

THE NEW FOUNDATION MOVEMENT --
ITS UNIVERSAL GOSPEL MESSAGE AND MISSION

Since the titles for these five sessions on The Early Quakers' Universal Message and Mission were announced in July, 1985, the question has been raised whether the activities associated with the name New Foundation can be properly described as a movement.

I do not think it necessary to discuss here the arguments for and against the term "movement." What I have to say here is concerned with the universal gospel message and mission and has to do with the New Foundation work and the New Foundation workers.

The name "New Foundation" did not come into general use until after 1976, but, in 1974 and 1975, Joseph Pickvance and Lewis Benson in England and John Curtis and Lewis Benson in the United States began to collaborate in holding weekend gatherings for the purpose of bringing to Friends and others the Christ centered message preached by George Fox. These three collaborators had spent a considerable time studying early Quaker writings and especially the writings of George Fox. We were all Quakers who were not satisfied with the kind of answers we were getting from the Society of Friends as to the content of the Quaker message and the nature of the Quaker society. We discovered that there was a whole universe of Christian thought and experience in the writings of George Fox that had not survived in any living Quaker tradition and we became convinced that what was most needed in the Society today could be supplied by Fox's Christian message. So after some prodding by Joe Pickvance, a beginning was made, and, in the spring of 1974, my three part article entitled "A Revolutionary Gospel" was printed in the "London Friend" just before my wife, Sarah, and I started out for England.

Before starting out on this five weeks speaking tour in 1974, I sought guidance as to how I was to proceed, and I was given a clear leading that if I could keep as close as possible to the everlasting gospel that George Fox preached and only spoke of it in so far as I could speak from my own experience, that nothing bad would come of it.

George Fox said: "The first work is to convince people of God's truth,"(1) and I saw my task as becoming engaged in this "first work." My three part article, "A Revolutionary Gospel," was made into a pamphlet* in which I said: "The rise of the Quakers in the 17th. century was a revolutionary event. The first Quaker prophets believed that their mission was to redirect the course of Christian history by rebuilding the whole Christian structure from the foundations. They claimed to be making a new beginning from a new starting point."(2) "The early Quaker movement was a new

* by The Tract Association of Friends, Philadelphia, 1974.

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beginning on a new foundation. The new foundation is to be found in the Quakers' revolutionary gospel message." (3)

In 1976, an international summer gathering at Haverford College brought people from England, Northern Ireland, Canada, and the United States. On this occasion I gave a series of lectures on the theme, "A New Foundation to Build Upon." Not long after this we began to call ourselves the "New Foundation Group," which later became the "New Foundation Fellowship." This name has served to give a growing number of people a means of corporate identification and it has focussed attention on the work of the group rather than on a few individuals.

But, having a name seems to have raised many questions about New Foundation itself, such as: Is it a church fellowship? Is it a fringe group on the periphery of the Society of Friends? To what extent does George Fox's message and teaching furnish the framework for the New Foundation message and mission? Who is authorized to speak for the New Foundation? What is its relation to the Society of Friends? Should it accept the status of a special interest group within a pluralistic Society of Friends? Is it a group, a fellowship, or a movement?

These questions seem to assume that once this group has a name of its own that it thereby acquires an identity of its own, and a destiny of its own, and that, if it so desires, it can cut the umbilical cord that has bound it to the witness and work of the early apostles and early Quakers. These questions seem to ignore the most basic fact about the New Foundation which is that it is a task centered fellowship and the questions of most importance that need to be asked about it are: Are we preaching the everlasting gospel again to the inhabitants of the earth? Are we making the most of every opportunity to do this? When the term "new Foundation" began to be used it was understood to mean the gospel foundation that George Fox proclaimed was "to be laid again in all the world." (4)

Concerning the term "fellowship," Fox declared: "This we know...the fellowship is in the gospel, that is, in the power of God." (5) "The gospel, which is the power of God, keep in it and the fellowship of it." (6) "All that be out of the gospel, the power of God, that the apostles and true church were in, they are out of the fellowship of the gospel and out of the order of it, [and they are] in their own orders and fellowships and not in Christ's." (7)

The words "New Foundation Fellowship" refer to the gospel foundation laid by Fox and to the gospel fellowship that is based on that foundation. We owe more to George Fox than to anyone else for our understanding of the content of

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the everlasting gospel and he can help us to keep on this gospel foundation.

The New Foundation Fellowship has no formal creed but this does not mean that it has not been building on the same gospel foundation that Fox was building on. To qualify as a tax exempt fund, the American George Fox Fund, Inc., had to incorporate under the laws of Pennsylvania, and in order to do this it had to make a clear statement of the purpose of the fund. So, the Articles of Incorporation read: "The purpose of the George Fox Fund, Inc. shall be to proclaim the everlasting gospel preached by George Fox...This is to be done by holding seminars, summer schools, and other gatherings, by preparing and distributing books, pamphlets, articles, newsletters and periodicals, by encouraging individuals to travel and speak to groups and by other appropriate means." I am not a trustee nor am I an officer of this self perpetuating trust fund, and I was not involved in setting it up, but I am deeply concerned that its work not be hindered by any wavering or fluctuating by New Foundation workers as to the basic purpose of the New Foundation work.

The genesis of the Quaker movement of the 17th. century can be traced to the first Quakers' conviction that the foundation of apostolic Christianity was the apostolic gospel preached by the apostles. They believed that the Christianity of their own day was no longer based on this gospel foundation. Their vision of hope for the future was rooted in their conviction that this apostolic gospel had been revealed to them and that, in so far as it was preached again and received again, it would bring about a Copernican revolution in Christian life and launch again the universal mission to preach the everlasting gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue and people.

The historical importance of the early Quakers' movement is not that they happened to be the founders of a religious society that managed to survive the vicissitudes of three centuries. If we put the emphasis where the early Friends put it we will see that what they did was of vital importance to the whole Christian cause in the whole world. In the early Quaker vision and experience, Quaker worship, ministry, fellowship, church order, and righteousness, all had a gospel foundation. But today, in the absence of this gospel foundation, everything in Quaker life has become problematic and there is much confusion and disorder. There is now a growing suspicion among Friends that without a much firmer foundation things will get worse and not better. So far, the gospel message preached by New Foundation workers has made its greatest appeal to Quakers who are looking for

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a firm, sure, unshakable foundation for their lives and for the corporate life of the Quaker community.

New Foundation workers are concerned that the gospel foundation that they are trying to lay again in all the world should not be confused with some other gospel or some other foundation. Toward this end they have been using several forms of expression to identify this gospel and to signify that it is understood to be a distinctive gospel. Fox used the term everlasting gospel, which, in its Biblical context (Rev. 14:6), is the gospel which is to be preached "to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people." The term "everlasting gospel" was used consistently by Fox and many early Friends because it stressed the universality of the gospel they preached.

Fox made it clear that the apostolic gospel that he preached was a gospel of power. Again and again he repeated the phrase, "the gospel, which is the power of God." By this he meant that the gospel has the power to raise up a righteous, holy people to God -- a New Covenant people, with no priest but Christ, no temple or temple worship, no ritualistic pathway to God, with one head, Jesus Christ, of whom God said: "This is my beloved Son, hear ye him."

So, when New Foundation workers speak of "the gospel that Fox preached," they are referring to this universal gospel which is a gospel of power. Fox was not the author of this gospel and he did not claim to be. But he claimed that it had been revealed to him and that through him hundreds had been raised up to share in the work of preaching it. And now, today, this universal gospel message has been turning men and women to Christ and some are hearing and obeying the same call that Fox heard to go forth and preach the gospel again to all the world.

The first Publishers of Truth in the 17th. century were not simply a band of Quaker lecturers who went about speaking on various religious subjects. They had received a universal gospel message and they were given a commission to preach it. The new community that was "raised up" with its new worship, ministry, and church order was a direct result of preaching this gospel. Is it possible for there to be a genuine movement for renewal among Quakers today that does not include a genuine recovery of the consciousness of universal mission?

When the "Valiant Sixty" started out and teams of Quaker missionaries were beginning to spread the gospel throughout England and beyond, Fox wrote: "In this night of apostasy, the pure religion and worship...were lost; but now they come to be set up again by Jesus Christ [and] his messengers and ministers of the gospel, as in the apostles' days." (8)

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"The Lord is bringing his people to himself, from all the world's ways to Christ the way; and from all the world's churches to the church which is in God, the father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and from all the world's teachers to teach his people himself...; for the mighty day of the Lord is come and coming...And the truth...shall be exalted; which shall answer that of God in everyone upon the earth, though they be from it."(9)*

During the past twelve years there has been much preaching of the everlasting gospel by New Foundation workers and men and women have become convinced that this gospel is the truth of God. But some of them have asked: "How is this New Foundation work and these New Foundation workers related to the Society of Friends?"

As I see it, preaching the everlasting gospel among Friends is an important part of the New Foundation work. Some workers have been doing this as Quakers and some have been doing it as non-Quakers. In so far as this work bears fruit it will result in profound changes among Friends as to their self-image, the nature and character of their worship and ministry, their understanding of the way a Christian community should be ordered, and the way corporate witness on moral issues can be found and maintained. These changes, if they occur, will be due to the power of the gospel and not to the power of the New Foundation workers.

There could be and should be a good relation between the Society of Friends and the New Foundation workers. But it must be remembered that the New Foundation work was not initiated by the Quaker Society and that, thus far, it has only received recognition as one of many "interest groups" in a pluralistic religious society.

Therefore, the desire to define at once the exact relation between New Foundation and the Society of Friends is not a desire that springs from a realistic understanding of the situation. New Foundation work has not been inspired by the spirit of separation. But it is a fact that the parts of the Quaker heritage that have inspired the New Foundation work are the parts that have been discarded or ignored by most present day Quakers. This may account for some of the tension between New Foundation and the Society of Friends. It is a situation that calls for patience on the part of all concerned.

I have been trying here to report on the rise and progress of this thing called New Foundation. I have been laying special emphasis on its message as a universal message and its mission as a universal mission. This gospel

* See also 4:361, "...there is something in man that answers the power which is the gospel."

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message is a gospel of power. It is by the power of the gospel that a great people was gathered in the 17th. century and by the same power men and women can do great things for God today.

As the work prospers, it will certainly call for the exercise of many gifts beside the gift of preaching, but surely, the giver of every good gift will supply such needs as they arise.

The perennial concern to keep to the simplicity of the gospel has caused some critics to grossly misunderstand the true nature and purpose of New Foundation work. It has been said of the New Foundation that it is a new religion that consists of talking incessantly about Christ and his gospel and never doing anything else. But, in all this preaching work, it is always assumed that as people become convinced and turned to Christ, they experience a hunger for worship gatherings in the name of Jesus and for a nurturing ministry and for gospel fellowship that includes counseling, and for an ordered, disciplined community of disciples that learns together, obeys together, and suffers together. This is as it should be. And I believe that, just as God is raising up people again to plant the gospel seed, so he will also raise up others to water and cultivate the tender plants. There is a need for both seed sowers and cultivators. If there are no seed sowers there will be no tender plants to cultivate.

In the 1650's, George Fox found that he was chiefly engaged in preaching the gospel, but in the 1660's and '70's, he was mostly occupied with nurturing work and with the task of consolidating gains that resulted from gospel labors of many gospel laborers. By the 1680's, he became aware that the ranks of the gospel preachers were thinning out and few Quakers were being drawn to preach the everlasting gospel again to all that dwell on earth.

Paul encountered a similar problem at Corinth where he found a Paul Party and an Apollos Party. The Paul party favored an aggressive gospel witness to the world; the Apollos Party favored a nurturing ministry to those already gathered. To Paul, it seemed obvious that both these types of ministry were essential and ought not to be polarized or made the occasion of party strife. But this was not obvious to all Christians in the apostolic age and it was not obvious to all Christians in the 17th. century. In both cases, the preaching of the everlasting gospel ceased to be a significant part of the churches' life and growth. People are still struggling with this problem today and New Foundation people are trying to learn the lesson that Christian history can teach us, namely, that it is of the very nature of the church that every part of it thrives and benefits

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when it is propagating itself by the power of the gospel; and every part of it suffers and languishes when it is not propagating itself by the power of the gospel. It is always fatal when a Christian community puts all its resources into a nurturing ministry and neglects the preaching of the everlasting gospel. I am one who would not like to see this fatal eventuality overtake the New Foundation.

Respecting the question: "What is the relation of New Foundation to the Society of Friends?" I believe it can be said that the extent to which New Foundation work can benefit the Society of Friends will be in direct proportion to the faithfulness of New Foundation workers in proclaiming the everlasting gospel to both Quakers and non-Quakers. The work of the New Foundation is bringing something new to all the several kinds of Quakers in the world and it can bring them all into true unity.

Twentieth century historiography has been dominated by two theories concerning the origins of Quakerism. In the early part of this century, the belief that 17th. century Quakers were spiritual descendants of the Christian mystics of the Middle Ages was widely accepted. But during the last forty years the theory that early Quakerism was a species of Puritanism has very largely superseded the mystical theory. These two theories have focused on mysticism and Puritanism and have diminished rather than increased our knowledge of who the early Friends really were.

Modern Quaker historians have been the victims of Historicism, which is the notion that in order to give an adequate account of the nature of an idea or an institution it is only necessary to describe historically how it came to be what it is. Because of this preoccupation with "historical sources and influences," modern Quakers have ignored the early Quakers' own account of who they were. Fox claimed that the Quakers had been raised up by the power of the long lost apostolic gospel which Christ had revealed to him and to others. His short history of the Quakers begins with the words: "How the Lord by his power and spirit did raise up Friends to declare his everlasting gospel and truth, as they had received it freely from Christ..."(10)

As I understand it, the New Foundation is a movement to preach again the same universal gospel preached by early Friends. If the first Quakers were reproclaiming the gospel preached by the apostles after a long hiatus during which the apostolic gospel went into eclipse, then, what New Foundation workers are doing today is a similar reproclamation of the everlasting gospel after a similar lapse since the Quakers ceased preaching it in the early 18th. century.

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I believe that the New Foundation work comes closer to a genuine recovery of the universal message and mission of the early Quakers than anything that has occurred in Quaker history since the 17th. century. As this work has progressed, it has seemed to me that a new day was dawning and that we are now standing on the threshold of a new era in Christian history.

But what if the gospel preaching ceases to be the central task of the New Foundation workers? What if New Foundation gatherings become occasions for discussing the relative merits of other causes that might take the place of keeping to the simplicity of the gospel? Although a major shift of emphasis may not be imminent, I think it is not too soon to point out that, if keeping to the simplicity of the gospel is not to be the first concern of the New Foundation workers, then we can expect a flood of alternatives to be offered in its place. Up to now, we have promptly corrected the mistake of some writers who have used the term, "New Foundations (pl.) Fellowship. We have one foundation: Jesus Christ. The New Foundation is not a new pluralism in place of the old pluralism -- it is an antidote to pluralism.

The New Foundation has a universal mission. The terms, "fringe group" or "special interest group" are misnomers when applied to New Foundation. We have good news for all Friends, all Christians, and all people. Since 1980, the periodical, New Foundation Papers, has been published and in every issue the masthead has carried the words, "We Seek the Good of All." In 1671, George Fox sent this message to King Charles II: "Blessed be the Lord God that he hath a people in this nation that seeks the good of all men...and of all women upon the face of the earth. It is not a sect or opinion but the good of all. We have the mind of the Lord Jesus Christ that desires not the death of a sinner but the good of all."(11)

Shortly before his death, Fox exhorted Friends to "go on with the work." The work that he was urging them to go on with was the work that is now being taken up again by New Foundation workers. The New Foundation Fellowship is a community of workers who have fellowship in this work.

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