministers led Friends to *expect* ministry from some, and also to encourage those young Friends in whom the gift of ministry was discerned, to be obedient in its exercise. Now that Friends have ceased to record ministers, and especially in those Yearly Meetings where few elders are found either, it is not surprising if outsiders doubt whether Friends believe in ministry at all. Is it not true that in *some* meetings which for a generation have had no ministers there is now little genuine ministry?

Friends should read again Penn’s earnest plea ‘that the ministry be held, preserved, and continued.’ ‘Nor is it enough that we have known the Divine gift, and in it have reached to the spirits in prison, and been the instruments of the convincing of others of the way of God, if we keep not as low and poor in ourselves, and as depending upon the Lord as ever.’ All the elements of ministry which have been before us are here: the simple desire to help, the menial service, the charismatic foundation, the obligation and obedience. In a century so intellectual as the seventeenth a man so well educated as William Penn, whose first book was a theological treatise, did not think it necessary to emphasize the need for a constant recourse to the fountains of faith in the Bible, and for thought and meditation in preparation for worship. Today, all the more so where there are now no ministers who may be depended

on to have had the meeting for worship in mind throughout the week, it is laid upon all to come with minds as well as hearts prepared. And some there are who do. Shipley N. Brayshaw was one. The testimony to the grace of God in his life, part of which was read in the London Yearly Meeting of 1958, records that ‘on every journey he would learn a passage of scripture or a poem, anything to prepare ... for meeting.’ His brother, A. Neave Brayshaw, was another. In 1655, in *The Quakers Catechism*, Richard Baxter thus taunted Friends: ‘When the lazy fit overtaketh Ministers, they are ready to preach without study as well as you do.’ It was a beautiful response when, nearly three hundred years later, Neave Brayshaw allowed in his Swarthmore Lecture that many a minister who knows a sermon will be required of him looks forward to it in the spirit of prayer, of love for his congregation, of watchfulness over his lower self and of expectation of power, and added: ‘Our way of worship and conception of ministry gives no excuse for our prayer and love, our watchfulness and expectation, being less than his.’⁶ Neave Brayshaw was then more than sixty years old: a good age, he held, at which to learn Hebrew, so as to come to closer grips with the Old Testament and thus to minister more effectively.

A searching summary of what should be behind much vocal ministry, the divine enabling and the human self-discipline, is hidden away in a note to Caroline Stephen’s *Quaker Strongholds*:⁷ ‘the result we look for,’ she writes in her chapter on Worship, ‘is the fruit of a devout intelligence, first purified, and then swayed, by the

immediate action of Divine power.’ Another Cornish Friend, an interpreter of Caroline Stephen, L. Violet Holdsworth, was well acquainted with all these prerequisites for vocal ministry. In a perceptive poem written round a verse easily passed over in the story of the wedding at Cana, she adds one more, namely, that ministry, or the preparation for it, will cost something.

*‘But the servants which drew the water knew.’
Ah yes, they knew, those willing-hearted servants
Within, without, intent that nought should mar
The gladness of a feast set forth for others—
They knew the secret of each heavy jar.*

*And still God keeps some secrets for the workers,
Secrets of beast and bird, and the good loam;
Secrets of mines, and fires, the mood of metals,
And how much grace it needs to run a home.*

*And they too know, who spread the feast of worship
To which with bridal gladness all may go,
The anxious cost, heart-searchings and abasements,
The ministers who draw the wine, they know.⁸*

Joy to make mention of his name. Water into wine. But there will be neither water nor wine, unless there are willing-hearted servants to draw it.

Friends, the Bible & the Church

The first half of the twentieth century has seen a remarkable recovery of the Bible as an object of study and

as an inspiration for the good life. Numerous versions, or paraphrases, of the Bible are put out and are read widely and avidly. Books about the Bible, also, are published in quantities and gain wide circulation. After long years of linguistic, historical and critical study, the understanding of the Bible has passed from its earlier, analytic phase. It is now the whole New Testament, not just the gospels, or one gospel at a time which is studied, indeed the whole Bible. It is biblical religion, the biblical revelation of God, to which attention is given, a living, integrated complex of faith and experience; and it is a whole with Christ as the centre, touchstone and key. Jesus is still the Jesus of history, to use T. R. Glover's title, but we now again see in Jesus Him of whom all the prophets have spoken, Him to whom all the apostles look back, Him for whom all the martyrs have died. The coming, sending, message of Jesus, the authority of the living Christ, is what, for Christians, links, makes intelligible and gives authority and unity to the different parts of the Bible. These are they which testify of Me.

The first half of the twentieth century has also seen a remarkable recovery of the Church: not now as a proud, grandiose institution nor as the State on its religious side, nor yet just a voluntary society formed by individual decision for some shared human purpose—though in its human aspect it is that, and Friends do well to continue to stress the voluntary nature of conviction: we still have to believe for ourselves, though not by ourselves. But the Church is seen today as an expression of the direct purpose of God, who calls men out of the world, to live together for His glory, for their mutual help, and to be His witnesses in

the world; with sanctions, ways and powers different from those present in any other society, because, to use the title of S. C. Neill's fine study of the Church's history, it is *The Divine Society*. The Church is seen anew as the company of the disciples of Jesus, who would proclaim Him and learn of Him and do His will, the instrument in the world of His living Spirit.

Both these developments have accompanying dangers, undoubtedly: dangers which may be summed up as the abrogation of our direct, individual, personal response and responsibility to God. In an age of much mental disturbance and moral uncertainty, men crave certainty and security. They no longer claim, or expect, infallibility or perfection in themselves, as early Friends did; but they still hope to find it in Bible or Church. This can give rise to a new fundamentalism or allegorizing typology, or to a new ecclesiasticism or mechanizing institutionalism, either of which must have an influence impersonal and deadening. Fortunately these perils are reduced when—and this also is one of the new things in this century—Bible and Church are held together: the Bible being seen as the book of the People of God, and the Church as the company of those who live by biblical religion. For then each points in its own way to Christ, to His glory, and to His way and will and authority.

To the perennial question, Where is the authority? in Bible or in Church? The answer thus now is, with God, the author of our being; with God in Christ, the author and perfecter of faith. It is not a matter of discussing Christ's divinity, notionally, as a doctrine required by orthodoxy. It is that we

find God in Him and, through Him, come close to us and drawing out the best in us and damping down the worst or overcoming it. When we listen to Him in the Gospels speaking with authority because He has the right to speak, the authority of vision, telling us what He sees, not what He has invented, we find the evil in us weakening and the good raised up, and we know that God is near. It is the same experience which we know when we are among the Lord's people, and we realize that they would not, could not, *be* without the Lord, the living Lord. His authority alone gives Bible or Church any authority over our lives which they possess; but insofar as it is His, it is an authority which claims us. There is in fact abroad in the world today among Christians, and more especially among those now becoming Christians, a humility before this authority, before the truth as it is in Jesus, and a wondering discovery of powers to live by, and of the adventure of witness, among His people, which are truly inspiring. Men are finding, as Penn tells us Friends found, that 'nothing else would do but Christ himself, the light of his countenance, a touch of his garment and help from his hand, who cured the poor woman's issue.'

How I long that Friends would take their place more readily, more seriously and more effectively in these great movements which are taking place among Christians generally! The double development which I have described is one which, granted a sympathetic understanding of it, Friends can hardly not welcome. Friends' insights and emphases, moreover, are needed to enrich, and sometimes to correct it; while Friends, even more, need close touch

with other Christians if they are not to dry up in the sand of their own peril, namely, a shallow humanism as much cut off from the fountain of life and truth as fundamentalism or ecclesiasticism can be. In the movement to use the new understanding of the Bible for the nourishment of the inner life, Friends should be taking a lead. Men ‘could not know the spiritual meaning of Moses’, the prophets’ and John’s words, nor see their path and travels, much less see through them, and to the end of them into the Kingdom,’ Fox wrote, ‘unless they had the Spirit and light of Jesus... But as man comes through by the Spirit and power of God, to Christ ... and is led by the Holy Ghost into the truth and substance of the Scriptures, sitting down in him who is the author and end of them, then are they read and understood with profit and great delight.’ Is not this what Friends should be saying today in all the discussions going on about the Bible and how to read it? No one else is likely to say it quite as Friends will.

But will they? It is always the old question: is the Light Within the Light of Christ? As much as the Bible is the Book of Christ and the Church the People of Christ, or—Light, Bible and Church—they are little worth. Friends still say they believe in a continuing revelation; to what purpose save as they believe in the revelation in Christ? Friends continue to call their places of worship meeting-houses; to what purpose save as testimony that, as Fox puts it, ‘the church is the people, whom God has purchased with His blood, and not the house’? What I have called Fox’s marching orders were ‘to bring people off from all their own ways to Christ, the new and living way; from their

churches, which men had made and gathered, to the church in God, ... which Christ is the head of; and off from the world's teachers, made by men, to learn of Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life.' At Brigflatts Fox says he gathered the meeting 'in the name of Jesus'; at Cockermouth he says he directed men 'to their teacher, that had died for them and had bought them with His blood': at Swansea he says 'a meeting was settled ... in the name of Jesus.' Such passages, and they are many, show that for Fox not only was the Light Within the Light of Christ, but the Christ whose Light shone within was one with the Jesus of Nazareth whom he found in the New Testament. The purpose of Fox's searching question, 'You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this, but what canst *thou* say?' is to put man not over against Christ and His apostles but in spiritual continuity with them. What we say is to be our own but it is also to be what He says: said then and still says, Christ in us the hope of glory.

The image of light which Friends made so peculiarly their own was a New Testament image, as we have seen. It had this disadvantage, that there is nothing personal about light. It may enlighten and it may release; so that to the Light may be attributed the power which elsewhere Fox expresses in these more personal terms, 'he that shows a man his sins is he that takes it away.' But light does not constrain: it does not call us to action, move our wills or evoke obedience. The image for what does this is not light, but a voice; and it is noteworthy that in their initial and transforming experience, both Fox and Nayler, like St. Paul, say that they heard a voice. Moreover, the story of

Fox and Nayler, indeed of early Friends generally, is the story of endless endeavours after obedience to the Divine voice, of openings, leadings and waitings ‘till I felt freedom from the Lord,’ going ‘hand in hand with him in all things,’ ‘leaving the whole work only to him.’ This too Friends today are called to demonstrate to other Christians. Utter, present commitment and devotion in the things of everyday to the Lord present in and among His people: this should be the note and contribution of Quakerism within the World Church. And no more than their message that men must be in the same Spirit as those were who gave forth the Scriptures will Friends give this message, unless they reverence both the Scriptures and the Church for the Light and Voice of Christ to be found in them.

How can Friends make what they think to be their distinctive contribution—the message of Christian Pacifism—telling men, like Fox at Beaumaris, that ‘they show an unworthy spirit, and below Christianity or humanity,’ unless they also like Fox first direct men to the light of Christ, that men may ‘see their Saviour Christ Jesus, their way to God’? How can Friends call on men to love their enemies, unless they point them (in Nayler’s words) to ‘the same love, who came from above to lay down his life for his enemies,’ and to ‘the same power, who can forgive sins and offences above seven times a day’? In a letter from Derby Jail, Fox wrote: ‘If the love of God had broken your hearts, ye would not have imprisoned me; but my love is to you, as to all my fellow-creatures.’ This love Fox had learned from one whom in the same letter he calls ‘my Savior.’

The strongly personal quality in Friends' way of worship and life; Friends' sensitiveness to the moving of the Spirit in meeting for worship or meeting for business; Friends' seeking to answer that of God in every man, thereby often encouraging and liberating the spirit in prison; Friends' discerning of others' conditions, the kind but searching glance that comes only after a discipline in which a passion for honesty is matched by a passion to help; Friends' faith in, and openness to, there being a way of God in every situation, a way of conciliation and door-opening (and therefore often first of door-making) these are among the things which other non-Friends besides myself would put in any list of what the best and truest Friends known to them have to give and are giving. Not one of them can be given save as it arises from a continually humble and sincere living relationship between ourselves, both as individuals and as a worshipping community, and the God whom we know in and through Christ. Not one is long possible save as, besides being sensitive to the Light of Christ, we are also obedient to His Voice. Like the Proud Quakers of Nottingham, who would have appropriated the title 'Children of Light,' like the Free Quakers of Philadelphia who claimed the freedom to fight with carnal weapons, the Ranting Friends who claimed to have risen above created things and out of all forms have passed away.

The Fifth Query in the *Christian Discipline* of London Yearly Meeting, in its present form, reads thus: 'do you maintain a steadfast loyalty to our Lord Jesus Christ?' The Friends who framed this query were thinking not so much of an enduring principle in the universe as of the Eternal

Christ who is one with Jesus of Nazareth; who is also the Risen Christ, risen from the dead and in His saving, redeeming love triumphant over the worst that men could do or can; and whom from the first century to the twentieth Christians have called *Lord*, as a token of their obedience, allegiance and steadfast loyalty.

*O Lord and Master of us all,
Whate'er our name or sign,
We own thy sway, we hear Thy call,
We test our lives by Thine.*

These words were written by a Quaker poet. They are familiar; but they are worth dwelling on.

Notes

1. The passage providing the title of this pamphlet was written as late as 1707
2. C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Forth Gospel*, p. 379.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 210, 307.
4. E. G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter*, pp. 379 ff.
5. F. Hildebrandt, *From Luther to Wesley*, p. 100.
6. A. N. Brayshaw, *The Things That Are Before Us*, p. 36.
7. P. 61, n.* The passage is quoted by D. N. Dalglish, *People Called Quakers*, p. 168, but without the reference.

8. From *West by North*, by L. V. H(oldsforth) and E. S. B(osanquet).

About the Author

Geoffrey F. Nuttall is Lecturer in Church History at New College, University of London. During part of the Spring and Summer of 1958 Dr. Nuttall was visiting lecturer at Pendle Hill. Among his books are: *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith & Experience* (Blackwell, 1946 out of print), *The Holy Spirit & Ourselves* (Blackwell, 1947), *The Reality of Heaven* (Independent Press, 1951), *Studies in Christian Enthusiasm* (Pendle Hill Pamphlet), and his most recent book, *Christian Pacifism in History* (Blackwell, 1958).

Pendle Hill

Located on 23 acres in Wallingford, Pennsylvania, Pendle Hill is a Quaker adult education, retreat, and conference center offering programs open to everyone. Pendle Hill's vision is to create peace with justice in the world by transforming lives. Since Pendle Hill opened in 1930, thousands of people have come from across the United States and throughout the world for Spirit-led learning, retreat, and community. Every year, people from many faiths and backgrounds come to experience Pendle Hill's educational programs in arts and spirituality, community activism and leadership training, and spiritual deepening.

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mission of spiritual education is also furthered through conference services—hosting events for a variety of religious and educational nonprofit organizations, including many Quaker groups.

The Pendle Hill pamphlets have been an integral part of Pendle Hill’s educational vision since 1934. Like early Christian and Quaker tracts, the pamphlets articulate perspectives which grow out of the personal experience, insights, and/or special knowledge of the authors, concerning spiritual life, faith, and witness.

A typical pamphlet has characteristics which make it a good vehicle for experimental thought. It is the right length to be read at a single sitting (about 9000 words). It is concerned with a topic of contemporary importance. Like words spoken in a Quaker meeting for worship, it embodies a concern, a sense of obligation to express caring or to act in response to a harmful situation.

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